

Conceptual Article:

Who Decides in AI-Mediated English Teaching? Distributed Agency and the Reconstruction of Teachers' Professional Roles

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Abstract

When English teachers began using generative AI, research initially focused on acceptance, perceptions, and patterns of use. These questions, however, leave a central issue underexplored: how generative AI reshapes teachers' professional agency when pedagogical decisions are increasingly mediated by AI systems. This conceptual article examines who makes pedagogical decisions when chatbots draft reading passages, provide feedback, or influence judgments about appropriate English. It combines a critical synthesis of research on language teachers and generative AI published between 2022 and 2025 with four analytic cases drawn from published studies and policy documents. Drawing on the ecological model of teacher agency and critical scholarship on language teachers and generative AI, the article proposes a framework of distributed and contested agency. The framework identifies five domains of pedagogical decision-making and four mechanisms through which agency is reshaped: silent delegation to AI defaults, an evaluation paradox, institutional foreclosure or manufacture of agency, and the entanglement of teacher and learner agency. Four propositions are examined through cases from Vietnam, Hong Kong, South Korea, and China. The analysis suggests that reluctance may represent professional judgment, tool-focused training may not develop pedagogical judgment, and institutional mandates or bans may constrain teacher agency. Implications are discussed for teacher education, policy, AI tool design, and future research.

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INTRODUCTION

Imagine an English teacher in a large public secondary school, sitting down on a Sunday evening with forty essays. (The scenario is a composite, offered for illustration.) She has heard that a chatbot can mark them. She pastes in the first one and within seconds has a corrected version, a list of errors, and a comment on organisation. The comment is fluent and mostly sensible. She notices, though, that two of the "errors" are constructions her students' textbook actually teaches, and that the corrected version sounds like an American undergraduate. She keeps one suggestion, discards the rest, and moves on to the second essay. Yet several decisions that used to be hers alone (what counts as an error, whose English is the model, how much help is enough)

have passed briefly through a system she did not design and cannot see into. Research on teachers' pedagogical reasoning treats judgement as the centre of professional work, including work with technology (Forkosh-Baruch et al., 2021). What generative AI (GenAI) changes is where those decisions are made and by whom, and it does so quietly. The research literature has only partly caught up. Reviews of GenAI in language education concentrate mainly on learners in higher education (Lee et al., 2025a; Xiao et al., 2025). Studies of teachers have described the affordances of tools and the digital competences teachers need (Kohnke et al., 2023; Crompton et al., 2024), how teachers use GenAI to prepare materials (Xin, 2024; Chen et al., 2024), and how professional GenAI competence can be developed (Moorhouse et al., 2024). A recent systematic review looked at the field specifically through the lens of language teacher agency. It found only fourteen empirical studies published between 2017 and 2025, most of them from Asia, and it noticed something awkward: studies built on technology acceptance models and qualitative studies do not fully agree with each other, and teachers with favourable attitudes towards GenAI do not always use it (Eedelouei, 2026). That review organises the evidence around the factors that shape an individual teacher's judgement. The present article builds on it but asks a different question: not what influences a teacher's judgement, but where pedagogical decisions now sit once they are shared among teachers, learners, AI systems, and institutions, and through which mechanisms they move. A similar mismatch appears in a survey of 445 in-service teachers in Spain, drawn from all subjects rather than language teaching alone, where positive attitudes coexisted with limited integration into teaching (Galindo-Domínguez et al., 2024).

That mismatch is interesting because it looks like a conceptual problem, not just a shortage of data. Much of the research treats agency as a disposition, a willingness or capacity to take up a tool. But in the sociological work that teacher education has borrowed (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Priestley et al., 2015), agency is something people achieve in particular situations, out of their histories, their hopes, and the material, structural, and cultural conditions around them. If that is right, asking whether teachers "accept" AI skips the more interesting question of who is deciding, on what grounds, and within what limits. The gap addressed here is therefore conceptual, not geographical. Asia supplies much of the available evidence, and it is used here because it offers contrasting arrangements of agency in close view: a national reform that built decisions into a product, a policy that kept the teacher as mediator, teacher-led experimentation with little guidance, and structured professional development. Two questions guide the article. First, how should teacher agency be understood when pedagogical decisions are spread across teachers, learners, AI systems, and institutions? Second, how are English teachers' professional roles being rebuilt, and under what conditions does that rebuilding strengthen or hollow out the profession? The article makes three contributions. The first is a framework of distributed and contested agency that names the decision domains involved and the mechanisms through which they are redistributed. The second is a set of four propositions that can be tested. The third is a challenge to two assumptions that currently shape both research and policy: that technology acceptance explains what teachers do, and that keeping a teacher "in the loop" protects pedagogy.

CONCEPTUAL APPROACH

This is a theory-building article. The author began with the ecological model of teacher agency, chosen because it treats agency as an achievement shaped by

conditions and because it has already been applied both to English teachers and to GenAI (Karimpour et al., 2025; Eedelouei, 2026). The recent research on language teachers and GenAI was then read with a specific purpose: to find the assumptions it shares and the questions it leaves alone. The reading covered peer-reviewed studies published between 2022, when ChatGPT was released, and 2025, located through Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar using combinations of "generative AI" or "ChatGPT" with "language teacher", "EFL teacher", "teacher agency", and "teacher education". Studies were retained when they concerned language teachers (pre-service or in-service) rather than learners alone and reported teachers' use of GenAI, their judgements about it, or the conditions of that use. The systematic review by Eedelouei (2026) served as an anchor and was extended with work on teacher education, assessment, and Global Englishes. From this reading the framework was built by asking which pedagogical decisions GenAI touches and where those decisions now sit. The five decision domains were derived inductively, by grouping the teacher decisions reported in the reviewed studies. The four mechanisms were derived deductively, by asking how each kind of condition in the ecological model (material, cultural, structural, and relational) could move a decision away from the teacher. How the mechanisms map onto the domains is set out after Table 1. Finally, the framework was tried against four cases (Vietnam, Hong Kong, South Korea, China), picked because agency is structured differently in each. Selection followed two criteria: who formally holds decisions about AI use (the teacher alone, a training programme, the state through a product, or the state through a guideline), and whether peer-reviewed evidence or authoritative policy documentation was available. The cases therefore vary on the feature the framework is concerned with, but they are not a sample of systems. The cases draw on published studies, official statements, and press reports. Peer-reviewed evidence was used wherever it existed. Official documents were preferred to press reports, and press reports were used only for dated, verifiable events such as a legislative vote, not for claims about teachers' experience.

THEORETICAL GROUNDING AND CRITICAL REVIEW

Agency as something achieved

The ecological model that Priestley et al. (2015) developed for teacher education, drawing on Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) sociology of action, defines agency as something achieved in a situation, not something a person carries around. It has three temporal strands. The iterational strand is the teacher's personal and professional history. The projective strand is what the teacher hopes and plans for. The practical-evaluative strand is the present judgement in which the teacher weighs risks and opportunities among the courses of action that seem open. What seems open depends on material, structural, and cultural conditions, which is why the same teacher may act very differently in two schools. Two consequences matter here. One is that agency cannot be read off a teacher's competence or attitude alone, since conditions enter the picture. The other is that repeating habitual practice in the face of something new does not count as agency in this model. Agency requires choosing among alternatives, and that is precisely what makes it hard to observe. Ecological approaches have been used with English language teachers in areas such as social justice instruction (Karimpour et al., 2025), and agency is tied closely to professional identity, which teachers keep rebuilding through experience and context (Beijaard et al., 2004). Within applied linguistics, a substantial literature on language teacher agency has debated whether agency is best seen as a capacity or an achievement and how it is bound up with identity and emotion (Kayi-Aydar et al., 2019; Tao & Gao, 2021). The present article takes the

achievement view developed there.

One tension should be stated at the outset. The ecological model places agency in human actors acting within conditions, and it has no place for non-human actors. The framework below does not claim that AI systems have agency in that sense. It treats a model's defaults as part of the material and cultural conditions of the teacher's practical-evaluative judgement, but as an unusual kind of condition, one that proposes answers rather than simply narrowing options. This keeps the analysis within the ecological model while borrowing from sociomaterial research the attention to how artefacts shape practice (Fenwick et al., 2011).

What the research on teachers and GenAI has found

Five themes recur in research on language teachers and GenAI, as Eedelouei (2026) organises it: GenAI competence and technological pedagogical content knowledge; perceptions, attitudes, and identity; contextual, digital, and structural conditions; emotional, ethical, and assessment-related tensions; and professional development. Work on teacher–AI collaboration asked how conversational AI and human teachers might work together (Ji et al., 2023). Intervention studies have shown that professional GenAI competence can be taught, most fully in an eleven-week programme for pre-service teachers in Hong Kong (Moorhouse et al., 2024), and other work has begun to explore GenAI within teacher education more broadly (Kohnke et al., 2025). Two features of this body of work matter for what follows. The first concerns professional development. Studies reviewed by Eedelouei (2026) lean on two approaches, communities of practice and tasks that integrate GenAI, and they concentrate on lesson planning and materials development. Feedback and assessment, where a teacher's judgement bears most directly on learners, get much less attention. The second concerns explanation. Quantitative studies grounded in technology acceptance models tend to show perceived usefulness predicting intention to keep using GenAI. Qualitative studies describe decisions as more complicated and more dynamic, and they record teachers with favourable views who nonetheless do not use it (Eedelouei, 2026). Emotions run through both strands, especially worry about AI-enabled cheating and about relationships with students (Eedelouei, 2026; Wang et al., 2026).

Three conceptual limits

Read against the ecological model, this literature runs into three limits, each of which the framework below tries to address. The first is agency reduced to intention. When agency is measured as acceptance, willingness, or intention, non-use shows up as a deficit, a lack of skill or of enthusiasm. The ecological model draws a line between judgement and action, though, and the gap between a favourable attitude and non-use is exactly what it would predict, since judging something useful is different from judging it safe to use in a particular institution with particular students (Priestley et al., 2015). Acceptance models were not built to represent that kind of judgement under constraint. The second is the isolated teacher. Most studies treat the teacher as a lone decision-maker. In practice a teacher's decisions depend on what learners do with AI on their own, on colleagues, and on institutional rules. Research on the three-way interaction among teachers, students, and GenAI in EFL education points this way (Guan et al., 2025), and work on assessment shows that teachers' agency depends on institutional arrangements as well as on what technology affords (Lee & Jeon, 2024). The third is the neutral tool. Research often speaks of teachers "using" GenAI as though it were a hammer. Models, however, carry defaults about language, level, and

correctness. Critical scholarship on GenAI-mediated writing argues that users need critical digital literacies exactly because outputs reflect data, commercial interests, and ideologies (Darvin, 2025), and a critical ecological analysis of GenAI in Global Englishes-oriented materials development starts from related worries (Lo, 2025). If the tool brings defaults into pedagogical decisions, it takes part in those decisions and is more than a means of carrying them out.

Why the Asian and Indonesian evidence matters for this argument

Much of the empirical work on language teachers and GenAI comes from Asia, and that does not seem incidental. Many Asian systems combine centralised curricula, high-stakes examinations, and large classes, and these arrangements narrow what teachers can decide even before AI arrives. The four cases are not uniform, however. Hong Kong and South Korea are well-resourced systems in which the constraints are examination pressure and centralised decision-making rather than scarcity, while parts of Vietnam, China, and Indonesia also face large classes and uneven access to technology. Textbooks and test specifications already carry decisions about content and norms. If agency is already bounded in this way, GenAI enters a space where some decisions were never fully the teacher's, and the risk of a further layer of delegation, this time to a model, is real. At the same time, learners in many contexts use AI outside school, so teachers meet decisions they did not authorise. If a framework of distributed agency holds where decision-making is already constrained and where learner use is intense, it has a fair chance of being useful elsewhere.

Indonesia, the context of many of this journal's readers, shows the same combination. English is taught within a centrally issued curriculum framework, classes are often large, and access to devices and connectivity varies widely between urban and rural schools. Teachers' attitudes appear broadly favourable: in a survey of 100 Indonesian language educators, most recognised ChatGPT's pedagogical uses and 87% supported integrating AI into education (Widianingtyas et al., 2023). From the 2025/2026 school year, coding and artificial intelligence became an elective subject from Grade 5 under Permendikdasmen No. 13/2025, with teacher training named as a priority (Harahap, 2025). Neither says who will decide how AI feedback, norms, and assessment work inside the English lesson, which is the question this framework asks.

A FRAMEWORK OF DISTRIBUTED AND CONTESTED AGENCY

The starting point is simple. GenAI has entered the decision structure of English teaching. Some decisions that teachers made themselves are now made, or shaped, by a model; others are made by learners consulting the model without the teacher; still others are made by institutions that decide which tools are allowed. The author proposes to treat agency in this situation as distributed, because no single actor holds it, and contested, because the distribution is negotiated and rarely equal. The idea has a history. Distributed cognition showed that thinking in complex work is spread across people and artefacts (Hutchins, 1995), relational agency describes how professionals expand their capacity by working with others on shared problems (Edwards, 2005), and sociomaterial research in education traces how objects and technologies take part in practice (Fenwick et al., 2011). The framework applies these ideas to a narrower object, the pedagogical decision, and adds that its distribution is contested. Table 1 sets out five domains in which the shift is visible.

Table 1. *Redistribution of pedagogical decisions in AI-mediated English teaching*

Decision domain	Conventional locus	Redistribution with GenAI	Reconstructed teacher role	Agency risk and opportunity
Task and material design	Teacher, textbook, curriculum	Model generates and adapts texts and tasks; teacher prompts and selects	Curator and adaptor of generated materials	Time saved (Xin, 2024) versus loss of design expertise
Language feedback	Teacher, peers	Model diagnoses errors and suggests revisions instantly	Judge of feedback quality; teacher of feedback literacy	Individual feedback versus unexamined claims of correctness (Bearman et al., 2024)
Target norms	Teacher, textbook, examination	Model's default variety and register act as the implicit standard	Mediator of which English counts	Reinforced hierarchy versus exposure to plural Englishes (Lo, 2025; Lee et al., 2025b)
Assessment and integrity	Teacher, institution	Authorship of student work is uncertain; detection and redesign are contested	Assessment designer and ethical gatekeeper	More valid tasks versus performative policing (Luo et al., 2025)
Conditions for learner practice	Teacher, learner	Learners reach AI independently and on demand	Orchestrator of human–AI–learner interaction	Self-regulated practice versus offloading of effort (Chang & Sun, 2024)

Source: Author’s synthesis of the studies reviewed in this article.

The table does not list what AI can do. It records where decisions with consequences for learning are taken, and by whom. Decisions, rather than tasks, serve as the unit of analysis, and there is a reason for this. A list of what AI can do goes out of date within months, whereas the question of where a decision sits is more durable, and it keeps attention on teachers' professional work and off the tool's features. A decision, in the sense used here, is any point at which someone chooses among alternatives with consequences for what learners experience: selecting a text, accepting a correction, setting a norm, accepting a piece of work as a learner's own. Most are small and many take seconds, which is part of why their redistribution goes unnoticed. For empirical work, a decision can be identified wherever an actor accepts, modifies, or rejects an option that affects learners, whether in observation, think-aloud data, or documents; micro-decisions (accepting one correction) should be distinguished from design decisions (adopting a tool or setting a norm for a course). Four mechanisms help explain how the redistribution shapes agency, and each is taken in turn. They do not map one-to-one onto the domains. Silent delegation acts most strongly on target norms and task design; the evaluation paradox on feedback and assessment; institutional foreclosure and manufactured agency on assessment and on whether tools are available at all; and the entanglement of teacher and learner agency on feedback and on the conditions for learner practice.

Silent delegation

The problem to be named here is narrower: delegation that nobody chose. With GenAI, decisions often transfer by default. The model's guess about reading level, its choice of examples, its notion of what counts as an error, and its quiet preference for

one variety of English become the substance of the lesson unless the teacher steps in. Because the outputs are fluent and plausible, stepping in feels unnecessary, and that is why the delegation is called silent. Tools differ here. General-purpose chatbots, platforms designed for English teaching, and automated writing evaluation (AWE) systems expose different settings, and many let teachers specify level, variety, or feedback focus. Silent delegation therefore names what happens when such settings go unused, not a fixed property of tools. The AWE literature, which predates GenAI, has long shown that outcomes depend on how teachers mediate automated feedback (Link et al., 2022). Learners' independent use adds to the effect, since the model's defaults reach them without passing through the teacher at all. The consequences are greatest for target norms. English teaching across much of Asia already has to deal with native-speakerism and with the privileging of a narrow standard, and critical scholars warn that GenAI can reproduce this at scale (Darvin, 2025; Lo, 2025). There is also direct evidence: when prompted in non-standard varieties of English, a widely used chatbot produced more stereotyping, demeaning, and condescending responses than it did for standard varieties (Fleisig et al., 2024). When teachers set norms deliberately, for example by asking for feedback that respects an institutionalised regional variety or by using AI to show pre-service teachers how English varies across places (Lee et al., 2025b), delegation turns into a decision. When they do not, the default becomes the classroom's unwritten curriculum.

In examination-driven systems the default is especially easy to miss, because the variety a model prefers often matches the variety examinations reward. Silent delegation then feels like convenience, not loss. The concern here is not that a standard variety is taught. Given high-stakes testing, that may be perfectly defensible. Nor do teachers always have much room to choose: where examinations and textbooks fix the norm, as in Indonesia and many other systems, the decisions at stake are narrower, such as which locally common forms to accept in low-stakes feedback and which varieties learners are exposed to. Proposition 1 concerns decisions within that latitude. It is that no one has made the choice: nobody has justified it to learners, or weighed it against the many ways English will be used outside the classroom. Making the decision deliberate, whether the answer is to keep the default or to depart from it, is what turns delegation into agency. Proposition 1. Where teachers do not deliberately specify how AI should decide (norm, level, feedback focus), decisions default to model and vendor settings, and those defaults come to function as an implicit curriculum. Operationally, defaults function as an implicit curriculum when the norms, levels, and feedback foci that learners meet in AI-mediated tasks match the tool's settings more closely than the teacher's stated intentions or the curriculum documents, which can be checked by comparing prompts, outputs, and lesson plans.

The evaluation paradox

If the model generates and corrects, what is left for the teacher? The usual answer is evaluation: judging whether the output is accurate, suits these learners, and serves the aim of the lesson. The literature on GenAI and teacher agency does emphasise practical-evaluative judgement (Eedelouei, 2026), and work in higher education has argued that developing evaluative judgement matters more, not less, in a time of GenAI (Bearman et al., 2024). A difficulty follows. Judging AI output well takes the very pedagogical content knowledge that comes from years of designing tasks, giving feedback, and reading learners' work, which are exactly the activities AI use may displace. This is a version of what Bainbridge (1983) called the ironies of automation: the more a system takes over routine work, the less practice operators get in the skills

they need to supervise it, and the more that supervision matters when the system errs. In teaching, the worry echoes older debates about deskilling. What is specific to language teaching is that the output to be judged is itself language, so the judgement required is linguistic as well as pedagogical. Teachers can compensate for the limits of GenAI in producing contextualised, personalised material by drawing on their domain knowledge, as studies summarised by Eedelouei (2026) indicate, and it seems to follow that teachers with less pedagogical knowledge have fewer resources for the task. Work on teacher feedback literacy points the same way: judging feedback well draws on experience of designing and giving feedback, which novice teachers have had less opportunity to build (Carless & Winstone, 2023). The paradox, then, predicts unequal agency. Teachers with strong knowledge can use AI to extend their judgement, while teachers without it risk being led by the tool. It also predicts that professional development which teaches tool operation, or which stays with lesson planning, will not produce the evaluative judgement needed for feedback and assessment, where the stakes for learners are highest.

There is a further cost that is easy to overlook. Judging is tiring. Research on teachers' classroom decision-making links decisions to cognitive load and to teachers' emotions (Blackley et al., 2021), and a teacher facing forty AI-corrected essays has forty small evaluations to make on top of everything else. If institutions do not build in time for this, evaluation will be done thinly, and thin evaluation is a route back to silent delegation. In large EFL classes this cost may decide whether teachers use AI at all: time saved in drafting feedback can be lost again in checking it, and the dilemmas involved carry an emotional load that can end in inaction (Luo et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2026). Proposition 2. The capacity for agentic evaluation of AI output depends on prior pedagogical content knowledge and is unevenly distributed; professional development limited to tool operation will widen differences among teachers, not narrow them.

Institutional foreclosure and manufactured agency

The third mechanism works above the classroom. In the ecological model, structural and cultural conditions decide which options exist and how risky they feel (Priestley et al., 2015). Two institutional patterns can bypass teachers' judgement. Foreclosure happens when policy removes options or overrides professional decisions. Studies discussed by Eedelouei (2026) report university teachers whose judgements about students' AI misuse were contradicted by their own institutions, leaving inaction as the least risky course. This fits an analysis of assessment as a "dilemmatic space" in which teachers' autonomy, career security, identity, and rapport with students pull in different directions (Luo et al., 2025). Manufactured agency is the opposite pattern. Here a reform builds decisions into a product or a mandate and then invites teachers to "use" it, so that agency seems present when decision rights are absent. The pattern resembles what Ball (2003) described as performativity, in which professionals are invited to act within terms set elsewhere and are judged by how well they perform them. Neither pattern belongs only to AI. What AI adds is that decisions now sit inside software which institutions buy and regulate, so the question of who holds the right to select, adapt, refuse, or override becomes concrete and immediate. Proposition 3a. Mandates that build pedagogical decisions into products, without giving teachers defined rights to adapt or override them, reduce practical-evaluative judgement to operating the product. Proposition 3b. Prohibitions that remove options without guidance shift risk onto individual teachers and make inaction the safest course. In both cases, structures that give teachers defined decision rights sustain agency.

Entangled teacher and learner agency

The fourth mechanism is relational. Teachers do not act in a vacuum. Learners bring their own AI use and their own judgements about it, and studies of teachers, students, and GenAI in EFL education treat the relationship as three-cornered (Guan et al., 2025). Evidence on chatbots suggests that teacher support shapes how motivated students are to learn with them (Chiu et al., 2024), and reviews of AI and self-regulated language learning treat self-regulation as something tools may support, which implies that design and teacher mediation matter (Chang & Sun, 2024). The reverse also holds. When learners consult AI at home, the teacher's decision space shrinks, because feedback and norm-setting have happened before the teacher sees the work.

The Hong Kong intervention illustrates the point. Pre-service teachers' competence improved in several respects, but less development was reported in guiding students towards responsible GenAI use (Moorhouse et al., 2024). That is the area where teacher and learner agency meet, and it appears to be the hardest to teach. Learners are not passive recipients either. Research on learner agency in second language learning treats it as relational and emergent rather than as a fixed trait (Larsen-Freeman, 2019), and that is the sense intended here. A student who finds that the chatbot flags a usage the teacher has taught as acceptable must decide whom to trust, and that decision is an exercise of agency with consequences for the teacher's authority. A teacher who dismisses the chatbot out of hand risks looking out of touch, and one who defers to it risks looking redundant. Yet agency is not zero-sum. Strategies that make AI use visible and open to discussion, such as asking learners to record their prompts and the suggestions they accepted or rejected, can widen the agency of both parties. Where AI use is hidden, both lose. With forty or more learners, such records need to be light: a short declaration of AI use on each draft, with the teacher examining a rotating sample in depth, is more realistic than full logs for every learner. Proposition 4. Where learners' AI use is made visible and negotiable (for example through prompt logs or annotated revisions), teachers exercise more latitude in feedback and norm-setting, and learners make more explicit choices about AI suggestions, than where that use remains hidden.

A worked illustration

A single writing lesson shows how the pieces fit together. This is an illustration and not data. A teacher asks learners to draft an argumentative paragraph and then consult a chatbot. For task design, the teacher chooses the prompt, but the model proposes structures and examples. For feedback, the model marks "errors" and offers rewrites, some of which reflect a preferred variety. For norms, whether a locally common usage gets flagged depends on a default that neither teacher nor learner has looked at. For assessment, the teacher must decide whether the final paragraph reflects the learner's ability. For practice conditions, learners may revise again at home with the same tool, unseen. Under silent delegation, all five decisions are made without anyone deliberating. Under distributed agency as framed here, the teacher specifies in advance the feedback focus and the variety to be accepted, asks learners to annotate which suggestions they took and why, uses the annotations to assess process as well as product, and returns to a few selected errors in class. The tool is the same, but the way decisions are distributed, and so the agency of teacher and learners, is different.

Four Cases

Four cases follow. They were chosen because each arranges agency differently, and so each puts pressure on a different part of the framework. Where a case could

reasonably be read another way, that reading is given.

Vietnam: when reluctance is a judgement

A qualitative study of seven experienced EFL writing teachers in Vietnam, using the ecological model, found reluctance towards AI tools. The teachers linked it to their attachment to traditional pedagogies, to the absence of clear guidelines, and to worries about accuracy and misuse (Le-Khanh et al., 2024). An acceptance survey would classify these teachers as low adopters and stop there. The ecological model invites a different reading. Without institutional guidance, using AI exposes a teacher to risks about accuracy and integrity that nobody else will share, and staying away may be a reasonable weighing of those risks. It would be a mistake to generalise from seven teachers, and the study does not claim to represent Vietnam. Non-use can be reasoned, a real judgement among options, or it can be habitual, a repetition of what one has always done. The ecological model does not count the second as agency. The difficulty is that the two look identical from outside, and acceptance instruments cannot tell them apart. Interviews and think-aloud tasks that probe how teachers reason can. The case also illustrates, though it cannot test, Proposition 3. Where no guidance exists, teachers have to build their agency on their own, through informal networks and private experiment, and that is available to some teachers much more than to others.

Hong Kong: developing judgement on purpose

Hong Kong offers the clearest example of teachers' GenAI competence being developed deliberately. An eleven-week programme in initial teacher education then built GenAI into sessions and assignments and required pre-service teachers to give reasons for their use and reflect on it (Moorhouse et al., 2024). Reported gains were greatest in pedagogical competence and critical awareness, and smaller in guiding students towards responsible use. This reads as partial support for Proposition 2. What seems to have developed teachers' capacity was less the instruction in tools than the requirement to evaluate and justify. It also supports Proposition 4, since the weakest gain concerned the learner side. Two cautions are needed. The evidence rests largely on self-reported competence within an initial teacher education course, and the wider research on professional development, as Eedelouei (2026) shows, has stayed with planning and materials while leaving feedback and assessment judgements underexamined. Whether the Hong Kong approach would transfer to in-service teachers working under exam pressure is an open question.

South Korea: decisions built into a product

South Korea planned to introduce AI-powered digital textbooks from 2025, beginning with English, mathematics, and information technology. The government described them as a means of personalised learning, with content tailored to each student's level and pace and with teachers given access to data-driven insights (Korea Times, 2024). In the terms of this article, decisions about sequencing, level, and feedback were placed inside a product, and teachers were cast as readers of its analytics. The textbooks were piloted in the first semester of 2025 and drew criticism from educators and parents that groundwork had been thin. The ministry moved to voluntary adoption, take-up stayed around 30 percent, and in August 2025 the National Assembly removed the books' status as official textbooks, reclassifying them as educational materials (Choi, 2025). The reasons for this outcome were mixed, party politics among them, and one case cannot prove a framework. Read with that caution, the episode is consistent with manufactured agency, though it does not demonstrate

it: it shows that a product-based reform can lose teachers' consent, not that the absence of decision rights was the decisive cause. The available evidence also concerns the programme as a whole rather than English classrooms specifically, so the case speaks to how curriculum policy allocates decision rights rather than to English teaching as such. It also shows silent delegation at the scale of a system: defaults about level and pace would have become the implicit curriculum of thousands of classrooms.

China: agency by guideline

China's 2025 guidelines on generative AI in primary and secondary schools, according to official and press reports, bar primary students from independently using tools that generate open-ended content and say that teachers should not use AI as a substitute for their core teaching responsibilities (Basic Education Teaching Guidance Committee of the Ministry of Education, 2025; People's Daily, 2025; Zou, 2025). The architecture differs from Korea's. Instead of building decisions into a product, the policy keeps the teacher as mediator and draws a boundary around what AI may do. Two consequences follow. For English teaching, the restriction means that young learners' AI practice has to run through environments teachers control, which raises the demand for teachers' evaluative judgement (Proposition 2) and for ways of making AI use visible (Proposition 4). And whether prescribed mediation amounts to agency depends on discretion. A guideline can protect the teacher's role while turning judgement into compliance. The guideline also covers all subjects; what it means for English will depend on the English curriculum standards and on whether the speaking and writing tools used in English lessons count as open-ended generation. Evidence on how the guidelines are being implemented is not yet available, so this case is offered as a question for research, not a conclusion.

Beyond Asia: substitute or extension?

The cases point to a question that reaches well beyond Asia. In systems with severe teacher shortages, which include parts of Africa, Latin America, and South Asia (UNESCO, 2024), the temptation is to let AI stand in for the missing teacher. The framework predicts that silent delegation and default norms would then run with little professional mediation, especially where local varieties of English are thinly represented in the models. The alternative is AI as an extension of teachers' agency. Teachers in Iran, for example, used ChatGPT as a reflective mentor within a community of practice when they had no access to a supervisor (Arefian et al., 2024), and AI chatbots have been used to raise pre-service teachers' awareness of varieties of English (Lee et al., 2025b). Which of these paths a system takes seems to depend less on the technology than on whether teachers are given decision rights, development opportunities, and time.

RECONSTRUCTING PROFESSIONAL ROLES

What is being rebuilt

The framework suggests that GenAI does more than add a tool to a teacher's repertoire. It rebuilds professional roles across the five decision domains in Table 1, and four of the rebuilt roles seem especially important. The teacher becomes a curator and judge of generated material and feedback, which moves expertise from producing to evaluating. The teacher becomes a mediator of norms, deciding, or failing to decide, which English the classroom treats as correct. The teacher becomes an orchestrator of interaction among learners, AI, and human peers, particularly where learners use AI outside class. And the teacher becomes a designer of assessment and a gatekeeper of integrity, because authorship can no longer be taken for granted. Each role follows

from a mechanism: curation and judgement from the evaluation paradox, mediation of norms from silent delegation, orchestration from the entanglement of teacher and learner agency, and assessment design from institutional foreclosure. Set against familiar typologies of teacher roles in CALL and ELT (facilitator, materials developer, assessor), the curator extends the materials developer and the assessment designer extends the assessor, whereas mediating norms that a tool supplies, and orchestrating learner use that happens out of sight, call for competences that existing typologies do not name. Whether this rebuilding strengthens or hollows out the profession is not settled by the technology. The framework points to conditions. It strengthens when teachers hold decision rights (Proposition 3), have developed evaluative judgement and not only tool skills (Proposition 2), set defaults deliberately (Proposition 1), and can see how learners use AI (Proposition 4). It hollows out when teachers become operators of pre-configured systems whose defaults they neither see nor control.

Why English is a particular kind of case

The framework is not limited to English, but English sharpens it. In most school subjects, AI supplies content or feedback about content. In language teaching, the model's output is also the object of learning, since usage-based accounts of acquisition hold that learners build their language partly from the input they meet repeatedly (Ellis, 2002), and AI-generated text and feedback are becoming a large share of that input. Learners are not simply imitators, since taking up a suggestion is itself a choice (Proposition 4), but what they choose among is shaped by the model. Handing decisions about correctness, register, and naturalness to a model therefore hands over a decision about the target of learning. This makes the teacher's role as mediator of norms more consequential, and more ideological, than in other subjects, because English carries histories of native-speakerism and unequal access. Assessment adds a further layer: English examinations test the learner's own language production, so uncertainty about authorship touches the validity of what is measured and not only the fairness of grading. Put differently, language education may be a limiting case for agency in AI-mediated teaching, because here the tool's language is at once the means of instruction and the thing being learned.

Three assumptions worth questioning

The first assumption is that technology acceptance explains practice. Acceptance models are good at describing adoption, and extended versions such as UTAUT already include facilitating conditions (Venkatesh et al., 2003), but the evidence gathered above shows favourable attitudes without use and, in some studies, use without favourable attitudes (Eedelouei, 2026). The framework offers a reason: practice comes out of judgement under conditions, and acceptance captures only a slice of that judgement. What even extended models cannot do is distinguish reasoned from habitual non-use, or show where a decision was actually taken. The second is that keeping a teacher "in the loop" safeguards pedagogy. Policy talk often assumes that human oversight is enough. Silent delegation and the evaluation paradox suggest it is not. A teacher who lacks the knowledge or the time to evaluate output, or who cannot see the defaults, is in the loop on paper and absent from the decision. A useful safeguard would say what teachers decide and what support they have for deciding it, and not merely that a person is present. The third is that reluctance signals a deficit. Reluctant teachers are often treated as needing persuasion or training. The Vietnamese case suggests that reluctance can be a reasoned response to missing guidance and uncertain accuracy (Le-Khanh et al., 2024), and treating it as a deficit may misdiagnose a problem that lies in

institutional conditions.

Implications

For teacher education, the main implication is to make evaluative judgement about AI output an explicit outcome. Programmes could ask teachers to compare AI feedback with learners' actual work, to critique the norms built into outputs, and to justify decisions to accept, adapt, or reject, as the Hong Kong course required (Moorhouse et al., 2024). That evidence comes from pre-service education, and whether the approach works for in-service teachers under examination pressure remains to be tested. Communities of practice and task-based designs have the strongest support in the literature, and they need to be extended from lesson planning to feedback, assessment, and norm-setting (Eedelouei, 2026; Kohnke et al., 2025). For policy, decision rights should be specified before AI is mandated or banned. The Korean and Chinese cases suggest that the architecture of a policy allocates agency whatever the policy says about its aims. Decision rights need not be elaborate. A school might specify that teachers decide whether and how AI is used for feedback in their own classes, that the varieties of English accepted are set by the department and shared with learners, and that the output of an AI-detection tool is never the sole basis for a grade. Such statements are modest, but they give teachers something to stand on when a dilemma arises.

For tool design, developers could make defaults visible and adjustable, allow teachers to set norms such as the variety of English accepted in feedback, provide logs that let teachers see how learners use AI, and preserve teacher override. Policy and procurement should also address who holds learner data and where it is processed, and the gap between paid and free tiers of the same tool, which can separate urban from rural schools and better-off from poorer learners. For research, the field needs to move from perception surveys towards designs that capture judgement and action: think-aloud protocols during AI-assisted planning and feedback, analysis of teachers' prompts and revisions, classroom observation, and longitudinal comparison across sites with different institutional arrangements. The four propositions offer hypotheses, and comparing the four arrangements identified here would allow their conditions to be tested. Indonesia, where AI is entering the school curriculum as an elective subject, would be a productive site for testing whether such curricular change alters English teachers' decision rights. Not all of this requires large projects. Classroom action research on annotated AI-assisted revision, reflective journals on decisions about AI feedback, and document analysis of school AI policies are within reach of teacher-researchers and would test the propositions in the classrooms where they matter.

What would count against the framework

A framework is only useful if it can be wrong. Proposition 1 would be weakened if teachers who never specify norms or levels nonetheless ended up with classroom practice that differs meaningfully from model defaults, for instance because learners or colleagues routinely correct the output. Proposition 2 would be in doubt if short training in tool operation improved teachers' judgements about feedback as much as training that required justification. Proposition 3 would be in trouble if systems that mandate or ban AI showed no difference from systems that specify decision rights, either in teachers' reported decision latitude or in documentary and observational indicators, such as how often teachers adapt or override tool settings and how they record assessment decisions. Proposition 4 would fail if learners' hidden AI use left teachers' feedback and norm-setting practices unchanged. Table 2 summarises the propositions, the mechanisms behind them, the cases that illustrate them, and how

each could be tested.

Table 2. Propositions, mechanisms, illustrating cases, and possible tests

Proposition	Mechanism	Illustrating case	Possible test
P1: defaults become an implicit curriculum	Silent delegation	Worked illustration; South Korea (system-level defaults)	Compare prompts, AI outputs, and lesson plans against tool defaults and teachers’ stated intentions
P2: evaluative capacity is uneven	Evaluation paradox	Hong Kong (justification-based programme)	Vary professional development (tool operation vs. required justification) and compare feedback judgements
P3a/3b: mandates and bans both foreclose judgement	Institutional foreclosure; manufactured agency	South Korea (3a); Vietnam (absence of guidance)	Compare systems by decision rights, using reported latitude plus override logs and assessment records
P4: visible AI use widens both agencies	Entangled teacher and learner agency	Hong Kong (weakest gain); China (mediated use for young learners)	Follow learners’ AI use alongside teachers’ feedback and norm-setting, with and without AI-use declarations

Source: Author’s synthesis.

Limitations

The framework rests on a selective reading of a young literature that leans heavily on self-report, and the cases draw partly on official and press sources. It may not capture settings where AI is built into school platforms rather than used individually, or where teachers work with sub-licensed tools. It also cannot be ruled out that some silent delegation is harmless, or even beneficial, when teachers lack the time to do everything themselves. Empirical work is needed to refine the propositions and, where necessary, to revise them. It also leans on one recent systematic review (Eedelouei, 2026) for its map of the field and so inherits that review's coverage. It combines an ecological model centred on human actors with attention to what tools contribute. And much of the underlying evidence comes from higher education and pre-service teacher education, while many of the article's claims concern school teachers, so the propositions should be tested in schools before they are relied on there.

CONCLUSION

The question this article has tried to press is not whether teachers accept AI but who decides, and under what conditions. It has proposed that agency in AI-mediated English teaching is distributed and contested, that it is reshaped through silent delegation, an evaluation paradox, institutional foreclosure or manufacture of agency, and the entanglement of teacher and learner agency, and that these mechanisms yield four propositions to test. For English teachers in Asia, including Indonesia, and for colleagues elsewhere who work under scarcity, high stakes, or both, the practical message is that the terms on which AI enters a school matter as much as the choice of tool. Its value, if it has any, is that it turns a vague worry about teachers and AI into questions that a study can ask. Systems that treat teachers as decision-makers, and not as operators or as safeguards in name only, will be best placed to use AI in ways that help learners without emptying the profession of its judgement.

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The author used ChatGPT for language editing of the revised sections. All output was reviewed and edited by the author, every reference was checked against its source, and the author takes full responsibility for the content.

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