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Perceptions of EFL Instructors on ChatGPT as a Co-Agent: An Exploratory Study of Classroom-Based Writing Activities

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ABSTRACT

Generative AI, especially ChatGPT, is increasingly used for writing feedback in higher education EFL classrooms. Although previous studies have noted its immediacy and comprehensiveness, concerns about accuracy and alignment have also been raised. Existing studies often emphasize technological capability over how AI feedback is managed in instruction. This study examined how ChatGPT can be positioned as a feedback agent in EFL writing and how co-agency is negotiated within the network of teachers, students, and ChatGPT. Thematic analysis was conducted on written interviews of 11 EFL teachers. The findings revealed that ChatGPT was not positioned as an author in its own right. Instead, it was described as a conditional co-agent. ChatGPT is most useful when integrated into teacher-led practice and aligned with task criteria. Because co-agency develops through classroom routines, whether ChatGPT supports writing or creates friction depends on how instructors position and regulate its use.

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One of the most significant challenges in the education of second language (L2) writers is providing written feedback on classroom-based writing activities (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Hyland & Hyland, 2006). Teachers must give written feedback on many developing drafts within the limited time available for instruction to their students, in addition to taking into account the differing language, rhetoric, and emotional needs of each student. In practice, very few teachers can successfully meet all of these demands. Due to the time pressure of having to provide written feedback quickly, many teachers tend to provide only basic or generalized feedback, as opposed to the detailed and comprehensive written feedback necessary for effective L2 instruction. This tendency for rushed, lack of detail has been specifically noted for classroom-based writing tasks that require immediate and real-time feedback (Lee, 2017, 2020). Prior to the emergence of AI-based tools, this gap between writing process ideals and classroom constraints remained largely unaddressed.

Recent developments in generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) have begun to fill this gap. ChatGPT has initially been recognized as an automated writing evaluation (AWE) tool providing instant and thorough feedback (Steiss et al., 2024). However, over time, as this model became more complex, it increasingly provided continuous feedback used in the teaching-learning process (Baidoo-Anu & Owusu Ansah, 2023), and ChatGPT functioned as an assistant that interacts with students during the writing instruction stage, rather than as a static evaluator (Teng, 2024). This interaction encourages collaborative writing tendencies and facilitates self-correction. Thus, it shifts the role of AI toward improving student participation and interaction within personalized learning experiences (Kasneci et al., 2023). As these tools become integrated into writing instruction, the ways in which students access feedback have also begun to change. The teacher is no longer the sole point of reference for assessment. However, this does not mean that pedagogical control has been lost. Understanding how teachers interpret and manage this change is still very important since they are the ones who decide how new technologies can be effectively integrated into the classroom (Li, 2024).

Such developments draw renewed attention to co-agency, which in this study refers to multiple actors carrying out pedagogical work in a coordinated manner. While co-agency has been extensively discussed in research on collaborative and cooperative learning, it has received limited attention in studies of AI-supported writing instruction. When teachers, students, and GenAI tools all participate in feedback processes, authority and responsibility become less straightforward. These are not assigned in advance. On the contrary, they take shape through ongoing classroom interaction. In other words, teachers' roles do not remain the same because instructional needs and classroom settings are consistently changing. Examining instructors' perspectives on these dynamics provides a picture of how co-agency is understood and enacted within classroom contexts.

This study explores how EFL instructors think about, and how they interpret, the use of ChatGPT as feedback in the writing lesson and how these teachers define, control and limit their co-agency as they prepare for and teach writing lessons involving AI-based tools. The main idea of this study is to understand how co-agency in writing instruction supported by AI is being determined, managed and limited by design and teacher mediation for use in classroom writing contexts.

The importance of this study is how the instructors interpret the redistribution of authority and responsibility associated with feedback provided by AI. Most previous research has focused on student use of GenAI for writing and evaluating the technical quality of AI-generated feedback (Barrot, 2023; Karagoz, 2025). However, the way instructors position GenAI in the process of distributing responsibility and authority can be seen in their actual classroom teaching practices. This study focuses on the accounts of EFL instructors and addresses such topics within the typical conditions of L2 writing instruction.

Accordingly, the study is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: How do EFL instructors conceptualize ChatGPT’s role in providing feedback during

classroom-based writing activities, including different stages of the writing process?

RQ2: How do EFL instructors perceive the distribution of feedback-related responsibility among teachers, students, and ChatGPT when all are involved in the same writing task?

RQ3: How do instructors evaluate the pedagogical affordances and limitations of ChatGPT's feedback for supporting students' writing development in classroom-based writing contexts?

RQ4: How do EFL instructors perceive the influence of ChatGPT-supported feedback on student autonomy during the writing process?

2. Literature Review

To address the research questions, it is first necessary to outline the pedagogical foundations of feedback in L2 writing and to situate recent developments in AI-supported feedback within this established tradition. Accordingly, the literature review draws on both teacher- and learner-focused research to build a conceptual grounding for examining co-agency in classroom-based writing activities.

2.1. Feedback in L2 Writing as a Pedagogical Practice

Feedback has long been positioned as a core component of L2 writing instruction, supporting learners as they identify linguistic problems, refine rhetorical choices, and align their texts with task expectations (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012; Hyland & Hyland, 2006). In classroom settings, on the other hand, feedback functions as more than an evaluative outcome. It is a situated pedagogical practice shaped by time pressure, learner diversity, and institutional constraints. Research within both school and higher education contexts has consistently shown that under the demands of time, learner variability and other institutional limitations make it difficult for teachers to provide timely, student-specific and multi-level feedback on student-created products during writing activities within the classroom, especially when multiple texts are produced at the same time (Lee, 2017, 2020). Under these circumstances, instructors are faced with the decision of which feedback to prioritize. Empirical studies show that superficial grammar issues are addressed more frequently than higher-level issues such as argument, organization, or content development because they can be handled more efficiently within the limited instructional time (Lee, 2020). These choices shape how students interpret feedback and approach revision in the writing process over time. Research into how students use feedback shows that the way students interpret and utilize feedback is not always what teachers intended. Students often either apply corrections as if they were a checklist or ignore advanced interpretations when the feedback is lengthy, or they do not have access to opportunities for guided revisions (Ferris, 2003; Sheen & Ellis, 2011). Similarly, Han and Hyland (2015) show that student engagement with feedback depends on students' understanding of the purpose of the feedback and their perceived relevance, besides the type of feedback provided. These studies suggest that in-class feedback is a pedagogically complex activity that is not dependent on a single factor.

These challenges provide important background for understanding why alternative forms of feedback have gained increasing attention in recent years. On the other hand, the introduction of new feedback sources into classroom-based writing activities raises fundamental questions about how roles, responsibilities, and decisions related to feedback are distributed among the various parties involved.

2.2. From Automated Feedback to Generative AI in L2 Writing

Initially, researchers conducted studies to evaluate the possible benefits of AWE systems on L2 writing by providing immediate, standardized, and detailed feedback. The results of these early studies showed that AWE systems have many limitations: they typically focus too heavily on surface-level features of writing, lack sufficient sensitivity to how tasks are constructed, and generate confusion regarding how to use and understand their feedback (Li et al., 2015; Ranalli et al., 2016). Based on this, it can be said that AWE tools cannot be positioned as central components of writing instruction but are generally positioned as complementary components.

The emergence of GenAI has reshaped this situation. Large language models, such as ChatGPT, provide comprehensive feedback that takes into account content and context, including explanations and examples (Steiss et al., 2024), in addition to what AWE systems do. Nevertheless, GenAI is not considered a standalone source of complete feedback. According to Li M. (2024) and Li S. (2025), the full potential of GenAI as a classroom tool can be realized when it is integrated into a human-centered teaching framework rather than being used solely as an independent evaluator. Similarly, comparative research shows that the pedagogical value of AI-generated feedback is shaped by how it is positioned along with other sources of feedback. For example, in a study by Mi et al. (2025), the authors highlight that although GenAI feedback may pose risks related to dependency on the AI-generated feedback and lack of critical engagement with their own writing, it can support peer feedback by providing detailed language support. It is understood that despite GenAI's ability to generate sophisticated responses, it must be purposefully guided and supported by other feedback sources throughout the writing process in order to promote reflective revision.

2.3. Teacher and Learner Perspectives on AI-Supported Feedback

Alongside more technical studies that score or benchmark feedback quality, there has been a noticeable rise in studies that ask what it is actually like to use GenAI for feedback, from the user's point of view. The research by Cengiz et al. (2025) on student engagement, for instance, suggests that learners often appreciate how quickly ChatGPT responds and how "complete" the feedback can feel. However, those same features can become a trap. Since the suggestions presented are already polished, some students have tended to accept them without considering why a change was necessary or what the effect of the change would be, which can leave comprehension relatively weak. Similarly, Zhan and Yan (2025), while discussing the effects of AI feedback on student feedback literacy, further argue that clear pedagogical guidance and teaching support are necessary to ensure sustainable interaction so that students can meaningfully use this type of feedback.

In studies focusing on teachers, both benefits and drawbacks have been highlighted. Teachers acknowledge that GenAI assists them when it comes to providing feedback on assignments, given that they frequently have many drafts requiring review simultaneously while trying to manage (Bao & Li, 2023; Li, 2024). However, doubts are also expressed besides the potential benefits. Instructors raise questions about how reliable and accurate the feedback is, whether it meets institutional assessment criteria, and what happens to student autonomy when students have immediate access to confident and fluent responses with a single prompt (Hossain & Al Younus, 2025; Karagoz, 2025). These concerns emphasize that teachers will continue to play a central role in how AI feedback is introduced, interpreted, and legitimized within teaching practices.

Studies on the reliability of large language models in the feedback process further emphasize the need for pedagogical caution. While studies show that LLMs provide more human-like feedback under certain conditions, these findings remain inconclusive and require human oversight to ensure reliability (Gaggioli et al., 2025). It is clear from this that although GenAI generates feedback resembling human outcomes, it is not a complete feedback source on its own. For that reason, AI-supported feedback makes more sense when it is treated as a multi-actor teaching arrangement. Understanding how instructors conceptualize roles and responsibilities within this arrangement is essential for explaining how GenAI reshapes classroom-based writing practices.

Despite an increasing number of studies on GenAI feedback in L2 writing, existing studies have more often prioritized learner outcomes or evaluations of output quality than instructors' interpretations of how feedback works and responsibilities are reorganized in classroom settings. This study addresses this gap by investigating how EFL instructors perceive the function of ChatGPT at various stages of the writing process, the distribution of roles and accountability among teacher, student, and AI, the pedagogical affordances and limitations of AI-generated

feedback, and the implications of AI use for fostering student autonomy. The comprehensive examination of these perspectives presents an exploratory account of the ways in which the role of AI-generated feedback forms a multi-actor instructional arrangement in classroom-based writing contexts. This multi-actor arrangement aligns with broader theoretical accounts of distributed cognition and shared agency, in which pedagogical work is understood as emerging from interaction among participants and mediating tools rather than residing in any single actor (Hutchins, 1995; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

3. Methodology

A qualitative approach is taken in the present study, focusing on the participants' perspective and their constructions of meaning, to explore how EFL instructors have conceptualized and how the use of ChatGPT affected the instructors' classroom-based writing activities.

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative exploratory research design to investigate how EFL teachers perceive ChatGPT as a feedback provider in classroom writing activities. When determining the study's approach, the limited number of empirical studies focusing on how teachers in L2 writing instruction interpret the emerging nature of GenAI and the distribution of roles in the feedback process were taken into consideration. Qualitative exploratory designs are suited to investigating under-theorized pedagogical phenomena and capturing participants' meaning-making processes in emerging instructional contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Dörnyei, 2007).

3.2 Context and Participants

The study included 12 EFL instructors currently working at foreign languages schools of state universities. The participants' total experience as EFL instructors ranged from 1 year to 25 years. Each instructor involved in the data collection process was currently teaching a writing-related course at their higher education institution. Having EFL instructors with such varying lengths of careers enables the researchers to gather and analyze the responses of both early and highly experienced instructors. This situation increased the analytical richness of the data set.

Although the researchers were not able to measure each instructor's technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK), all of them indicated that they had previously used digital media in the classroom to support their teaching of writing. This statement of use includes varying degrees of familiarity, ranging from initial exploratory use to more sustainable classroom integration. Since these instructors experienced AI interaction at different levels, it was possible to obtain perceptions reflecting a variety of experiences.

The study used criterion sampling to ensure access to information-rich cases aligned with the exploratory aims of the study. The selected participants must have been EFL instructors in foreign languages schools of state universities who actively taught English writing-related courses in addition to having some level of experience or exposure to AI-supported feedback tools. Since participation was voluntary, the sample was limited to those who agreed to participate in the study. One written interview was excluded during the analysis phase because it was not sufficiently in-depth and did not provide sufficient data in relation to the research focus. Therefore, the final data set consisted of 11 content-rich interviews. This sample size is considered appropriate for qualitative exploratory research that prioritizes analytical depth and richness of perspectives over representativeness or generalizability (Patton, 2015). Working with a relatively small sample in this study made it possible to focus more on each response and to examine meaningful differences in recurring patterns and perceptions in detail.

3.3 Data Collection

Data were collected from instructors' reflections on using ChatGPT in classroom-based writing activities. To allow instructors flexibility in how they represent themselves and to capture an exhaustive view of each instructor's experience and perspective, data were gathered through written interviews.

Instruments

The data were collected through a written interview consisting of six open-ended questions. The interview was designed to elicit the instructors' views on a) ChatGPT's potential role in different stages of the writing process, b) the distribution of responsibility for feedback among teachers, students, and AI, c) the pedagogical affordances and limitations of AI-generated feedback, and d) the potential effects of AI on student autonomy in the writing process. Written interviews were selected as a means for participants to have time to reflect on their experiences and express their views on AI-supported feedback in greater detail. Given the exploratory nature of the study, this format was deemed appropriate for capturing the depth and clarity of participants' well-considered, experience-based perceptions rather than spontaneous responses.

When developing the interview questions, attention was paid to ensuring that the questions were consistent with the research questions of the study and the existing literature on AI-supported feedback in L2 writing. To obtain a variety of views and not to constrain the responses to predefined categories, the questions were prepared in an open-ended format. Initially, 10 interview questions were prepared for the research, of which six were selected from this question pool and added to the written interview tool based on expert opinion.

Procedure

Written interviews were conducted asynchronously. Asynchronous data collection is recommended in studies that actively focus on working professionals as it reduces time pressure and facilitates well-considered, information-rich responses (Ratislavová & Ratislav, 2014). Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time and provided informed consent. For instant communication, interview questions were sent via email to all participants, and a week was given to submit their responses. Data were all collected in written format, and participants' identities were anonymized prior to analysis. Ethical approval from the relevant ethics committee was obtained, and the study processes were carried out in accordance with established ethical guidelines.

The data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis, following the studies of Braun and Clarke (2006, 2021). This approach is frequently used in exploratory qualitative research to explain participants' processes of meaning-making and interpretation. The analysis began by repeatedly reading the written interview responses to become familiar with the data. Initial codes were generated inductively from the data by the researchers and an experienced qualitative research specialist working independently. Although the research questions set the analytical focus, no predefined coding phase was applied. Following the initial coding, the coders compared their code sets and engaged in iterative discussions to resolve inconsistencies, refine code definitions, and agree on a common code set. These collaborative discussions during the initial coding phase were held to enhance analytical transparency. Consistent with reflexive thematic analysis, this process was used to support discussion and clarification of interpretations rather than as a measure of objectivity (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020).

The final themes were continuously refined throughout the data analysis process to ensure consistency and clear distinctions between themes. The emerging themes were organized in relation to the research questions to determine how they clustered around the focus of the research questions.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant ethics committee prior to the start of the study. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, that participation was voluntary, and that precautions had been taken to ensure confidentiality. All data were stored and secured in accordance with institutional data protection guidelines for the analysis and reporting of findings.

4. Results

4.1 RQ 1: Conceptualizing ChatGPT's Role in Classroom-based Writing Activities

While instructors saw ChatGPT's role in providing feedback for classroom writing

assignments in different ways, rather than assigning ChatGPT one traditional function, all instructors viewed the role of ChatGPT as flexible; its functions depended on a combination of the pedagogical goals established by the instructor and also the stage of completion of the writing activity and the degree of mediation of the instructor. Instructors' accounts suggested three different ways of seeing the role of ChatGPT: as a supportive assistant, as a conditional co-agent, and as a limited contributor to writing activities.

The majority of the instructors conceptualized ChatGPT primarily as a supportive assistant, particularly during the initial stages of writing development. In this capacity, ChatGPT was viewed as a valuable resource for brainstorming ideas, providing examples of writing, and addressing language problems that often consume excessive amounts of time in the classroom. Additionally, through using ChatGPT, instructors believed that students would not only be able to overcome their initial hesitation and linguistic difficulties, but they would also still have access to and be able to utilize the feedback provided to them by their instructor. One instructor noted that "I see ChatGPT as being a tool for my students to get started or clarify their language issues, but I do not view it as a tool that helps my students determine what quality writing is." In this specific instance, it can be said that ChatGPT would function more as a supplemental resource than as a replacement for the instructors' feedback.

A second group of instructors defined ChatGPT as a conditional co-agent. According to the accounts, only if the instructor clearly taught students how to use ChatGPT, how to evaluate ChatGPT's feedback in terms of information quality, and how to select which feedback was appropriate for them, ChatGPT could provide feedback on writing and assist in editing or reviewing drafts. In this case, ChatGPT's ability to cooperate with the student would depend on whether the student used ChatGPT in accordance with the guidelines provided by the instructor. One instructor described this boundary between ChatGPT's potentiality and actualization well: "ChatGPT could serve as a second pair of eyes; however, a student must understand how to communicate with ChatGPT effectively, or they will receive only generalized advice." ChatGPT can assist students in developing their written work, as long as it fits within the boundaries that the instructor established.

There were fewer instructors who viewed ChatGPT positively but also had concerns that ChatGPT provided limited benefits in anything other than grammar and spelling. These instructors were skeptical about ChatGPT's ability to produce feedback because they were unsure how well ChatGPT's responses would match the expectations of a specific assignment or the institutional assessment criteria. Additionally, these instructors raised the issue that there was a concern regarding the accuracy and trustworthiness of ChatGPT's feedback. As one instructor noted, "Students trust ChatGPT's feedback too much, even when ChatGPT is providing feedback that is not relevant or appropriate for the assignment." In this context, ChatGPT would function as a peripheral tool for writing, and a degree of caution must accompany its use in order to ensure that its value is maximized.

Across all three conceptualizations, instructors emphasized their role as the regulator. ChatGPT cannot be considered an autonomous authority on the provision of feedback for writing. Instead, its role must be defined, monitored, and given credibility within the established instructional context and the expectations of the classroom.

4.2 RQ 2: Negotiating Responsibility in AI-Supported Feedback

Instructors discussed how ongoing negotiations regarding responsibility when using ChatGPT in classroom-based writing activities occur among themselves and their students. They neither see responsibility as fixed nor describe it as transferred from teacher to AI. Instead, they described responsibility-sharing configurations shaped by instructional goals, task demands, and students' readiness. These configurations reflected different levels of instructor control and student input. Responsibility is therefore viewed as a negotiated aspect of AI-supported feedback.

Participants generally tended to view instructors as having the final say in evaluating writing quality and legitimizing feedback. In this configuration, ChatGPT could provide suggestions, but the final

authority in determining revision priorities and validating feedback remained with the instructor. Many participants emphasized that the authority of instructors is necessary to maintain the integrity of assessment and instructional coherence. As one instructor stated, "Students can look at what ChatGPT says, but they need to know that the final word still comes from the teacher." Thus, the function of AI-generated feedback is seen as a type of advisory assistance.

Other instructors described a more distributed model. Feedback-related decision-making was shared across teachers, students, and ChatGPT under explicit guidance. Instructors described practices requiring students to compare AI-generated feedback against established criteria for each assignment and teacher feedback. In this way, students are treated as evaluators of the feedback. One participant noted that, "If students learn to question and evaluate feedback, then ChatGPT becomes part of the process instead of being the final decision-maker." This type of structure redistributes responsibility. Instructors still play a role in overseeing instructional practices, but students are typically more active participants in their own learning process and make feedback assessments using both instructors' and ChatGPT's feedback.

Participants also stressed the need for additional training on working with ChatGPT to reduce the number of problems related to how students use AI-generated feedback. In particular, some instructors remarked on instances where students assigned excessive authority to AI feedback when the feedback exhibited fluency and confidence. One instructor said, "They automatically assume that it must be correct because it seems convincing." Participants in the study described this practice as potentially posing pedagogical dangers as it could cause students and instructors to transfer responsibility from one another.

4.3 RQ 3: Perceived Pedagogical Affordances and Limitations of ChatGPT-Supported Feedback

Instructors mentioned both the pedagogical affordances and limitations of ChatGPT-supported feedback to form an understanding of its educational value in the context of the classroom. They perceived the benefits and limitations of ChatGPT-supported feedback to be dependent on the conditions of instruction.

ChatGPT was viewed as affording instructors time efficiency and the immediacy of receiving feedback. Instructors reported that ChatGPT provides immediate feedback on language usage, sentence structure, and the basic coherence of the text. Furthermore, ChatGPT-supported feedback is valuable in the context of classroom writing when there is little time to provide that feedback to students. Many instructors reported that AI-generated feedback has the potential to ease the workload that instructors deal with on a daily basis. At the same time, it gives instructors the time to concentrate on more advanced aspects of the assignment, such as argumentation and connection to the assignment. "AI's feedback really reduces the time that I have to spend on things that students can check for themselves," one instructor stated, "so I can devote more time to helping them with meaning or structure." The instructors' comments indicate that ChatGPT-supported feedback complements the instructional feedback provided by instructors and enhances instructional efficiency.

Another thing that many instructors pointed out was the potential of ChatGPT-supported feedback to be used in the scaffolding process for their students. Instructors observed that ChatGPT could generate ideas for students, provide alternative formulations of their ideas, and demonstrate how to use language effectively for writers who have limited language skills. As a result, instructors believe that the use of AI-supported feedback in the classroom can create fewer psychological obstacles and increase participation in the drafting and revision processes when students use ChatGPT. Furthermore, it is important to note that instructors stated that scaffolding was effective when the students received specific instructions on how to use the feedback generated by ChatGPT effectively.

On the other hand, instructors stated that one of the main limitations of using AI-generated feedback in the classroom is that the feedback generated by ChatGPT lacks reliability and task alignment with the student's assignment. Instructors reported that the wording in ChatGPT's feedback can be overly general. Instructors also stated that AI-generated

feedback may include comments that do not reflect the expectations for assessment set forth by their institution or that do not meet the expectations for the assignment as a whole. One instructor indicated that, "It gives advice that sounds good, but not always what we actually want students to do in this task." These limitations were compounded for students who may not have had any experience evaluating the feedback they received from ChatGPT. The second major limitation of ChatGPT-supported feedback is the lack of critical thinking skills required to integrate the feedback provided by ChatGPT into students' own texts. Instructors stated that when students receive a large quantity of AI-generated feedback, the feedback provided is likely to cause the students to apply it mechanically and with minimal reflection or informed decision-making. Moreover, the instructors indicated that when feedback provided by AI is fluent and gives confidence to the reader, it may deter students from thinking critically about the feedback and comparing the feedback they received from multiple sources. Another instructor stated, "I think that they can revise their text, but they have no understanding of why they made those revisions."

While the instructors did not frame the affordances and limitations as static characteristics of the technology, they did acknowledge that the effective use of ChatGPT-supported feedback is a function of instructional design, teacher mediation, and student preparedness. All instructors evaluated the effective use of ChatGPT-supported feedback as context-dependent, based on guided use and clearly defined expectations for how to use the AI-generated feedback for the assignment. Therefore, they viewed GenAI as a tool with educational outcomes that depend upon classroom conditions and the instructional decisions of the instructor.

4.4 RQ 4: Perceived Influence of ChatGPT-Supported Feedback on Student Autonomy

Instructors discussed student autonomy alongside artificial intelligence to understand the conditional and restrictive aspects of ChatGPT-supported feedback. Student autonomy was not seen as an automatic benefit of AI use but rather depended on how instructors structured their instructional designs to support student independence throughout the course. As part of integrating artificial intelligence into the classroom with ChatGPT, instructors stated that they used instructional design decisions and teaching strategies or techniques to encourage students to take more responsibility for their writing.

Several instructors associated guided use of ChatGPT with greater learner independence. Instructors indicated that an increase in autonomy would result when students utilize AI to develop reflective and decision-making processes. In instructors' accounts, it is emphasized that using ChatGPT enables students to explore multiple alternatives in their writing and make decisions about revisions before submitting their drafts to the instructor for evaluation. As one instructor noted, "When students know they need to justify their choices, this tool encourages them to take more responsibility for their writing." Based on this, we can say that student autonomy through the evaluation and justification of students' decisions is linked to their use of the AI tool.

Instructors also raised concerns regarding the potential negative implications of not having structured systems in place to facilitate students' independent decision-making in the way of ChatGPT support for feedback. Instructors noted that without oversight, students may become dependent on and offload their critical thinking skills when using ChatGPT for feedback. Some instructors cited the problem of students accepting the suggestions of the AI without critical analysis. As one instructor noted, "If they simply take the AI feedback and act on it without thinking, it is not autonomous learning." Aware of this situation and its impact on students' revision of their writing, instructors noted that revision strategy development and metacognitive awareness were two main instructional goals. Instructors agreed that students will not achieve autonomy based solely on the use of AI support. Student autonomy was defined as a learning target supported by access to structured guidance and support for students as they move through the stages of their writing process. Through interview responses, the majority of instructors viewed student autonomy as a construct that was shaped by learners, teachers, and the AI tool. However, there was a recognition of the

dual potential of the integration of ChatGPT as a support for learning and a barrier to learning, depending on the guidance and formal support provided for the students' use of the tool.

Within the scope of the analytic themes, instructors articulated varied but similar ideas regarding their understanding of the role of ChatGPT in writing activities in the classroom. Specifically, there were noticeable variances in the position of ChatGPT, based on the individual writing stages and the emphasis on the instructor's pedagogical regulation, as well as teacher mediation. Instructors identified multiple configurations of how they and ChatGPT share responsibility in this area, and the configurations were dependent upon the design of instruction and the established norms of the classroom. In a similar manner, when determining the benefits and potential downsides of integrating AI support, instructors linked these concepts to the levels of guidance, task alignment, and student preparedness for completion of the task. Overall, the perspectives of student autonomy identified by participants demonstrated a consistent response regarding the need for structured engagement of students with the ChatGPT tool and the manner in which instructors' regulatory practices and instructional priorities shape flexible use of the tool in the classroom.

5. Discussion

This exploratory study examined how EFL instructors perceive ChatGPT when it enters classroom-based writing activities as a feedback source. Instructors described AI-supported feedback as a pedagogical arrangement shaped by classroom norms, task demands, and teacher mediation. A shared point across accounts was that ChatGPT does not carry educational consequences on its own. Consequences depend on how the tool is positioned and governed within the instructional context. Instructors assigned different roles to ChatGPT. They also differed in how much responsibility they were willing to share and what kinds of guidance they considered necessary. Co-agency appeared in routine classroom decisions. These decisions included who evaluates feedback, who legitimizes revision priorities, and what counts as acceptable engagement with AI-generated suggestions.

These findings can be interpreted through shared agency and distributed cognition (Hutchins, 1995; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Agency is produced in interaction among participants and mediating tools. When ChatGPT is introduced into classroom writing, cognitive and pedagogical work related to feedback becomes distributed across teachers, students, and the system. Instructors described ChatGPT as an instructional tool that also shapes classroom participation. Its contributions influenced decisions about authority, responsibility, and the pacing of revision. This view resonates with work that places GenAI within teacher-mediated instructional activities and rejects the idea of AI as a self-sufficient feedback authority (Barrot, 2023; Bao & Li, 2023; Guo & Wang, 2024). Participants reported that ChatGPT was most useful for language-focused support, idea generation, and early-stage drafting. A key point in this dataset concerns how instructors bound these uses. They adjusted the tool's involvement in relation to the writing stage, task expectations, and student readiness. ChatGPT's pedagogical role emerged through these local decisions. Technical affordances did not settle the role by themselves.

A central theme across accounts concerned how responsibility was shared and negotiated. Instructors often did not view responsibility as being totally handed over to ChatGPT. Instead, they stated that responsibility was being distributed through their pedagogical design. This finding corresponds with the existing literature demonstrating that most teachers are reluctant to delegate evaluating authority to GenAI, especially in writing tasks linked to assessment (Karagoz, 2025; Hossain & Al Younus, 2025). The instructors in this research generally viewed themselves as the ultimate arbiter of the legitimacy of the feedback from GenAI. While their students could consult feedback provided by GenAI, the instructors retained the authority to decide whether to accept, reject, or change that feedback. In this way, sharing of responsibility was conducted within well-defined instructional parameters. Some of the instructors described how they were able to share the responsibility of evaluating student work while still

maintaining an appropriate level of instructional coherence. One example of this was as follows: Instructors required their students to compare the task criteria and comments from the instructor with the feedback provided by GenAI before making a final decision.

Findings related to student autonomy support the same interpretation. Instructors did not equate autonomy with unmediated access to AI feedback. They defined autonomy in terms of students' capacity to evaluate feedback sources, justify revision choices, and align revisions with task goals. This view is consistent with research documenting superficial uptake when AI-generated feedback is treated as authoritative (Zhan & Yan, 2025). This study extends that line of work by showing how instructors locate autonomy in structured engagement. They also locate it in sustained mediation across time.

When ChatGPT was embedded in a routine created by instructors, it enabled students' autonomy in their writing. However, over-reliance on teacher approval limited the potential for students to develop an independent dialogue with ChatGPT. The implications of this dependence on teacher verification raise an instructional question about balance. While teachers must provide instructional guidance to maintain quality and accountability, they must also create a space for students to practice evaluating and making decisions. In summary, the findings indicate that ChatGPT's position in writing instruction is neither static nor homogeneous. Instead, instructors negotiate their use of ChatGPT based on their assessment of the efficiency, control, and development of the learner. The data demonstrate that instructors conceptualize the use of ChatGPT in terms of its practical integration into the writing process. Thus, the data indicate that the development of AI-assisted feedback is heavily reliant on instructors' use of autonomy in determining how ChatGPT is structured, governed, and employed in practice, as well as on the instructor's responsibility for the assessment of revision.

6. Conclusion

The current study explored instructor experiences of using ChatGPT as a co-agent in supporting writing instruction by investigating how instructors conceptualize ChatGPT's capability to provide students with feedback and develop their writing skills when used as part of a classroom writing activity. In order to gain insight into the way that instructors within higher education perceive ChatGPT's role, responsibility, pedagogical affordances, and implications for student autonomy in the class, the study collected written interview data from instructors currently working in higher education.

The results of the study demonstrate that instructors do not conceptualise ChatGPT as an independent or self-sufficient authority on feedback. Instead, instructors conceptualize feedback generated by AI as part of a larger pedagogical arrangement that requires instructors to oversee, rationalize, and co-ordinate with other elements of their instruction. Across the various interviews, instructors referred to ChatGPT as a flexible resource, whose utility is dependent on the manner in which it is incorporated into the writing task, how teachers mediate its use, and how they situate it for student use. Instructors consistently emphasized that even with the provision of feedback generated by AI, feedback legitimacy, revision priorities, and assessment standards remain anchored in the instructor's judgment. Additionally, the study highlights that co-agency between instructor and student, while using AI to support writing instruction, does not occur spontaneously through redistribution of responsibilities, but emerges through intentional pedagogical design. For example, instructors indicated that they perceived the possibility of sharing responsibility for determining the appropriate amount of feedback, the appropriate revision priorities, and the standards for determining what constitutes good writing only under the conditions of clear expectations and guidelines for students to evaluate, make comparisons, and justify their use of feedback from multiple sources. Within this model, student autonomy is regarded as a pedagogical outcome

that emerges from engagement in structured processes to build feedback literacy, not from access to AI tools without mediation.

The contributions of this study to the growing body of literature on the use of GenAI as a resource for L2 writing instructors have been to shift the focus away from technological capabilities and place greater emphasis on pedagogical governance. Instructors interpreted, regulated, and legitimized the use of ChatGPT in the practices of writing instruction, suggesting that the most significant educational impact of ChatGPT may be less about the output that it produces. Instead, it is a result of the manner in which instructors use, regulate, and interpret its output within writing instruction.

Therefore, professional development for teacher educators and curriculum developers should address not only their understanding of how to use AI to produce and provide instructional value but also how to strategically orchestrate and monitor the use of feedback generated by AI within writing instruction.

The limitations of the study include that the instructor sample was small and only reflective of those instructors working within higher education; thus, the findings are not necessarily representative of the general instructor population. Additionally, because the data were collected through written interviews only, the researcher had no way to determine how quickly participants responded, to identify the immediate emotional responses or other spontaneous reactions of participants to AI-generated responses, which may provide further insight into the ways in which writing instructors engage with AI-generated feedback in the moment. Despite these limitations, this study provides valuable insight into how AI-generated feedback may be used by writing instructors as they enter into new instructional spaces. Furthermore, the findings underscore the centrality of instructor agency and its role in determining the degree to which GenAI-based feedback will be a meaningful resource in improving pedagogical practice and whether GenAI-based tools create new tensions in the instructional process. As GenAI becomes more integrated into language education, an understanding of the interpretive and regulatory processes described in this study will remain important for the responsible use of AI in L2 writing instruction.

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