



# “Is this Really your Work?”: A Qualitative Study of Teacher-Led Interviews and Student Accountability in the Age of Generative AI

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## Abstract

As generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) tools become increasingly embedded in academic writing practices, questions of authorship, integrity, and accountability require new assessment approaches. This study examines teacher-led interviews as a mediational assessment practice, informed by an integrative cultural–historical activity theory (iCHAT) perspective that emphasizes how reasoning, responsibility, and authorship develop through guided social interaction. Teacher-led interviews were designed to prompt students to explain and justify their research writing decisions, including how they engaged with GenAI support. Reflection data were collected from 24 Master’s-level English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students, who were asked to participate in short teacher-led interviews about their research proposal submissions as part of the unit assessment. Thematic analysis indicates that the interviews supported the emergence of an ethical orientation toward academic work, expressed through cognitive, emotional, and agentive developments. Students engaged more critically with ideas and AI-generated suggestions (cognitive), negotiated feelings of anxiety, fairness, and recognition (emotional), and adopted more proactive and self-regulated preparation strategies (agentive). These outcomes appeared to be shaped by how students experienced the interview (*perezhivanie*), suggesting that the interview reoriented the object and motive of the writing task from producing text to being able to account for one’s reasoning and decisions. The study proposes a cultural-historical framework conceptualizing teacher-led interviews as a mediational space where dialogic accountability supports reflective, ethical, and principled engagement with GenAI. Implications highlight the need for assessment practices that cultivate development through guided explanation rather than rely solely on detection or surveillance.

**Keywords** Assessment · Critical thinking · Ethical · Generative AI · Interview · *Perezhivanie* · Teacher

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## Introduction

The rapid uptake of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) in higher education has begun to unsettle established pedagogical norms and assessment practices. Tools such as ChatGPT can provide new forms of support for academic writing and research; however, they may also introduce ambiguity into the boundary between student-authored work and machine-generated output (J. Jiang et al., 2024a, b; Revell et al. 2024). This ambiguity has raised emerging concerns regarding academic integrity, authorship, and the value of intellectual labor. Institutional responses have, to date, tended to involve AI-detection technologies or policy restrictions (e.g., Ibrahim, 2023), though such measures have been critiqued for variable accuracy, limited transparency, and uncertain pedagogical alignment (Giray et al., 2025). In some cases, they may inadvertently emphasize surveillance over engagement, reinforcing an adversarial rather than dialogic orientation to assessment.

At the same time, the increasing presence of GenAI has renewed interest in critical thinking as an essential competency in higher education (Zhou et al., 2024). As students interact with AI-generated content, they may need support not only in identifying potential inaccuracies or biases, but also in evaluating, contextualizing, and reflecting upon the knowledge they produce and consume (Cong-Lem et al., 2024, 2025; Chen, 2025; Darwin, Rusdin et al., 2024). However, the integration of AI into learning environments does not automatically cultivate these capacities. Without deliberate guidance, AI use can risk encouraging surface-level engagement or diminishing students' sense of agency, potentially constraining the development of independent reasoning. These concerns have led to calls for assessment approaches that encourage ethical engagement, scaffold reflective judgment, and foreground students' active participation in meaning-making (Liu et al., 2025).

Within this evolving landscape, teacher-led interviews may offer a promising supplementary assessment approach for promoting academic integrity amid the growing use of GenAI. Unlike automated detection systems or purely written submissions, teacher-led interviews provide opportunities for students to articulate, justify, and reflect on their work in real time. Such interactions can enable educators to better understand students' reasoning processes and support verification of authorship, while also creating space for formative dialogue. The relational and dialogic nature of interviews may foster cognitive accountability and provide opportunities for clarification and feedback (Cornell et al., 2013; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Nevertheless, this approach remains relatively underexamined, particularly in contexts where student writing and decision-making are increasingly shaped by GenAI. As such, further research is needed to understand how students experience teacher-led interviews within AI-mediated academic environments.

This study responds to this gap by examining how graduate students experience teacher-led interviews as a supplementary assessment method in GenAI-influenced academic settings. It focuses on how the interview shapes students' engagement with their writing and their perceptions of academic responsibility. Accordingly, the study addresses the following research questions:

- (1) *How do students perceive oral interviews as a means of verifying authorship and academic honesty in the age of GenAI?*
- (2) *In what ways do these interviews influence students' preparation strategies, emotional responses, and critical thinking?*

This study is significant for several reasons. First, it offers empirical evidence on how students perceive oral interviews as a means of reinforcing academic integrity at a time when AI-generated content is increasingly present in educational settings. Second, it advances the conversation on assessment reform by proposing a model that values human interaction, reflection, and ethical accountability, counterbalancing the impersonal nature of automated detection systems. Third, by foregrounding the emotional and cognitive dimensions of interview-based assessment, the study contributes to ongoing efforts to design inclusive, formative, and dialogic approaches that support both learning and fairness. In doing so, it provides practical and theoretical insights for educators and institutions seeking to maintain academic rigor while adapting to the evolving technological landscape.

## Literature Review

### Reframing Academic Integrity and Critical Thinking in the GenAI Era

The rapid integration of GenAI into higher education has reignited long-standing concerns about academic integrity, authorship, and critical thinking. GenAI tools such as ChatGPT have blurred the boundaries between original student work and algorithmically generated content, leading to uncertainty regarding what constitutes intellectual authorship (J. Jiang et al., 2024a, 2004b); Revell et al. 2024). Traditional institutional responses have often emphasized detection-based solutions, including AI-detection software and policy-driven plagiarism enforcement (e.g., Ibrahim, 2023). However, a growing body of research critiques these strategies for their limited accuracy, lack of transparency, and reliance on punitive logic. For instance, Gorichanaz (2023) found that students accused of using ChatGPT reported frustration, confusion, and disempowerment, particularly when unable to contest opaque algorithmic decisions.

In parallel, educators and scholars have raised concerns that GenAI may erode students' critical thinking capacities. Jia and Tu (2024) argue that while AI can support learning motivation and efficiency, its passive use may reduce students' metacognitive engagement and awareness. Guo and Lee (2023) similarly suggest that over-reliance on AI-generated explanations may encourage surface-level understanding rather than deeper analytical reasoning. As AI systems increasingly participate in knowledge production, it becomes essential for learners to engage critically, not only with content, but with the epistemic logics embedded in AI outputs. Thus, recent scholarship has moved toward promoting critical AI literacy (Liang & Wu, 2024) and incorporating reflective assignments that require students to interpret, revise, or interrogate algorithmic contributions (Zhou et al., 2024).

In summary, these trends signal the need to rethink assessment design in ways that uphold academic integrity while fostering critical thinking. Rather than relying exclusively on surveillance-oriented tools, scholars advocate for approaches that are interactive, formative, and situated within human relationships (Amrane-Cooper et al., 2024; Evangelista, 2025). Central to this emerging discourse is the idea that integrity and cognition are not only individual traits but co-constructed through dialogic and relational assessment practices.

## Dialogic Assessment and Teacher-Led Interviews: Emerging Evidence

Among alternative assessment strategies, teacher-led interviews offer a promising yet under-explored mechanism for authenticating student work in GenAI-influenced academic contexts. Oral assessments have long been used in fields such as language education, medical training, and law, where they serve as tools for eliciting conceptual understanding, practical reasoning, and situational judgment (e.g., Fatima et al., 2024). These assessments typically involve verbal articulation of thought processes, real-time questioning, and opportunities for clarification, features that make them well suited for verifying genuine understanding.

More recently, oral and dialogic assessment formats have gained attention as a counterbalance to the limitations of automated detection systems. Crawford et al. (2023) argue that human-centered assessments foster trust and accountability by engaging students in meaningful dialogue about their work. Fatima et al. (2024) document how student-teacher interviews in medical education encourage learners to take ownership of their reasoning and receive timely, constructive feedback. Such methods are not only tools of evaluation but also spaces for reflection, clarification, and formative growth.

In GenAI-integrated learning environments, emerging research has explored how oral assessment and learning tasks may interface with students' use of AI tools during preparation. Exintaris et al. (2023), for instance, implemented ChatGPT-generated prompts in a chemistry workshop, finding that students who used the tool as a simulated dialogue partner exhibited greater metacognitive awareness. Suriano et al. (2025) further demonstrate that students who interacted with ChatGPT to explain, defend, or critique ideas developed more complex thinking pathways, provided that these activities were embedded within tasks requiring justification and reflection. These results suggest that oral interaction, whether with humans or AI, can activate deeper reasoning processes when scaffolded appropriately.

Despite these developments, little research has directly examined teacher-led interviews as a response to academic integrity challenges posed by GenAI. Most studies either focus on detection mechanisms or explore AI's cognitive impact in isolation from learning assessment structures. There remains a need to investigate how dialogic, relational forms of assessment, such as teacher-led interviews, can function as both ethical verification tools and developmental learning opportunities in AI-mediated classrooms.

### Research Gap and Justification

In light of the above, this study addresses a key gap in the literature: the lack of empirical research on teacher-led interviews as a supplementary assessment method for upholding academic integrity and promoting critical thinking in GenAI-enhanced higher education contexts. While previous studies have documented the limitations of automated detection tools and the potential of dialogic formats, few have examined how students themselves perceive oral interviews in this emerging landscape. Particularly absent are studies exploring the emotional, cognitive, and ethical dimensions of such interviews from the learner's perspective.

This study responds to that need by investigating graduate students' experiences with teacher-led interviews embedded in a research writing-intensive course. It offers empirical insights into how students navigate the pressures, opportunities, and ethical tensions of oral verification, and how such interviews may influence their engagement with academic tasks

in the presence of GenAI tools. By centering student voice and examining both the challenges and benefits of this format, the study contributes to evolving efforts to design assessment practices that are not only technologically relevant but also pedagogically inclusive, ethically grounded, and developmentally rich.

## An Integrative Cultural-Historical Activity Theory Perspective on Teacher-Led Interviews

This study adopts an integrative Cultural–Historical Activity Theory (iCHAT) perspective (Vygotsky, 1978; Leontiev, 1978), as also elaborated in Cong-Lem and Nguyen (2024) and Cong-Lem (2025). Grounded in iCHAT, learning is understood as a mediated, relational, and experientially lived process, rather than the outcome of isolated individual cognition. Higher psychological functions, such as reasoning, justification, and self-regulation, develop first in social interaction before becoming reorganized as internal capabilities (Vygotsky, 1987).

Mediation is central to this view: individuals act on the world through culturally produced tools and signs that shape how they perceive, evaluate, and articulate meaning (Vygotsky, 1978, 1994). Language is the primary mediational means, and GenAI now participates in this semiotic environment by offering additional representational and linguistic options. Following Cong-Lem et al. (2025), GenAI is not understood as a cognitive substitute but as a mediational field that requires interpretive agency: learners must decide how to incorporate, revise, or resist AI-generated suggestions. The educational significance of GenAI use therefore depends not on the tool itself, but on how learners work on and through its outputs in purposeful activity.

Social interaction provides the developmental conditions for this evaluative and reflective work. Through dialogic engagement, learners encounter the expectations, interpretive norms, and reasoning practices of a community. This aligns with the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where guided articulation and explanation enable the learner to reorganize emerging understandings (Vygotsky, 1978). However, participation in the ZPD is not guaranteed by interaction alone. Whether instructional situations become developmental depends on how learners experience and interpret them.

This interpretive–affective relation is theorized through *perezhivanie*, which refers to how the learner lives through the demands of the situation, including its expectations, emotions, and meanings (Vygotsky, 1994). *Perezhivanie* explains why the same instructional structure may afford opportunities for conceptual deepening for one student while prompting anxiety or avoidance in another.

To account for the reorganization of meaning in the writing task when teacher-led interviews are introduced as a supplementary assessment, we draw on Leontiev's (1978) account of activity, object, and motive. The object of an activity is often the problem or purpose toward which it is oriented, while the motive reflects why the activity matters to the learner. When academic writing is approached primarily as producing a correct text for evaluation, the object is mostly task completion. The teacher-led interview introduces a condition of anticipated explanation, which can shift the object to authorship-as-accountability, where the learner must stand behind and justify the reasoning reflected in their work. When the object shifts, the motive may also shift, from compliance to agentic participation in scholarly meaning-making (Cong-Lem, 2025).

In this study, the teacher-led interview functions as a mediational juncture in two phases. Before the interview, the expectation of speaking as the author reorients how learners monitor sources, evaluate GenAI outputs, and reflect upon their claims. During the interview, dialogic questioning invites learners to articulate tacit decisions, reorganize partial understandings, and publicly enact authorship within a relational ZPD. Whether this potential becomes developmental depends on the individual learner's *perezhivanie*, where the interview can be experienced as collaborative inquiry or evaluative scrutiny.

In sum, from an iCHAT perspective, the teacher-led interview does not merely verify authorship; it redefines the meaning or object of the writing task, positioning GenAI as something to be interpreted and justified rather than reproduced. Its educational significance lies in cultivating the conditions in which conceptual understanding, reflective agency, and ethical academic practice may develop.

## Methodology

### Research Design

This study employed a qualitative design to explore how teacher-led interviews may foster ethical awareness, critical thinking, and academic accountability in MA-level coursework. Specifically, the study aimed to understand students' preparatory reasoning and perceived responsibilities when asked to orally verify the originality and integrity of their written assignments. A combination of teacher-led interviews and open-ended written reflections was used to elicit participants' cognitive and emotional responses to this form of integrity-based assessment. The reflections were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis approach to identify patterns of meaning across students' accounts.

### Participants

Participants were master's students enrolled in an English Linguistics graduate program at a Vietnamese public university. Two cohorts were involved in the study: Class1 Cohort was taking a Discourse Analysis unit, while Class2 Cohort was enrolled in a Research Methods in Applied Linguistics unit. A total of 24 students voluntarily completed the open-ended reflection form used for data collection.

As a national requirement for English-major graduates, all participants were expected to have attained a minimum English proficiency level of C1 (Advanced) on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) upon completing their graduate degree. Despite this formal proficiency, some students still expressed anxiety about participating in oral interviews, suggesting that communicative pressure may stem more from social and emotional factors than from linguistic competence alone.

While the study did not seek to compare subgroups, it is worth noting that students in the Class2 cohort had previously attended a faculty-led workshop on the use of GenAI in academic contexts (Cong-Lem et al., 2025). This prior exposure may have informed their awareness of ethical issues related to authorship and plagiarism. In contrast, students in the Class1 cohort had not received structured instruction on GenAI at the time of the study.

Additionally, participants had varying degrees of prior experience with oral or interview-based assessments, as written assignments were the dominant assessment mode throughout their academic training.

## Data Collection

Reflection data were collected using a structured, open-ended questionnaire administered via Google Forms, which students could complete either before or shortly after their oral interview depending on their individual scheduling and readiness. This flexible administration approach was necessary due to time constraints during the final class session and the extended duration of interviews. The reflection instrument was used to capture students' cognitive engagement and ethical awareness as they prepared for the teacher-led interview. The reflections highlight how the anticipation of having to articulate and justify their work prompted deeper interaction with course concepts, more deliberate decision-making in drafting, and greater attentiveness to academic integrity when using GenAI tools. In this way, the reflection data shed light on how the interview, as a supplementary assessment element, supported critical thinking and reinforced responsible engagement in the writing process. Students were allowed to respond in either English or Vietnamese, based on their linguistic comfort. This bilingual option ensured that participants could express nuanced reflections without the barrier of language anxiety.

## Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using inductive thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework: familiarization, initial coding, theme development, theme review, theme definition, and report production. All student reflections were read multiple times to identify recurring meanings, patterns of interpretation, and affective tone. Analytic memos were written during early readings to capture emerging impressions and to trace shifts in meaning across the dataset. Table 1 provides illustrative examples of how raw excerpts were coded and organized into focused codes and final themes.

Initial codes were generated manually through open coding and included both descriptive labels (for example, "anxiety about speaking," "checking references again") and more interpretive categories (for example, "self-regulation under anticipation," "accountability to reasoning"). Codes were compared and refined iteratively and then grouped into candidate themes that captured shared patterns of meaning. Rather than comparing the two cohorts as separate groups, responses were examined across participants to ensure themes reflected common interpretive processes while still allowing for individual variation.

Themes were refined through constant comparison, with attention to the cognitive, emotional, and ethical dimensions evident in student reflections. For instance, codes such as "nervous about speaking," "forgetting under pressure," and "difficulty speaking quickly in English" were consolidated into a theme concerning emotional and communicative tension in oral verification. In contrast, codes such as "rechecking references," "anticipating questions," and "using ChatGPT to self-test understanding" informed a theme focused on anticipatory preparation and reflective engagement with the writing task. Together, these analytic steps supported the identification of the three overarching themes reported in the Findings.

**Table 1** Illustrative coding process from Raw reflections to thematic categories

Participant (Pseudonym)	Excerpt	Initial Codes	Subcategories	Final Themes
Student P	“The interview made me feel more responsible for my work; I couldn’t just write something without understanding it.” (Q005)	Responsibility awareness	Ownership of authorship	Reinforcing Academic Authenticity & Engagement
Student J	“It helped me take more ownership—it’s not only about completing an assignment but really understanding it.” (Q006)	Task to authorship shift	Internalization of authorship	Reinforcing Academic Authenticity & Engagement
Student R	“I’m always afraid I’ll forget everything when the teacher asks.” (Q021)	Performance anxiety	Communicative pressure in oral defense	Emotional & Behavioral Responses to Oral Verification
Student L	“I used to just write and submit, but now I think about what the teacher might ask.” (Q024)	Anticipatory preparation	Strategic rehearsal and metacognitive planning	Emotional & Behavioral Responses to Oral Verification
Student V	“I couldn’t just say what I did; I also had to explain the reasons behind my decisions.” (Q037)	Justification requirement	Reasoned justification of methodological choices	Fostering Critical Thinking while Negotiating Fairness & Inclusivity
Student E	“When the teacher asked why I chose one method over another, I realized I hadn’t really thought it through before.” (Q038)	Revealing conceptual gaps	Development of metacognitive awareness	Fostering Critical Thinking while Negotiating Fairness & Inclusivity

## Ethical Considerations

Participants were informed of the study’s purpose, voluntary nature, and the anonymity of their responses. The dual role of the instructor as both teacher and researcher was addressed by clearly separating academic evaluation from research participation and by emphasizing that opting out would not affect course standing. All names and identifiable data were removed during transcription and analysis. Students’ names and class identifiers were coded, and pseudonyms were assigned in all transcripts, reflections, and reporting. Furthermore, offering the reflection instrument in both English and Vietnamese was a deliberate ethical choice to support equitable participation, allowing students to reflect in their preferred language without fear of linguistic misjudgement.

## Results

This section presents the qualitative findings derived from open-ended survey responses completed by 24 graduate students enrolled in two master’s-level courses, Discourse Analysis (Class 1) and Research Methods in Applied Linguistics (Class 2), at a Vietnamese university. Guided by thematic analysis, three interrelated themes emerged that illuminate both the cognitive and affective dimensions of the interview experience: (1) reinforcing academic

authenticity and engagement, (2) emotional and behavioral responses to oral verification, and (3) fostering critical thinking while negotiating fairness and inclusivity. While the analysis is qualitative and interpretive rather than quantitative, an approximate distribution of coded excerpts was used to convey the relative prominence of each theme across the dataset. These proportions reflect how frequently particular experiences and orientations were articulated and are intended as descriptive indicators rather than inferential or comparative claims. Based on this coding distribution, Theme 1 (Reinforcing Academic Authenticity and Engagement) appeared in approximately 57% of coded excerpts, Theme 2 (Emotional and Behavioral Responses to Oral Verification) in 47%, and Theme 3 (Fostering Critical Thinking, Fairness, and Inclusivity) in 55%. Overall, the findings highlight the teacher-led interview as functioning simultaneously as a mechanism of academic accountability and a pedagogical space that supports deeper intellectual engagement and reflective learning.

### **Reinforcing Academic Authenticity and Engagement**

A dominant theme emerging from the data was the interview's function in verifying the authenticity of student work and prompting more engaged learning. Many participants viewed the interview not only as a means of detecting dishonesty, particularly misuse of AI tools, but also as a form of academic self-accountability. As Student M (Class2) observed, if someone relied on AI or copied content, "it would be obvious when they can't explain what they wrote." The implication here is that oral defense exposes gaps between surface-level fluency and actual understanding.

Knowing they would need to explain their work in real time encouraged many students to prepare more thoroughly. For Student P (Class1), the interview "made me more responsible. I couldn't just write anything." This indicates a shift from task completion to conceptual ownership, driven by the expectation of verbal articulation.

Others described how the interview format motivated them to internalize their work. Student J (Class2) noted that it "made me take ownership. It's not about just finishing an assignment anymore," highlighting a deeper level of cognitive engagement than typical written tasks might demand.

In addition to its academic function, the interview was seen as a more humane alternative to automated plagiarism checks. Student T (Class1) commented that they "felt less judged than with Turnitin" because the teacher listened to explanations rather than relying on similarity scores. Similarly, Student F (Class2) described the process as "stressful but fairer," since it allowed them to speak for themselves rather than be evaluated solely by algorithms.

Together, these perspectives suggest that teacher-led interviews support academic integrity not just by deterring misconduct, but by fostering greater student agency, trust, and deeper interaction with course content.

### **Emotional and Behavioral Responses To Oral Verification**

Many participants reported experiencing heightened emotional responses in anticipation of the interview component. Anxiety was a recurring theme, particularly among students less confident in their spoken English or unfamiliar with oral assessments. Student R (Class1) explained that, despite understanding the content, "I'm always afraid I'll forget everything when the teacher asks." Similarly, Student D (Class2) described struggling to perform under

pressure, commenting, “It’s not easy to think and speak fast in English, especially when you are nervous.” These accounts reveal that the interview format, while designed to assess comprehension and ownership, also introduced performance-related stress that could inhibit verbal expression.

Despite these affective challenges, the majority of students acknowledged that the interview served as a source of productive pressure. Several described preparing more intentionally as a result. Student Y (Class1) remarked, “It pushed me to understand every part of my assignment. I didn’t want to be embarrassed in the interview,” suggesting that the potential discomfort of oral questioning encouraged a deeper level of content mastery. In this way, emotional discomfort was not merely an obstacle but also a motivational catalyst.

Students also reported adopting new behaviors to manage the anticipated interaction. Many engaged in more thorough preparation, such as reviewing references, anticipating potential questions, or organizing their responses in advance. Student L (Class2) reflected, “I used to just write and submit, but now I think about what the teacher might ask,” while Student W (Class1) described preparing “a small outline” to support clarity during the discussion. These behavioral shifts indicate a heightened metacognitive awareness and an effort to anticipate and articulate reasoning under evaluative conditions.

A subset of students incorporated AI tools such as ChatGPT into their preparation strategies, viewing them as rehearsal or feedback mechanisms. Student H (Class2) stated, “I asked ChatGPT to act like a teacher and quiz me about my topic,” while Student N (Class1) explained, “It helped me organize my ideas, but I still made sure I knew the answers myself.” These reflections suggest that GenAI was positioned as a cognitive scaffold rather than a replacement for understanding.

However, concerns about overreliance on such tools also emerged. Student K (Class2) expressed ambivalence, noting, “If I use AI too much, it feels like it’s not really my thinking.” This comment underscores a self-regulatory stance toward technology use, revealing an awareness of the fine line between learning support and compromised authorship. Rather than rejecting AI entirely, students appeared to be navigating its role in supporting, rather than substituting, authentic learning and performance.

In examining the written reflections, it became clear that students completed them at different points in relation to the interview, depending on their own readiness and scheduling. As a result, the reflections varied in orientation: some conveyed an anticipatory stance, marked by uncertainty, self-monitoring, and preparation, while others reflected back on the interview as a completed interaction, often emphasizing reassurance, fairness, or strengthened responsibility. Because the reflection activity was not tied to a fixed sequence, these differences are interpreted as variations in how students framed the interview rather than as temporal phases of development. Across these orientations, however, a common pattern emerged in which initial tension and hesitation often gave way to a stronger sense of ownership and intentional engagement with one’s academic work.

### **Fostering Critical Thinking while Negotiating Fairness and Inclusivity**

Participants widely acknowledged that the interview component required a higher level of cognitive engagement than written assignments alone. Unlike tasks that primarily assessed content delivery, the interviews demanded that students defend their ideas, explain methodological choices, and clarify conceptual links. Student V (Class2) noted that they “couldn’t

just say what I did, I had to explain why I did it," highlighting the shift from descriptive reporting to critical justification. This reflective turn marks a pedagogical benefit of oral questioning: it makes visible the reasoning behind decisions, rather than merely the outcomes.

Several participants emphasized that the back-and-forth structure of the interview helped uncover gaps in their initial thinking. Student E (Class1) shared, "When the teacher asked why I chose one method over another, I realized I didn't fully think it through." Such moments, while potentially uncomfortable, appeared to foster deeper metacognitive awareness. By being asked to elaborate or justify, students engaged in what some described as a "mini-defense," reminiscent of academic oral examinations in higher-degree research programs. These exchanges encouraged not only content recall but also epistemic reflection.

At the same time, issues of fairness and accessibility surfaced in the data. While many viewed the interview as an equitable tool for verifying understanding, some students felt disadvantaged due to language anxiety or challenges in oral expression. Student A (Class1) explained, "I know the content, but speaking fast and clearly is hard for me," while Student Z (Class2) admitted, "The ideas are in my head, but I get blocked when I have to explain out loud." These reflections suggest that the assessment's effectiveness was mediated not only by students' knowledge but also by their linguistic confidence and emotional regulation.

Students proposed a range of measures to enhance fairness. These included receiving guiding questions in advance, being allowed to use brief notes, and combining interviews with written reflections. As Student Q (Class1) suggested, "Even just 5–10 minutes to prepare before the questions start would help reduce stress." Others felt that the interview should be one of several assessment components rather than a standalone method, particularly to accommodate diverse learning and communication preferences.

Despite these concerns, most participants continued to value the interview as an opportunity to demonstrate deeper understanding. Student B (Class2) commented, "Even if it's scary, it proves I really understand my topic. It's not just words on paper." This statement captures the dual nature of the experience: emotionally demanding but intellectually affirming. It also reinforces the idea that oral defenses, when implemented with sensitivity to learners' needs, can promote both academic integrity and meaningful learning.

## Discussion

### Summary of Results

These findings speak directly to the research questions guiding this study regarding how students experienced the teacher-led interview and how this shaped their engagement with GenAI in their academic writing. Many students did not view the interview as a form of surveillance or suspicion, but rather as a dialogic space in which they could articulate and justify their decisions. In responding to the expectation of explanation, students described revisiting sources, refining arguments, and clarifying the rationale behind their use of GenAI, indicating a shift toward more deliberate and critical engagement with the writing process. In this respect, the interview acted not simply as a check on the final product, but as a mediational condition that reoriented the motive of the task toward producing ideas that could be meaningfully explained.

Importantly, the findings highlight that this reorientation took shape before the interview itself occurred. The anticipation of needing to speak as the author prompted students to prepare differently: rehearsing justifications, organizing key points, and in some cases using GenAI to probe or test their own understanding. This anticipatory work reflects a form of emerging academic agency that addresses the second research question, showing how dialogic accountability may support more reflective and self-regulated use of GenAI. Emotional responses were also central to how students interpreted the interview. While nervousness and linguistic uncertainty were common, many described these feelings as motivating rather than discouraging, provided the interaction was framed as supportive rather than punitive.

### Comparison with Prior Literature and Study Contributions

Recent scholarship has underscored the increasingly complex interplay between GenAI, academic integrity, and assessment practices. For instance, Amrane-Cooper et al. (2024) documented the ambivalence in educators' and students' perceptions of AI, identifying both its potential to democratize assessment through personalization and its risks of exacerbating inequality. Similarly, Crawford et al. (2023) emphasized the ethical imperative of character-building and leadership in guiding responsible GenAI use, arguing that technologies like ChatGPT could support integrity if integrated into pedagogy with foresight. Our study adds empirical granularity to these broader claims by directly capturing how EFL students in Vietnam navigate these tensions at the point of oral verification, a high-stakes, emotionally charged moment rarely examined in current research.

Several studies (e.g., Ardito, 2024; Evangelista, 2025) have advocated for redesigning assessments to withstand AI misuse, focusing on structural and policy responses. In contrast, our study adopts a learner-centered lens, illustrating the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral strategies that students employ when required to account for their own work. While Gorichanaz (2023) explored student responses to false accusations of AI use based on Reddit discussions, our study uniquely investigates voluntary interviews conducted in a classroom setting with pedagogical intent. This shift from reactive to formative contexts enriches the emerging landscape of AI-integrity research.

Furthermore, studies like Guo and Lee (2023) and Suriano et al. (2025) have shown that interacting with ChatGPT can promote critical thinking when guided effectively. Our results resonate with this optimistic view, especially among participants who used GenAI tools to prepare but retained ownership over their ideas. Yet our data also reveal self-regulatory tensions, with some participants expressing discomfort or ethical hesitation, echoing concerns raised in Zhai et al.'s (2024) systematic review about overreliance on AI diminishing cognitive agency.

By focusing on oral interviews as an educational intervention rather than solely a detection mechanism, this study shifts the conversation from punitive to pedagogical uses of AI-integrity practices. Unlike studies relying on large-scale surveys or performance metrics (e.g., Jia & Tu, 2024; Jiang et al., 2024a, 2024b), this study provides qualitative insight into how students interpret and make sense of the interview as an assessment practice, and how these interpretations shape their orientations toward GenAI use and academic responsibility.

## An iCHAT Framework for Understanding the Mediational Role of Teacher-Led Interviews in Developing Academic Integrity

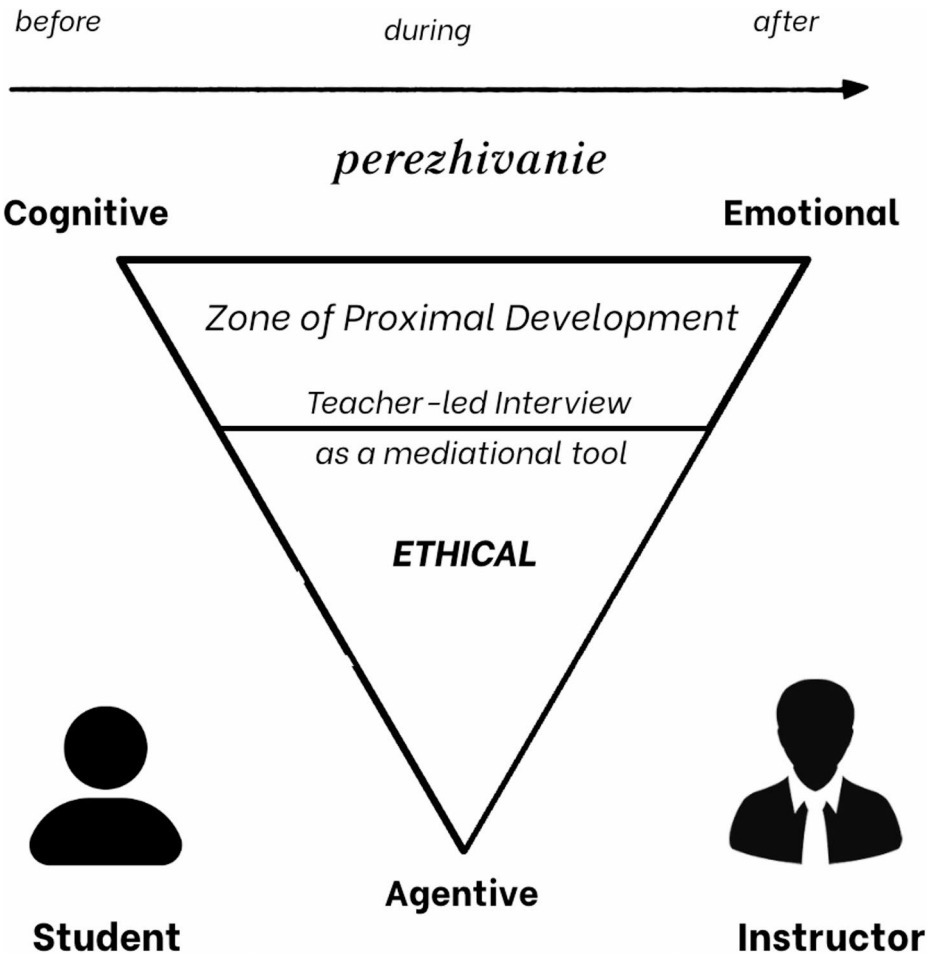
To theorize the developmental processes observed in this study, the iCHAT perspective is adopted, drawing from Vygotsky's (1978, 1987) account of mediated development and Leontiev's (1978) conceptualization of activity, motive, and object (cf. Cong-Lem and Nguyen, 2024; Cong-Lem, 2025). Within this perspective, academic writing is understood not as an isolated skill but as a socially and culturally mediated activity whose meaning and developmental potential depend on the conditions through which it is enacted. The teacher-led interview is therefore examined not as an additional evaluative step appended to written assessment, but as a mediational practice that reorganizes how students orient to, engage in, and experience academic writing in GenAI-supported environments.

Figure 1 conceptualizes the teacher-led interview as a supplementary mediational assessment practice that may reshape the object and motive of the writing activity. In Leontiev's (1978) terms, the object is what gives an activity its direction and significance, what the learner understands the task to be for. The motive reflects the learner's relational stance toward that object, why the task matters and how it is lived. The findings of this study suggest that the introduction of a forthcoming interview, one in which students are expected to speak as the author of their written work, shifts the object of writing from producing a correct or polished text to preparing to account for one's reasoning, decisions, and use of GenAI. This shift was articulated by participants who described rechecking sources, rehearsing explanations, and revising claims not simply for clarity, but to ensure they could 'stand behind' their work when questioned. In activity-theoretical terms, the motive of writing becomes dialogic accountability rather than task completion.

This reorientation does not occur through instruction alone. Rather, it is experienced, interpreted, and taken up through *perezhivanie*, the learner's lived, affective–meaningful relation to the assessment situation (Vygotsky, 1994). The data indicate that students variously experienced the anticipated interview as motivating, anxiety-inducing, fair, validating, or uncertain. For some, the interview created a sense of productive urgency to understand their work more deeply; for others, concern about spontaneous speaking in English or fear of being exposed as overly reliant on GenAI shaped their approach. *Perezhivanie* therefore mediates whether the interview functions as a supportive developmental prompt or as a source of pressure that constrains participation. In this formulation, development does not arise from the structural presence of the interview alone, but from how learners interpret what the interview means for them as authors.

During the interview itself, social interaction operates within the ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978). As students articulate the reasoning behind their written decisions, tacit understandings are brought into public dialogue, where they can be probed, clarified, or reorganized. Instructor questions, such as requests for justification, invitations to trace claims back to evidence, or prompts to reconsider the appropriateness of GenAI-suggested phrasing, function as mediational supports that help learners externalize and refine their thinking. Consistent with Vygotsky's genetic law of development, such reasoning first appears on the interpersonal plane before later becoming internalized as self-regulatory academic practice.

This mediational process was reflected across three developmental dimensions identified in the findings. Cognitively, students demonstrated increasing attention to reasoning quality, source interpretation, and principled evaluation of AI-generated material. Emotionally, they



**Fig. 1** A Cultural-Historical Framework for Understanding Teacher-Led Interviews as Mediational Spaces for Supporting Ethical and Agentive Learning with GenAI

navigated tensions of vulnerability, fairness, and recognition, with several reporting a shift from anxiety to a felt sense of legitimacy and ownership. Agentively, students adopted more proactive preparation strategies, including rehearsing explanations, constructing outlines, and using GenAI tools as interactive prompts rather than as text-generators. These developments do not represent stable outcomes but emergent orientations, shaped by the conditions of dialogic accountability afforded by the interview.

The iCHAT framework clarifies how and why a supplementary oral interview may support academic integrity and ethical authorship in GenAI-mediated learning environments. Its educational significance lies not in detecting misconduct nor enforcing compliance, but in reorganizing the conditions under which writing is undertaken, shifting academic work from text production to conceptually accountable authorship. The developmental potential of this process depends on *perezhivanie* and the relational quality of the interview interac-

tion, underscoring the importance of assessment practices that cultivate guided explanation rather than rely solely on detection-oriented surveillance.

### Implications for Assessment and Pedagogical Practice

The findings indicate that teacher-led interviews can offer a viable and pedagogically meaningful approach to fostering student accountability and academic integrity in AI-mediated learning environments. Rather than functioning merely as a mechanism for detecting misconduct, the interview operates as a reflective space in which students are invited to explain the reasoning behind their writing decisions and to make transparent how they engaged with GenAI tools. In doing so, the assessment shifts from surveillance-based enforcement to relational accountability, where integrity is not imposed or policed, but co-constructed through dialogue, recognition, and shared responsibility for academic work. This aligns with calls in the literature for assessment models that foreground process, authenticity, and ethical awareness (Ardito, 2024; Crawford et al., 2023; Evangelista, 2025).

However, several implementation considerations warrant attention. First, teacher-led interviews may not be feasible in all instructional contexts, especially those with large student enrolments or limited instructional time. While this study was conducted in a postgraduate setting with manageable group sizes, further work is needed to explore how interview-based approaches can be adapted or scaled. Selective integration, for example, in capstone projects, academic writing courses, or assignments involving high degrees of autonomy, may represent one potential pathway (Khlaif et al., 2024; Lukianenko & Kornieva, 2024).

Second, although interviews may help clarify authorship and encourage responsible AI use, they require careful design to avoid inequitable outcomes. Students with limited oral proficiency or heightened anxiety may find the format challenging, potentially affecting the reliability or fairness of the process. Clear rubrics, transparent expectations, and opportunities to rehearse interview-style reflection could help address some of these concerns.

Third, the pedagogical framing of the interview is also important. When positioned as a routine part of the assessment process rather than a disciplinary mechanism, interviews may help cultivate a classroom culture that values process transparency and dialogic engagement. Such framing is consistent with broader moves in higher education toward formative, inclusive, and AI-resilient assessment strategies (Amrane-Cooper et al., 2024; Evangelista, 2025).

Finally, realizing this shift requires institutional support. Academic integrity frameworks and assessment policy guidelines need to acknowledge the developmental role of dialogic, process-oriented assessments and provide the structural conditions, such as reasonable class sizes, assessment scheduling flexibility, and staff training, for instructors to implement interviews meaningfully. Without such institutional scaffolding, the responsibility for shaping ethical academic practice risks falling solely on individual teachers, rather than being sustained as a shared educational commitment.

### Limitations and Directions for Future Research

While this study provides timely insights into the role of teacher-led interviews in addressing authorship and integrity concerns in AI-augmented learning contexts, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study was conducted with a small, context-specific

sample comprising two master's student cohorts at a Vietnamese university. Although participants represented varied academic tracks and prior exposure to GenAI, the results are not intended to be widely generalizable. Future research could explore how teacher-led interviews function in more diverse educational contexts, including different institutional cultures, academic levels, and disciplines.

Second, while teacher-led interviews were implemented as a supplementary assessment tool, the study's data were derived from students' written reflections collected via open-ended Google Forms responses. These reflections captured immediate, self-reported perceptions, which may not fully account for longer-term changes in understanding or behaviors. Follow-up studies may benefit from incorporating additional data sources, such as longitudinal tracking, classroom observations, or stimulated recall protocols, to examine how students' conceptions of authorship and learning evolve over time.

Third, while this study focused on students' experiences of being interviewed, it did not capture actual interview transcripts or interactional dynamics. Future research could include discourse-analytic or ethnographic approaches to examine how these interviews function as dialogic assessment events, especially in relation to students' claims of ownership, understanding, and accountability in the age of GenAI.

Another limitation concerns the timing of the reflections. Because students completed their responses either before or shortly after the interviews, the data do not allow for a systematic comparison between pre- and post-interview perspectives. While minor tonal differences were observed between cohorts, these were not treated as evidence of temporal change. Future studies could adopt a structured pre–post design to examine how emotional and cognitive responses evolve across interview stages.

Finally, more research is needed to understand how such oral assessment strategies intersect with broader pedagogical goals, such as promoting academic integrity, fostering critical AI literacy, and designing inclusive assessment practices. Examining variations in student responses across demographic or proficiency profiles could also reveal important equity considerations.

## Conclusion

This study examined teacher-led interviews as a mediational form of assessment in GenAI-assisted academic writing. The findings show that requiring students to explain and justify how they composed their work, including how they engaged with GenAI, can reorient the meaning of the writing task from producing a text to participating in a dialogic process of reasoning. Within this context, an ethical orientation toward academic work develops first, and is then expressed through cognitive, emotional, and agentic outcomes: students engaged more deliberately and critically with ideas, experienced shifts in confidence and presence when speaking as authors and took more proactive responsibility for the decisions reflected in their writing. These developments were shaped by how students experienced the interview (i.e., constituting their *perezhivanie*) and by the opportunities it created for guided articulation within the zone of proximal development.

The study contributes a cultural-historical explanation of how accountability in GenAI-supported writing can be cultivated through dialogue rather than surveillance, and how ethi-

cal self-regulation emerges through participation in shared scholarly practices. Implementing such interviews more broadly will require institutional support for workload, teacher preparation, and sensitivity to linguistic and affective variation among learners. Future research may explore how this approach functions across disciplines, over extended time frames, and in multilingual educational settings. The findings call for assessment practices that are developmentally oriented, socially responsive, and ethically grounded, supporting learners in navigating authorship, agency, and critical literacy in an era shaped by generative AI.

## Appendix A: Open-Ended Reflection Questions

Students were invited to reflect on their preparation and perceptions of the teacher-led interview process using the following prompts. Responses could be written in either English or Vietnamese, depending on students' linguistic comfort.

1. How do you think the interview will help confirm that the work you submit is your own? Please share why you feel that way.
2. What do you think are the main strengths and weaknesses of using interviews as part of the assessment process? How effective do you think they are at ensuring students do their own work?
3. How do you feel about having an interview as part of your assignment? Do you believe it provides a fair opportunity for you to demonstrate your knowledge? Why or why not?
4. Knowing there will be an interview, do you think it will change how you work on your assignment? If yes, in what ways?
5. Do you think requiring interviews for assignments is a fair way to verify academic honesty? What are your thoughts on how to make this process better for everyone involved?

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## Declarations

**Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process** During the preparation of this work, the author used ChatGPT-5 to assist with language refinement and clarity. After using this tool, the author carefully reviewed, revised, and verified all content, and take full responsibility for the integrity and accuracy of the manuscript.

**Ethics Approval** This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical research principles. At the time of the study, a formal institutional ethics committee or review board was not yet in place at the author's university. Nonetheless, ethical integrity was carefully maintained throughout the research process. Participants were fully informed of the study's purpose and procedures, and voluntary participation was ensured through explicit informed consent.

**Competing Interests** The author declares that they have no competing interests.

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