

Navigating Generative AI in English Language Education: Competencies of Novice and Experienced Vietnamese EFL Teachers

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Abstract. This study has investigated the generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) competencies of Vietnamese in-service EFL teachers across different teaching experience levels. Employing an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, the study collected quantitative data from 581 novice and experienced EFL teachers using the Teachers' Generative AI Competencies (T-GAIC) instrument and qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with 14 participants. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics and independent-sample t-tests, while qualitative data were examined through thematic analysis. The findings indicated that both novice and experienced teachers perceived themselves as having relatively high levels of GenAI competencies, despite the rapid emergence of AI technologies in Vietnamese higher education. Independent-sample t-tests revealed statistically significant but small differences in technological proficiency, with novice teachers reporting higher levels than experienced teachers ($t = 3.29, p < .05, d = .27$), and in risk and ethical awareness, with experienced teachers reporting higher levels than novice teachers ($t = -3.48, p < .05, d = .30$). No significant differences were found in pedagogical compatibility, preparing students for effective GenAI use, or professional development and communication. Overall, the limited magnitude of the group differences suggested that GenAI competencies might extend beyond technological familiarity or teaching experience alone. More importantly, the qualitative findings revealed that teachers' GenAI competencies were negotiated through institutional ambiguity, professional identity concerns, informal learning networks, and the hidden evaluative labour associated with AI-generated content. The study refines current understandings of teachers' AI competencies by highlighting their multidimensional, socially situated, and context-dependent nature in AI-mediated language education.

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1. Introduction

The rapid emergence of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) is reshaping higher education worldwide. In English language education, tools such as ChatGPT, Copilot, and Gemini are increasingly being used to generate lesson plans, develop learning materials, provide feedback, and support classroom interaction (Al-Khresheh, 2024; Moorhouse & Wong, 2025). Recent surveys indicated that over 60% of university instructors have experimented with GenAI tools for teaching and assessment purposes (UNESCO, 2025). This growing uptake suggests that GenAI is no longer merely an emerging technological possibility; it is becoming part of the everyday professional decision-making of teachers.

However, the educational value of GenAI does not depend solely on whether teachers use these tools (Shi, 2025). Effective integration requires teachers to evaluate the accuracy, linguistic appropriateness, cultural relevance, and pedagogical suitability of AI-generated content (Lee & Zhai, 2024), align AI-supported activities with learning objectives; and guide the responsible use of GenAI by students (Shi, 2025). Teachers must also address risks associated with misinformation, bias, privacy, academic integrity, and overreliance on AI-generated outputs (Chiu et al., 2024; Shi, 2025; UNESCO, 2022). Consequently, the central issue is not simply whether teachers adopt GenAI, but whether they possess the technological, pedagogical, professional, and ethical competencies required to integrate it meaningfully into language education (Shi, 2025).

Although research on AI in education has expanded rapidly, the available evidence remains uneven (Dai et al., 2026). A substantial body of existing research has focused on students' use of GenAI, academic integrity, and the pedagogical potential of AI-assisted learning (Cong-Lem et al., 2026; Kangwa et al., 2025). Studies involving teachers have often examined general AI competence, attitudes, or adoption intentions rather than the specific competencies required to integrate generative AI into classroom practice (Hoang & Bui, 2026; Ng et al., 2023; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2025). This distinction is particularly important in English language education, where teachers must make careful decisions about whether AI-generated language, examples, feedback, and learning tasks are appropriate for the proficiency levels, instructional goals, and sociocultural contexts of learners (Lee & Zhai, 2024; Shi, 2025).

The need for such evidence is particularly salient in Vietnamese higher education. GenAI tools are becoming increasingly accessible to Vietnamese EFL teachers for lesson planning, material development, feedback, assessment, and professional learning (Al-Khresheh, 2024; Lee & Zhai, 2024; Moorhouse & Wong, 2025). Yet institutional policies, formal professional development opportunities, and pedagogical guidance regarding GenAI integration remain uneven across universities (Lee & Zhai, 2024; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2025). Vietnamese EFL

teachers therefore work in a context in which access to GenAI may expand more rapidly than the institutional support needed to ensure its responsible and pedagogically appropriate use (Lee & Zhai, 2024). Under these conditions, teachers may differ not only in technological confidence but also in their pedagogical judgement, ethical awareness, and opportunities for professional learning (Shi, 2025).

Three interrelated gaps therefore remain. First, there is limited empirical evidence on teachers' competencies for integrating GenAI specifically into English language education, as distinct from research on students' GenAI use or teachers' general AI competence (Cong-Lem et al., 2026; Dai et al., 2026; Hoang & Bui, 2026; Kangwa et al., 2025; Ng et al., 2023; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2025). Second, research on GenAI competencies in Vietnamese EFL higher education remains scarce, despite the rapid local expansion of AI-mediated teaching practices and uneven institutional support (Al-Khresheh, 2024; Lee & Zhai, 2024; Moorhouse & Wong, 2025; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2025).

Third, although teaching experience is often assumed to influence the engagement of teachers with emerging technologies, little is known about whether novice and experienced EFL teachers differ in specific dimensions of GenAI competence (Shi, 2025). The common assumption that novice teachers are naturally more technologically capable, while experienced teachers are more cautious may obscure more complex competence profiles, in which technological familiarity, pedagogical reasoning, professional learning, and ethical judgement develop differently across career stages (Shi, 2025; Su & Yang, 2023; Van den Berg & Du Plessis, 2023).

To address these gaps, the present study investigated the GenAI competencies of novice and experienced Vietnamese in-service EFL teachers. The study makes three contributions. First, it extended the emerging literature on teachers' AI competence by focusing specifically on GenAI competencies in Vietnamese EFL higher education. Second, it examined differences across five dimensions of GenAI competence: technological proficiency, pedagogical compatibility, preparing students for the effective practices of GenAI, GenAI-related professional development and communication, and risk and ethical awareness. Third, by integrating survey data with interview accounts, the study examined how institutional conditions, professional identity, informal learning networks, and the evaluative labour associated with AI-generated content shape teachers' competencies. In doing so, the study conceptualised GenAI competence as a multidimensional and socially situated professional practice rather than as a purely technical capability.

The study was guided by the following research questions: RQ1: To what extent do Vietnamese novice and experienced in-service EFL teachers differ in their GenAI competencies? RQ2: What factors influence Vietnamese in-service EFL teachers' GenAI competencies?

Based on the literature suggesting that teaching experience may be associated with differences in teachers' technological confidence, pedagogical judgement, and ethical awareness in AI-mediated educational contexts, the following hypothesis was formulated: H_1 : There are significant differences between novice and experienced Vietnamese in-service EFL teachers across the dimensions of generative AI competencies.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Generative Artificial Intelligence in English Language Education

GenAI has introduced new possibilities for English language education by enabling teachers to generate lesson materials, design learning activities, provide feedback, and support differentiated instruction (Al-Khresheh, 2024; Lee & Zhai, 2024; Moorhouse & Wong, 2025). However, as noted in the T-GAIC framework, the pedagogical value of GenAI does not depend solely on teachers' access to AI tools (Shi, 2025). Teachers must also be able to perform the hidden evaluative labour of checking the accuracy, linguistic appropriateness, cultural relevance, and instructional suitability of AI-generated content before using it in language classrooms (Lee & Zhai, 2024). Furthermore, teachers are expected to guide students' responsible use of GenAI and to address critical ethical concerns, including misinformation, bias, privacy, academic integrity, and overreliance on AI-generated outputs (Shi, 2025; UNESCO, 2022)

Accordingly, teachers' GenAI competencies extend beyond basic technological literacy (Shi, 2025). In English language education, such competencies involve the ability to use GenAI tools purposefully, align AI-supported activities with language-learning objectives, evaluate generated materials critically, and make contextually appropriate pedagogical decisions (Lee & Zhai, 2024; Shi, 2025). These demands are particularly important in EFL settings, where teachers need to ensure that AI-generated language, examples, tasks, and feedback are appropriate for learners' proficiency levels, learning needs, and sociocultural contexts (Lee & Zhai, 2024). Although research on AI in education has expanded rapidly, empirical evidence concerning teachers' GenAI competencies in EFL contexts remains limited, especially in settings where formal institutional guidance and professional development opportunities are still emerging (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2025).

2.2 Theoretical Framework: Teachers' Generative AI Competencies

Research on teachers' engagement with educational technologies has commonly drawn on technology acceptance and integration frameworks, particularly the technology acceptance model (TAM), the unified theory of acceptance and use of technology (UTAUT), and technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK) (Granić, 2022). TAM and UTAUT are useful for explaining why teachers may adopt or intend to use a technology, particularly through factors such as perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, performance expectancy, and social influence (Davis, 1989; Venkatesh et al., 2003). TPACK, in contrast, conceptualises the interconnected technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge that teachers need to integrate technology meaningfully when designing instruction (Koehler & Mishra, 2009; Lorenz & Romeike, 2023). These frameworks provide

valuable insights into teachers' engagement with GenAI; however, each addresses only part of the professional demands associated with GenAI-mediated language education, including the critical evaluation of AI-generated content, ethical and responsible use, adaptation of materials to learners' needs, and ongoing professional learning (Hoang & Bui, 2026; Ng et al., 2023; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2025; Shi, 2025; UNESCO, 2022).

The UNESCO (2022) AI Competency Framework for Teachers provides a broader policy-oriented and normative reference for understanding these demands (UNESCO, 2022). The framework positions teachers not merely as users of AI tools, but as professionals responsible for ensuring that AI use remains human-centred, pedagogically purposeful, ethically responsible, and supportive of learners' agency (UNESCO, 2022). In English language education, this implies that EFL teachers should evaluate critically the accuracy, linguistic appropriateness, cultural relevance, and instructional suitability of AI-generated materials (Lee & Zhai, 2024; Shi, 2025); adapt such materials to learners' proficiency levels and learning needs; address concerns related to bias, privacy, and academic integrity (Chiu et al., 2024; Shi, 2025; UNESCO, 2022); and guide students toward responsible and critical GenAI use (Shi, 2025). Although the UNESCO framework informs the broader conceptualisation of teacher AI competence in this study, it is not used as the primary analytical framework.

GenAI integration requires more than the willingness of teachers to adopt a tool or their ability to combine technology with pedagogy and content (Shi, 2025). Because GenAI can generate instructional materials, feedback, assessment tasks, and linguistic content autonomously, teachers must also evaluate the reliability, linguistic appropriateness, cultural relevance, and pedagogical suitability of AI-generated outputs (Lee & Zhai, 2024; Shi, 2025). They must guide the responsible use by students of GenAI, participate in ongoing professional learning, and address risks related to misinformation, bias, privacy, academic integrity, and overreliance (Chiu et al., 2024; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2025; Shi, 2025; UNESCO, 2022). Thus, an acceptance-oriented framework such as TAM may explain the initial willingness of teachers to use GenAI, while TPACK may illuminate instructional integration; neither framework alone sufficiently captures the ethical, evaluative, and professional dimensions that are central to the sustained use of GenAI by teachers (Hoang & Bui, 2026; Ng et al., 2023; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2025; Shi, 2025; UNESCO, 2022).

For this reason, the present study is anchored in the Teachers' Generative AI Competencies (T-GAIC) framework developed by Shi (2025). The T-GAIC framework conceptualises GenAI competence as a multidimensional professional construct encompassing technological proficiency, and pedagogical compatibility, preparing students for the effective practices of GenAI, GenAI-related professional development and communication, and risk and ethical awareness. Unlike frameworks that focus primarily on technology acceptance or knowledge integration, T-GAIC captures directly the competencies required for teachers to use GenAI critically, responsibly, and pedagogically in practice.

The framework is particularly appropriate for English language education (Shi, 2025). EFL teachers must determine whether AI-generated language, examples, explanations, feedback, and learning activities are appropriate for the proficiency levels, communicative needs, and sociocultural contexts of learners (Lee & Zhai, 2024; Shi, 2025). They must also decide how GenAI can support, rather than replace, teacher judgement and meaningful learner interaction (Shi, 2025; UNESCO, 2022). Accordingly, the five T-GAIC dimensions provide a coherent lens for examining the distinct but interconnected competencies required of Vietnamese in-service EFL teachers in AI-mediated educational settings (Shi, 2025).

In the present study, the five T-GAIC dimensions constitute the quantitative variables used to compare novice and experienced teachers (Shi, 2025). Teaching experience is treated as a professional characteristic that may be associated with different competency profiles rather than as a determinant of overall competence (Shi, 2025). The qualitative strand then extends the framework by examining how institutional guidance, access to professional learning, pedagogical beliefs, professional identity concerns, informal learning networks, and the evaluative work required to adapt AI-generated content shape the competency development of teachers (Hoang & Bui, 2026; Jin et al., 2025; Jose et al., 2025; Ng et al., 2023; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2025). In this way, the study uses T-GAIC not only as a measurement framework but also as a basis for understanding GenAI competence as a socially situated professional practice (Shi, 2025; UNESCO, 2022).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed methods design to investigate GenAI competencies among Vietnamese in-service EFL teachers. According to Creswell and Creswell (2023), this design involves collecting and analysing quantitative data in the first phase, followed by qualitative data to explain and elaborate on the quantitative findings. The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings therefore enabled a more comprehensive examination of teachers' GenAI competencies as both measurable professional capabilities and socially situated practices. This design was considered appropriate because the study aimed to examine differences in GenAI competencies between novice and experienced Vietnamese in-service EFL teachers and to explore the factors shaping these competencies.

3.2 Research Setting and Participants

This study was conducted in the Vietnamese higher education context and involved 581 in-service EFL teachers from public and private universities where English is taught as a foreign language. The participants were recruited using convenience sampling to access in-service EFL teachers with GenAI experience across different institutional contexts (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Among the participants, 389 (66.9%) were female and 192 (33.1%) were male. Most participants held master's or doctoral degrees in TESOL, Applied Linguistics, or English Language Education.

An a priori power analysis was conducted using G*Power 3.1 to determine the minimum sample size required for the independent-samples t-tests. Assuming a medium effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.50$), a two-tailed alpha level of .05, a statistical power of .95, and an approximately equal allocation ratio between the two groups, the analysis indicated that a minimum total sample of 210 participants was required. The final sample of 581 teachers, including 276 novice and 305 experienced teachers, therefore exceeded the required sample size and provided adequate statistical power to detect meaningful group differences.

The study specifically targeted in-service EFL teachers because they were engaged actively in English language teaching in increasingly AI-mediated educational environments. To ensure eligibility for participation, only teachers who had experience using GenAI tools for teaching, lesson planning, material development, assessment, feedback provision, or professional learning were invited to participate.

The participants were classified into two groups based on their teaching experience. The novice teacher group consisted of 276 teachers with fewer than three years of teaching experience, while the experienced teacher group included 305 teachers with more than five years of teaching experience. Teachers with three to five years of experience were excluded to ensure clearer distinctions between the two professional groups. This grouping was adopted to enable a focused comparison of teachers at relatively early and more established stages of professional practice, particularly in relation to their differentiated engagement with GenAI technologies (Shi, 2025).

3.3 Instruments

Two research instruments were employed in this study: a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview guide. The questionnaire was adapted from the Teachers' Generative AI Competencies (T-GAIC) instrument developed and validated by Shi (2025). The original 36-item instrument measures five dimensions of teachers' GenAI competencies: technological proficiency of GenAI, pedagogical compatibility of GenAI in teaching, preparing students for the effective practices of GenAI, GenAI-related professional development and communication, and risk and ethical awareness of GenAI in education. In the original validation study, the instrument was developed and tested with 478 pre-service and in-service teachers. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses supported its five-factor structure, and the final instrument demonstrated strong internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha > .90$) and acceptable model fit (RMSEA = .078, CFI = .946, TLI = .934) (Shi, 2025).

For the present study, the questionnaire was translated into Vietnamese to ensure participants' comprehension. The translated version was reviewed by two experts in educational technology to assess its clarity, appropriateness, and contextual relevance, resulting in minor linguistic revisions. A pilot study was subsequently conducted, and the adapted instrument demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency, with Cronbach's α coefficients exceeding .70 (Taber, 2018).

In the qualitative phase, a semi-structured interview guide was employed. The guide was developed independently by two researchers based on the research questions and relevant literature on teachers' GenAI competencies and AI integration in education. The interview protocol included 10 open-ended questions focusing on teachers' experiences with GenAI, pedagogical use of AI tools, professional challenges, ethical concerns, institutional support, and factors influencing their competencies (see Appendix 1). For example, participants were asked about the challenges they encountered when using GenAI tools in their teaching practices and the institutional, professional, and pedagogical factors that influenced their development of GenAI competencies for English language teaching.

The two versions were compared and refined into a final version through collaborative discussion. To enhance qualitative trustworthiness, credibility was supported through expert review of the interview guide and the use of representative participant excerpts. Dependability and confirmability were strengthened through independent coding by two researchers, discussion of coding discrepancies, and the maintenance of a documented coding and theme-development process. Transferability was supported by providing detailed descriptions of the research context, participants, and data collection procedures.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

As the study involved minimal-risk research with adult teacher participants and did not involve any intervention, clinical procedures, or collection of sensitive personal data, formal institutional ethical approval was not required under the research procedures of the participating institutions. Nevertheless, ethical principles were strictly observed throughout the study. Before accessing the online questionnaire or participating in the interviews, all participants received an informed consent form explaining the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality, anonymity, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Only participants who provided informed consent were included in the study.

3.5 Data Collection and Analysis

The quantitative data were collected through an online questionnaire administered via Google Forms. The questionnaire required approximately 7–12 minutes to complete, and a total of 581 valid responses were collected for analysis.

Following the quantitative phase, 14 participants were purposively selected for follow-up interviews, seven novice teachers and seven experienced teachers with varying levels of GenAI competencies. The participants were coded from T1 to T14 to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. The selection criteria included: (1) willingness to participate in follow-up interviews; (2) experience using GenAI tools for teaching or professional purposes; and (3) representation from both novice and experienced teacher groups with different levels of GenAI competencies. The interviews aimed to provide deeper insights into the factors shaping teachers' GenAI competencies in English language education.

The interview questions focused on teachers' experiences with GenAI, pedagogical use of AI tools, professional challenges, ethical concerns, institutional support, and factors influencing their competencies. Two guiding questions included: (1) What challenges do you encounter when using generative AI tools in your teaching practices? (2) What factors influence your ability or willingness to develop competencies in using generative AI for English language teaching?

Table 1: Characteristics of chosen interview participants

Participant ID	Years of Experience	GenAI Competency Level	Group
T1	13	Moderate (3.3)	Experienced
T2	15	Moderate (3.4)	Experienced
T3	11	High (4.1)	Experienced
T4	18	Moderate (3.5)	Experienced
T5	9	High (4.2)	Experienced
T6	7	High (4.0)	Experienced
T7	12	Moderate (3.6)	Experienced
T8	2	High (4.3)	Novice
T9	1	High (4.1)	Novice
T10	2	Moderate (3.5)	Novice
T11	1	High (4.0)	Novice
T12	2	Moderate (3.4)	Novice
T13	1	High (4.2)	Novice
T14	2	Moderate (3.3)	Novice

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) and inferential statistics, specifically independent-sample t-tests, in IBM SPSS Statistics 27. Prior to hypothesis testing, the assumptions of normality and homogeneity of variance were assessed and found to be met (Sig. >.05). Cronbach's alpha coefficients were also calculated to examine the reliability of the questionnaire. Independent-sample t-tests were subsequently conducted to compare the GenAI competencies of novice and experienced teachers.

The qualitative data obtained from the semi-structured interviews were analysed using thematic analysis following the framework of Braun and Clarke (2006). The interview recordings were transcribed in Vietnamese and translated into English for analysis and reporting purposes. Two researchers coded the interview transcripts independently. Inter-coder reliability was assessed using Cohen's Kappa, which indicated substantial agreement between the two coders ($\kappa = .64$). Any coding discrepancies were discussed and resolved through consensus. The final codes were then compared, refined, and grouped into broader themes aligned with the research questions.

The initial coding process produced 24 codes, which were compared, discussed, and refined through iterative meetings. Related codes were then clustered into

eight subthemes and four overarching themes that captured both the constraints and the facilitating conditions shaping teachers' GenAI competencies. To enhance analytical transparency, Table 2 presents the final thematic structure, including themes, subthemes, and the number of participants whose accounts contributed to each subtheme. Frequencies are reported descriptively to indicate the prevalence of patterns across the 14 interviews rather than the relative importance of the themes. Representative excerpts from participants were selected to support the interpretation of the findings.

Table 2: Thematic structure of factors shaping Vietnamese EFL teachers' GenAI competencies

Theme	Subtheme	Frequency (n = 14)
Institutional and professional constraints	Institutional ambiguity and unclear guidance on GenAI use	10
	Professional identity concerns and perceived threats to teacher authority	8
Evaluative and emotional demands of GenAI use	Hidden evaluative labour in checking and adapting AI-generated content	11
	Pressure to remain continuously updated with emerging AI tools	7
Informal and pedagogical resources	Informal professional learning through colleagues and online communities	12
	Student-centred pedagogical beliefs as a driver of meaningful AI use	9
Complementary forms of professional expertise	Novice teachers' technological experimentation and adaptability	8
	Experienced teachers' pedagogical judgement and contextual decision-making	9

As shown in Table 2, the analysis generated four overarching themes and eight subthemes. The themes demonstrated that teachers' GenAI competencies were shaped not only by technological capability but also by institutional conditions, professional identity, evaluative demands, informal learning opportunities, and differentiated forms of expertise across career stages.

4. Results

4.1 Levels of In-Service Teachers' Generative AI Competencies

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics for overall GenAI competencies among novice and experienced Vietnamese in-service EFL teachers. Both groups reported high overall levels of GenAI competencies. Novice teachers obtained a mean score of 3.87 (SD = 0.76; n = 276), whereas experienced teachers obtained a mean score of 3.52 (SD = 0.81; n = 305). Based on the established interpretation criteria, where mean scores from 3.50 to 5.00 indicated a high level of competency, both groups were classified as demonstrating high GenAI competency levels. Although novice teachers reported a higher overall mean score than experienced teachers, independent-sample t-tests were conducted across the five competency dimensions to determine whether statistically significant group differences existed.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for Overall GenAI Competencies by Teaching Experience

Group	N	Mean	SD
Novice teachers	276	3.87	0.76
Experienced teachers	305	3.52	0.81

These findings suggested that GenAI has become sufficiently accessible for teachers across different career stages to engage with it in their professional practices. At the same time, the observed difference in overall mean scores may indicated variations in how novice and experienced teachers approach GenAI use. Novice teachers might be more inclined to experiment with emerging tools for lesson planning, material development, and instructional support, whereas experienced teachers might draw more heavily on established pedagogical routines and professional judgement when deciding whether and how to integrate GenAI. To examine these patterns more rigorously, independent-sample t-tests were conducted across the five dimensions of teachers' GenAI competencies.

4.2 Differences in Generative AI Competencies between Novice and Experienced Vietnamese In-Service EFL Teachers (RQ1)

As shown in Table 4, statistically significant differences were found in technological proficiency and risk and ethical awareness, whereas no significant group differences emerged in pedagogical compatibility, preparing students for the effective practices of GenAI, or professional development and communication.

Table 4: GenAI competency levels of novice and experienced teachers across dimensions

Dimensions	NOVICE (N = 276)		EXPERIENCED (N = 305)		<i>t</i>	95% CI	Cohen's <i>d</i>
	M	SD	M	SD			
Technological proficiency	3.88	0.74	3.67	0.79	3.29*	0.08 to 0.34	0.27
Pedagogical compatibility	3.71	0.76	3.75	0.81	-0.64	-0.16 to 0.08	-0.05
Preparing students with effective practices of GenAI	3.69	0.73	3.74	0.77	-0.82	-0.17 to 0.07	-0.07
Professional development and communication	3.73	0.79	3.77	0.82	-0.59	-0.15 to 0.09	-0.05
Risk and ethical awareness	3.68	0.75	3.89	0.71	-3.48*	-0.33 to -0.09	-0.29

Note. $p < .05$. Cohen's *d* values were calculated using pooled standard deviations. Positive values indicate higher scores among novice teachers, whereas negative values indicate higher scores among experienced teachers. Absolute values of approximately .20, .50, and .80 indicate small, medium, and large effects, respectively.

Novice teachers reported significantly higher technological proficiency ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 0.74$) than experienced teachers ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 0.79$), $t = 3.29$, $p < .05$, 95% CI [0.08, 0.34], Cohen's $d = 0.27$. Although statistically significant, this difference represented a small effect size, indicating a modest advantage for novice teachers in their confidence and ability to explore and use GenAI tools for instructional purposes.

In contrast, experienced teachers reported significantly higher levels of risk and ethical awareness ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 0.71$) than novice teachers ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 0.75$), $t = -3.48$, $p < .05$, 95% CI [-0.33, -0.09], Cohen's $d = -0.29$. The effect size was also small, indicating that experienced teachers showed a modestly stronger awareness of issues related to academic integrity, misinformation, ethical AI use, and the responsible integration of GenAI into teaching practice.

No statistically significant differences were found for pedagogical compatibility, $t = -0.64$, Cohen's $d = -0.05$; preparing students for the effective practices of GenAI, $t = -0.82$, Cohen's $d = -0.07$; or professional development and communication, $t = -0.59$, Cohen's $d = -0.05$. The effect sizes for these dimensions were negligible, suggesting that novice and experienced teachers reported highly comparable levels of competency in aligning GenAI with pedagogy, guiding students' effective use of GenAI, and engaging in AI-related professional learning and communication.

Overall, the findings indicated that teaching experience was associated with differentiated but limited competency profiles. Novice teachers demonstrated a small advantage in technological proficiency, whereas experienced teachers demonstrated a small advantage in risk and ethical awareness. However, the negligible differences across the remaining three dimensions suggested that GenAI competencies cannot be explained by teaching experience or technological familiarity alone. Rather, teachers across both career stages appeared to share broadly similar levels of pedagogical, student guidance, and professional-development-related GenAI competencies.

4.3 Negotiating Generative AI Competencies in Vietnamese EFL Contexts (RQ2)

4.3.1 Constraints Shaping Teachers' GenAI Competencies

One prominent challenge reported by participants was the uncertainty surrounding the pedagogical legitimacy of GenAI use in English language teaching. Several teachers explained that, although GenAI tools were increasingly common in their professional practices, institutional expectations regarding appropriate AI use remained unclear. As a result, many teachers relied on personal experimentation rather than formal training or institutional guidance. T4 explained:

"Sometimes I use ChatGPT to prepare activities or generate discussion questions, but I am still unsure whether my university fully accepts this practice because there are no clear policies...."

Another novel insight emerging from the interviews was the concern of teachers about maintaining their professional identity in AI-mediated classrooms. Rather

than fearing direct replacement by AI, several participants expressed anxiety that excessive dependence on GenAI might gradually reduce teachers' intellectual authority and pedagogical creativity. This concern appeared particularly strong among experienced teachers. T2 noted that

"If teachers only copy AI-generated materials without adapting them, students may eventually feel that teachers are no longer the real source of knowledge...."

This response suggests that teachers' concerns extended beyond the usefulness of AI-generated materials. Uncritical reliance on such content might weaken the professional authority of teachers and obscure their pedagogical expertise. GenAI competence therefore requires not only technical use but also the critical selection and adaptation of AI-supported materials in line with teachers' professional judgement.

In addition, many participants highlighted the hidden cognitive burden associated with GenAI integration. Although GenAI tools were often described as time-saving tools, teachers explained that effective AI use actually required considerable effort in prompt construction, output evaluation, and content verification. Several participants stated that AI-generated materials frequently contained inaccurate information, culturally inappropriate examples, or linguistically unnatural expressions that required extensive modification before classroom use. T9 shared that

"People often think AI reduces teachers' workload, but I still spend considerable time checking whether the information is accurate, whether the language suits my students, and whether the activities fit my lesson objectives..."

This finding challenged the common assumption that GenAI automatically reduces teachers' workload. Its value depends on teachers' capacity to verify, adapt, and contextualise AI-generated content, meaning that GenAI competence involves critical evaluative labour rather than merely operational technological skills.

Interestingly, novice teachers also reported emotional pressure associated with the expectation to become "AI-competent teachers." Some participants explained that younger teachers were often assumed to possess advanced AI skills because of their age and digital familiarity. However, several novice teachers admitted that they sometimes felt overwhelmed by the rapid emergence of new AI tools and features. T11 commented that

"New AI tools appear almost every month. I try to learn them, but it is difficult to know which ones are actually useful for teaching. If I stop learning even briefly, I worry that I will become outdated..."

This finding revealed that technological adaptability does not necessarily translate into professional security. For novice teachers, the rapid pace of GenAI development may create continuous pressure to update their skills, making competence development an ongoing and emotionally demanding process rather than a stable achievement.

4.3.2 Factors Facilitating Teachers' GenAI Competencies

The findings further revealed that teachers' GenAI competencies were strongly facilitated by informal professional learning communities rather than by formal institutional training programmes. Many participants stated that they primarily learnt about GenAI tools through colleagues, Facebook groups, YouTube tutorials, or online teacher communities. Teachers frequently exchanged prompts, lesson ideas, and AI-related teaching experiences in informal digital spaces. T5 explained:

"Most practical AI knowledge comes from other teachers online, not official workshops. In teacher groups, we share prompts, discuss whether AI responses are reliable, and exchange ideas about adapting generated materials for different classes..."

This suggested that teachers' GenAI competence was developed not only through formal institutional provision but also through peer-based knowledge exchange. Informal online communities appeared to function as practical spaces where teachers could share prompts, evaluate tools, and adapt AI use strategies to their own teaching contexts.

Another important facilitating factor was teachers' pedagogical orientation towards student-centred learning. Participants who viewed GenAI as a tool for enhancing learner autonomy and classroom interaction appeared more willing to experiment with AI-supported instructional practices. Several teachers described using GenAI to personalise learning materials, create differentiated tasks, or encourage students' critical thinking about AI-generated content. T6 stated:

"I do not use AI to replace teaching. I use it to create more opportunities for students to interact, discuss, and evaluate information critically..."

This finding indicated that teachers' pedagogical beliefs shaped not only whether they used GenAI, but also the purposes for which they used it. Teachers who viewed AI as a resource for extending learner interaction and critical engagement were more likely to integrate it in ways that complemented, rather than displaced, their instructional role.

The interview results also revealed that experienced teachers often compensated for lower technological confidence through stronger pedagogical judgement. While novice teachers tended to explore AI tools more quickly, experienced teachers appeared more selective and reflective in deciding when and how GenAI should be used in classrooms. Several experienced teachers emphasised that effective AI integration depended less on technical mastery and more on understanding students' learning needs and classroom contexts. T3 explained:

"Knowing many AI tools is not the most important thing. Teachers need to decide whether a tool is suitable for particular students, learning objectives, and classroom conditions. Sometimes a simple tool is more useful than a more advanced one..."

This response highlighted that meaningful GenAI competence depends not on the number of tools teachers can operate, but on their capacity to make context-sensitive pedagogical decisions. Such judgement may help to explain why the two

groups reported broadly comparable levels across several competency dimensions despite differences in technological proficiency.

5. Discussion

5.1 Divergent Strengths in Vietnamese EFL Teachers' GenAI Competencies

The findings suggested that teachers' GenAI competencies should not be viewed as a single capacity that develops automatically through technological familiarity or teaching experience (Shi, 2025). Instead, novice and experienced teachers demonstrated different but potentially complementary competencies, supporting the multidimensional nature of GenAI competence (Shi, 2025; UNESCO, 2022).

Novice teachers' stronger technological proficiency may reflect greater confidence in experimenting with conversational tools, whereas experienced teachers' greater ethical and risk awareness may reflect accumulated professional responsibility and sensitivity to instructional consequences (Su & Yang, 2023; Van den Berg & Du Plessis, 2023). This pattern supports a human-centred view of AI competence that values ethical responsibility, critical evaluation, and pedagogical judgement alongside technical skills (Ng et al., 2023; UNESCO, 2022). However, the small differences between groups also indicate that teaching experience alone partially explains the readiness of teachers to integrate GenAI (Hoang & Bui, 2026; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2025).

This pattern aligns with the UNESCO (2022) AI Competency Framework for Teachers and the T-GAIC framework of Shi (2025), both of which conceptualise AI competence as human-centred and multidimensional. Beyond the ability to operate AI tools, competence includes ethical responsibility, pedagogical judgement, and professional learning. Thus, novice teachers' technological confidence should not be viewed as comprehensive competence, while experienced teachers' ethical sensitivity should not be interpreted as resistance to innovation. Instead, the two groups appear to demonstrate different but complementary dimensions of the broader AI competence profile described by UNESCO (2022) and Ng et al. (2023).

The findings also extended the argument of Ng et al. (2023) that teachers' AI digital competencies involve both technical and non-technical dimensions, including technological understanding, critical evaluation, pedagogical adaptation, and lifelong learning. Although the present findings partly support the common expectation that less experienced teachers might be more willing to explore emerging technologies, they challenge the assumption that technological familiarity translates directly into stronger AI competence overall, reinforcing the view of Shi (2025) that GenAI competence is a multidimensional rather than a unitary skill set.

While novice teachers showed higher technological proficiency, experienced teachers demonstrated significantly stronger risk and ethical awareness (Su & Yang, 2023; Van den Berg & Du Plessis, 2023). The absence of statistically significant differences in pedagogical compatibility, preparing students for effective GenAI use, and professional development and communication

suggested that both novice and experienced teachers might face similar challenges in transforming individual tool use into sustained pedagogical practice. This is especially relevant in the Vietnamese higher education context, where institutional guidance and structured opportunities for AI-related professional learning remain uneven (Hoang & Bui, 2026; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2025).

The findings further support and refine the T-GAIC framework of Shi (2025). The differentiated pattern across technological proficiency and risk, and ethical awareness reinforces the view of Shi (2025) that GenAI competence comprises multiple interrelated dimensions rather than a unitary skill set. However, the present study adds a career-stage perspective to this framework, suggesting that these dimensions develop unevenly across professional trajectories.

Specifically, technological proficiency may be strengthened through frequent experimentation with emerging tools, a trait more prevalent in novice teachers, whereas risk and ethical awareness develop through repeated engagement with classroom realities and academic integrity concerns (Su & Yang, 2023; Van den Berg & Du Plessis, 2023). Importantly, the lack of group differences in the remaining dimensions indicates that these competencies may depend more strongly on contextual conditions, such as institutional policy and access to professional learning (Hoang & Bui, 2026; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2025), and collaborative support in informal networks (Jin et al., 2025; Ng et al., 2023).

Taken together, the findings challenge deficit-oriented comparisons between novice and experienced teachers. Neither group was uniformly more competent; rather, novice teachers may contribute technological openness and experimentation, whereas experienced teachers may offer pedagogical discernment and ethical caution (Su & Yang, 2023; Van den Berg & Du Plessis, 2023). Professional development should therefore move beyond standardised, career-stage-based training to create collaborative opportunities for teachers to exchange complementary expertise (Jin et al., 2025; Ng et al., 2023). This approach aligns with multidimensional AI competence models (Ng et al., 2023; Shi, 2025; UNESCO, 2022) and responds to the institutional ambiguity and uneven support identified in the Vietnamese context (Hoang & Bui, 2026; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2025).

5.2 Negotiating GenAI Competencies in AI-Mediated Language Educational Contexts

The qualitative findings revealed that Vietnamese in-service EFL teachers' GenAI competencies were shaped by complex professional, pedagogical, and sociocultural negotiations rather than merely by technological knowledge. Although the quantitative findings suggested relatively high levels of GenAI competencies among both novice and experienced teachers, the interviews demonstrated that teachers' engagement with GenAI was often accompanied by uncertainty, emotional tension, and continuous professional adaptation. These findings indicated that teachers' GenAI competencies should be understood as socially situated and contextually negotiated practices rather than as fixed technological abilities.

The findings suggested that the uncertainty of teachers about GenAI use was both practical and professional. Unclear institutional policies required teachers to make independent decisions about legitimate classroom use, potentially affecting their confidence and willingness to develop relevant competencies (European Commission, 2022; Hoang & Bui, 2026; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2025; UNESCO, 2022). Participants also worried that excessive reliance on AI-generated materials could undermine the authority, creativity, and instructional authenticity of teachers (Lee & Zhai, 2024). These concerns extend discussions of integrity, misinformation, and ethics (Holmes & Porayska-Pomsta, 2023; Jose et al., 2025; Qian, 2025) by highlighting the efforts of teachers to preserve their distinctive pedagogical role.

The findings also revealed the hidden labour of GenAI integration. Rather than simply reducing workload, GenAI required teachers to construct prompts, verify outputs, and adapt materials to the linguistic and contextual needs of students. This challenges optimistic claims about AI-driven efficiency (Pahi et al., 2024) and suggests that GenAI competence involves not only technical skills, but also critical judgement and ongoing pedagogical evaluation (Ng et al., 2023; Shi, 2025).

Another significant finding was the important role of informal professional learning networks in facilitating the GenAI competencies of teachers. Many participants reported learning about AI tools primarily through colleagues, online teacher communities, YouTube tutorials, and social media platforms rather than through formal institutional training (European Commission, 2022; Hoang & Bui, 2026; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2025; UNESCO, 2022).

This finding supports previous research emphasising the importance of collaborative and self-directed professional learning in technology integration (Ng et al., 2023). However, the present study demonstrated further that informal digital communities functioned as important spaces where teachers collectively negotiated AI-related uncertainties, exchanged practical strategies, and developed contextually relevant understandings of GenAI integration in English language teaching (Adiyono et al., 2025; Floris, 2025; Jin et al., 2025). This suggested that the professional learning of teachers in AI-mediated contexts might occur increasingly outside formal institutional structures (Jin et al., 2025; Ng et al., 2023).

Interestingly, the findings also complicated common assumptions regarding the technological adaptability of novice teachers (Shi, 2025). Although novice teachers demonstrated stronger technological confidence in the quantitative phase, the interviews revealed that this confidence often coexisted with feelings of anxiety and professional pressure to remain up to date with rapidly evolving AI technologies (UNESCO, 2022). This finding refines previous literature portraying younger teachers as naturally comfortable with educational technologies (Ng et al., 2023). In the context of rapidly changing GenAI ecosystems (Al-Khreshneh, 2024; Moorhouse & Wong, 2025), technological adaptability itself might become a source of emotional pressure, as teachers feel compelled to engage in continuous self-updating to avoid becoming professionally outdated (Shi, 2025).

Finally, the interviews revealed that experienced teachers often compensated for lower technological confidence through stronger pedagogical reasoning and contextual decision-making. Rather than prioritising mastery of multiple AI tools, experienced teachers emphasised selecting technologies according to the learning needs, classroom realities, and pedagogical objectives of students (Su & Yang, 2023; Van den Berg & Du Plessis, 2023).

This finding extended theoretical perspectives that conceptualise AI competencies as multidimensional constructs involving ethical awareness, pedagogical reasoning, and reflective professional judgement rather than technological proficiency alone (Ng et al., 2023; Shi, 2025; UNESCO, 2022). Collectively, the findings suggested that GenAI competencies emerge through ongoing negotiations among technological possibilities, institutional conditions, professional identities, and pedagogical values in AI-mediated language education contexts (Hoang & Bui, 2026; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2025).

Drawing on the integrated findings, Figure 1 proposes a socially situated model of the GenAI competencies of Vietnamese EFL teachers. Rather than presenting a linear process, the model shows how competence is shaped through the interaction of institutional conditions, professional identity, and pedagogical judgement, evaluative labour, and informal professional learning networks. Unclear policies and limited formal training require teachers to make individual decisions about the legitimacy of GenAI use, while concerns about professional authority, instructional authenticity, and the needs of students shape these decisions. The work of prompting, verifying, adapting, and contextualising AI-generated materials may strengthen the critical competence of teachers but can also discourage sustained use. Informal networks partly address these pressures by offering peer support and contextually relevant strategies. GenAI competence therefore emerges as a dynamic professional practice rather than as an individual technical skill.

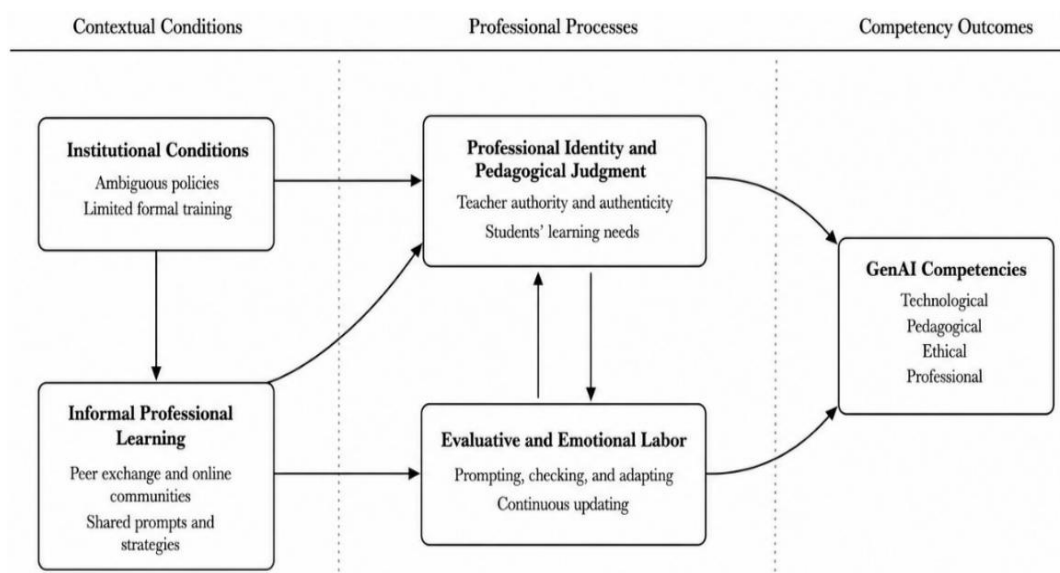


Figure 1: A socially situated model of Vietnamese EFL teachers' GenAI competencies

6. Conclusion

This explanatory sequential mixed-methods study has examined the GenAI competencies of novice and experienced Vietnamese in-service EFL teachers. Both groups reported high overall levels of GenAI competence. However, novice teachers demonstrated stronger technological proficiency, whereas experienced teachers reported greater risk and ethical awareness. The effect sizes of these differences were small. No significant differences were found in pedagogical compatibility, preparing students for effective GenAI use, or professional development and communication.

By integrating the survey and interview findings, the study showed that GenAI competence should not be understood as a purely technical or experience-based attribute. Instead, it is a multidimensional and socially situated professional practice shaped by institutional conditions, professional identity, evaluative and emotional labour, pedagogical judgement, and informal professional learning networks. The proposed conceptual model highlights further how these conditions interact to shape the technological, pedagogical, ethical, and professional engagement of teachers with GenAI.

This study contributes to the existing literature in several ways. First, it extends current research on the AI competencies of teachers by focusing specifically on GenAI competencies in the Vietnamese EFL context, which remains underexplored in previous studies. Second, the study refines existing understandings of the AI competencies of teachers by demonstrating that different competency dimensions might be associated with different forms of professional expertise. Third, the qualitative findings provide novel insights into the sociocultural negotiation of GenAI competencies, particularly regarding the professional identity and informal learning practices of teachers in AI-supported educational environments.

The findings generate several implications for teacher education and institutional practice. Because novice teachers showed stronger technological proficiency but lower risk and ethical awareness, their professional development should extend beyond tool use to include evaluating AI-generated content, identifying misinformation and bias, protecting privacy, addressing academic integrity, and avoiding uncritical reliance on AI outputs. This may help to translate technological confidence into responsible and pedagogically sustainable practice.

Conversely, the stronger ethical awareness but comparable technological proficiency of experienced teachers suggests a need for practical, low-stakes opportunities to build confidence in using GenAI for specific English language teaching purposes, such as adapting reading materials, generating discussion prompts, creating vocabulary activities, and drafting feedback for teacher review. Training should connect these applications to the existing pedagogical expertise of teachers. Finally, the absence of group differences in pedagogical compatibility, student preparation, and professional development indicates a shared need for institutional support. Universities should establish clear, enabling guidelines on teacher verification, transparency, student guidance, and academic integrity,

thereby reducing institutional ambiguity rather than simply regulating the practices of teachers.

This study has several limitations. First, the quantitative findings relied on self-reported GenAI competencies, which may not reflect fully the actual classroom practices of teachers or their ability to evaluate and adapt AI-generated materials in real time. Responses may also have been influenced by social desirability bias. Second, convenience sampling may have attracted teachers already interested in or familiar with GenAI, potentially contributing to the relatively high competency levels reported. Third, because the study was conducted in Vietnamese higher education, its findings may not generalise to other educational levels, disciplines, or institutional contexts. Fourth, the cross-sectional design captured competencies at one point in time and could not examine how they develop as technologies, policies, and teaching practices evolve.

Finally, the small qualitative sample and absence of classroom observations, teaching artefacts, and policy documents mean that the findings reflect reported experiences rather than demonstrating fully how GenAI competencies are enacted in practice. Future research could use longitudinal mixed-methods designs, classroom observations, artefact-based analysis, and broader sampling across regions and educational contexts.

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Appendix 1

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

1. **Could you describe your overall experience of using generative AI tools in English language teaching?**
Probes: Which GenAI tools have you used? How frequently do you use them? For what teaching-related purposes do you usually use them?
2. **How do you use GenAI to support lesson planning, material development, classroom activities, assessment, feedback, or other professional tasks?**
Probes: Could you describe a specific example? What did the tool generate? How did you adapt the output before using it in your teaching or professional work?
3. **How confident do you feel when selecting and using GenAI tools for English language teaching?**
Probes: What makes you feel confident or less confident? Have you experienced difficulties with prompt writing, tool selection, or controlling AI-generated responses?
4. **How do you decide whether AI-generated materials, examples, feedback, or activities are suitable for your students?**
Probes: How do you evaluate linguistic accuracy, cultural relevance, students' proficiency levels, and alignment with lesson objectives? Can you recall an output that you decided not to use?
5. **What challenges do you encounter when using generative AI tools in your teaching practices?**
Probes: Do these challenges relate to inaccurate information, unnatural language, inappropriate examples, technical issues, limited time, student engagement, or uncertainty about appropriate use? How do you usually address these challenges?
6. **How does using GenAI affect your workload and professional responsibilities?**
Probes: Does it save time, create additional work, or both? How much effort is required to prompt, check, revise, and adapt AI-generated content before classroom use?
7. **What concerns, if any, do you have about the ethical and responsible use of GenAI in English language education?**
Probes: How do you address misinformation, bias, privacy, copyright, academic integrity, or students' overreliance on AI-generated content?
8. **How do you guide students to use GenAI effectively and responsibly for English learning?**
Probes: Do you provide students with rules, examples, prompts, or evaluation criteria? How do you encourage them to verify AI-generated information and maintain responsibility for their own learning?
9. **What kinds of institutional support, policies, or professional development opportunities are available to you regarding GenAI use?**
Probes: Are there clear institutional guidelines? Have you attended any training or workshops? How do colleagues, online communities, or professional networks support your learning? What forms of support are currently missing?
10. **What factors influence your ability or willingness to develop competencies in using GenAI for English language teaching?**
Probes: How do teaching experience, professional identity, institutional expectations, access to training, colleagues, online communities, and students' needs influence your development? What support or changes would help teachers use GenAI more meaningfully, confidently, and responsibly?