

Catalyst not Threat: English Teachers Perspectives on AI

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Abstract. This study challenges dominant narratives that frame AI as a threat to authorship and creativity by showing that teachers largely position it as a catalyst for ideation and linguistic support rather than a replacement for writing. Findings indicate that AI is pedagogically accepted when it functions as an auxiliary tool that scaffolds thinking and expands access to ideas, but remains subject to regulation to preserve visible and traceable student intellectual labor. Teachers consistently require transformation of AI-generated outputs through paraphrasing, rewriting, and in-class writing, thereby maintaining human cognitive engagement as the basis of authorship. Across narratives, authorship shifts from origination to transformation, where creative agency is assessed through the extent of student reworking of AI-generated content. Teachers neither fully embrace nor reject AI but condition its use on sustained human interpretive and compositional effort. The study concludes that generative AI operates as a catalyst for creative writing when it enhances rather than replaces student intellectual participation, with pedagogical legitimacy grounded in the persistence of discernible human agency.

Keywords: creative writing pedagogy, authorship, hermeneutic phenomenology, Gadamer, AI in education

Introduction

Generative artificial intelligence (AI) has recently reshaped educational practices and creative production across multimodal domains such as text, video, and audio (Vadhil et al., 2024). Its rapid integration into classrooms has been driven by its capacity to simulate human-like text generation through pattern recognition and large-scale data modeling (SingularityNET, 2024). This technological shift is no longer marginal: 86% of students now report using AI tools in their academic work (Kelly, 2024), indicating that AI-mediated writing has become a normalized feature of contemporary education rather than an emerging anomaly. Within this condition, AI is increasingly understood not as an external disruption but as part of the writing ecology itself.

Literature presents a divided but converging tension around this development. On one side, AI is framed as a democratizing force that expands access to writing support and idea generation (Marche, 2023), while also enhancing feedback, scaffolding, and differentiated instruction in

language learning contexts (Huang et al., 2022; Bahari, 2020). Studies further show that AI-supported environments can improve engagement and creativity by reducing cognitive load and supporting co-creation processes (Cen & Shakibaei, 2026; Collins et al., 2024). These findings position AI as a pedagogical resource that functions as a catalyst for ideation and writing development rather than a substitute for it.

On the other side, concerns persist regarding the erosion of critical thinking, originality, and independent writing skills when AI use becomes excessive (Zhai et al., 2024). Educators report heightened anxiety over plagiarism and declining academic integrity, with 72% expressing concern about cheating and more than 60% reporting fears about weakened student writing and thinking skills (Hallowell, 2023). These anxieties extend beyond textual duplication and point to a deeper issue: whether students' intellectual labor remains visible and attributable within AI-mediated outputs (Cardon et al., 2023; Sullivan et al., 2023). Even when AI improves fluency and structure, scholars argue it cannot replace the interpretive and reflective dimensions of writing that signal authentic authorship (Wang, 2024).

This tension has redefined writing instruction and teacher roles. Teachers are increasingly positioned as mediators who regulate AI use while preserving student engagement in cognitive processes (Tutton & Cohen, 2025). They operate within what has been described as a "dilemmatic space," balancing innovation with the preservation of authentic student voice (Kershen & Johnson, 2025). Professional development initiatives further reflect this shift, as AI literacy becomes necessary for teachers to appropriately integrate technology while sustaining pedagogical integrity (Yang et al., 2024).

Despite growing scholarship on AI in education, most studies prioritize student experiences, technological affordances, or institutional policy frameworks. Less attention has been given to how teachers interpret AI's role in creative writing as a lived pedagogical experience, particularly in the Philippine context where English instruction plays a central role in academic and communicative development. This gap is significant because teachers are the primary agents who determine whether AI functions as a support structure for learning or a substitute for student authorship.

Responding to this gap, the present study examines how English teachers interpret students' use of generative AI in creative writing. Using Gadamerian hermeneutic phenomenology (Gadamer, 1975; Moules et al., 2015), the study treats understanding as an interpretive process shaped through dialogue and reflection, where meaning emerges from the

interaction between teacher experience and pedagogical context. Hermeneutic inquiry, with its emphasis on openness and interpretive depth, allows for an exploration of how teachers construct the conditions under which AI is viewed as either pedagogically enabling or ethically problematic (Kafle, 2011).

Guided by Alsaigh and Coyne's (2021) hermeneutic analytical framework, the study analyzes teachers' narratives to understand how AI is positioned within the creative writing classroom. In doing so, it foregrounds a central interpretive question: under what conditions does generative AI function as a catalyst that enhances creative writing without displacing the student as the identifiable author of their work?

Methods

This study employed a Gadamerian hermeneutic phenomenological design grounded in Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophy (1975) to examine English teachers' narratives on generative artificial intelligence (AI) in creative writing. Hermeneutic phenomenology understands meaning as emergent through interpretive engagement rather than fixed description, where understanding unfolds dialogically between researcher, participant, and context (Gadamer, 1975; Moules et al., 2015). This approach aligns with the study's focus on how AI is experienced not as a disruptive threat but as a pedagogical catalyst that reorganizes writing practices and authorship relations in lived classroom settings. As such, the design prioritizes interpretive depth over measurement, consistent with hermeneutic inquiry's emphasis on openness and meaning-making (Kafle, 2011).

The study was guided by Gadamer's core philosophical constructs: pre-understanding, the hermeneutic circle, and fusion of horizons. Researchers explicitly treated pre-understandings as interpretive resources that shaped engagement with data rather than biases to be eliminated. This orientation is particularly relevant in examining AI in creative writing, where meaning is continually negotiated between technological mediation and human agency. Through iterative dialogue with participants, the study explored how teachers construct AI as either supportive scaffolding or ethically constrained assistance within writing instruction.

Data analysis followed the Gadamerian analytical framework of Alsaigh and Coyne (2021). This framework supports a cyclical interpretive process consistent with hermeneutic philosophy, enabling movement between parts of narratives and the emerging whole. Open-ended interviews generated dialogical data that allowed teachers to articulate how AI functions as a

writing catalyst while still requiring regulatory boundaries to preserve student authorship and intellectual visibility.

The study was conducted among English teachers from three educational institutions in Tagbilaran City, Bohol: Holy Name University, Bohol Island State University, and Dr. Cecilio Putong National High School. These sites were purposively selected to capture variation across tertiary and secondary contexts while minimizing institutional homogeneity. Interview settings were arranged in mutually agreed, private spaces within school premises to support reflective engagement.

Participants consisted of three purposively selected English teachers: two from tertiary institutions and one from secondary education. Inclusion criteria required a Bachelor's degree in English or Secondary Education major in English and at least one year of Creative Writing teaching experience. Teachers with less than one semester of experience in Creative Writing instruction were excluded. Adequacy was determined through interpretive sufficiency, reached when iterative reading of transcripts produced stable meaning-structures without new interpretive shifts. This was evidenced by convergence of meaning units across interviews, repeated confirmation of emerging patterns during hermeneutic cycling, and diminishing novelty across analytic iterations (Alsaigh & Coyne, 2021; Nigar, 2020).

The researchers functioned as the primary instruments of data generation. Data were collected through one-on-one, open-ended interviews guided by a central question with follow-up probes designed to elicit reflective narrative. Interviews lasted 15–30 minutes, were audio-recorded with consent, and supplemented by reflective journals documenting tone, pauses, non-verbal cues, and interpretive impressions. This reflexive layer supported hermeneutic sensitivity to meaning as contextually embedded and co-constructed.

Ethical clearance was obtained from the Holy Name University Ethics Review Board (HNU-ERB-July_2025-91). Participation was voluntary, with informed consent secured prior to data collection. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. Scheduling and venue selection were determined based on participant availability to minimize disruption to teaching responsibilities.

Reflexivity was strengthened through iterative researcher meetings conducted before and during data collection to surface preconceptions regarding AI as a pedagogical catalyst in creative writing. Mock interviews were also conducted to refine questioning strategies and maintain consistency in dialogical engagement.

Interviews were conducted in a conversational, dialogical manner rather than a rigid structured format. One researcher facilitated each interview, another assisted with probing questions, while additional researchers documented contextual observations. This arrangement supported layered interpretation of how teachers articulate AI as both enabling and regulating creative writing processes.

Data analysis followed the “Gaining Understanding through Dialogue with Text” phase of Alsaigh and Coyne’s (2021) framework. Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim for accuracy. Transcripts were repeatedly reviewed to deepen immersion in the data. First-order constructs were derived from direct participant statements, followed by second-order interpretive constructs generated through collaborative reflection. These were then clustered into categories and subthemes before being synthesized into final themes through iterative hermeneutic comparison between parts and whole.

Interpretation remained researcher-driven, with credibility strengthened through repeated transcript verification, cross-checking of interpretations, and validation by a qualitative analyst. Throughout the process, AI-assisted tools were used for transcription support, coding assistance, and manuscript drafting; however, interpretive authority remained fully with the researchers, ensuring ethical transparency, confidentiality, and human oversight consistent with emerging discussions on AI integration in research practice (Vetter et al., 2024; Yang et al., 2024; Zhai et al., 2024).

Results

Across participants, generative AI is consistently positioned not as a disruptive force but as a pedagogically integrated resource that reorganizes writing processes while maintaining human authorship at the center. Rather than displacing creative writing, AI functions as a catalytic layer that expands ideation, supports linguistic development, and prompts more deliberate forms of teacher regulation. Across narratives, meaning converges on a shared interpretive stance: AI is valuable only insofar as it amplifies, rather than replaces, student intellectual labor.

AI as Extended Ideational Space. Teachers describe creative writing as a process already distributed across cognitive and technological resources. Generative AI is framed as an extension of thinking that supports idea generation and linguistic enrichment rather than a substitute for authorship. One participant notes that AI “is just there to guide our ideas or to enrich our

ideas” (Participant 3), while another equates it with familiar tools, stating that “AI is just like Google” (Participant 3). Classroom practices further normalize this distributed model of ideation, where students are allowed to “read and search” (Participant 2).

Within this configuration, AI operates as an entry point into thinking rather than a producer of finished thought. Teachers maintain a clear boundary between assistance and authorship, emphasizing that AI-generated content remains subordinate: “we don’t use it word for word from the computer... it does help” (Participant 3). Writing is thus reconstituted as a process of guided ideation where human judgment remains decisive.

Pedagogical Structuring for Human-Centered Writing. AI integration is enabled through structured pedagogical arrangements that preserve visibility of student thinking. Teachers design learning conditions that distinguish formative use from evaluative accountability. This includes in-class writing tasks where students “do that inside the classroom and... submit... their cell phones” (Participant 2), as well as restrictions during examinations where “during major exams they are not going to use that” (Participant 2).

Rather than exclusion, AI is managed through contextual control. It is treated as analogous to established tools, with one teacher stating, “it’s like using a calculator, right?” (Participant 2). Teachers also rely on comparative evaluation—“can compare and contrast” student outputs (Participant 1)—and individualized profiling, where they “survey their students first... their own unique capacities and abilities” (Participant 3).

Across accounts, pedagogical regulation functions not as restriction but as a mechanism that ensures AI use remains anchored to demonstrable student authorship.

Authorship as Transformative Practice. Authorship is consistently understood as a process of transformation rather than origination. Teachers define ownership of text through the extent of student reworking applied to AI-generated material. Direct copying is rejected as it violates this interpretive threshold: “if you copy it word for word, it’s plagiarism already” (Participant 3).

In contrast, paraphrasing and rewriting are positioned as constitutive acts of authorship, since “paraphrasing would give you the opportunity to own your idea” (Participant 3). One participant reinforces this boundary principle explicitly: “you should not own something which you are not making” (Participant 3).

AI-generated text becomes pedagogically legitimate only when it is re-inscribed through student cognition. Authorship, therefore, is not displaced but relocated into the act of transformation.

Cognitive Expansion and Linguistic Enablement. Teachers consistently describe AI as expanding students' access to ideas, particularly in contexts where reading exposure is uneven. One participant observes that "not all students are readers... so if you're not a reader, your ideas... tend to be limited" (Participant 3). Within this condition, AI becomes an enabling scaffold that broadens ideational possibilities, as "because of AI, they were able to come up with brighter ideas" (Participant 3).

AI is thus positioned as a compensatory intellectual resource that supports entry into creative writing processes. Teachers encourage its use as a generative prompt: "seek AI so that you can have an idea to increase what you have had before" (Participant 3). Creativity is framed as a movement from initial limitation toward elaborated expression—"something you came up from nothing to something" (Participant 3).

In this sense, AI functions as a catalyst for ideation while remaining external to the act of authorship itself.

Cognitive Calibration in AI Use. Rather than signaling decline, teachers describe AI use as requiring ongoing calibration to sustain meaningful learning engagement. Efficiency gains are acknowledged as part of its catalytic value, particularly in idea generation and drafting. However, teachers emphasize the need to balance speed with sustained cognitive engagement.

One participant notes that "everything that is too much is not good... you're not helping" (Participant 1), which is interpreted not as rejection of AI but as a reminder that pedagogical value depends on proportional use. Similarly, rapid output generation—"only take one second" (Participant 2)—is understood as a prompt for instructional adjustment rather than a negative outcome.

Concerns about surface-level learning, where students "did not learn anything about that" (Participant 3), are addressed through structured writing tasks and paraphrasing requirements that re-anchor learning in student processing. Even warnings about misuse—"if you're going to abuse AI... it would give you negative effects" (Participant 3)—are framed as conditions for responsible integration rather than inherent technological risk.

Across narratives, AI is not constructed as a threat but as a tool requiring disciplined pedagogical framing to ensure sustained intellectual engagement.

Human Formation as Anchoring Principle. Across all accounts, human development remains the organizing horizon for AI integration. Teachers consistently affirm that technological use must remain embedded within affective and ethical formation. One participant emphasizes relational presence, stating that “we need also to be a feeling being” (Participant 3), while another extends this into explicit moral formation: “the feeling part should be maintained. The love part should be maintained. Compassion... respect... discipline” (Participant 3).

Writing instruction is therefore not reduced to technical production but embedded within value formation. Teachers insist that “you need to relate that with values as human beings” (Participant 3), while institutional acceptance is grounded in ethical orientation, reflected in “honesty is always the best policy” (Participant 2).

Human formation functions as the stabilizing framework through which AI is interpreted, regulated, and legitimized as a pedagogical catalyst.

Discussion

Generative AI, as interpreted through teachers’ narratives, is not constructed as an external technological rupture but as an enabling layer embedded within existing writing pedagogy. Its role is consistently framed in catalytic terms: it expands ideation, supports linguistic production, and accelerates entry into writing, while still requiring sustained human transformation to achieve pedagogical legitimacy. Across accounts, AI does not displace creative writing; it reorganizes the conditions under which authorship is recognized and evaluated.

The data align with scholarship positioning AI as a catalyst for ideation and writing development rather than a substitute for human composition. Prior studies highlight AI’s capacity to enhance feedback, scaffolding, and language learning support (Bahari, 2020; Huang et al., 2022), while broader systematic syntheses confirm its expanding role in education systems (J et al., 2024). Empirical work further shows that AI-supported environments can improve creativity and engagement through cognitive load reduction and co-creation dynamics (Cen & Shakibaei, 2026; Collins et al., 2024), while also enhancing emotional and cognitive dimensions of writing practice (Wang, 2024).

Teachers’ narratives extend these findings by treating AI as part of a distributed ideational ecology already present in contemporary writing classrooms. This is consistent with Marche (2023), who frames generative AI as expanding writing possibility spaces, and with SingularityNET (2024),

which conceptualizes AI as mimicking and reorganizing human creative processes. In this configuration, AI functions as a structured extension of ideation rather than an autonomous creative source.

However, the catalytic value of AI is conditioned. Even as studies emphasize student openness to adoption (Chan & Lee, 2023; Kim et al., 2024), teachers in this study insist that ideational expansion remains pedagogically valid only when subordinated to student interpretive labor. AI is thus epistemically productive but not authorially sufficient.

A key divergence from earlier scholarship emerges in how authorship is operationalized. While Wang (2024) argues that AI cannot replace interpretive and reflective dimensions of writing, teachers specify how this irreducibility is enacted: through transformation. Authorship is not located in idea generation but in the degree of cognitive reworking applied to AI-generated material.

This reframes creative writing as a transformation-based practice rather than origination. The teacher emphasis on paraphrasing and rewriting resonates with Sullivan et al. (2023), who locate ethical risk in unmediated AI output adoption, and Cardon et al. (2023), who emphasize the need for AI literacy that preserves intellectual labor visibility. Similarly, Barrett and Pack (2023) document teacher skepticism toward unregulated AI writing use, reinforcing the centrality of human revision as a marker of learning.

In this study, transformation becomes the operational criterion of authorship legitimacy. AI may generate input structures, but authorship emerges only when students re-inscribe those structures through interpretive labor. This aligns with Tsao and Nogues (2024), who argue that AI redistributes creative agency, but the present data qualify this redistribution: it is acceptable only when asymmetry remains visible in favor of human cognition.

Teachers position themselves within the mediating role described by Tutton and Cohen (2025), but their narratives specify how mediation is enacted: through contextual regulation rather than prohibition. AI is integrated into learning phases while being restricted in evaluative contexts, producing a segmented pedagogical ecology where its catalytic function is temporally bounded.

This reflects Kershen and Johnson's (2025) characterization of teaching in AI-assisted dilemmatic spaces, where epistemological assumptions about writing must be continuously renegotiated. However, teachers in this study frame the central dilemma not as innovation versus tradition but as acceleration versus traceability. AI is pedagogically acceptable when it accelerates ideation without erasing observable cognitive effort.

Professional development literature suggests that teacher self-efficacy is critical for AI integration (Yang et al., 2024), and this is supported in practice by teachers' active construction of regulatory frameworks. These frameworks operate in the absence of unified institutional policy, consistent with broader concerns about uneven governance in AI-integrated education systems.

Existing scholarship often situates AI ethics in terms of plagiarism and academic misconduct (Sullivan et al., 2023; Cardon et al., 2023). Teachers in this study partially affirm this concern but reorient the ethical axis. The central issue is not textual duplication per se, but the disappearance of student agency within the writing process.

This shift aligns with Vetter et al. (2024), who emphasize ethical interrogation of text generation systems beyond surface-level integrity concerns, and with Zhai et al. (2024), who document cognitive risks associated with over-reliance on AI dialogue systems. However, teachers articulate a more precise threshold: ethical violation occurs when AI replaces decision-making rather than when it produces text.

Thus, ethical evaluation becomes process-oriented rather than product-oriented. AI use is acceptable when it preserves interpretive choice, revision, and justification—core indicators of agency and learning presence.

Literature frequently frames AI as beneficial through cognitive load reduction and increased efficiency (Cen & Shakibaei, 2026; Collins et al., 2024). Teachers confirm this catalytic benefit but simultaneously interpret efficiency as pedagogically risky when it eliminates necessary struggle, such as in flipped classrooms where the struggle is necessary for students to prepare for the high-stakes analog assessments.

This tension complicates purely positive accounts of cognitive offloading. While Zhai et al. (2024) identify negative cognitive consequences of over-reliance, teachers specify the mechanism: learning is weakened when effort is bypassed rather than redistributed. Efficiency is acceptable when it supports ideation; it becomes problematic when it eliminates iterative engagement with writing difficulty.

This interpretation is reinforced by Mendoza (2026), who conceptualizes AI as a cognitive scaffold rather than a replacement for intellectual labor. Teachers similarly frame AI as enabling access without substituting cognitive formation.

Teachers' accounts also align with Marche's (2023) observation of AI as an equalizing tool for access to writing resources, particularly for learners with limited exposure to reading and advanced vocabulary. This is consistent

with Wang (2024), who documents divergent experiences of AI-assisted writing across linguistic backgrounds.

However, teachers extend this argument by emphasizing structural unevenness in literacy development. AI becomes compensatory infrastructure in contexts of limited reading engagement and constrained linguistic resources. This resonates with Kim et al. (2024), who highlight variability in student perceptions of AI-assisted writing processes.

Yet this compensation introduces a pedagogical tension: external fluency may obscure internal developmental gaps. The result is a reconfiguration of how competence is inferred in writing assessment.

The findings partially converge with Tsao and Nogues (2024), who argue that AI decentering authorship redistributes creative agency. However, teachers resist full redistribution. Creativity is not attributed to AI-human hybridity in equal terms but to the student's transformative intervention over AI-generated material.

This refines Bal and Arseven (2026), who identify broad shifts in creativity under AI-supported writing environments. In the present study, creativity is operationalized not as novelty of output but as the intensity of transformation applied to algorithmic input.

This position is consistent with Chan and Lee (2023), whose work on generational adoption gaps highlights differing epistemic orientations toward AI, and with Pandan and Inocian (2025), who emphasize contextualized pedagogical strategies as central to meaningful learning design. Creativity, in this framing, is not generated by AI but enacted through disciplined human reworking.

Finally, findings resonate with Toquero (2026), who identifies regulatory uncertainty in Philippine higher education regarding AI integration. Teachers' narratives confirm this gap but show its practical consequence: individualized governance of AI use.

Without consistent institutional frameworks, regulation becomes teacher-dependent, producing variability in what counts as acceptable AI assistance. This reinforces Kershen and Johnson's (2025) dilemmatic framing while grounding it in procedural fragmentation.

The result is a distributed governance system where ethical and pedagogical thresholds are locally constructed rather than institutionally standardized. This aligns with broader concerns in AI-assisted education research regarding inconsistent implementation of policy and practice across contexts (J et al., 2024).

Conclusions

Generative AI is accepted not as a creative agent but as a catalytic infrastructure for ideation and drafting. Its pedagogical legitimacy depends on three interlocking conditions: (1) expansion of access to ideas (Marche, 2023; Huang et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2024); (2) cognitive support without elimination of effort (Cen & Shakibaei, 2026; Zhai et al., 2024; Mendoza, 2026); and (3) preservation of visible human interpretive labor (Cardon et al., 2023; Sullivan et al., 2023; Vetter et al., 2024). Within this structure, authorship is reconstituted as transformation, ethics as agency preservation, and creativity as reworking rather than origination. Teachers neither reject nor fully embrace AI; they domesticate it as a catalyst whose value is contingent on the persistence of discernible human cognition within the writing process.

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