REDEFINING THE AUTHOR'S ROLE IN THE GENAI ERA:THE PROBLEM OF AUTHORIAL AGENCY IN EFL ACADEMIC WRITING

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Abstract

This article examines the problem of authorial agency that arises when generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) tools are integrated into the academic writing of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. The study is built around the following thesis: uncontrolled use of GenAI dilutes the authorial voice of the student's text and erodes the sense of ownership over it, yet this risk can be prevented — the student must act as a critical decision-maker who directs the argument and its logic, while AI is used strictly as a supportive tool for brainstorming and language refinement rather than content generation. The article systematizes the theoretical foundations of authorial agency, its constituent pillars, the acceptable and unacceptable forms of AI use, and directions for classroom implementation, presented through tables and diagrams.

Keywords: generative artificial intelligence, EFL academic writing, authorial agency, authorial voice, critical thinking, writing pedagogy, digital literacy.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the growing popularity of generative artificial intelligence systems such as ChatGPT, Claude, and Gemini has had a significant impact on language education, particularly on the EFL academic writing process. On one hand, these tools offer practical help to students in correcting grammatical errors, enriching vocabulary, and improving text structure. On the other hand, their uncontrolled use raises serious pedagogical and ethical concerns: instead of forming their own ideas, students increasingly tend to accept ready-made text suggested by AI.

This situation directly conflicts with the core purpose of academic writing — developing the student's independent thinking, evidentiary reasoning, and argumentation skills. For this reason, the question "who is the author?" carries not only legal-ethical but also profound pedagogical significance. This question becomes even more complex in the EFL context, since students are simultaneously mastering both linguistic tools and modes of thought, and this dual challenge may push them toward excessive dependence on AI assistance.

The purpose of this article is to clarify the theoretical content of authorial agency under GenAI conditions, analyze the risks of its erosion, and propose practical criteria for preserving it.

2. The Relevance of the Problem

For EFL students, academic writing involves a two-tier challenge: mastering linguistic tools (grammar, vocabulary, syntax) and developing an academic mode of thinking (thesis, evidence, structure). GenAI tools solve the first challenge quickly and efficiently, but this very convenience may tempt students to bypass the second, more important stage — generating independent content.

As a result, a student may submit a text that is technically "correct" but not substantively their own. Over the long term, this leads to underdevelopment of the student's critical thinking, independent argumentation, and academic writing skills. Furthermore, academic integrity policies at many institutions have not yet clearly regulated the subtler, intermediate forms of GenAI use (for example, using it solely for language polishing), which increases uncertainty and mistrust between teachers and students.

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At the same time, addressing the problem purely through prohibition is ineffective, since GenAI tools are becoming an integral part of the modern professional and academic environment. For this reason, a balanced approach — teaching responsible use of AI — is regarded as the most viable solution.

3. Theoretical Foundations

Several theoretical strands can inform an analysis of authorial agency. Together they illuminate the role of the author in EFL writing instruction from different angles, as summarized below:

Theoretical strand	Core idea and relevance to EFL writing
Process writing theory	Writing is not linear but a recursive process of drafting, revising and editing; the author must remain actively engaged at every stage
Social-constructivist approach	Knowledge and text are constructed through social interaction; AI can serve as an "interlocutor", but final meaning is shaped by the student
Author-function theory	The author is not merely a text producer but a socio-legal function that assigns meaning and responsibility to a text; this function should not be transferred to an automated system
Digital literacy theory	A contemporary writer must use digital tools critically and strategically, which includes a distinct competence in AI literacy

Table 1. Theoretical strands relevant to understanding authorial agency

All of these theoretical strands converge on one general conclusion: authorial agency is not a static state but a dynamic practice that must be actively maintained at every stage of the writing process. Under GenAI conditions, this practice takes on a new form, but its essence — the student's conscious control over the text — remains unchanged.

4. The Concept of Authorial Agency and the Risk Posed by GenAI

Authorial agency is a writer's capacity to exercise conscious control over, and take responsibility for, the content, structure, and style of their own text. In traditional writing pedagogy, this concept is formed through the student's active participation in drafting, revision, and editing.

Under GenAI integration, this process can develop in two distinct directions. In the first, AI functions purely as a supportive tool — the student remains at the center and makes all significant decisions. In the second, AI is used as a generative tool that produces content — which shifts authorial agency from the student to the AI system, weakening the sense of ownership over the text.

The diagram below visualizes these two functional directions — the supportive function and the function that violates authorial agency:

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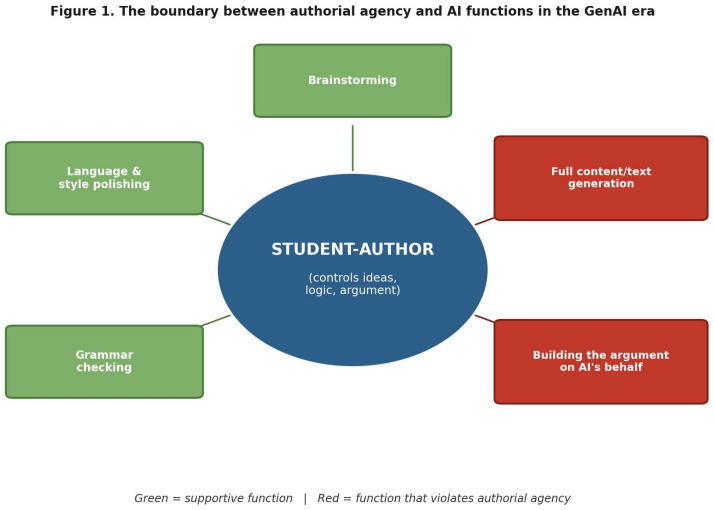


Figure 1. The boundary between authorial agency and AI functions in the GenAI era

5. The Constituent Pillars of Authorial Agency

To understand authorial agency holistically, it is useful to divide it into four interrelated components: cognitive independence, transparency, critical control, and stylistic consistency. Together, these four pillars ensure the student's genuine sense of ownership over the text, as shown in the diagram below:

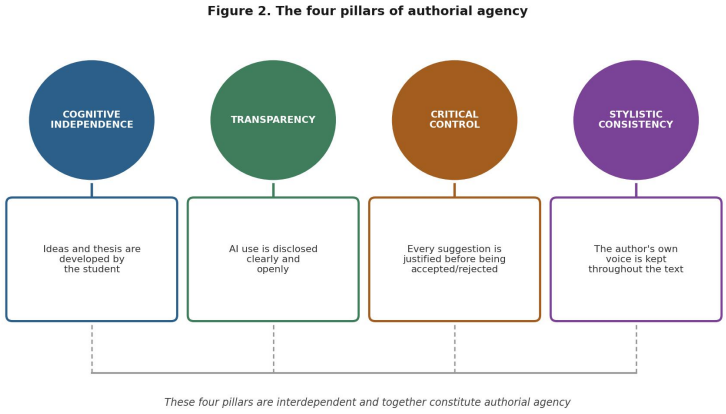


Figure 2. The four pillars of authorial agency

Cognitive independence means that the thesis and argument are developed by the student. Transparency requires open disclosure of how AI was used, which represents a modern form of academic integrity. Critical control involves justifying the acceptance or rejection of every AI suggestion. Stylistic consistency ensures that the student's own voice is maintained throughout the text. The absence of any one of these four pillars can partially or fully undermine authorial agency.

6. Acceptable and Unacceptable Forms of AI Use

To preserve authorial agency in student writing, clear boundaries must be set for AI use. The table below compares acceptable and unacceptable practices across the main stages of the writing process:

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Activity	Acceptable (preserves authorial agency)	Unacceptable (undermines authorial agency)
Idea generation	Brainstorming with AI and independently selecting from a list of generated options	Accepting an AI-proposed thesis as one's own without scrutiny
Text structuring	Reviewing AI-suggested outlines, then choosing and rebuilding one's own structure	Inserting an AI-written section or paragraph unchanged
Language and style	Polishing grammar, lexical choice and tone with AI assistance	Replacing one's entire style with the AI's "voice", losing one's own
Evidence and argument	Independently verifying AI-suggested evidence against sources	Using unverified facts or citations straight from the AI output
Final decision	The student is responsible for accepting or rejecting every AI recommendation	Treating the AI's output as "finished" text

Table 2. Acceptable and unacceptable forms of GenAI use in EFL academic writing

7. A Practical Case Analysis

To illustrate the problem more concretely, consider two hypothetical scenarios. In the first, a student asks AI for several possible thesis options for an essay topic, critically evaluates them, selects the one that best fits their own view, independently verifies the supporting evidence against sources, writes the text in their own words, and only at the end uses AI for a grammar check. In this scenario, authorial agency is fully preserved.

In the second scenario, the student asks AI to write the entire essay on the same topic and submits the result with almost no changes. Such a text may be grammatically and stylistically "correct" on a technical level, but it contains none of the student's own thinking, choices, or responsibility — meaning authorial agency has effectively been lost. The difference between these two scenarios is precisely defined by the four pillars and the table of acceptable/unacceptable practices presented above.

The approach and criteria proposed in this article are conceptual in nature, and confirming their effectiveness requires further work in the following directions:

• Testing the practical application of these criteria among student groups at different proficiency levels (A2–C1);

• Developing clear assessment rubrics for instructors and verifying their reliability;

• Studying how authorial agency manifests across different academic genres (essay, research article, report);

• Exploring, through qualitative research, how students themselves perceive their experience of working with AI.

Conclusion

The integration of GenAI into EFL academic writing brings both opportunity and risk. The key to preserving authorial agency lies in limiting AI to a supportive role for brainstorming and language

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polishing rather than allowing it to generate content. While the student retains full control over the logic and thesis of the argument, AI should be used only for secondary, technical functions. The four-pillar model, the table of acceptable/unacceptable practices, and the assessment criteria proposed in this article can serve as practical tools toward this goal.

In conclusion, it is worth emphasizing that neither excluding GenAI entirely from academic writing nor accepting it without restriction is the right solution. The most viable path is to teach students to engage with AI consciously, critically, and responsibly — an approach that protects not only the quality of the text but also the student's long-term capacity for independent thought and academic writing competence.

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