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Generative AI as Teacher-Guided Feedback: Exploring Independent Academic Writing among First-Generation Undergraduates in Tamil Nadu

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Abstract: *First-generation undergraduates in Tamil Nadu often arrive at college with strong oral reasoning but little prior exposure to the conventions of academic English. Many have studied in Tamil-medium schools, and few have a parent or older sibling who can read a draft and say what is missing. Generative AI tools now offer them a reader at any hour. Yet unmediated use can slide into outsourcing, where the tool writes and the student submits. This article examines a middle path: generative AI positioned as teacher-guided feedback rather than as a text producer. Drawing on a qualitative multiple-case design in [two] arts and science colleges in the Kongu region, we followed [n] first-generation undergraduates across a [12]-week writing module. Teachers set explicit boundaries, modelled feedback-seeking prompts, and required students to keep a revision log showing what they accepted, rejected or reworked. Data came from semi-structured interviews, draft histories, revision logs and teacher reflective notes, analysed through reflexive thematic analysis. Four themes emerged: (1) from answer-seeking to question-asking, (2) the teacher as a trust anchor, (3) language as both bridge and barrier, and (4) the slow growth of evaluative judgement. Students who used the tool within a teacher-framed routine reported greater confidence in planning and revising their own arguments, while teacher mediation appeared central to preventing dependency. The study argues that the pedagogical value of generative AI for first-generation writers lies less in the tool than in the feedback culture built around it. Implications are offered for writing instruction, institutional AI policy and bilingual support in regional Indian higher education.*

Keywords: *generative AI; AI-assisted feedback; academic writing; first-generation students; feedback literacy; Tamil Nadu; higher education*

I. INTRODUCTION

Ask a first-year student in a small-town arts and science college near Erode what makes an assignment hard, and the answer is rarely the content. It is usually the page. Many of these students can explain a concept well in Tamil, argue a point in class, and connect a textbook idea to something they saw at home or on the farm. Then they sit down to write in English, and the argument that felt so clear begins to fall apart. Sentences stall. Paragraphs repeat. The student knows something is wrong but cannot say what.

For first-generation undergraduates, this difficulty is sharpened by what is missing around them. There is often no one at home who has written a college essay, no older cousin who can glance at a draft, and no private tutor within reach or budget. Teachers in government and aided colleges carry large classes, so detailed written feedback on every draft is more hope than practice. The student is left to guess what "academic" writing wants. Generative AI has walked into this gap almost overnight. Tools such as ChatGPT, Gemini and Copilot are free or cheap, available on a basic smartphone, and able to respond in English or Tamil within seconds. Early studies suggest these tools can give feedback on content, organisation and language that students find useful (Escalante et al., 2023; Mahapatra, 2024; Steiss et al., 2024). Surveys also show that students already use them widely, often without guidance (Baek et al., 2024; Chan & Hu, 2023). The risk is plain. A tool that can comment on an essay can also write one. Students who are least sure of their English may be the most tempted to hand the whole task over, and the least equipped to judge what comes back (Tate et al., 2025; Warschauer et al., 2023). Case studies have already described students who pass feedback from one AI tool to another and paste the result into their drafts, learning very little in the process (Yeung, 2025). For first-generation learners, whose confidence as writers is still forming, that shortcut could quietly widen the very gap AI seems to close. This article explores a different arrangement. Instead of treating generative AI as either a threat to police or a writing machine to exploit, we examine it as a source of feedback that sits inside a teacher's design. The teacher decides what the tool may and may not do, models how to ask it useful questions, and requires students to show how they responded. The AI becomes one voice in a feedback conversation that the teacher still leads. Our interest is whether, under these conditions, first-generation students begin to write more independently, not less.

The study is set in the Kongu region of western Tamil Nadu, where many arts and science colleges draw heavily from rural and semi-urban families with no prior history of higher education. It is guided by three questions:

- 1) How do first-generation undergraduates in Tamil Nadu use generative AI for feedback when their use is framed and guided by a teacher?
- 2) What role does teacher mediation play in shaping whether AI feedback supports or replaces students' own writing decisions?
- 3) How do students describe changes in their sense of independence and judgement as academic writers over the module?

The contribution is threefold. First, the study adds evidence from an Indian regional context, where research on AI-assisted writing remains thin compared with East Asian and Western settings. Second, it focuses on first-generation status, a group whose needs are often mentioned in AI policy debates but rarely studied directly. Third, it proposes a practical account of "teacher-guided AI feedback" that colleges with limited resources can adapt.

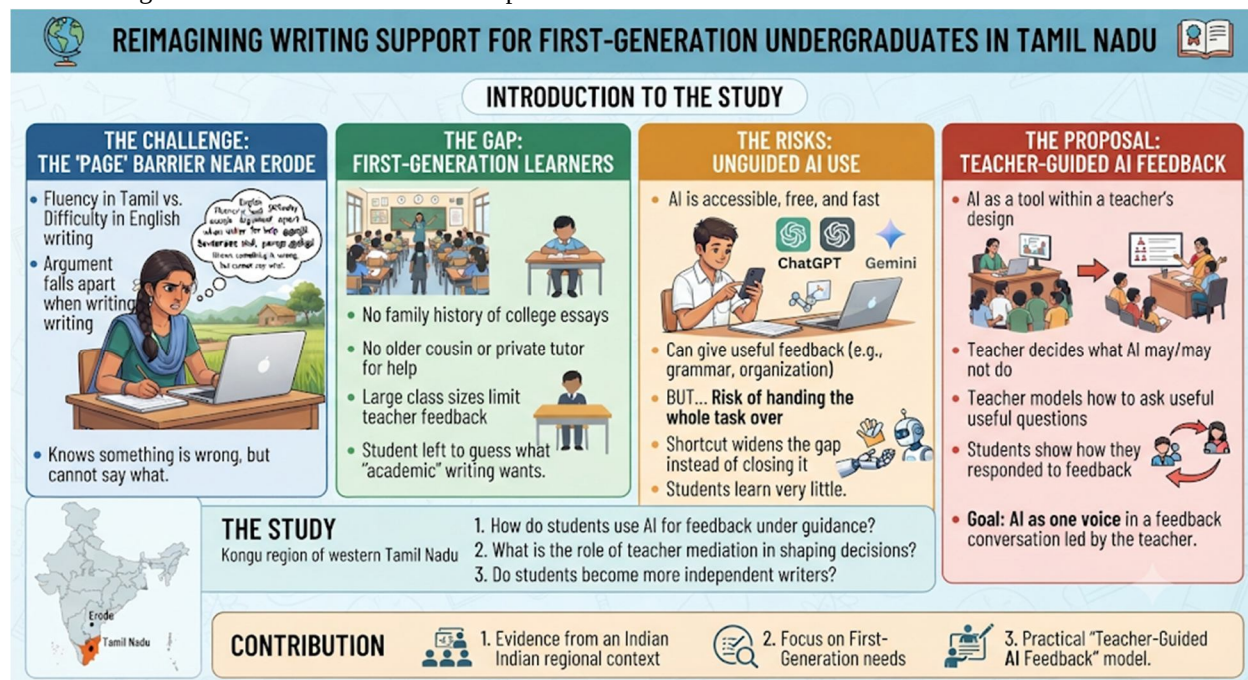


Fig 1: Reimagining Writing Support for First-Generation Undergraduates in Tamil Nadu: Introduction to the Study

This infographic outlines the writing hurdles faced by first-generation students near Erode, the risks of unguided generative AI, and a proposed teacher-guided AI feedback model designed to foster writing independence.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A. Generative AI as a source of writing feedback

Research on generative AI and writing feedback grew quickly after late 2022, and most of it asks a simple question first: is the feedback any good? The early answers are cautiously positive. Steiss et al. (2024) compared human and ChatGPT feedback on the same set of student essays and found that trained humans still did better on most dimensions, especially on accuracy and on pointing students toward clear priorities. The gap, however, was smaller than many expected, and ChatGPT did relatively well on criteria-based comments. In a classroom study with English-as-a-second-language learners, Escalante et al. (2023) found no meaningful difference in writing gains between students who received AI feedback and those who received tutor feedback, while students were split in which they preferred. Evidence from India is especially relevant here. Mahapatra (2024) ran a mixed-methods intervention with undergraduate ESL students and used ChatGPT as a formative feedback tool. Students who worked with it showed clear improvement in academic writing, particularly in content and organisation, and focus-group data suggested they valued having a responsive reader for large classes where teacher time was scarce. Guo and Wang (2024) approached the question from the teacher's side. They found that ChatGPT generated far more feedback than teachers did and covered content, organisation and language. Teachers, though, did not simply adopt it. They selected, trimmed and reframed its comments, which suggests that the teacher's judgement remained central even when the machine produced the raw material.

B. How students actually engage with AI feedback

Quality on paper is not the same as learning in practice. A second line of research asks what students do with AI feedback once they have it. Koltovskaia et al. (2024) studied graduate writers revising with ChatGPT and described their engagement across behavioural, cognitive and affective dimensions. Participants mostly used it for sentence-level concerns, noticed and questioned some of its suggestions, and appreciated it for paraphrasing. Yeung (2025) followed four engineering undergraduates using a generative-AI writing platform over a full term. The contrast between cases was striking. One student with strong English engaged deeply with higher-order comments about structure. Another passed the platform's feedback to a second chatbot, asked it to rewrite the text, and pasted the result into his draft. Lower-proficiency students tended to act on grammar suggestions and ignore general comments on coherence because they did not know how to respond to them.

That finding matters for first-generation students. If the learners who most need structural guidance are the least able to use it, AI feedback may reward those who are already strong. Tate et al. (2025) reported the same concern from instructors in a writing-intensive course, one of whom observed that weaker writers struggled to know what to ask the tool because they could not yet see their own weaknesses. Warschauer et al. (2023) framed this as a set of contradictions for second-language writers. AI can help them sound fluent, yet that fluency can hide gaps in their thinking and weaken their sense of ownership.

C. From unguided use to structured, teacher-led integration

A third strand shifts attention from the tool to the pedagogy around it. Barrot (2023) argued early that ChatGPT's value for second-language writing depends on how it is introduced, warning against over-reliance and inaccurate output while noting its potential for feedback and modelling. Cummings et al. (2024) described a first-year writing course in which generative AI was used in limited, deliberate ways, finding promise for idea generation and research while stressing the need for a clear instructional framework. Bedington et al. (2024) drew on faculty and student experiences in a professional writing course and argued for "human-machine teaming", in which authorial agency and decision-making remain with the student.

The most detailed account of this approach comes from Tate et al. (2025). Across a year of design-based research, they built a writing tool that asked students questions rather than writing for them, and they asked instructors to decide where AI fit their learning goals. Their revised framework emphasises that students should think before prompting, push back on AI output instead of accepting it, check its claims, and reflect on how they used it. Beck and Levine (2024) offered a complementary lens, asking which uses of generative AI are likely to support learning to write and which are likely to replace it.

D. Students' perceptions and the question of equity

Surveys consistently find broad use and mixed feelings. Chan and Hu (2023) reported that Hong Kong university students saw real benefits in personalised support and writing help, alongside worries about accuracy, over-reliance and academic integrity. Baek et al. (2024) found similar patterns in the United States, where students' use and trust varied by background and familiarity with the tools. Few studies, however, look directly at first-generation undergraduates, and fewer still do so in India. Existing work tends to treat students as one population, although access to guidance, confidence in English and family support are distributed very unevenly.

E. Gap in the Literature

Three gaps stand out. Most empirical work on AI feedback comes from East Asia, North America and Europe, with limited evidence from regional Indian colleges. Studies that do examine engagement rarely separate out first-generation learners, even though their situation makes both the promise and the risk of AI sharper. Finally, while several authors call for teacher-led integration, few studies trace what that guidance looks like in daily practice and how students experience it over time. The present study addresses these gaps together.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study draws on two connected ideas: feedback literacy and mediated engagement.

A. Feedback literacy on both sides of the desk

Feedback literacy describes the understandings and dispositions that let people make sense of feedback and use it to improve their work. Carless and Winstone (2023) argue that student feedback literacy does not develop on its own. It grows through the teacher's own feedback literacy: how teachers design tasks, explain the purpose of comments, and create space for students to act on them. Feedback, in this view, is a process the student takes part in, not information delivered to them.

This is a useful lens for generative AI. A chatbot can produce feedback in large volume, but volume is not the problem first-generation students face. Their difficulty is knowing which comments matter, how to act on them, and when to disagree. Those are feedback-literacy skills, and the literature suggests they are shaped by teachers rather than by tools (Carless & Winstone, 2023; Guo & Wang, 2024). We therefore expected the teacher's framing to be decisive in whether AI feedback built independence or dependency.

B. Engagement as behavioural, cognitive and affective

To describe what students did with AI feedback, we borrowed the three-part view of engagement used in recent feedback studies (Koltovskaia et al., 2024; Yeung, 2025). Behavioural engagement refers to what students do: which suggestions they accept, reject or rework. Cognitive engagement concerns how deeply they process feedback, for example whether they understand why a change is needed. Affective engagement covers their feelings and attitudes, including trust, frustration and confidence. Looking at all three helps separate a student who accepts every suggestion without thought from one who accepts fewer but understands more.

C. Teacher-guided AI feedback as a working model

Bringing these ideas together, we use the term teacher-guided AI feedback to describe an arrangement with four features, adapted from the principles in Tate et al. (2025) and Bedington et al. (2024):

Feature	What the teacher does	What the student does
Boundaries	States which AI uses are allowed (questions, comments, explanations) and which are not (drafting or rewriting whole passages)	Uses AI within these limits and discloses its use
Modelling	Demonstrates feedback-seeking prompts in class, in English and Tamil	Adapts model prompts to their own drafts
Accountability	Requires a revision log recording each AI suggestion and the student's response	Records whether each suggestion was accepted, rejected or reworked, and why
Dialogue	Reviews logs and drafts, discusses choices in short conferences	Explains and defends revision decisions

The model assumes that independence does not mean writing without help. It means making one's own decisions about help. A student who asks the AI for comments, rejects half of them for good reasons and rewrites the rest in their own words is, in this sense, writing more independently than a student who works alone but copies a model essay.

IV. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

We adopted a qualitative multiple-case design. The aim was not to measure how much AI improved writing scores but to understand how students used AI feedback, how teachers shaped that use, and how students made sense of it. A case-based approach suited this aim because it allowed us to follow individual students across several drafts and to compare patterns across them, as in recent work on AI feedback engagement (Koltovskaia et al., 2024; Yeung, 2025).

B. Setting

The study took place in [two] arts and science colleges in the Erode–Tiruppur belt of western Tamil Nadu during the [odd semester, 2025–26]. Both colleges are affiliated to university and serve a large share of students from agricultural, small-business and wage-labour families. In both, English is the medium of instruction for most undergraduate programmes, although many students completed their schooling in Tamil medium. The writing module was embedded in the [Part II English / Communicative English] course taken by first- and second-year students.

C. Participants

Participants were selected through purposive sampling. Students were eligible if neither parent had completed a college degree, if they had access to a smartphone with internet, and if they volunteered after an information session. Of the 100 eligible students who consented, 55 were followed in depth as focal cases, chosen to vary by gender, school medium, discipline and initial writing level. 5 teachers who taught the module also participated.

Participant group	Number	Notes
Focal student cases	55	First-generation; mix of Tamil- and English-medium schooling
Wider student cohort (logs and drafts only)	45	Consented to share revision logs and drafts
Teachers	5	Taught the module; kept reflective notes

Pseudonyms are used throughout. Students' disciplines and schooling details are reported in general terms to protect identity.

D. The teacher-guided AI feedback module

The module ran for [12] weeks and centred on two assignments: a [600-word] argumentative essay and a [1,000-word] short research report. It followed the four features described in Section 3.3.

In weeks 1–2, teachers introduced generative AI plainly: what it does well, where it makes mistakes, and why a fluent answer can still be wrong. They set clear rules. Students could ask the AI for comments, explanations of errors, questions about their argument, and examples of structure. They could not ask it to write or rewrite paragraphs. Every use had to be recorded.

In weeks 3–4, teachers modelled prompts live in class, often switching between English and Tamil. Examples included "Read my paragraph and ask me three questions a reader might have" and "Tell me where my argument is weakest, but do not rewrite it." Students practised on sample paragraphs before using their own drafts.

In weeks 5–12, students drafted each assignment at least three times. After each draft, they sought AI feedback, recorded every suggestion in a revision log, and marked it as accepted, rejected or reworked with a one-line reason. Teachers reviewed logs alongside drafts and held short individual conferences of [10–15] minutes at two points during the module.

E. Data collection

Four sources of data were gathered:

- Semi-structured interviews with focal students at the start, middle and end of the module, lasting about [40] minutes each. Students chose to speak in Tamil, English or a mix; Tamil segments were translated by the researchers and checked by a second bilingual colleague.
- Draft histories for each assignment, showing changes between versions.
- Revision logs recording AI suggestions and students' responses.
- Teacher reflective notes written weekly, plus one end-of-module interview with each teacher.

F. Data analysis

Interview transcripts, logs and teacher notes were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis. Two researchers read all material repeatedly, generated initial codes independently, and then met to compare and refine them. The engagement dimensions in Section 3.2 served as sensitising concepts rather than a fixed coding frame. Draft histories and revision logs were used to check whether what students said matched what they did. For example, when a student said they "mostly rejected" AI suggestions, we checked the log and the drafts. Themes were reviewed against the full data set and refined over [three] rounds of discussion.

G. Trustworthiness and ethics

Credibility was supported through triangulation across four data sources, member checks with 55 focal students, and peer debriefing with a colleague outside the project. Two of the researchers were not involved in teaching or grading participants, which reduced pressure on students to present their AI use favourably.. Participation was voluntary, did not affect grades, and students could withdraw at any time. AI use within the module was declared openly and treated as legitimate, so students had no reason to hide it.

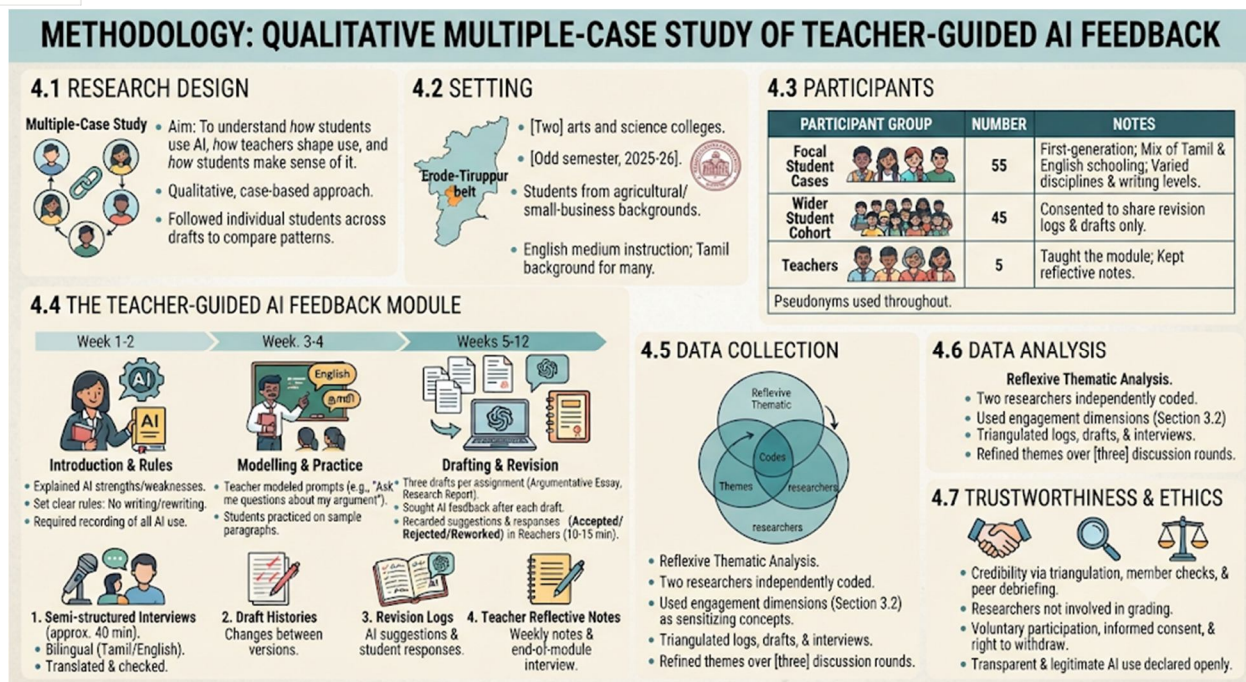


Fig 2: Methodology: Qualitative Multiple-Case Study of Teacher-Guided AI Feedback

This infographic illustrates a qualitative multiple-case study involving 55 focal students and 5 teachers across two colleges. It details a 12-week module featuring AI boundaries, modeling, revision logs, and interviews, supported by reflexive thematic analysis to examine how teacher mediation shapes student writing independence.

V. FINDINGS

Four themes describe how students moved through the module. They are presented roughly in the order students experienced them, although individual paths were uneven.

Revision log summary (all assignments)	Count	Share of logged suggestions
AI suggestions logged	100	100%
Accepted as given	50	50%
Reworked in the student's own words	45	40%
Rejected with a stated reason	5	10%

A. From answer-seeking to question-asking

In the opening weeks, most students approached the AI the way they had approached guidebooks and model answers in school. They wanted the correct version. Early prompts in the logs were often requests such as "correct my essay" or "make this better", which the teachers' rules did not allow and which students then had to reword. Several students described this as confusing at first. If the tool could fix the paragraph, why not let it?

The shift came when students began using the modelled prompts that asked the AI to question them rather than correct them. Prompts like "ask me what a reader would not understand" produced responses that students could not simply paste. They had to answer. Teachers' notes record that by the middle of the module, a growing number of logs contained questions the AI had raised and the student's written reply. For some students, this was the first time anyone had asked them to explain their own argument in writing.

Not every student made this shift. 55 focal students continued to prefer sentence-level correction throughout, and their logs show high acceptance of grammar suggestions with little engagement on structure. This mirrors patterns reported elsewhere, where lower-confidence writers act on concrete language feedback and set aside general comments they do not know how to use (Yeung, 2025).

B. The teacher as a trust anchor

Students trusted the AI's English, but they did not always trust its judgement. More precisely, they did not know when to trust it. Several described moments when the AI suggested a change that sounded better but, on reflection, altered what they meant. Without someone to check with, they tended to accept the change because the AI "knows English better."

The short teacher conferences mattered here more than we expected. Students brought specific AI comments to these meetings and asked whether they were right. Teachers often did not answer directly. Instead, they asked the student what they had intended and whether the suggestion helped say it. Over time, students reported relying less on the teacher's verdict and more on this question itself.

Teachers, for their part, described the revision logs as a window into students' thinking that ordinary drafts never gave them. One teacher noted that the log showed not only what the student changed but what they had considered and refused, which made feedback conversations far more targeted.

C. Language as both bridge and barrier

For students from Tamil-medium schools, the ability to talk to the AI in Tamil, or in a mixture of Tamil and English, was important. Several first explained their ideas to the tool in Tamil, asked it to help them see the structure of what they had said, and then wrote the English paragraph themselves. This allowed them to separate two problems that usually arrive together: knowing what to argue and knowing how to say it in English. Language was also a barrier. AI responses in English were sometimes too dense for students to act on, and a few students admitted accepting suggestions they did not fully understand. Teachers addressed this by encouraging students to ask the AI to explain its comment more simply or in Tamil before deciding. Where students did so, logs show more "reworked" entries and fewer straight acceptances. There was a quieter concern too. A few students worried that polished English from the AI would make their own writing look weak by comparison. This echoes the tension noted by Warschauer et al. (2023), where fluent machine text can unsettle a second-language writer's sense of ownership.

D. The slow growth of evaluative judgement

By the final weeks, the clearest change was not in grammar but in how students talked about their own writing. Early interviews were dominated by statements such as "I don't know if it is correct." Later interviews contained more reasoned judgements: this paragraph repeats the previous one, this example does not support the point, and this sentence is too long for what it says.

The revision logs support this. Rejections with stated reasons became more common in the second assignment than the first, and the reasons became more specific. [Insert comparison of rejection rates or example reasons across the two assignments. Some students also described deciding not to consult the AI at all for certain paragraphs because they already knew what needed fixing.

This growth was gradual and uneven. Students who began with stronger English moved faster. Those who struggled most with English often stayed closer to the AI's suggestions, which raises a question we return to in the discussion.

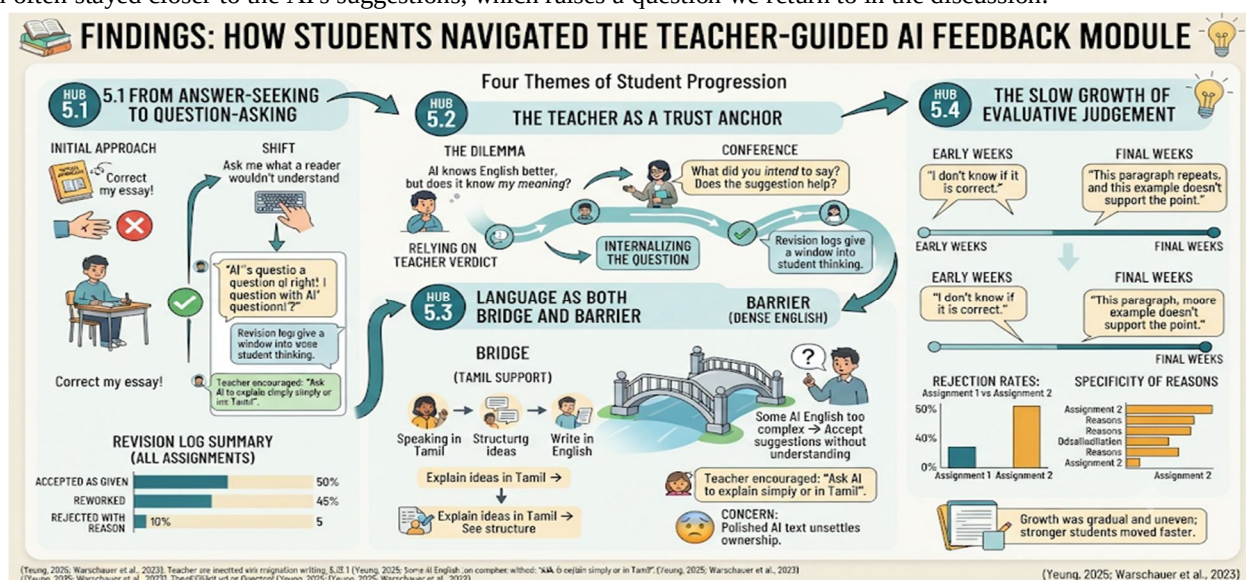


Fig 3: Findings: How Students Navigated the Teacher-Guided AI Feedback Module

This infographic illustrates four student progression themes: moving from answer-seeking to question-asking, relying on teachers as trust anchors, utilizing language as both a bridge and barrier, and developing slow evaluative judgement over time.

VI. DISCUSSION

This study set out to understand whether generative AI, placed inside a teacher's feedback design, could support rather than replace independent academic writing among first-generation undergraduates in Tamil Nadu. The findings suggest that it can, but only partly because of the tool. Most of what changed for students came from the routine built around it.

A. *The tool matters less than the frame*

Previous studies have shown that AI feedback can be close to human feedback in quality (Escalante et al., 2023; Steiss et al., 2024) and can improve student writing in Indian ESL classrooms (Mahapatra, 2024). Our findings do not dispute this, but they shift the emphasis. The same tool that some students elsewhere used to outsource their revisions (Yeung, 2025) became, in this module, a way of being questioned. The difference lay in what students were allowed to ask, what they were shown how to ask, and what they had to record afterward.

This aligns with the argument that feedback literacy grows through teacher design rather than exposure alone (Carless & Winstone, 2023). It also echoes Guo and Wang (2024), whose teachers filtered and reframed AI comments rather than passing them on. In our case, teachers did something slightly different. They did not filter the AI's feedback for students. They taught students to filter it themselves, and the revision log made that filtering visible and discussable.

B. *Why the "no rewriting" rule helped*

The rule against asking the AI to rewrite text was initially unpopular. Yet it appears to have been one of the most important features of the module. By closing off the easiest route, it pushed students toward prompts that required a response. This fits the "think first" and "talk back" principles described by Tate et al. (2025), and the concern raised by Beck and Levine (2024) that the same technology can either support or bypass the work of learning to write. For first-generation students, who may have limited confidence to resist a fluent answer, a clear external boundary seems to do work that self-regulation alone cannot yet do.

C. *Teacher mediation as protection against the Matthew effect*

One of the more worrying findings in recent literature is that AI tools may help strong writers more than weak ones (Tate et al., 2025; Yeung, 2025). Our data show a similar tendency. Students with stronger English moved faster toward evaluative judgement. However, the teacher conferences appear to have narrowed this gap somewhat. When lower-confidence students brought specific AI comments to a teacher, the conversation gave them a way into higher-order feedback they would otherwise have ignored.

This suggests that AI feedback does not remove the need for teacher time. It changes how that time is spent. Instead of writing long comments on every draft, teachers spent shorter periods helping students interpret and judge feedback they already had. For colleges with large classes and limited staff, this may be a realistic trade.

D. *Bilingual use as a resource, not a shortcut*

The role of Tamil in students' AI use deserves attention. Much of the literature on AI and second-language writing treats the first language as background, or as a risk if students translate wholesale (Barrot, 2023; Warschauer et al., 2023). In this study, the first language was often where thinking happened. Students used Tamil to clarify what they wanted to say and English to say it. Where teachers encouraged this deliberately, it seemed to separate idea development from language production in a helpful way. This finding may be particularly relevant to regional Indian contexts, where first-generation students often have far greater academic confidence in their home language than in English.

E. *Rethinking "independence"*

Finally, the findings invite a more realistic definition of independent writing. In surveys, students often worry that using AI makes their work less their own (Chan & Hu, 2023; Baek et al., 2024). Our participants expressed the same fear early on. By the end, several described independence differently: not as writing without help, but as being able to decide which help to take. That view is consistent with the human-machine teaming perspective of Bedington et al. (2024), where authorial agency lies in decisions rather than in isolation. It is also, arguably, closer to how experienced academic writers actually work, drawing on reviewers, colleagues and editors while keeping final judgement for themselves.

VII. IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

A. Implications for teaching

For writing teachers in regional colleges, the study points to a few practical steps that need little funding. Set clear, simple rules about what AI may and may not do in a writing task, and explain why. Spend class time modelling prompts that ask the AI to question or comment rather than correct, and allow students to prompt in Tamil or mixed language. Use a short revision log so that students record AI suggestions and their decisions; this turns hidden AI use into something that can be discussed. Replace some written comments with brief conferences focused on how students judged the feedback they received.

B. Implications for institutions

For college and university administrators, blanket bans on AI tools are unlikely to hold and may disadvantage students who have no other source of feedback. Clear, discipline-appropriate guidelines that distinguish feedback use from text generation would serve students better. Faculty development should focus less on detecting AI use and more on designing tasks where AI supports thinking. Affiliating universities in Tamil Nadu could also consider including basic AI and feedback literacy within existing English and communication courses, where first-generation students are most likely to encounter academic writing for the first time.

C. Limitations

The study has several limitations. It was conducted in [two] colleges in one region, with a small number of focal cases, so its findings are not meant to generalise statistically. Participants were volunteers and may have been more motivated than their peers. Revision logs rely on students' honesty; although AI use was openly permitted, some unrecorded use is likely. The module was also led by teachers who were interested in the approach, and results may differ where teachers are less committed or have heavier loads. Finally, the study did not measure writing quality with an independent rubric, so claims about improvement rest on students' accounts, teachers' observations and draft histories rather than on scored outcomes.

D. Directions for future research

Future work could compare teacher-guided and unguided AI use across a larger sample, using both qualitative data and rubric-based writing scores. Longitudinal studies could follow students into later semesters to see whether the evaluative habits built in one module persist. Research on Tamil-English prompting in particular, and on regional-language use of AI more broadly, remains very limited and deserves attention. It would also be useful to study teachers' own feedback literacy with AI, since this study suggests that teachers' framing is where much of the benefit originates.

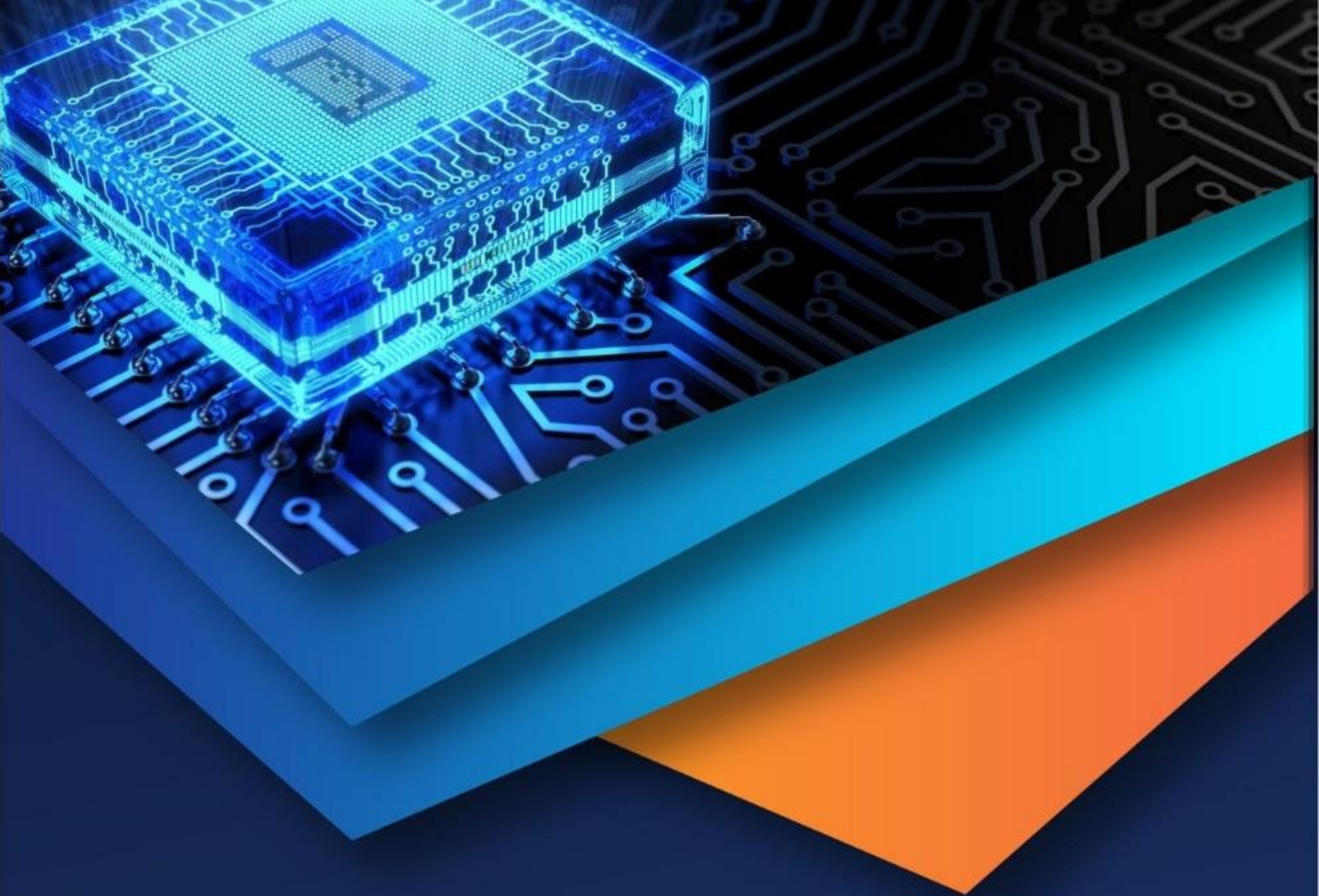
VIII. CONCLUSION

First-generation undergraduates in Tamil Nadu bring real intellectual resources to college, yet they often meet academic writing alone. Generative AI can offer them a patient, always-available reader, and that is no small thing. Left unguided, though, the same tool can just as easily write for them, leaving the underlying skill undeveloped and their confidence no stronger. This study suggests that the outcome depends largely on the teacher. When teachers set clear limits, modelled good questions, required students to account for their choices and talked with them about those choices, AI feedback became a way of learning to judge one's own writing. Students moved, slowly and unevenly, from asking for correct answers to asking better questions, and from trusting the machine by default to weighing what it said. The lesson for regional Indian higher education is not that every classroom needs better technology. It is that a modest, well-designed feedback routine can turn a widely available tool into genuine support for students who have had too little of it. Independence, for these writers, does not mean doing without help. It means learning to decide what help is worth taking.

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