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Becoming an Expert L2 Writing Teacher in the Age of AI: A Dialogical–Narrative Case Study in a Chinese University

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Abstract. Research on Artificial Intelligence (AI)-mediated L2 writing has focused mainly on students' use of tools and their effects on writing outcomes, while comparatively little is known about how writing teachers construct professional expertise in AI-rich classrooms. This article addresses that gap through a year-long dialogical–narrative case study of an experienced Chinese university writing teacher ("Wei"), based on three interviews, two classroom observations, student texts and teaching artefacts. The analysis shows that Wei's expert identity is not a fixed set of traits, but an evolving, dialogically negotiated configuration of integrated knowledge about writing and writing instruction, student-centred pedagogy, sustained reflection, leadership and growing AI-related competence, co-constructed in interaction with students, colleagues, digital tools and institutional reform discourses. Wei's trajectory both confirms and extends existing models of L2 writing teacher expertise by showing that AI literacy and the capacity to negotiate technological and institutional tensions have become central to expert identity in technology-mediated classrooms. Conceptually, the study refines existing accounts of expert writing teachers in the age of AI. Practically, it highlights the need for professional development and institutional support that help teachers critically integrate AI into writing pedagogy under digital reform.

Keywords: AI-assisted teaching; dialogical approach; educational reform; teacher AI literacy; writing teacher expertise

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1. Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly reshaping education, and L2 writing is a key site of change. Large language models now support idea generation, organisation and linguistic refinement, and L2 writers increasingly rely on such tools to enhance efficiency and accuracy (Barrot, 2023; Wang & Wang, 2025). However, this raises concerns about academic integrity, over-reliance on AI and the erosion of critical and creative thinking (Moorhouse et al., 2025). In China, these pedagogical questions are sharpened by national digital education initiatives such as the *Opinions on accelerating education digitalisation* issued by the Ministry of Education (2025) and by university-level reforms that require courses to embed AI into digital teaching, document learning processes and align instruction with visible outcomes.

In exam-oriented university contexts, L2 writing teachers are therefore under growing pressure to redesign tasks, feedback and assessments while helping students engage with AI in critical and responsible ways. To capture the complexity of teacher work in this context, this study adopts a dialogical approach to teacher identity (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). From this perspective, teacher identity is not a fixed essence but an ongoing process of positioning among multiple, sometimes conflicting, I-positions and contextual voices. Tensions between personal beliefs, classroom realities, technological tools and institutional expectations are treated not simply as obstacles, but as potential sites of reflection, reorientation and growth.

Existing research has provided important insights into three relevant areas. First, studies of L2 writing teacher expertise describe expert teachers as drawing on integrated knowledge of writing and writing instruction, student-centred pedagogy, reflection, innovation, and professional commitment (Lee & Yuan, 2021). Second, dialogical and narrative work has shown that writing teacher identities are multiple yet capable of continuity across changing contexts (Millán et al., 2024). Third, emerging research suggests that AI is reshaping language teacher roles, pedagogical choices, and professional self-understandings (Ghiasvand & Seyri, 2025). However, little is known about how experienced L2 writing teachers in Chinese universities construct and enact expert teacher identity while integrating AI into writing pedagogy under institutional digital reform.

Responding to this gap, this paper presents a year-long case study of an experienced L2 writing teacher ("Wei") at a Chinese university. Using semi-structured interviews, classroom observations and teaching artefacts, this study examines how Wei constructs and enacts expert identity in AI-mediated L2 writing instruction. Accordingly, this study addresses the following research question: How does an experienced L2 writing teacher dialogically construct and enact an expert teacher identity while integrating AI into L2 writing pedagogy under institutional digital reform? By tracing Wei's year-long trajectory, the study contributes to existing work in three ways. It shows how established models of L2 writing teacher expertise remain useful in technology-mediated classrooms; it highlights AI literacy and the dialogical negotiation of technological and

institutional tensions as central to expert identity; and it provides a situated account from Chinese higher education, where digital reform gives these negotiations particular urgency and shape.

2. Literature Review

2.1 AI and L2 Writing

The emergence of AI has profoundly reshaped the ecology of L2 writing instruction. Tools such as ChatGPT (OpenAI, 2022), Gemini (Google, 2023), and DeepSeek (DeepSeek-AI, 2024) enable learners to generate ideas, refine grammar and receive instant feedback. Research consistently shows that learners perceive these tools as helpful for improving linguistic accuracy, content development, and writing fluency (Koltovskaia et al., 2024; Hwang et al., 2025). Students often use these tools for brainstorming, translation and revision, suggesting that generative AI functions as both a learning scaffold and a collaborative partner in writing (Cengiz et al., 2025; Huang & Wang, 2025). These affordances produce positive and diverse effects. Rather than simply "helping" learners, AI changes how they distribute effort, trust feedback and position themselves in relation to authorship and responsibility.

Recent studies point to an important tension in learners' engagement with AI. On the one hand, students often value AI because it helps them write more efficiently and with greater linguistic confidence. On the other hand, their engagement is selective and uneven. Cengiz et al. (2025), for example, show that learners are more likely to trust grammar-level suggestions than advice on organisation or content, suggesting that students do not accept machine feedback wholesale but weigh different kinds of input differently. Moorhouse et al. (2025), by contrast, argue that learners' reported sense of "empowerment" can be misleading when it is not accompanied by critical awareness of how AI shapes writing choices. These studies suggest that the issue is not simply whether AI empowers learners, but what kind of agency is being exercised: selective uptake, strategic dependence or critical resistance.

This tension has led to growing interest in AI literacy. Xu et al. (2025) conceptualise student AI literacy along four dimensions – understanding, use, evaluation and ethics – while Wang and Wang (2025) add a focus on critical awareness and reflective evaluation. Darvin's (2025) call for critical digital literacies further expands the issue beyond operational skills, arguing that learners also need to recognise how AI systems privilege particular language norms, genres, and meanings, and thereby participate in shaping what counts as "good writing". These frameworks suggest that AI literacy in L2 writing should not be reduced to effective tool use. It also includes the capacity to evaluate outputs critically, question the values built into them, and make ethically informed decisions about authorship, originality and responsibility.

For the purposes of this study, AI literacy is understood as a multidimensional capacity involving understanding, use, evaluation, and ethics (Xu et al., 2025), enriched by critical awareness of how AI shapes voice, norms, and meaning (Darvin, 2025; Wang & Wang, 2025). For students, this refers to the ability to use

AI support strategically, evaluate it critically and selectively accept or reject it in writing. For teachers, it includes the capacity to design tasks, scaffold critique and frame classroom use within pedagogical and ethical norms. However, most of the literature discussed above remains learner centred. What remains underexplored is how teachers mediate these tools in classroom practice – how they design AI-assisted tasks, organise feedback and sustain pedagogical values amid technological change. The next section therefore shifts from learners' engagement with AI to L2 writing teacher expertise and identity.

2.2 Locating Writing Teacher Expertise Within L2 Writing Literature

Research on writing teacher expertise has become a central strand of L2 writing studies because effective writing instruction depends not only on teachers' linguistic knowledge but on their ability to design, mediate and sustain meaningful learning experiences. As Hirvela (2019) argues, L2 writing teacher expertise is best understood as a constellation of pedagogical beliefs, disciplinary knowledge and professional skills that support students' communicative and reflective writing competence.

Early investigations of language teacher expertise (Farrell, 2013; Tsui, 2003; 2009) underscored that expert teachers differ from novices not merely in what they know, but in how they integrate knowledge in practice, respond to context and reflect on teaching. Yet these accounts still tend to treat expertise primarily as an individual attribute, paying less attention to its relational and socially mediated character.

Within L2 writing, Lee and Yuan (2021) offered a more discipline-specific and process-oriented model, identifying six dimensions of expertise: integrated writing pedagogy knowledge, student-centred teaching, reflective and agentive professionalism, pedagogical leadership, passion for writing and continuous learning. Their framework is especially important for the present study because it shifts attention from static competence to the situated development of writing teacher expertise.

A dialogical–narrative perspective adds a further layer to this view. From this perspective, expertise is not simply possessed but negotiated through the interaction of multiple I-positions and contextual voices. In AI-mediated classrooms, positions such as "teacher of thinking and voice," "guardian of fairness," "AI learner," or "curriculum leader" may come into tension. Expertise, therefore, lies not only in demonstrating knowledge or leadership but in working through these tensions and maintaining pedagogical coherence over time.

Recent studies have begun to situate writing teacher expertise in digital contexts. Lin and Crosthwaite (2024) found that teacher feedback remained more context-sensitive and rhetorically attuned than AI-assisted correction, while Segaran and Moltudal (2025) highlighted the role of reflective experimentation and adaptive problem-solving in digitally supported teaching. Extending this perspective, Weng (2024) demonstrated that expertise development in online environments is closely tied to identity construction and agency. Together, these studies suggest

that expertise in digitally mediated writing classrooms involves not only knowledge and pedagogy, but also the capacity to respond critically and adaptively to technological change.

Despite these developments, research on L2 writing teacher expertise in AI-assisted pedagogy remains scarce. Most studies privilege learners' engagement or tool efficacy, which leaves how teachers themselves learn, adapt and sustain professional coherence amid technological and institutional change unexplored. The present study addresses this gap through a three-part conceptual framework: Lee and Yuan's (2021) dimensions of L2 writing teacher expertise; a dialogical view of teacher identity (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011); and an emergent notion of teacher AI literacy.

In this study, teacher AI literacy is treated not as a separate skill set, but as a cross-cutting component of expertise that reshapes how knowledge, reflection, student-centred pedagogy and leadership are enacted in technology-mediated writing classrooms. By tracing Wei's one-year trajectory, the study shows how expert identity is co-constructed with digital tools, colleagues, and reform discourses and how teacher AI literacy becomes embedded in everyday pedagogical judgement, task design and assessment.

3. Methods

3.1 Subject and Context of the Study

The focal participant, anonymised as Wei, is an experienced university English teacher who took part in a one-year digital teaching reform project at a Sino-foreign joint university in China. Established in 1998 through collaboration between a local public university and an American institution, this university has a strong orientation towards English-medium teaching, international collaboration and curriculum innovation. Within this setting, *English Writing* had recently been designated a "first-class" undergraduate course; a high-quality course expected to demonstrate strong learning outcomes, innovative pedagogy and transferable teaching models with an emphasis on digital integration in Chinese higher education policy. *English Writing* was therefore positioned as both a core disciplinary course and a visible site for institutional reform.

Wei was selected as the focal case because she combined four features central to this study: substantial experience in L2 writing instruction, a formal leadership role in the writing programme, direct involvement in the university's digital reform and first-class course construction, and sustained engagement with AI-assisted writing pedagogy. At the time of data collection, she was 42 and had around 10 years' experience teaching *English Writing*. As leader of the writing teaching team, she coordinated three colleagues and multiple second-year writing classes, chaired weekly meetings, co-designed syllabi and assessments and led the institutional process of building *English Writing* into a digitally supported model course. Under the reform, she was also responsible for collecting "digital evidence" of teaching and learning, including online discussion logs, writing performance records and classroom activity documentation for internal review.

During the study, Wei taught two parallel classes of about 50 second-year English majors, each meeting for a weekly 100-minute session. *English Writing* was a required core course for these students, who had already undergone many years of formal English study and were expected to develop academic and argumentative writing abilities as part of their disciplinary training. Wei's courses systematically integrated digital platforms (e.g., Xuexitong) for pre-class preparation, group discussion, materials distribution and formative assessment in multimedia and smart classrooms. These classes were therefore representative of the institutional push to combine writing instruction, digital platforms and visible learning outcomes.

Wei's professional trajectory has been shaped by her dual identity as alumna and teacher at the same institution. Having completed her undergraduate studies there and received funding for a master's degree in the United States, she returned to fulfil a service commitment. This biographical continuity, combined with her admiration for an influential American writing teacher, underpins her desire to "teach writing well."In a context where research pressure is relatively low, she had concentrated her energy on teaching, pedagogical leadership and course development.

Wei provided written informed consent for participation in the interviews, classroom observations and the use of teaching artefacts. Students in the observed classes were informed about the study, and all student texts used in the analysis were anonymised. To safeguard confidentiality in a context shaped by institutional reform, all personal names, course identifiers and institutional details were replaced or omitted.

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected over one academic year during the university's digital teaching reform. To make the longitudinal design explicit, Table 1 summarises the main data sources. The observations targeted lessons Wei identified as representative of her digitally supported writing pedagogy. Four student artefacts from these lessons were selected purposively as typical or contrasting examples discussed in interviews and observations.

Table 1: Overview of data sources

Data source	Timing	Volume	Primary purpose
Semi-structured interviews	Months 1, 5, 11	3 interviews, 60–90 minutes each	To elicit Wei's retrospective and ongoing accounts of teaching beliefs, emotions, task redesign and changing understandings of expertise
Classroom observations	Months 5, 11	2 observed lessons	To document enacted teaching practices, teacher–student interaction and the role of digital tools in lesson implementation
Student artefacts	Months 5, 11	4 focal texts/organisers from observed lessons	To trace how task design was realised in student work and to triangulate Wei's interpretations of students' learning and development
Teaching artefacts	in the reform year	lesson materials, rubrics, platform-based task records	To examine how pedagogical intentions were translated into task design and assessment

Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim in Chinese. Draft English translations were generated with ChatGPT 5.0, then checked and refined jointly by Wei and the second and third authors. Coding was conducted with reference to the original Chinese transcripts because the analysis focused on narrative stance, positioning and evaluative language. English translations were used for presentation in the article, but key excerpts were repeatedly checked against the Chinese originals during analysis and writing to preserve nuances of tone, emphasis and self-positioning. Observation notes captured task structure, teacher prompts, student responses and moments that Wei later identified as significant. Student texts and teaching artefacts were anonymised and treated as documents that could either support or refute Wei's retrospective accounts, whether partially or fully.

Data analysis followed a dialogical–narrative approach (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; De Fina, 2013) and proceeded in three stages. First, the interview transcripts were coded in a hybrid way: deductive categories drawn from the theoretical framework (e.g. I-positions, contextual voices, evaluative stance) were combined with inductively identified tensions, recurring concerns and shifts in pedagogical orientation. This stage focused on how Wei positioned herself and others in relation to students, colleagues, institutional expectations and digital tools. Second, the coded material was reorganised chronologically and read narratively to trace how she linked past experiences, present challenges and future-oriented commitments in constructing an expert teacher identity over the reform year.

Third, observation notes and teaching artefacts were used to triangulate interview-based interpretations, identify key turning points and examine where narrated and enacted positionings converged or diverged. Particular attention was paid to how Wei positioned herself and students within classroom stories of AI-assisted tasks (roughly corresponding to Bamberg's (1997) Level 1) and how

she located herself in relation to broader institutional and technological discourses such as digital reform (Level 3). Coding was conducted through NVivo 14, and analytic decisions were reviewed through regular discussion among the authors.

Ethical approval was obtained from the university, and Wei provided informed consent. Students in the observed classes were informed that classroom activities and anonymised texts might be used for research purposes. Trustworthiness was strengthened in three ways. First, member checking took place through Wei's review of translated interview excerpts and through follow-up clarification of emerging interpretations in later interviews. Second, triangulation allowed the study to compare narrated intentions with enacted practice; for example, student texts and observation notes were used to confirm or complicate Wei's accounts of task redesign and students' engagement. Third, an audit trail was maintained through analytic memos, versioned coding records and notes from author discussions about interpretive decisions.

4. Results and Findings

4.1 Reframing Writing and Writing Ability in an AI-rich Environment

Wei's understanding of writing and writing ability has developed through a series of tensions, adjustments and redefinitions across the reform year. This tension arises in the perceived mismatch between students' everyday performance and some of their written products. Early in the reform year, she described how certain assignments triggered suspicion:

> *"But when they hand in a homework assignment, the writing is extremely good. You just know they copied from AI. … At the beginning I was definitely angry. Why are you cheating me?" (1st interview)*

Here she positions herself as a guardian of fairness and effort, and positions AI as both a source of *"cheating"* and a threat to her I-position as evaluator. At this stage, the disruption is not only technical but also moral and professional: it unsettles her assumptions about what student performance should look like and what, as a teacher, she is evaluating. Yet she also admits that the same tools help her *"clarify ideas"* for lesson design and document writing in the same narrative. This ambivalence marks the starting point of a gradual reframing of what counts as *"real"* writing ability in her course.

This first tension has led Wei to reconsider what writing instruction should prioritise. Looking back on her earlier practice, Wei noted that she used to devote extensive class time to structure and language. The ease with which students can now generate fluent text has forced her to reconsider that emphasis:

> *"Previously, I spent a great deal of time teaching structure and language. … Should I encourage students to focus more on the ideas behind their writing and on self-expression? But sometimes what they write with AI feels rigid and lacks 'human warmth'." (1st interview)*

The tension she articulates is no longer simply "with or without AI", but between grammatically polished, generic prose and writing that carries lived experience and emotional depth. This has prompted her to re-centre her thinking and meaning making:

> *"Writing, in essence, is putting one's thinking into words … the essence of writing remains thinking... allowing class time to be devoted to thinking and expression – that is what a writing class should be."(2nd interview)*

Across these reflections, she moves from a form-oriented view of ability (accuracy, structure) to a view that foregrounds logical organisation, stance and the connection between argument and experience. In dialogical terms, her earlier I-position as a teacher of structure and language is not abandoned but reworked in relation to a newer position that gives greater weight to thinking, self-expression and voice. AI is recast from an enemy of writing to a tool that can remove some linguistic obstacles so that class time can focus on thinking.

This conceptual shift is seen in how Wei redesigns tasks and assessments. Rather than simply banning or allowing AI, she differentiates between high-stakes and low-stakes work and builds in explicit conditions for use:

> *"…for those assignments that count toward the grade, I definitely won't just let you write something at home and hand it in while using AI freely. I set specific requirements instead. … In some situations, you can't use AI... In other situations, I allow you to use it, but I ask you to analyse what it has done and what you think about it." (2nd interview)*

Here, writing ability is no longer equated with the final text alone. It also includes the capacity to connect writing to course content, to revise one's own drafts, and to explain what has been learnt from AI-supported revision. By designing situations where AI is forbidden (exams) and situations where its presence must be made visible and critiqued, she positions herself as a designer of conditions under which different facets of ability can be demonstrated. The teacher's role therefore shifts from simply judging written products to structuring when, where and how different forms of writing ability can be shown.

A key site where this reframing of writing ability becomes concrete is Wei's redesign of evaluations. Wei has gradually woven AI into what counts as "real ability", as she explained:

> *"Now I ask them to submit their essays to AI for evaluation, and they must write a reflection report: What do you think are the good points of its revisions, and why?" (2nd interview)*

To support this, she provides an evaluation rubric and asks students to upload their compositions to DeepSeek together with the rubric (see Appendix), so that feedback moves beyond grammar to task fulfilment, organisation, critical thinking and language use. In this configuration, writing ability no longer means only producing a text; it also includes being able to mobilise AI-based evaluation, identify which revisions are helpful, and explain why. Wei, therefore, is repositioning herself from a sole examiner of products to a mediator of human–AI judgement and inviting students into that shared evaluative space. However, Wei soon realised that this first step was not enough:

> *"…they almost worshipped AI, with nothing but praise throughout the report. So, I added another requirement: They must write at least one counterargument – Which suggestion do you disagree with, and why?" (3rd interview)*

By building this "obligatory no" into subsequent assignments, she turned critical dissent into part of the expected performance: appropriate use of AI feedback now includes the capacity to justify disagreement, not just to accept corrections. For Wei, good writers are those who can both learn from AI and say a reasoned "no", integrating AI feedback into their own voice rather than letting it override their judgement. This marks a further step in her understanding of writing ability: it is no longer enough for students to use external feedback effectively; they must also demonstrate judgement, selectivity and ownership.

Across the three interviews, Wei's narratives trace a clear developmental arc in how she understands writing and writing ability in an AI-rich environment. Confronted at first with AI-polished essays that did not match students' in-class performance, she spoke from a position of anger and fear – about cheating, unfair grading and even the possibility of being "replaced". In the middle of the reform year, this shock became a trigger for redesign: she moved high-stakes writing into phone-free exams, used rubrics to channel AI evaluation towards content, organisation and reasoning and required reflective reports in which students explain what AI has improved and why.

By the final interview, she articulated a more settled view that writing ability lies in thinking, voice and justified decision making, with AI positioned as a visible resource to be used, evaluated and sometimes refused rather than a hidden author. Rather than eliminating disruption, Wei works through it: the initial shock of *"perfect essays"*became the starting point for rethinking what she values in writing and how those values can be assessed. Through this reframing, she positioned herself as an expert writing teacher who holds on to core values while revising criteria and classroom practices, so that "real ability"is not eclipsed but redefined in technology-mediated writing classrooms.

4.2 Repositioning Herself as a Critical, Student-centred AI Mediator

While Wei's reframed conception of writing foregrounds thinking and expression, her narratives also showed how she repositions herself as a particular kind of teacher in technology-rich classrooms: a critical, student-centred mediator. This identity has developed as she tries to turn a valued principle – student-centredness – into workable classroom practice. Even before the digital reform she endorsed the idea that "*teaching should pay greater attention to students' individual differences and interactive participation*" (1st interview), yet she admitted that discussions often "*proceeded with difficulty, as students struggled to express themselves*" (1st interview). At that stage, "student-centredness" was more a valued principle than a stable practice, generating an inner dialogue about how to help students "engage actively" in meaningful ways.

A first step in this repositioning appears in Wei's use of technology to make genre knowledge more visible to students. In the descriptive writing unit, Wei uses a

text-to-image activity to let students feel what precise description means. She explained:

> *"…feed their own description into a text-to-image tool ... if they forgot to mention the earring, there was no earring; if they didn't specify the shape or colour, the image changed … without precise details, the 'picture' in the reader's mind is incomplete." (2nd interview)*

Here, she designed the task so that the mismatch between generated images and the source text becomes a concrete experience through which students grasp reader-oriented detail. The digital tool is positioned as a mirror that exposes the limits of vague language, while she remains the one who frames the activity, guides the comparison and names the underlying principle of good descriptive writing. Rather than simply "using a tool," she mediates between technology, genre expectations and students' emerging awareness of the audience.

A second step appears in process writing, where Wei uses external suggestions but retains pedagogical control over what enters the classroom. Seeking ways to make process writing livelier, she recalled:

> *"I asked DeepSeek to design an activity.... It suggested several options, including using rap... I then chose and simplified ideas that matched my students' level and interests." (2nd interview)*

In class, this becomes an activity where students compose short raps such as the following:

> *"First, cut the tomatoes into pieces, please be cautious.*
> *Second, stir-fry the eggs in oil pans, a little dangerous.*
> *Third, mix them together, become delicious tomatoes and eggs,*
> *Wow, I will be famous." (Class observation 1)*

Rather than following the suggested plan uncritically, Wei filters and reshapes it – shortening the task, lowering language demands and linking it explicitly to process markers and sequencing. The lesson is playful, but her commentary during observation shows that she continually relates students' lines back to genre features (e.g., clarity of steps, logical order, appropriate connectors). This episode shows a further shift in identity: Wei is no longer simply coping with new tools, but using her judgement to adapt them to learner fit, task purpose and genre goals.

A third step appears when Wei brings automated evaluation into classroom dialogue and turns it into an object of critique. Reflecting on a cause-and-effect assignment graded on the online platform, she recounted:

> *"I chose one student's composition … I suspected AI had helped…I let ChatGPT and DeepSeek both give evaluations … I kept asking: would you really encounter this situation in your life? Can you give an example? Is the argument in the second paragraph really connected to your own experience? … Gradually, students started to shake their heads. … Next time I gave a similar assignment, I told them: you must write at least one point of disagreement…" (3rd interview)*

Wei publicly staged a three-way dialogue between the student text, the automatic evaluations and the class's shared sense of plausibility and experience. Automated feedback is not treated as an ultimate judge but as a voice that must itself be questioned; students are invited to inhabit I-positions as critical writers who can both use and resist machine suggestions. Here, her mediator role becomes more explicit: she is not only designing activities but also organising a space in which students learn to interrogate external authority and articulate their own stance.

Across these episodes, Wei's identity as a critical, student-centred mediator was not presupposed but gradually built. Early in the reform year, she spoke from hesitant and sometimes defensive positions – worried about cheating, unsure how to handle automated scores, frustrated by "*silent*" discussions. As new tools and policy demands entered her classroom, they initially appeared as external pressures. Over time, however, she learnt to talk back to these voices: first by experimenting with small activity changes, then by designing whole lessons in which digital resources were carefully staged to serve genre understanding, process awareness and students' own experiences. The descriptive, process and cause–and-effect units marked successive steps in this trajectory. These episodes showed a shift from student-centredness as a general belief to student-centred mediation as a concrete pedagogical practice. Dialogically, her I-position shifted from a teacher "*coping with*" tools and reform to one who increasingly coordinated the relations among students, texts and technologies in more deliberate ways.

4.3 Co-constructing Expert Identity with AI, Colleagues and Policy

Beyond her evolving views of writing and student-centred pedagogy, Wei's narratives also show how her expert identity is co-constructed through ongoing dialogue with AI, colleagues, experts and institutional policies. Rather than presenting herself as an isolated "expert", she repeatedly describes becoming an expert as a shared, distributed process in which AI-generated suggestions, collegial discussions and policy demands all become voices that shape what a competent L2 writing teacher should look like. One strand of this co-construction appears in planning. Wei now routinely consults an AI-based assistant when preparing lessons for different units:

> *"When preparing lessons, I discuss with DeepSeek … it provides me with numerous plans at once … it's easy to be led astray by it. …Finally, I still have to rely on my own judgement and check with my colleagues."(2nd interview)*

Here, she explicitly names both productivity and risk. The tool generates "numerous plans", but she emphasises that she must filter them and cross-check with colleagues. In identity terms, she positions herself not as a follower of technology, but as someone who curates external input and remains answerable for final decisions. At this stage, expertise is framed as judgement: knowing how to use external suggestions without surrendering control to them. A second strand appears in how these planning routines reshape classroom design. The redesign of a cause–and-effect writing lesson shows this clearly. Wei spent almost an entire 50-minute session on a single "big paper" group activity one year ago. However, by the second-class observation, the lesson had a different structure: after a brief

review of cause–and-effect structure and language, she asked groups to choose a prompt and complete a graphic organiser on heavy drawing paper within 20 minutes. Compared with an ordinary A4 worksheet, the larger, thicker sheets turned the organisers into visible "products" that could be displayed and archived, adding a sense of ceremony and making outcomes tangible for students and for evaluators.

Two student artefacts illustrate the task. In Figure 1, the group working on "Why People Love Sweets" listed three causes (taste/flavour, emotions/memories, visual appeal/packaging) and two effects (health, economic) with short elaborations and added hand-drawn sweets in the margins. In Figure 2, the group focusing on "AI Replaces Human Beings" identified several drivers of AI use and highlighted job displacement as a major effect, adding small robot sketches to make the topic more concrete. These products suggest that the 20-minute module did not reduce learning to mechanical box-filling: students constructed multi-layered causal chains in their own words, while also adding visual elements that connected reasoning structure to theme. The artefacts therefore show not only a shorter task, but a more sharply structured one – one that makes student reasoning visible within limited class time.

Figure 1: Student-produced cause–effect organiser on "Why People Love Sweets"

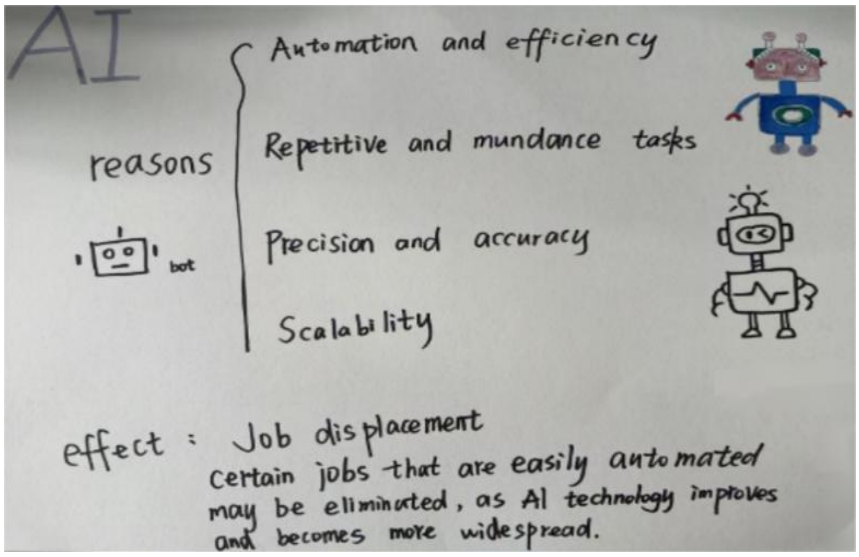

Figure 2: Student-produced cause–effect organiser on "AI Replaces Human Beings"

A third strand concerns Wei's response to institutional reform. In later interviews, she linked this kind of design back to institutional pressures and digital planning tools. She remarked:

> *"This semester has been special … Outcomes Based Education (OBE) and digitalised teaching have all converged. At first, I felt quite restricted … I thought my classes were quite 'free', but now I realise that kind of freedom was sometimes unstable and inefficient." (2nd interview)*

This comment marks a moment of institutional discontinuity: she recognises that the "freedom" she values is now problematised as lacking stability and efficiency. Yet rather than stopping at complaint, she goes on to reframe these requirements as a support for clarifying her own stance:

> *"The university's promotion of OBE has actually given us a practical grasp … each class consists of four modules, and for each module, I know exactly what goals to achieve, what activities to use and what outputs students are expected to produce." (3rd interview)*

Placed alongside the observed cause–and-effect lesson, these comments show how policy and planning tools have gradually been appropriated into her own expert script. The "four modules" logic translates into a 20-minute cause-and-effect segment with clear objectives, group work and a visible product. Digital tools help her break broad goals into concrete options, but she reserves for herself the authority to choose the topic, design the organiser, require group collaboration and leave space for students' playful drawings. What first appears as external pressure is gradually recast as a practical frame for her own pedagogical judgement.

Co-construction is equally evident in her work with colleagues. As course leader for *English Writing*, Wei described how she shares her AI-mediated designs and reflections in team meetings and coordinates a collective workflow:

> *"We've reached a consensus that AI must be deeply integrated into writing instruction. Later, we established a process: each teacher conducts their own dialogue with AI … and then we gather to discuss improvement plans. With AI's help, everyone feels less anxious…" (1st interview)*

Here, expertise is explicitly distributed. Each teacher prepares lesson drafts with the help of digital tools, and then the team jointly revises them. Wei positions herself as a facilitator who coordinates common goals ("deep integration of AI into writing instruction"), sets up shared procedures and convenes evaluative discussions. Her expert role here lies less in supplying "the right answer"than in organising a process through which ideas can be tested, revised and shared.

Wei's emerging leadership has a clear emotional dimension as these collaborative and institutional processes begin to confirm her professional worth. She admitted feeling worn out by her coordinator role – *"As the person in charge, I sometimes feel really tired and think: Why me?"*– but she also noted how colleagues' growing confidence and students' visible progress reshape how she sees herself:

> *"Seeing the achievements of my students and colleagues, I feel our efforts are worthwhile … I really enjoy my writing classes now." (3rd interview)*

Institutional recognition, team uptake of her designs, and student artefacts like the cause–and-effect organisers all act as external confirmations of her professional value. Enjoyment here is not simply satisfaction, but a stronger sense that leadership, collaboration and digitally supported design have become part of who she is as a writing teacher.

In this one-year reform, Wei's expertise did not appear as a status she already possessed and then applied to reform. It was gradually built with others and over time: with digital tools that offered many but imperfect suggestions, with colleagues who questioned and refined her ideas, and with institutional demands that she learnt to reinterpret as resources rather than constraints. Early in the reform, she talked about needing to *"have one's own judgement"*; by the end of the year, this stance was enacted in concrete routines – screening plans, coordinating team workflows and reorganising lessons into clear modules while keeping students' thinking central. In this ongoing process, her expert identity was co-constructed: she came to see herself, and to be seen by others, as a writing teacher who can coordinate institutional agendas, collegial collaboration and digitally supported planning in more deliberate ways.

5. Discussion

This study examined how an experienced L2 writing teacher constructed and enacted an expert identity while integrating AI under digital reform. The findings show that Wei's expertise was not fixed but gradually built as a configuration of writing knowledge, student-centred pedagogy, reflective judgement, leadership and emerging digital competence, negotiated with students, technologies, colleagues and institutional demands. The discussion therefore focuses on three points: how her trajectory confirms existing models of L2 writing teacher expertise, how it extends them through AI literacy and reflective adaptability, and how expert identity is produced through technological and institutional tensions.

Wei's case resonates strongly with key components in Lee and Yuan's (2021) framework of L2 writing teacher expertise. Her trajectory shows sustained integration of writing knowledge, student-centred pedagogy, reflection and pedagogical leadership. This convergence is not accidental. Faced with technological and institutional change, Wei continues to judge teaching through long-standing commitments to student learning, reflective improvement and collaborative professionalism. In this sense, her case suggests that AI and digital reform do not displace the core dimensions identified by Lee and Yuan; rather, they recontextualise them and make them newly visible in practice.

Wei's case extends Lee and Yuan's (2021) model in several technology-era directions. Tool-related competences become a constitutive part of expertise. Echoing Barrot's (2023) call for teachers to work with digital tools while foregrounding process and personal voice, Wei uses them not merely to generate model texts or corrections but to design process-oriented, dialogic tasks that make students' thinking and stance visible. Her practice parallels recent accounts of "empowered" writing, where writers must critically negotiate the effects and ethics of tool-mediated text production (Sandstead & Kibler, 2025). Her case further suggests that reflection is not merely one dimension among others, but the mechanism through which knowledge, pedagogy, leadership, and professional commitment are recalibrated under reform, in line with Tsui (2003) and Farrell (2013). What is new, then, is not simply the presence of AI, but the way expert identity comes to include critical technological judgement, AI-aware assessment and ethically oriented pedagogical redesign.

Wei's practice also points to teacher AI literacy as a core strand of expertise in a Chinese digital reform context. Echoing Barrot's (2023) argument that teachers should capitalise on AI's affordances while keeping process, experience and voice central, she deliberately steers students away from passive acceptance of output and towards more active, questioning forms of use, close to Ouyang and Jiao's (2021) notion of AI-supported or "AI-empowered". In doing so, Wei fosters student AI literacy across the dimensions of "understanding", "use", "evaluation" and "ethics" identified by Xu et al. (2025).

Her own trajectory suggests a parallel, teacher-side AI literacy comprising at least four capacities: understanding affordances and limits for writing pedagogy; designing AI-mediated tasks, feedback and assessment; guiding students' critical, agentive uptake; and framing use within norms of authorship and academic integrity. In contrast to Jiang's (2025) finding that many Chinese foreign language teachers' digital practices lag behind their beliefs, Wei's practices closely match and sometimes exceed, her initial digital awareness. This alignment appears to have arisen from institutional support, her own curiosity, emotional investment and habitual self-reflection.

Wei's negotiation further shows how expert identity is produced through technological and institutional tensions. She confronts three main clusters of disruption: AI-assisted cheating and soulless student writing, the challenge of redesigning tasks and classroom sequences around new tools, and institutional

pressures from digital educational reform, where OBE and critical thinking are bundled as key indicators. In line with dialogical perspectives (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011), these tensions do not simply fragment her identity but become sites of repositioning. Anger over opaque writing leads to AI-aware assessment sequences; overload from tool-generated suggestions leads to more selective, modular lesson design; and feelings of being "tied up" under reform gradually give way to a more structured sense of pedagogical purpose. Compared with Ghiasvand and Seyri's (2025) broader account of AI-driven role transformation and professional growth, Wei's case specifies how, in L2 writing, expert identity emerged as she learnt to choreograph AI, students and policy in ethically and pedagogically principled ways.

6. Conclusion

This study shows how an experienced L2 writing teacher in a Chinese university gradually constructs an expert identity as she redesigns writing pedagogy under digital reform. Wei's case confirms core dimensions of writing teacher expertise but also suggests that digital competence and AI literacy have become part of what expertise now entails. From a dialogical perspective, her identity is sustained through negotiating technological and institutional tensions rather than avoiding them. The study further outlines teacher AI literacy as part of expertise, linking task design, feedback, ethical judgement and authorship. Its contribution is necessarily bounded by its focus on one highly committed teacher in one institution over a single reform year, and by the absence of student and administrative perspectives. Future research could compare teachers across institutions, trace changes in teacher AI literacy over time, and examine how professional development supports AI-mediated writing pedagogy.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Appendix

Rubric: AI-Assisted Peer Review (Initial Version)
When you use AI to evaluate a classmate's (or your own) essay, copy–paste this rubric together with the essay into the AI chat box and use the following prompt:

You are my English Writing teacher. Evaluate my essay according to the rubric below. Your evaluation should cover the following items:

1. Does this essay clearly answer the task? Which sentences show my main position? Where do I need more explanation or examples?

2. Is my argument logically organised and easy to follow? Which paragraphs are well organised, and where is the structure weak or confusing? How could I improve the connections?

3. Does my essay show analysis rather than just description? Which parts are too general or template-like, and how can I make them deeper and more analytical?

4. Which sentences are unclear, inaccurate or too general? Please highlight 3–5 typical problems in grammar or word choice and suggest better alternatives, without changing my ideas.