AI and Graduate Teaching Labor: Reshaping Workload, Autonomy, and Institutional Power

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Abstract

The role of graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) is shaped by a combination of instructional, administrative, and scholarly responsibilities, yet their labor often remains undervalued within higher education's institutional hierarchy. As artificial intelligence (AI) tools become increasingly integrated into university classrooms to assist with instructional design, writing support, and administrative organization, their impact on GTA labor calls for close examination. This study investigates how AI transforms instructional responsibilities, affects pedagogical autonomy, and reshapes labor expectations. Drawing on qualitative interviews with five GTAs from an English Department, including both domestic and international instructors, the research explores how AI intersects with linguistic diversity, institutional culture, and workload distribution. The findings indicate that while AI can aid some routine tasks, it often creates new forms of invisible labor such as prompt design, emotional management, and self-directed learning. Rather than reducing the burden, AI often intensifies it in implicit ways. This study contributes to ongoing conversations about academic labor by calling for AI policies that are transparent, equitable, and developed with meaningful input from educators.

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Suman Dey is a Ph.D. student in the Rhetoric, Theory, and Culture program at North Dakota State University. His research explores the intersections of language, identity, and power, with particular attention to epistemic justice and equitable learning through AI-assisted writing instruction. His scholarly and creative work investigates how linguistic diversity, colonial histories, and religious narratives shape discourse and influence public and institutional power.

The integration of generative artificial intelligence (AI) in higher education is not only a technological development but also a labor and governance issue with far-reaching consequences. As tools such as ChatGPT are introduced to assist with instructional design, support writing processes, and streamline administrative work, these changes unfold within a university system already marked by precarious employment and expanding

managerial control. Graduate teaching assistants (GTAs), who are underpaid, overburdened, and largely excluded from institutional decision-making, experience these changes with particular intensity. Adjunct faculty, who often teach multiple courses across different universities under similarly unstable conditions, face many of the same challenges, though this study focuses specifically on GTAs. From my perspective as a GTA, these tools are not neutral additions to teaching. On the surface, AI appears to promise efficiency and relief, but in practice it introduces new and often invisible tasks. Designing prompts, reshaping assignments, preparing lessons on ethical use, and monitoring how students interact with these systems take significant time and effort that rarely appear in workload expectations or compensation models. Far from reducing our responsibilities, AI may make teaching more mechanical, narrowing pedagogical choices, and may subject our labor to new forms of surveillance and accountability. These pressures remind us that what is at stake is not just technology but the human and relational dimensions of teaching itself.

This article distinguishes between two discourses. The first is institutional and administrative, where AI is framed as a tool of efficiency, compliance, and innovation. The second is rooted in writing studies, where questions of pedagogy, authorship, and linguistic justice are central. This separation matters because what appears as progress in the language of administration often produces additional labor, surveillance, and constraint in the daily work of instructors. Generative AI is reorganizing GTA labor in three key ways: by expanding workload through new forms of invisible labor, by constraining autonomy through institutional expectations, and by reshaping governance through systems of surveillance and control. These effects are especially sharp for GTAs, who teach with significant responsibility but little authority. What is framed as time-saving technology often demands time for prompt design, ethical coaching, monitoring, and student guidance. Moreover, as Imran et al. explain, AI is most effective when aligned with constructivist learning principles such as scaffolding, metacognitive reflection, and conceptual change (36). These principles require careful human guidance, and this is work that AI itself cannot replace. Without recognition of that fact, GTAs are asked to carry out expanded pedagogical responsibilities without corresponding authority or support.

For clarity, I use the term AI use to refer to four categories: surveillance and monitoring, instructor tool use, AI-literacy instruction, and student use. Identifying AI practices through these categories avoids ambiguity and highlights the distinct pressures each creates for graduate instructors. Critical scholarship further underscores these dynamics. For example, De Roock shows how large language models enforce narrow conceptions of correct language that "marginalize the richness and validity of nonstandard linguistic practices" (595), and Vee cautions that institutional enthusiasm for new technologies often outpaces careful consideration of their long-term pedagogical and social consequences. Similarly, Press documents how administrators often impose AI without consultation, aiming to cut labor costs rather than improve learning (16-17). Taken together, these studies help explain why GTAs face expanded responsibilities, reduced autonomy, and intensified surveillance when AI enters higher education. Across this scholarship, AI emerges as a managerial, linguistic, and pedagogical intervention that redistributes labor onto instructors while constraining autonomy and care. Collectively, this scholarship foregrounds the stakes of linguistic justice and

pedagogical care, showing that writing instruction is not only about efficiency but also about supporting students' voices, identities, and intellectual growth.

This study is guided by three central questions: How does the use of AI influence the distribution of teaching responsibilities and the experience of instructional labor for GTAs? In what ways does it restrict or reconfigure their pedagogical autonomy, particularly in writing instruction? And what would it mean to integrate AI into higher education in ways that support graduate educators rather than deepen their precarious academic labor conditions? By situating these questions within both institutional and disciplinary discourses, this article argues that AI may expand GTA workload, constrain pedagogical autonomy, and reinforce precarity while also reproducing dominant linguistic norms. The findings point to the need for policies that value linguistic justice, acknowledge invisible labor, and ensure that graduate educators have a meaningful role in shaping how AI enters classrooms.

Literature Review

Artificial intelligence in higher education does not enter a neutral landscape. It arrives entangled in histories of labor stratification, institutional governance, and systems of control. For Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs), these dynamics are especially acute because their work has long been devalued within what is described by Rowland, on the basis of feminist composition scholarship, as a "feminized" status of labor in the discipline (1). Within this framework, such work is theorized as "care work" (1), a condition I refer to here as care labor. Rowland further describes GTA teaching as relational and emotional work that exceeds official contracts and remains largely invisible. Extending this analysis, Kirschenbaum and Raley argue that "the administrative and pedagogical burdens of reinvention" around AI fall disproportionately on instructors with the least institutional latitude, particularly those with heavy course loads and limited control over curricula (509–10). Imran et al. frame AI as enhancing pedagogical approaches and personalized learning, while also acknowledging implementation challenges and the necessity of teacher training and sustained professional development (35-36, 43-44). Beyond these expanded duties, AI introduces new forms of rhetorical labor, including prompt engineering. As Hart-Davidson et al. emphasize, prompting should be understood as an iterative, reflective, and ethically grounded literacy practice rather than a purely technical task. When prompt design is reduced to efficiency or output optimization, it risks functioning as the very kind of technological shortcut that Hart-Davidson et al. warn may come "at a human cost" (254). In instructional contexts, GTAs must therefore craft prompts that guide students toward critical engagement and rhetorical awareness rather than procedural compliance, a form of pedagogical and intellectual labor that requires time and expertise but remains largely unrecognized within official workload expectations. As Gupta and Shivers-McNair demonstrate, prompt writing emerges through commercially driven platforms and informal micro-literacy economies. Interpreted through the lens of academic labor, this emergence shifts pedagogical work into invisible domains that demand adaptation from contingent instructors without corresponding institutional recognition or support.

These structural demands also bring an emotional burden. GTAs are often pressured to present AI as progress even when they themselves feel undertrained or uncertain. Watermeyer et al. note that the rhetoric of efficiency frequently becomes a mandate to demands greater

output without proportional support, and Kirschenbaum and Raley describe an atmosphere of amazement mixed with anxiety (504). GTAs must appear adaptable and technologically fluent while absorbing the strain of rapid institutional change, an affective dimension of academic labor that remains invisible but deeply shapes their teaching. Together, these workload pressures and emotional demands reveal how AI multiplies rather than simplifies academic labor, a condition that leaves little space for reflective and relational pedagogy and foreshadows future constraints on autonomy.

The politics of language exacerbate these pressures. The Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) affirmed in its 1974 Students' Right to Their Own Language (SRTOL) resolution that linguistic authority is not inherent to any single American dialect and that students retain the right to their own language varieties. Yet, nearly fifty years later, April Baker-Bell demonstrate how schools continue to reproduce what she terms "Anti-Black Linguistic Racism" (24). She argues that the devaluation of Black Language in classrooms mirrors the broader devaluation of Black lives, insisting that justice requires more than code-switching; it requires dismantling "White Mainstream English" (WME) as the invisible norm (18). In this sense, linguistic hierarchies and racial hierarchies are inseparable. For GTAs, many of whom teach multilingual and racially diverse students, AI systems that privilege standardized English reproduce the same exclusions that SRTOL and Baker-Bell critique. What is presented as neutral "correction" by AI models carries forward the erasure of marginalized voices and forces instructors to mediate between students' lived languages and institutionalized norms.

Recent scholarship on AI in composition studies confirms these concerns. Drawing on Byrd's analysis of linguistic punishment and De Roock's critique of AI's simulated authority, this scholarship frames large language models as reinforcing narrow standards of correctness that marginalize nonstandard expression. Laquintano and Vee add that multilingual writers often turn to AI because they know what kinds of English are rewarded institutionally, which places GTAs in the position of reasserting rhetorical agency where systems flatten difference (531). This body of research echoes Baker-Bell's call to resist linguistic erasure. What she theorizes as linguistic violence in schools can be understood as extending into digital systems that normalize standardized English. Instead of liberating educators, AI creates new pedagogical constraints, reduces the space for affirming diverse voices, and shifts more responsibility onto instructors to humanize machine outputs.

Institutional structures further compound these pressures. Press argues that AI is rarely introduced through open dialogue; it is imposed from above as a mechanism of efficiency and cost-cutting (15-16). Labor responses to AI underscore these tensions. For example, during a graduate worker strike at Boston University, the administration suggested using ChatGPT to manage course responsibilities, a proposal strongly rejected by SEIU Local 509 (Press 15). The union emphasized that such measures undermine the relational and pedagogical labor GTAs perform. Bowman and Kovanen similarly argue that the rhetoric of "professionalization" often disguises unpaid labor, insisting instead that "graduate students are workers" whose teaching, grading, and mentoring must be recognized as central labor rather than supplementary training (2). These examples highlight that resistance to AI is inseparable from broader struggles over academic labor rights. Vee describes this as a form of "technical

debt," where institutions adopt technologies quickly without planning for long-term ethical and pedagogical consequences. Watermeyer et al. frame this condition of AI-mediated academic labor within the prestige economy of higher education, where metrics and digital surveillance regulate academic labor and reward visible productivity over relational pedagogy (447-49). These dynamics reflect what Burrows, cited in Woodcock, calls 'quantified control,' the convergence of metrics, markets, and surveillance to regulate academic labor (134). Within this framework, AI does not simply support instruction but embeds managerial logics that privilege speed, output, and compliance over reflective pedagogy. For GTAs, who already lack security and authority, quantified control intensifies their precarious status by reducing instructional autonomy and intensifying administrative surveillance. Even when AI is optional, institutional culture makes its use in classroom instruction feel required and thereby compromises an instructor's pedagogical decision-making capacity. This is especially troubling in writing instruction, where responsiveness, reflection, and linguistic diversity—all issues which depend on the choices of instructors—are central to meaningful learning.

In response to these vulnerable teaching conditions, critical voices within writing studies have begun to resist the normalization of AI. McIntyre, Fernandes, and Sano-Franchini argue in "Refusing Generative AI in Writing Studies" that adopting AI without carefully critiquing its place in the classroom undermines pedagogical commitments to equity and justice, particularly when instructors are pressured to comply with university/administrative expectations. Their position aligns with Baker-Bell's call for antiracist language pedagogy that affirms students' voices, a commitment that stands in tension with efficiency-driven approaches to AI adoption. Taken as a whole, this scholarship reveals a concerning contradiction: while institutions frame AI as progress, its use often reinscribes linguistic inequality and expands invisible labor. This review therefore establishes the stakes of my study: to show how GTAs, positioned at the margins of authority yet at the center of classroom practice, experience AI as both a pedagogical burden and a site where linguistic justice is urgently at risk.

Methodology

Research Approach

This study employs a Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) approach (Charmaz) to examine how Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) experience the integration of generative AI in writing instruction. CGT emphasizes the co-construction of meaning between researcher and participant and situates knowledge within broader institutional and cultural contexts. This framework is appropriate for capturing the complexity of GTA labor, pedagogy, and autonomy in an era of technological change. As previously mentioned, three interrelated themes guide this study: (1) how AI influences GTA workload, (2) how it reshapes instructional autonomy, and (3) how it restructures institutional governance and surveillance. These questions provide an analytic lens but are not imposed on participant perspectives; instead, they develop dialogue with the data through iterative coding and memo writing.

Participants and Data Collection

The study received IRB approval (Protocol #IRB0005567) and followed all ethical guidelines. Five Graduate Teaching Assistants participated: Jainab, Ali, and Penelope from Bangladesh, Frances from the United States, and Kwame from Ghana. All were teaching writing-intensive courses at a public university in the Upper Midwest, and their varied national and linguistic backgrounds offered valuable perspectives on how AI intersects with labor precarity across cultural and institutional contexts. Recruitment relied on purposeful sampling through professional and departmental networks to identify participants who had direct experience teaching with or around AI in writing courses. Each participant provided informed consent, selected a pseudonym, and retained the right to withdraw at any point.

Interviews took place in person and were recorded through Zoom to ensure accuracy. Each session lasted between thirty and sixty minutes and focused on teaching responsibilities, experiences with AI, and perceptions of institutional pressures. Transcripts were first generated using Zoom's automated transcription feature. Short, de-identified excerpts were then uploaded to ChatGPT to refine punctuation and formatting. Personal identifiers and pseudonyms were excluded at every stage to preserve confidentiality and maintain anonymity. All transcripts manually reviewed and corrected to maintain both accuracy and fidelity to participant perspectives. Participants were fully informed about the transcription and editing process, given the option to decline the use of AI-assisted refinement, and assured that all data were securely stored with all identifying details removed.

The decision to use ChatGPT for limited transcript refinement reflected reflexive awareness rather than convenience. The transcripts were originally generated by Zoom's automated feature. When uploading transcript excerpts to ChatGPT, it was not indicated that the text came from research interviews to protect participant privacy. All files were divided into short, de-identified segments and stored on an encrypted drive to prevent data exposure. This methodological choice reflected the study's central theme: Graduate Teaching Assistants, like the researcher, often operate in institutional systems where AI use appears necessary but not fully voluntary. The inclusion of AI in this limited role became part of the analytic framework, showing how technological dependence and restricted agency influence academic labor. The study also recognized broader ethical concerns associated with AI, including surveillance, data retention, and environmental cost, while maintaining a commitment to care, consent, and transparency throughout the research process.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the systematic stages of Constructivist Grounded Theory. Each transcript was first divided into meaningful segments and coded in the participants' own words to preserve their perspectives. These initial or open codes reflected concrete experiences such as emotional labor, invisible work, prompt pedagogy, and AI-literacy instruction. In the next stage, focused coding grouped the most frequent and significant codes into broader categories such as expanded workload, soft mandate, and linguistic erasure. Axial coding was used to analyze the relationships among these categories to identify causal conditions, contextual influences, and consequences.

Throughout this process, analytic memos documented emerging insights and supported the transition from descriptive accounts to interpretive frameworks. After initial coding, I also wrote brief participant-level thematic summaries that synthesized recurring patterns across each interview and anchored them in representative excerpts to support cross-case comparison and reflexive analysis. These summaries were reviewed against the complete data to ensure accuracy and preserve participants' voices. Table 1 illustrates how open codes evolved into broader themes aligned with the four analytic buckets: surveillance and monitoring, instructor tool use, AI-literacy instruction, and student use.

Table 1. Coding Progression from Open to Axial Themes

Open Codes (in participants' words)	Focused Categories	Axial Themes	Analytic Buckets
"I spend more time writing AI prompts than grading papers" (Ali)	Prompt pedagogy as invisible work	Expanded Workload	Instructor Tool Use
"Students expect me to teach them how to use ChatGPT, but that was never in my contract." (Penelope)	AI-literacy instruction without recognition	Expanded Workload	AI-Literacy Instruction
"It feels like I am watched through the LMS logs." (Kwame)	Soft surveillance in digital platforms	Surveillance and Monitoring	Surveillance/Monitoring
"If I don't use AI in at least one lesson, it looks like I'm not innovative." (Frances)	Soft mandate to adopt AI	Constrained Autonomy	Instructor Tool Use
"My students' voices disappear when AI rewrites their drafts." (Jainab)	Erasure of linguistic diversity	Linguistic Justice & Identity	Student Use
"We don't have a choice; policies are made without us." (Kwame)	Lack of GTA consultation in decision-making	Institutional control and governance	Governance
"I felt anxious presenting AI as progress when I myself was unsure." (Penelope)	Emotional burden of technological change	Invisible Affective Labor	Instructor Tool Use

Researcher Positionality

I write as a Graduate Teaching Assistant in first-year writing in an English Department at a public university in the Upper Midwest, positioned both as an insider and as a critical observer of the labor conditions this study explores. I design assignments, lead discussions, and work within the same institutional structures and expectations that shape participants' experiences.

This professional and disciplinary proximity offers insight into the lived realities of GTA labor while requiring continuous self-reflexivity so that my own perspective does not overshadow participants' voices. My dual role as instructor and graduate student informs how I interpret the institutional and cultural dimensions of AI integration. While administrator discourse across the university celebrates AI as a modern and efficient tool, graduate students and faculty in our English Department approach it as an object of study for rhetorical inquiry and ethical reflection. University administration encouraged me to include at least one class session discussing AI and its ethical implications for student writing, rather than requiring direct tool use, an invitation that functioned as an expectation rather than a choice. This situation parallels what participants described: an ostensible discourse of autonomy accompanied by subtle and implicit institutional pressure to incorporate it into our classroom instruction. It also reflects a broader divide between administrative priorities that emphasize efficiency and departmental values that center authorship, linguistic justice, and reflective pedagogy.

In my own teaching, I have seen how AI compounds labor in ways that are seldom recognized or compensated. Integrating AI responsibly requires sustained intellectual work, emotional care, and careful pedagogical judgment. The challenge lies not only in learning to use AI but also in translating its presence into ethical classroom practice that demands ongoing judgement, explanation, and care. Students increasingly bring AI-generated texts into their writing, which calls for guidance on authorship, transparency, and critical awareness. Responding to these realities demands time and reflection that rarely appear in official workload models. I also encounter the broader structures of digital oversight that accompany technological adoption: learning management systems that record every instructional action and metrics that represent teaching through data rather than human interaction. These mechanisms alter how I understand accountability and professional agency and create a sense of visibility that shapes both pedagogical decisions and emotional labor.

Although AI may provide limited support for drafting or organization, I treat it cautiously and never rely on it for evaluative feedback. My approach to responding to student writing centers on attentiveness to multilingual expression and on affirming students' rights to their own language. This orientation guides both my pedagogy and my interpretation of participants' accounts. Throughout the study, I used memo writing and peer debriefing to maintain analytic distance while recognizing that my own standpoint provides important context. When my perspective appears in the Results, it functions to situate the analysis within lived institutional conditions rather than to present additional data. This reflexive stance clarifies how GTAs experience AI as a condition of expanded labor, constrained autonomy, and redefined pedagogical care.

Results

AI Training as Personal Responsibility (AI-Literacy Instruction)

Across all five interviews, Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) described learning to use artificial intelligence as a self-driven effort rather than an organized institutional process. Workshops were brief introductions and often optional. Frances explained that she received some training but that "AI literacy really develops through self-education," which for Frances

involved hours of independent practice and experimentation. Penelope observed that "no training makes you perfect," since the rapid evolution of tools demands continuous adjustment. Jainab, who had attended a graduate seminar on AI and pedagogy, noted that such opportunities were rare and that teachers "must train themselves before talking about AI with students." Ali and Kwame both viewed AI knowledge as a moral responsibility that supports ethical teaching rather than a compliance task. Kwame also added that the belief that AI saves time reflects a misunderstanding because responsible use requires reflection and careful evaluation.

Participants also recognized that AI-literacy instruction has become part of their workload even though it appears nowhere in official policy. They guide students on rhetorical and ethical dimensions of AI use, yet institutional support is minimal. Frances summarized this situation clearly: "We are the ones figuring it out first, and then maybe it becomes policy later." This gap between institutional enthusiasm for innovation and the lack of concrete guidance positioned GTAs as first responders to technological change, responsible for developing pedagogical expertise that leadership later adopts as policy.

Prompt Pedagogy as Everyday Teaching Tool (Instructor Tool Use)

Prompt creation emerged as the most time-consuming and conceptually demanding element of teaching with AI. Participants treated prompts not as technical commands but as pedagogical tools that shape rhetorical thinking. Frances said she wrote prompts "not just to get better answers from the tool but to help students think critically about their questions." Penelope added that when students compose their own prompts, they "slow down and really consider what they want," which improves metacognitive awareness. Jainab observed that collaborative learning patterns shifted because students often arrived with AI-generated material instead of collectively produced ideas, which forced her to redesign group discussions to restore interaction. Kwame emphasized that "prompt engineering is the key," since the quality of engagement depends on the student's clarity and ethical awareness. Ali explained that the creative process still belongs to the human writer, and the teacher's role is to help students use AI as a supplement to reasoning rather than a substitute for it.

My own classroom experience reflected similar challenges. I use group discussions to help students examine how prompts shape voice, agency, and bias. Students write their own discussion prompts and analyze how AI interprets them. This process slows their thinking and encourages rhetorical precision. It also requires extensive preparation time and emotional presence. Each prompt I design must be tested, adjusted, and contextualized for diverse student backgrounds. Like the GTAs I interviewed, I find that prompt pedagogy demands the same intellectual care as traditional writing instruction but receives little recognition in workload or evaluation.

Hidden Work and Emotional Strain (Expanded Workload)

Participants consistently reported that AI increased rather than reduced their workload in this setting. They revised syllabi, redesigned assignments, tested tools, and monitored student use without compensation or acknowledgement. Frances said that "every time we teach, we should revise our course," a task that required continuous intellectual effort. Kwame noted that "using

AI means rethinking classroom materials and peer strategies; it is not less work, only different work that goes unseen." Penelope recalled an anxious summer spent testing AI outputs to check fairness in feedback.

Several GTAs experimented with AI-assisted feedback but clarified that the decision was personal, not institutional. Ali explained that he tested AI only to explore time-saving possibilities but later rephrased all generated comments so that "students do not feel dismissed." I share a similar position. I never delegate final feedback to AI. I have tested AI for phrasing short formative notes, rewritten every suggestion, and removed wording that suppressed student voice. The experience confirmed that AI cannot replace the relational and rhetorical judgment that feedback requires. This process demands attention to multilingual expression and to students' linguistic agency. Collectively, such experiments illustrate how AI integration extends emotional and interpretive labor while remaining invisible in institutional metrics.

Autonomy with Expectations (Institutional vs Departmental Influence)

Participants stated that they had freedom to decide how to use AI, but many experienced indirect pressure to include it in their classes. This pressure emerged from two distinct sources. At the institutional level, leaders framed AI adoption as innovation and modernization. At the departmental level, writing program administrators emphasized critical literacy and rhetorical responsibility when using AI. Frances explained that she incorporated AI because "departmental guidance encouraged us to discuss it with students." Ali said that "no one forced us, but it seemed safer to include it." Jainab confirmed that instructors were encouraged rather than required, though the suggestion did not feel optional. Penelope described an ethical motivation: "AI is already part of students' reality."

My own experience mirrors this pattern. I received a message requesting that every section of first-year writing include at least one lesson on AI. Although the directive was framed as a recommendation, declining felt professionally risky. The difference between institutional enthusiasm and departmental caution captures how formal autonomy exists alongside cultural pressure. AI thus becomes a soft mandate: a marker of professional responsibility that instructors must perform even when official policy is silent.

Invisible Oversight (Surveillance and Monitoring)

GTAs reported that while their teaching was seldom observed in person, they remained aware of continuous digital visibility. Frances said she had not been observed in four years but still feared that a student complaint could lead to administrative scrutiny. Kwame explained that Blackboard records every instructional action and "even if submissions are anonymous, the system knows who uploaded what." Penelope noted that once digital systems became integral to teaching, instructors were informed about built-in monitoring features. Ali admitted that he felt cautious whenever uploading lesson plans or announcements. Participants described this condition as ambient surveillance where data tracking replaces human evaluation. For many, this sense of oversight restricted pedagogical experimentation. In my own teaching, I feel compelled to check analytics to confirm compliance and to avoid misunderstandings. This climate of visibility influences not only how GTAs teach but also how they understand

professional accountability. Surveillance thus functions less as explicit supervision and more as a structural condition that shapes behavior.

Language, Voice, and Ideological Constraints (Student Use)

AI tools often reinforced standardized English norms that can erase linguistic diversity. Jainab observed that "students' voices disappear when AI rewrites their drafts." Similarly, Frances found that AI flattened tone and emotion, and Kwame explained that multilingual students' intentions are often altered when the tool standardizes their phrasing, leading to confusion about authorship. Some students lose confidence after repeated corrections that make their writing sound less like their own.

These experiences reflect broader ideological constraints. GTAs tried to protect students' linguistic agency but often had to spend extra time mediating between institutional expectations of correctness and the desire to preserve individual voice. In my teaching, I discuss these tensions openly through group activities that compare human and AI revisions of the same text. Students then analyze what disappears or changes when AI edits their writing. Such exercises demonstrate that linguistic justice is not an abstract principle but daily classroom practice that requires careful rhetorical negotiation.

The Rhetoric of Replaceability (Institutional Control)

All participants expressed unease about institutional narratives suggesting that AI might replace instructors. Frances questioned whether evidence supports such claims, while Jainab insisted that "you cannot be replaced by a machine." Ali said the issue lies "not in AI itself but in the humans who use it wrongly." Kwame warned that when GTAs demand fair treatment, they risk hearing that "AI can do the teaching." Participants recognized these statements as rhetorical strategies rather than realistic predictions. They saw the discourse of replaceability as a managerial tool that devalues human expertise and undermines morale.

GTAs defined their work through empathy, ethical care, and contextual understanding, qualities they believed machines could not reproduce. For them, teaching is an act of judgment and relationship, not an algorithmic process. AI therefore serves as a mirror for labor politics in higher education, revealing how institutions value efficiency over pedagogy and how contingent instructors resist attempts to frame their work as replaceable.

Discussion

AI Expands Labor Rather Than Reduces It (Instructor Tool Use and AI Literacy Instruction)

The results show that AI adds work to the lives of GTAs rather than reducing it. Participants spent extra hours learning to use AI tools, revising syllabi, and monitoring student practices. What universities often describe as efficiency becomes a transfer of invisible labor. GTAs perform technical, emotional, and rhetorical work that remains absent from workload calculations. Participants described assignment revision, tool testing, and feedback adaptation as time-intensive forms of labor that required sustained intellectual and emotional effort. These experiences highlight how AI integration introduces affective demands alongside technical work, intensifying teaching labor rather than alleviating it. This pattern reflects what scholars

of academic labor identify as the feminization and invisibility of care work in higher education (Rowland; Kirschenbaum and Raely). Tasks such as mentoring, checking tone, and guiding ethical use are essential to student success but receive little recognition. AI does not automate this labor; it relocates it into less visible domains. The instructor's role becomes that of mediator who translates institutional enthusiasm for technology into the lived realities of teaching. As Rowland and Kirschenbaum observe, such labor remains central to pedagogy but peripheral in university discourse. My own experience confirms this. Teaching with AI requires longer preparation, emotional attentiveness, and reflection that intensify workload without acknowledgment.

Autonomy Within Soft Mandates (Institutional vs Departmental Expectations)

While GTAs retained technical autonomy in how they used AI, their decisions reflected competing discourses. Institutional leaders equated AI adoption with innovation and modernization. Writing program administrators emphasized critical literacy, authorship, and student care. Frances and Ali both explained that departmental encouragement to discuss AI with students felt more like an expectation than an option. This informal requirement, or soft mandate, demonstrates how power operates through expectation rather than formal policy and frames AI adoption as a maker of professional responsibility even in the absence of explicit enforcement. The distinction between institutional and departmental pressures clarifies how autonomy becomes conditional. Institutional rhetoric values technological participation as a sign of professionalism, while disciplinary discourse calls for critique and reflection. GTAs stood between these positions and translated managerial expectations into classroom practice. Declining to use AI appeared professionally risky, even when not mandated. This layered expectation turns innovation into obligation. Participant accounts reveal that autonomy in name can coexist with constraint in practice, a dynamic that mirrors managerial patterns across higher education.

Surveillance, Oversight, and the Politics of Data (Surveillance and Monitoring)

Although participants were seldom observed directly, they experienced continuous digital oversight. Blackboard and other management systems recorded every instructional action, creating what Frances described as a quiet sense of being watched. This atmosphere appears to alter how instructors plan lessons, communicate with students, and evaluate their performance. Kwame's remarks about anonymous data still being traceable illustrate how these systems convert teaching into measurable output.

This finding supports Woodcock's concept of quantified control, where educational labor is monitored through metrics rather than human judgment (134). For GTAs, especially international instructors, visibility intersects with vulnerability. The fear of misinterpretation or discipline encourages caution and self-censorship. Even without explicit monitoring, the infrastructure of surveillance produces compliance. AI technologies strengthen this effect because they depend on data extraction and record keeping. What begins as instructional support becomes a tool of governance. The university's investment in AI therefore signals not only technological progress but also administrative power.

Language, Voice, and Pedagogical Care (Student Use and Instructor Tool Use)

Participants consistently described AI systems as reinforcing existing linguistic hierarchies. Across cases, instructors noted that AI-mediated revisions often diminished voice, flattened tone, and altered rhetorical intention, particularly for multilingual writers. These patterns align with arguments that linguistic racism operates through the privileging of a single standardized English, rendering other forms of expression less visible or less legitimate (Baker-Bell).

For GTAs, linguistic justice functions as a daily responsibility rather than a theoretical goal. They work to preserve students' identities while meeting institutional expectations of academic discourse. My own classroom practice parallels theirs. Through group discussions, I ask students to compare AI-edited and self-revised drafts to see what meaning changes. This practice restores agency and invites reflection on rhetorical difference. Such pedagogy requires time, patience, and careful interpretation. AI therefore multiplies rather than replaces the human effort necessary to sustain inclusive instruction. It turns the teacher into both linguistic advocate and ethical interpreter, roles that institutions rarely acknowledge but that sustain equity in education.

The Rhetoric of Replaceability (Institutional Control and Labor Politics)

Across interviews, GTAs rejected the claim that AI could replace instructors, yet they recognized how such arguments circulate as managerial rhetoric. Participants expressed skepticism about the evidence behind these assertions and emphasized that effective instruction depends on empathy, contextual judgment, and relational awareness that automated systems cannot reproduce. Participants also interpreted narratives of replaceability as mechanisms of institutional control that discourage collective demands for fair treatment. In this sense, claims that AI can perform teaching function less as descriptions of reality and more as discursive moves that reinforce compliance and limit critique.

Framed this way, the rhetoric of replaceability aligns with what Watermeyer et al. describe as an ideology of efficiency, where "productive efficiency" becomes a dominant justification for intensified academic work (446). By positioning AI as both assistant and potential replacement, institutions preserve flexibility while avoiding accountability. GTAs understand this contradiction. They know that effective teaching depends on emotional intelligence, rhetorical awareness, and cultural sensitivity, qualities that learning language models are unable to reproduce. Their resistance reframes AI as a site of ethical conflict where human values challenge institutional priorities.

Institutional Support and Policy Implications (Across All Four Buckets)

The interviews show that current institutional frameworks fail to support AI integration ethically or equitably. GTAs learn, adapt, and instruct without compensation, guidance, or recognition. AI literacy and prompt pedagogy now represent substantial labor that remains outside workload policy. At the same time, surveillance technologies expand without transparent oversight. These structural conditions call for institutional reform.

Universities must acknowledge AI-related tasks as legitimate academic labor. Training programs should be paid, sustained, and collaboratively developed. Departments should clarify expectations so that ethical instruction does not rely on individual initiative. Policies must

distinguish between AI use that enriches learning and AI use that enforces compliance. Above all, administrators should recognize refusal, the choice not to use AI, as a valid pedagogical decision rather than a rejection of innovation.

Toward an Ethic of Care in AI Pedagogy

The findings show that teaching with AI represents not a technical modification but an ethical and relational transformation. Every stage of the process, including prompt design, student guidance, feedback, and the navigation of surveillance, requires attentiveness and care. When GTAs integrate AI with thoughtfulness, they act as cultural translators who balance institutional demands with students' diverse realities. Yet this care remains invisible within institutional discourse that privileges productivity over pedagogy.

An ethic of care redefines AI not as a substitute for human effort but as a catalyst for reflection on what meaningful teaching requires. It centers empathy, transparency, and voice rather than efficiency. Recognizing this ethic within AI pedagogy means valuing relational labor as essential to education. For GTAs, whose work exists at the intersection of technology and precarity, such recognition would affirm their expertise and preserve the human core of writing instruction.

Conclusion: Toward Ethical and Equitable AI Pedagogy

This study suggests that artificial intelligence expands rather than reduces the work of Graduate Teaching Assistants. It adds new responsibilities such as prompt design, ethical instruction, emotional care, and digital monitoring, which remain invisible in institutional workload calculations. The findings show that AI reshapes teaching through four distinct areas: instructor tool use, AI-literacy instruction, surveillance and monitoring, and student use. Across these areas, participants described how autonomy appears intact but is complicated by subtle institutional and departmental pressures. Institutional leaders promote AI as evidence of innovation, while Writing Program administrators frame it as a subject of rhetorical awareness and student care. This difference reveals that formal freedom can coexist with implicit obligation. The pressure to adopt AI often arises from institutional narratives of modernization rather than disciplinary commitments to pedagogy.

Moving from critique to action, this study calls for clear and humane policy. Universities must recognize AI-related preparation, prompt design, and ethical guidance as legitimate academic labor. Departments should create paid and ongoing training that includes the right to decline AI use when it conflicts with pedagogical purpose. Transparent surveillance policies are essential so that data tracking does not silence instructor agency. Writing programs should revise rubrics to value authorship, linguistic diversity, and student voice instead of machine-like correctness. For GTAs, workload credit and mentoring structures should reflect the expanded demands of AI-mediated teaching. Though this study was limited to five participants at one institution, its insights apply broadly to writing programs where graduate educators balance responsibility with limited authority. Ethical attention to data security and energy use must remain central as higher education negotiates AI integration. Recognizing these human costs is the first step toward building an AI pedagogy grounded in care, transparency, and justice rather than efficiency alone.

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