

Article**Pioneering AI-Enhanced IELTS Task Delivery in Vietnam: A Transformative Model for Intermediate Learners**

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Abstract

In Vietnam's rapidly evolving educational landscape, integrating artificial intelligence (AI) into language instruction remains an emerging yet promising frontier. This study presents an AI-powered web platform for task delivery in an IELTS preparation course for intermediate learners (CEFR B1–B2) targeting band scores of 6.0–6.5. Conducted at a private language center in Hanoi, it examines how AI systems can transform task design and pedagogical roles in a traditionally teacher-led context. Over 12 weeks, 30 students completed IELTS-focused tasks via an AI-integrated platform featuring automated feedback (Writing and Speaking), adaptive practice (Reading and Listening), and individualized performance tracking. Learner progress and engagement were analyzed through learning analytics, teacher reflection logs, and final test scores. Quantitative data measured skill development, while qualitative data captured learner perceptions and instructional changes. Comparisons between pre-course diagnostics and end-course results showed statistically significant improvement, particularly in Writing and Speaking, where immediate AI feedback supported efficient self-correction and targeted practice. Learners also demonstrated increased autonomy, strategic awareness, and task persistence. Teachers reported a shift from traditional assessment roles to facilitators of personalized learning. The findings indicate that AI-enhanced task delivery enables meaningful pedagogical transformation, addressing learner diversity, reducing teacher workload, and improving outcomes. This study proposes a scalable, context-sensitive model for IELTS preparation and broader L2 instruction in Vietnam and Southeast Asia.

Keywords

AI in Vietnamese education, IELTS preparation, end-course assessment, task delivery innovation, learner outcomes, intermediate learners, teacher role transformation, applied linguistics

Introduction

The use of artificial intelligence (AI) in education is becoming more common worldwide, yet in Vietnam, this integration is still at an early stage. AI holds potential to bring major improvements to English language instruction, especially in the context of high-stakes tests like IELTS. Traditionally, IELTS preparation in Vietnam has relied heavily on teacher-led instruction, with teaching practices being strongly driven by teachers' beliefs and learners' expectations rather than the test itself (Nguyen et al., 2020). However, this model may not always support learners in developing independent learning habits or meeting specific skill targets effectively. Nguyen et al. (2020) documented that IELTS preparation courses in Vietnam significantly shape classroom practices, with teachers exercising autonomy in

planning and delivery while often maintaining teacher-led, exam-focused instructional patterns that may constrain the development of learners' independent strategy use. As a result, there is a growing interest in finding new ways to support students, particularly at the intermediate level (CEFR B1–B2), who often aim for band scores between 6.0 and 6.5.

This study focused on learners with intermediate English proficiency, as this group represents the most common proficiency range among students in Vietnam based on IELTS demographic data (IELTS Partners, 2025). Additionally, it is possible that a considerable proportion of learners in this proficiency range take the IELTS test at least once, which could offer a useful indication of their proficiency. Chen et al. (2024) found that, despite variations in English learning contexts, the imperative of college admission strongly motivates students to engage diligently in English study in order to meet academic requirements and future career demands. In the Vietnamese context, where university entrance requirements typically begin at a band score of 5.5, intermediate learners are therefore especially driven to reach and exceed this benchmark. Motivated by the concrete goal of university admission, students tend to study diligently and engage consistently with learning tasks, as achievement goals are positively associated with academic engagement and performance (Țepordei et al., 2025), making them an ideal group for investigating the effectiveness of AI-supported learning.

This study explores one possible direction: the use of an AI-powered web platform to deliver IELTS tasks to learners. Such task delivery is central to language learning, as it serves as the interface through which learners engage with both instructional content and communicative practice, thereby directly influencing learning outcomes. Ebadi et al. (2025), using a mixed-methods design grounded in activity theory, found that AI-powered interactive speaking tasks significantly improved EFL learners' IELTS speaking performance and reduced speaking anxiety, with AI-supported learners outperforming those in traditional classrooms. The study also showed that AI-mediated tasks enhanced engagement, self-regulated learning, and feedback quality, fostering a more supportive, learner-centered environment.

This research focuses on how AI can support the delivery of tasks in all four IELTS skills—Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing—while also improving the learning process through feedback, practice, and performance tracking. This study investigates the integration of an AI-enhanced web platform for IELTS task delivery in a real-world instructional setting in Vietnam. Focusing on intermediate-level learners (CEFR B1–B2) enrolled in a 12-week IELTS preparation course, the study examines both learning outcomes and classroom practices associated with AI-mediated instruction. Drawing on quantitative performance data and qualitative insights from learning analytics, learner reflections, and teacher logs, the research explores how AI-supported task delivery influences IELTS performance, learner engagement, and instructional roles. By situating AI use within a traditionally teacher-centered exam preparation context, this study aims to provide practice-oriented evidence and pedagogical insights relevant to language teachers, program designers, and institutions seeking to meaningfully integrate AI into high-stakes EFL instruction. Accordingly, the study addresses the following research aims and questions.

Research Aims

This study aims to examine the pedagogical value of integrating an AI-enhanced web platform into IELTS task delivery for intermediate-level EFL learners in Vietnam. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Investigate the extent to which AI-supported task delivery enhances learners' IELTS performance across the four skills of Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing in a 12-week preparation course.
2. Explore patterns of learner engagement, autonomy, and feedback use in an AI-mediated IELTS learning environment.
3. Examine how the integration of AI reshapes teachers' instructional roles and classroom practices within a traditionally teacher-led IELTS preparation context.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: To what extent does AI-enhanced task delivery improve intermediate Vietnamese learners' IELTS performance across the four language skills?

RQ2: How do learners engage with AI-supported IELTS tasks in terms of task completion, use of automated feedback, and learning behaviors over time?

RQ3: How does the use of an AI-powered platform influence teachers' instructional roles and pedagogical practices in IELTS task delivery?

Literature Review

Research on the integration of artificial intelligence into language learning consistently highlights its transformative potential. Xu and Wang (2024) found that learners who incorporated AI tools into their English studies achieved significantly higher outcomes than those relying solely on conventional methods, indicating that AI-supported instruction directly contributes to measurable learning gains. Similarly, Ayotunde et al. (2023) reported that embedding AI in learning management systems creates a personalized and engaging environment that effectively develops all four language skills. Beyond skill enhancement, these authors emphasized the need for clear guidance on how educators can select and apply AI tools in pedagogically sound ways. With regard to receptive skills, Zhang (2025) demonstrated that AI-based adaptive learning platforms incorporating speech-to-text and predictive analytics enhance English listening comprehension through automated analysis and individualized feedback. Hidayat (2024) reported that AI-based personalised reading platforms improve reading comprehension by providing adaptive content, real-time feedback, and data-driven support tailored to learners' needs. In productive skill domains, AI-enhanced speaking instruction improves performance primarily through immediate feedback and iterative practice. By providing real-time speech recognition that highlights mismatches between intended and produced utterances, AI tools promote learners' noticing of pronunciation and intonation errors, thereby facilitating self-correction and measurable gains in oral proficiency compared to conventional instruction (Junaidi, 2020). Research indicates that AI-based speaking practice platforms can improve learners' speaking accuracy and fluency, particularly when the systems provide immediate, targeted feedback and structured opportunities for repeated practice (Qiao & Zhao, 2023). AI-mediated speaking assessment research has shown that AI feedback systems, such as ELSA Speech Analyzer, can lead to significant improvements in EFL learners' speaking performance, particularly in fluency, pronunciation, and motivation to communicate (Dakhil et al., 2025). Similarly, in writing instruction, Thao et al. (2025) highlighted that AI enhances L2 writing through a recursive feedback mechanism that promotes noticing and proceduralization. By delivering timely and systematic corrective feedback, AI helps learners identify recurring errors, refine interlanguage representations, and reduce cognitive load, thereby supporting improvements in accuracy, complexity, and fluency within a human-AI instructional framework. Asadi et al. (2025) suggested that AI enhances students' writing by delivering immediate, personalized feedback and model-based guidance aligned with key

IELTS criteria, thereby enabling targeted revision and iterative improvement in organization and language accuracy within a teacher-supported framework.

A related body of work examines how AI tools shape the learning environment itself. Pokrivcakova (2019) argued that AI supports more flexible, inclusive, and personalized learning spaces—an important contribution given the strong link between environment quality, motivation, and instructional effectiveness. Extending this perspective, Kutsyk and Nykyporets (2024) demonstrated that adaptive pacing and tailored content improve learner engagement and retention, while AI-supported instruction can be as effective as traditional teaching, particularly for beginners. Complementing these findings, Vančová (2023) showed that AI-driven pronunciation tools improve clarity of speech, increase motivation, and reduce speaking anxiety, suggesting that AI also supports affective dimensions of learning essential for long-term progress.

Regional studies across Asia provide additional insight into how AI is being adopted in diverse educational systems. In Jordan, Wardat and Akour (2025) found that AI-enabled practice environments reduce learners' affective filters and encourage communicative risk-taking. In Thailand, Waluyo and Kusumastuti (2024) observed that AI tools improve efficiency by reducing time spent on labor-intensive tasks. In Indonesia, Hamdani and Zainuddin (2025) highlighted AI's capacity to deliver personalized feedback in writing instruction, while in Malaysia, Yusoff et al. (2025) emphasized that continued use of AI tools is strongly influenced by learner satisfaction and perceived usefulness. Li (2024) further demonstrated that AI-driven devices promote educational equity in China by providing access to high-quality resources regardless of background. Collectively, these studies reinforce AI's potential to support personalization, efficiency, learner autonomy, and equitable access to learning opportunities.

Synthesizing these themes, AI-powered platforms offer several clear advantages for EFL learners, including personalized pathways, adaptive feedback, enhanced engagement, and improved access to resources (Ayotunde et al., 2023; Kutsyk & Nykyporets, 2024). Research also demonstrates that AI supports the development of all four language skills, fosters creativity, and reduces anxiety—factors that strengthen learner autonomy and motivation (Vančová, 2023; Li et al., 2023; Wardat & Akour, 2025). Furthermore, regional evidence across Asia highlights AI's potential to streamline learning processes, deliver immediate feedback, and address educational inequities (Waluyo & Kusumastuti, 2024; Hamdani & Zainuddin, 2025; Li, 2024). Despite these advancements, several gaps remain. Much existing research focuses on general language learning, low-stakes digital practice, or learners at the extreme ends of the proficiency spectrum, leaving the needs of intermediate-level students—a large and highly relevant learner population—underexplored. Recent systematic and bibliometric reviews indicate that although AI-assisted language learning research has expanded rapidly, many studies emphasize overall effectiveness, tool types, or learner attitudes rather than examining how AI supports learners at specific proficiency stages (Ekizer, 2025; Dou et al., 2025). Similarly, a scoping review of AI-mediated language learning reports that most empirical studies are situated in informal or autonomous learning contexts and rarely target clearly defined proficiency groups within formal instructional settings (Liu & Zhao, 2025). As a result, the pedagogical needs of intermediate-level learners—who constitute a large and highly relevant population in many EFL and exam-oriented contexts—remain comparatively underexplored in the existing literature.

Additionally, although research on artificial intelligence in language learning continues to grow, few studies have specifically investigated its application in high-stakes exam preparation

contexts such as IELTS. Most existing work examines AI tools for general language learning or digital practice, rather than the complex requirements of standardized assessments that demand task authenticity and scoring accuracy. For instance, large-scale observational research on AI-enabled practice tests has been conducted for high-stakes assessments such as the Duolingo English Test, yet such examinations—while informative—are not directly focused on IELTS preparation, and highlight emergent rather than well-established research streams in test preparation (Burstein et al., 2025). Similarly, studies exploring AI-assisted instructional approaches in IELTS writing contexts remain limited, with only a small number of narrative inquiry and mixed-methods investigations addressing how AI support integrates with teacher practice in task-based preparation courses (e.g., Asadi et al., 2025). This suggests that AI's role in authentic, strategic test preparation—particularly where scoring accuracy and task familiarity are critical—has not yet been systematically examined in the literature, creating an important gap for research focused on IELTS and similar high-stakes testing environments.

Questions surrounding how AI-mediated task delivery interacts with traditional teacher-led instruction and how it supports sustained skill development as well as influences learner engagement have not yet been systematically addressed. Recent systematic reviews highlight the pedagogical benefits of AI tools, such as adaptive feedback and personalized learning; however, significant challenges and gaps remain, including issues of bias, data privacy, and contextual sensitivity, as well as limited infrastructure and teacher preparedness, overreliance on technology, reduced teacher–student interaction, and the need for more longitudinal evidence and effective integration with human instruction (Garzón, 2019; Yuensook et al., 2025; Yıldız-Durak & Onan, 2025).

Moreover, emerging research on AI in language classrooms indicates that while AI technologies can enhance learner engagement and motivation, the role of teachers in mediating and contextualizing AI-mediated feedback remains central and underexamined, suggesting a need for deeper micro-level study of human–AI instructional interactions (Ng, 2025). Studies examining classroom management and instructional practices also underline that AI-supported tools can change teachers' roles and student engagement patterns, yet the systematic investigation of these dynamics, especially in high-stakes and long-term learning trajectories, remains scarce (Fernández Jiménez, 2024). Together, these reviews underscore that deeply contextualized, teacher-integrated research on AI-mediated instructional delivery and learner development is still emerging rather than well established. Although affective factors such as anxiety and motivation are well established as influential variables in second language learning, their role in exam-oriented classroom contexts has received comparatively limited empirical attention. Foundational work in SLA has consistently demonstrated that learner motivation and affective states shape engagement, persistence, and achievement (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2013). More recent empirical studies in general EFL contexts further confirm that classroom anxiety and motivation are significant predictors of language performance and participation (Li, 2024; Liu & Zhao, 2025). In technology-mediated learning, emerging research suggests that AI-supported instruction may reduce anxiety and enhance motivation through personalized feedback and low-pressure practice environments (Huang et al., 2025). However, most of these studies are situated in general or low-stakes learning contexts, and only a limited number explicitly examine affective dynamics under the heightened pressure of high-stakes assessments, where anxiety and motivation may function differently and more intensely (Mirsanjari, 2025). Consequently, despite widespread acknowledgment of affective factors in SLA and educational technology research, their specific roles within exam-focused instructional settings remain inadequately investigated.

The present study addresses these gaps by examining how an AI-enhanced platform can support intermediate Vietnamese learners in IELTS task delivery. By integrating quantitative performance data with qualitative insights from learner engagement and teacher reflections, the study provides empirical evidence on how AI can be meaningfully incorporated into a high-stakes EFL environment. In doing so, it contributes context-specific understanding of AI's pedagogical affordances and limitations, and offers practical guidance for educators seeking to leverage technology while maintaining instructional quality and fostering learner autonomy.

Methodology

Research design

This study employed a mixed-methods, quasi-experimental design to investigate how an AI-powered learning platform supports IELTS task delivery for intermediate-level learners. Because participants were drawn from intact classes I taught, no random assignment was possible. Quantitative data were collected through IELTS-format pre-, mid-, and post-tests, while qualitative data were derived from teacher logs, platform analytics, and learner reflections. A paired-sample *t*-test served as the primary statistical method for comparing pre- and post-test performance.

Participants

The study involved 30 learners aged 14–20 enrolled in an IELTS preparation course at a private English center in Hanoi, Vietnam. Their initial proficiency ranged from CEFR B1 to B2. Participants were selected based on intact-class membership, and all received the same instruction and access to the AI platform. The participant group included both male and female learners, primarily secondary school students, with a smaller number of first-year university students. This demographic profile reflects typical enrolment patterns in private IELTS preparation programs in Vietnam. This study followed ethical guidelines for research involving human participants. Informed consent was obtained from all learners (and guardians where appropriate). All data were anonymized, and this study received approval from the center's academic management department.

Setting

The research was conducted at a private English center where the researcher worked as an IELTS instructor. Over a 12-week period, students attended two sessions per week. Each session paired two IELTS skills (e.g., Listening–Writing, Reading–Speaking) and was supplemented with weekly AI-based assignments, forming a blended learning environment.

Tools and materials

AI platform

The primary digital tool used in this study was Summit.onluyen.vn, an AI-powered learning platform developed by Edmicro. The platform provided automated feedback on Writing and Speaking, adaptive difficulty for Listening and Reading, performance analytics, and real-time error detection. Students received instant AI-mediated feedback utilization, after which the researcher reviewed their work and assigned IELTS-aligned band scores.

Assessment materials

Official IELTS practice tests (e.g., Cambridge IELTS series and other authorized materials) were used for diagnostic and summative assessment. Writing and Speaking were evaluated using a rubric aligned with the official IELTS Writing and Speaking Band Descriptors.

Procedure

This study followed a structured 12-week procedure. Each week, students attended two instructor-led sessions, each of which lasted three hours, and completed at least one AI-based assignment. Many assignments contained multiple components, requiring multiple logins per week. After students submitted tasks, the AI platform provided immediate feedback; the researcher then reviewed each submission, added personalized comments, and assigned band scores. Learners completed three IELTS-format tests at Weeks 1, 6, and 12. Speaking and Writing were not assessed at the pre-test stage due to practical and scoring constraints associated with evaluating productive performance.

Data collection and assessment

Quantitative data

Quantitative data consisted of Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing scores from three IELTS-format tests. Listening and Reading raw scores were converted to IELTS bands using the official band score conversion tables (IELTS Partners, 2020c). Writing and Speaking were scored using criteria aligned with the official IELTS Writing and Speaking Band Descriptors (IELTS Partners, 2020a, 2020b). A series of paired-samples *t*-tests was conducted to examine within-skill changes over time. For Reading and Listening, comparisons were made between pre-test and post-test scores, while for Speaking and Writing, mid-test scores were used as baseline measures due to the absence of initial pre-test data.

Qualitative data

Qualitative data included teacher logs and learner reflections, supplemented by platform analytics (e.g., task completion and login frequency) to contextualize engagement patterns. These sources provided insight into engagement patterns and self-regulatory behaviors (e.g., task completion, retry attempts, and time investment), as well as AI-mediated feedback utilization and affective responses during the course.

Qualitative data analysis

A thematic analysis was conducted to interpret the qualitative data, following a primarily inductive (data-driven) approach, in which themes were derived from the data rather than predetermined by a theoretical framework. Teacher logs and learner reflections were first segmented into meaning units and subjected to open coding, generating initial codes such as task engagement, feedback uptake, persistence, affective responses, and perceived challenges with AI feedback.

These codes were then iteratively reviewed and grouped into broader categories through constant comparison, allowing patterns to emerge across participants. Coding and theme development were conducted iteratively until thematic saturation was reached. While the analysis was inductive, the development and interpretation of themes were informed by prior research on learner engagement, self-regulation, and feedback processing, as synthesized in the literature review to ensure conceptual coherence. For example, excerpts in which learners described revising their responses after receiving automated feedback were coded as *feedback uptake* and grouped under the theme of *AI-mediated feedback utilization*. Similarly, statements expressing frustration with overly detailed or unclear feedback were coded as *feedback-related challenges* and categorized under *perceived limitations of AI feedback*. In total, five main themes were identified: (1) learner engagement, (2) AI-mediated feedback utilization, (3) self-regulation and persistence, (4) affective responses to AI-supported learning, and (5) perceived limitations of AI feedback.

Integration of learning analytics and IELTS assessment

Learning analytics from the AI platform—including task completion rates, submission timestamps, and engagement frequencies—were integrated with standardized IELTS assessment tools. Writing and Speaking performance was evaluated using the official IELTS band descriptors (IELTS Partners, 2020a, 2020b), while Listening and Reading scores were interpreted using the official conversion tables (IELTS Partners, 2020c). This integration enabled a comprehensive analysis of both learner improvement and patterns of engagement with the AI-supported environment.

Results

Quantitative improvements in IELTS performance

A series of paired-samples *t*-tests was conducted to examine changes in students' IELTS performance over the 12-week intervention. Results indicated significant within-skill gains across all four skills, with large effect sizes in every case. For receptive skills (Reading and Listening), comparisons were made between pre-test and post-test scores, as these measures were administered at both time points. Reading scores improved significantly from pre-test to post-test, $t(29) = -5.82, p < .001, d = 1.06$, and listening scores also increased significantly, $t(29) = -5.11, p < .001, d = 0.93$. For productive skills (Speaking and Writing), comparisons were conducted between mid-test and post-test scores, as baseline data at the beginning of the course were not available for these skills. The mid-test therefore served as a proxy baseline following initial familiarisation with task formats and scoring criteria. Speaking scores improved significantly from mid-test to post-test, $t(29) = -4.82, p < .001, d = 0.88$, as did Writing scores, $t(29) = -4.40, p < .001, d = 0.80$.

These analyses reflect within-skill comparisons based on available measurement points rather than uniform pre–post comparisons across all skills. These results are summarized in Table 1. The overall pattern of improvement across the four skills is visually illustrated in Figure 1, which shows consistent upward trends across the observed measurement intervals.

Table 1

Paired-Samples t-Test Results for IELTS Skill Improvements Across Measurement Intervals

Skill	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
Reading	-5.82	< .001	1.06
Listening	-5.11	< .001	0.93
Speaking	-4.82	< .001	0.88
Writing	-4.40	< .001	0.80

Note. $N = 30$. Reading and Listening scores were compared from pre-test to post-test, whereas Speaking and Writing scores were compared from mid-test to post-test (proxy baseline). Cohen's *d* was calculated as $|t| / \sqrt{30}$.

Platform engagement patterns

Task completion rates

Task completion remained high throughout the intervention, typically ranging from 80% to 95%. Completion was strongest in the early weeks, followed by a modest decline around Weeks 7–9 before stabilizing toward the end of the course. Weekly completion trends are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 1
Mean Band Scores Across Available Measurement Points (Pre-, Mid-, and Post-Test) by Skill

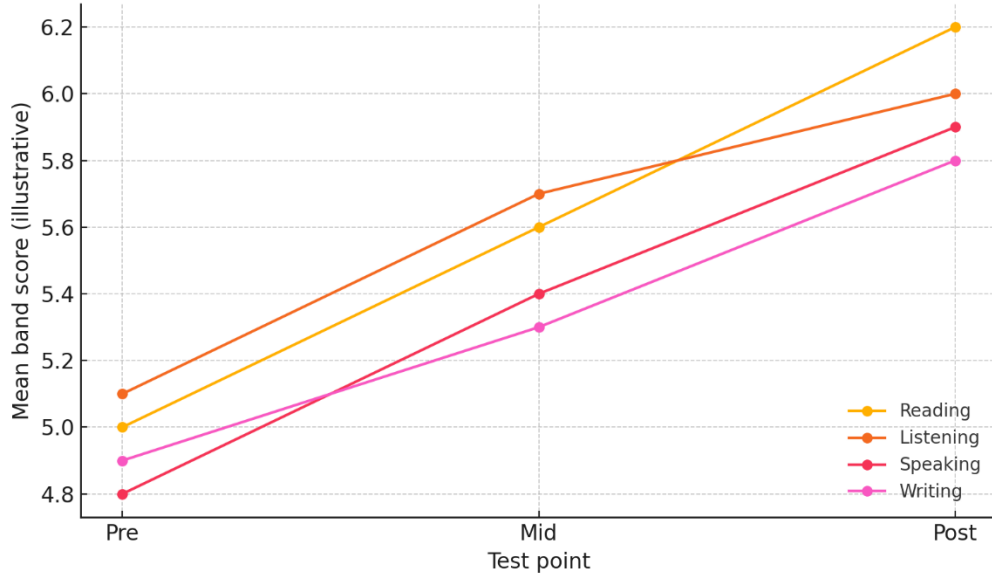
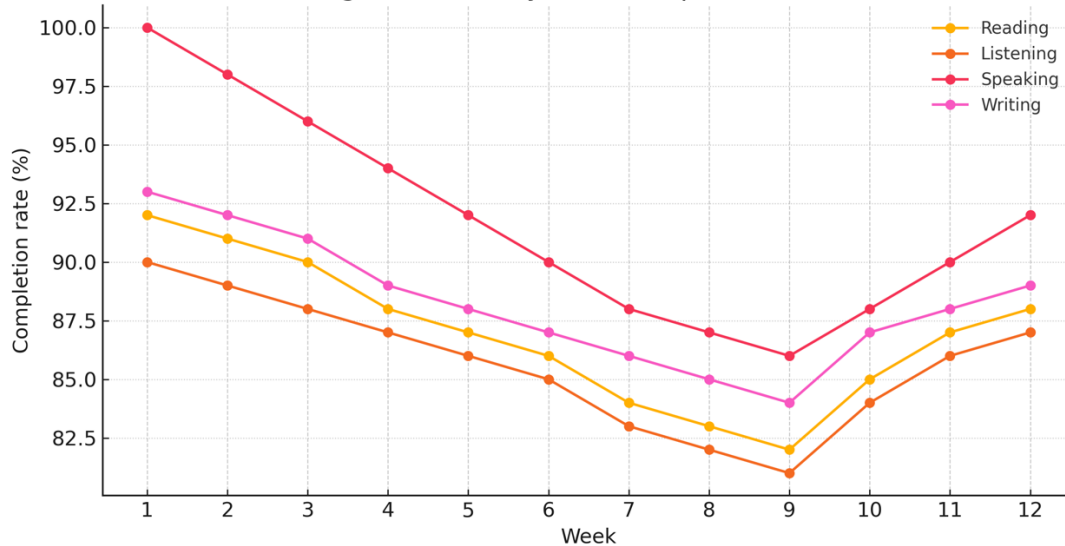


Figure 2
Weekly Task Completion Rates Across Skills Over the 12-Week Intervention



Time spent on the platform

Students’ weekly time investment demonstrated a gradual downward trend from Week 1 (4.5 hours) to Week 10 (2.5–2.8 hours), followed by a rebound in the final two weeks as students prepared for the post-test. This trajectory is presented in Figure 3.

Retry attempts

Retry attempts were highest in the early weeks—especially for Speaking and Listening—and declined steadily over time. By the final weeks, retries were minimal, suggesting increased mastery, reduced novelty, or more selective engagement. These patterns are illustrated in Figure 4.

Figure 3
Mean Weekly Time Spent on the Platform

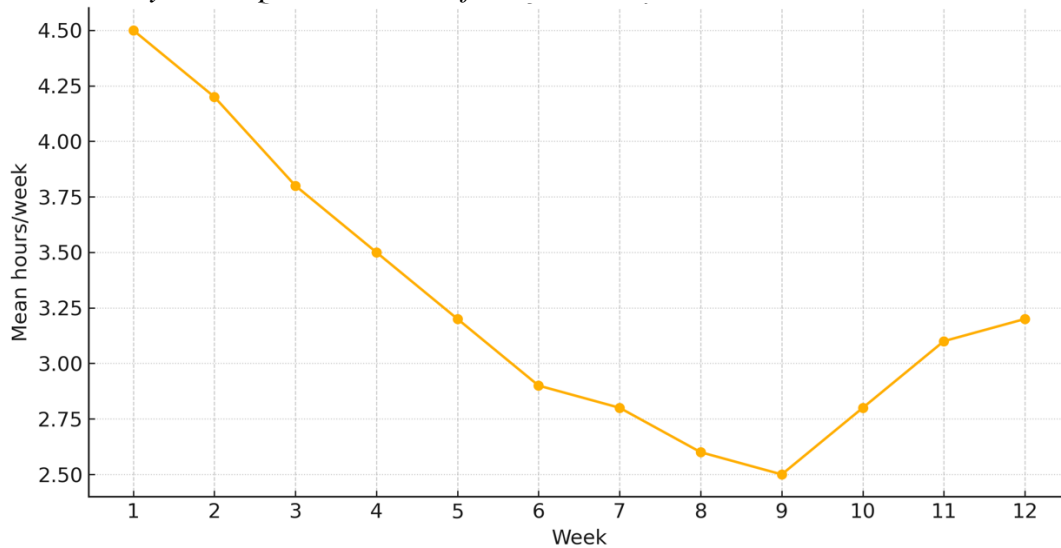
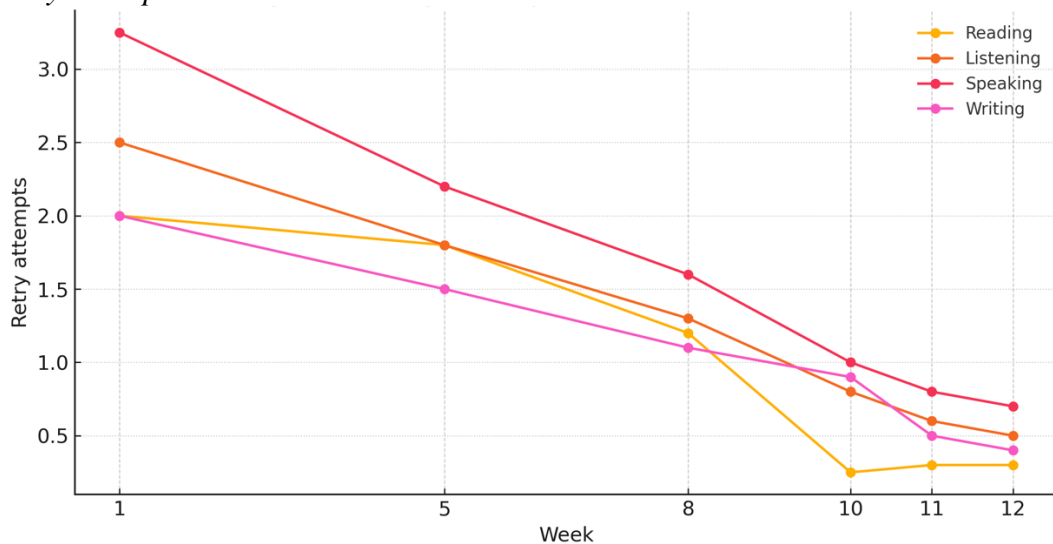


Figure 4
Retry Attempts Across Selected Weeks



Qualitative insights from teacher and student perspectives

The qualitative findings are organised around the five themes identified in the analysis: (1) learner engagement, (2) AI-mediated feedback utilization, (3) self-regulation and persistence, (4) affective responses to AI-supported learning, and (5) perceived limitations of AI feedback. Evidence is drawn from teacher logs, learner reflections, and platform analytics.

Theme 1: Learner engagement

Teacher observations indicated that several students initially struggled with pacing and time management, but notable improvement occurred by Week 5. Platform analytics (e.g., task completion rates and login frequency) further showed that learners who maintained consistent participation demonstrated more stable progress, whereas those with irregular engagement patterns progressed more slowly.

Theme 2: AI-mediated feedback utilization

Learners who actively engaged with AI-mediated feedback—by reviewing, interpreting, and seeking clarification—demonstrated higher levels of autonomy and stronger final outcomes.

Student reflections highlighted the perceived value of the immediacy and specificity of feedback, particularly in guiding revisions and identifying errors.

Theme 3: Self-regulation and persistence

Persistence emerged as a key predictor of progress. Students who consistently completed or repeated tasks (e.g., Students 3 and 30) showed steady gains, while those who missed assignments (e.g., Students 9 and 21) progressed more slowly. In addition, learners who reduced participation midway through the course generally demonstrated weaker improvements, even when they re-engaged later, suggesting the importance of sustained self-regulatory behavior.

Theme 4: Affective responses to AI-supported learning

Student reflections revealed generally positive affective responses to the AI platform. Several learners reported reduced anxiety when practicing speaking in an AI-mediated environment, alongside increased confidence in their performance. However, some learners also expressed frustration when feedback was perceived as overly strict or difficult to interpret.

Theme 5: Perceived limitations of AI feedback

Despite overall positive engagement, several limitations were identified. Some learners reported technical issues, such as platform time-outs that resulted in lost recordings, leading to frustration and reduced opportunities for practice. Feedback overload also emerged as a concern, particularly when pronunciation corrections were overly fine-grained or writing feedback was excessively detailed. Additionally, several students recommended the inclusion of bilingual explanations to improve accessibility and comprehension.

Summary of findings

The results demonstrate that learners made significant and educationally meaningful gains across all four IELTS skills, with large effect sizes indicating substantial improvement over the course of the 12-week program. Engagement with the AI platform remained consistently high, although patterns of use evolved as learners became more familiar with the system.

Qualitative evidence further highlighted the importance of learner engagement, AI-mediated feedback utilization, self-regulation and persistence, and affective responses, while also identifying several limitations of AI feedback including occasional technical issues, instances of feedback overload, and fluctuations in learner motivation, suggesting areas for refinement in future implementations. Overall, the findings indicate that the AI-enhanced learning environment effectively supported sustained and meaningful progress in learners' IELTS performance.

Discussion

This study examined how an AI-enhanced platform supported IELTS task delivery for intermediate Vietnamese learners. The findings demonstrate that the integration of AI meaningfully contributed to learner improvement, engagement, and instructional transformation, thereby achieving the three research objectives.

Objective 1: Impact of AI on IELTS performance

The quantitative results revealed significant within-skill gains across all four IELTS skills, with large effect sizes. These improvements provide high-stakes evidence supporting prior claims that AI can accelerate language learning (Ayotunde et al., 2023; Xu & Wang, 2024). In particular, the strong improvement in Listening and Reading aligns with findings that AI-

mediated feedback appears to enhance receptive skills through repeated, individualized practice. Gains in Writing and Speaking, though more gradual, are consistent with studies showing that AI may support the development of productive competencies when learners engage with detailed corrective input (Vančová, 2023).

Importantly, this study extends the literature by indicating that these effects occur not only in general EFL settings, but also in exam-oriented, high-stakes preparation, an area that has been underexplored. The results therefore suggest that AI-supported task delivery can meaningfully improve test-specific performance for intermediate-level learners—a group often overlooked in AI research. However, given the quasi-experimental design and the absence of a control group, these findings should be interpreted as indicative rather than conclusive.

Objective 2: Learner engagement with AI-supported task delivery

Platform analytics and qualitative evidence indicated generally high levels of engagement, although patterns appeared to evolve over time. Initial enthusiasm—reflected in high completion rates, extended study time, and frequent task retries—seemed to decline gradually before stabilizing in later weeks. This trajectory may suggest that learner engagement becomes more selective and efficient as familiarity with the tool increases.

Learners valued the immediacy and specificity of AI-mediated feedback, particularly in Writing and Speaking, and several reported reduced anxiety when practicing speaking with the AI system. These affective benefits indicate that AI-supported environments may facilitate low-pressure practice conditions and increase learners' willingness to communicate, thereby supporting more frequent and sustained oral production (Wardat & Akour, 2025). At the same time, the challenges identified—such as feedback overload, strict pronunciation scoring, and occasional technical disruptions—suggest that AI-mediated learning may not be uniformly seamless. These findings provide a more nuanced perspective on optimistic claims in the literature, indicating that while AI may facilitate personalization and learner autonomy, its effectiveness likely depends on how feedback is calibrated and how learners manage cognitive and affective demands. In addition, learners' affective responses—particularly reduced speaking anxiety and increased confidence—suggest that AI-supported environments may help create more supportive conditions for language practice.

Objective 3: Changing roles of teachers and the learning environment

The findings suggest that the AI-enhanced model may have reshaped the teacher's role from primary evaluator to facilitator and mediator. Learners frequently appeared to rely on teacher explanations to interpret AI-mediated feedback, and teacher guidance seemed to play an important role in sustaining engagement, clarifying platform analytics, and contextualizing progress. This human–AI synergy is consistent with Pokrivcakova's (2019) argument that AI enhances learning most effectively when embedded within flexible, well-supported instructional environments.

By shifting routine assessment and practice to the platform, the instructional model may also have promoted greater learner autonomy. High retry rates in Week 1 and more selective retry strategies in later weeks suggest that learners exercised agency in regulating their own learning. This pattern points to the potential of AI to support self-regulated learning; however, it also indicates that autonomy may decline in the absence of sufficient motivational scaffolds—an important consideration for future implementations.

Contribution to existing literature

The findings position this study as a meaningful contribution to ongoing discussions about the role of AI in EFL education. The results provide high-stakes evidence that AI-supported task delivery can enhance IELTS-specific performance, extending existing research that has largely focused on general language learning or low-stakes practice environments. By examining this integration within a Vietnamese context—where teacher-centered pedagogy remains prevalent—the study offers valuable contextual insight into how AI can function within Southeast Asian educational systems. The findings also present a balanced perspective by confirming the benefits of AI for personalization, autonomy, and skill development while simultaneously highlighting cognitive, affective, and technical challenges that are often overlooked in previous research. Furthermore, this study advances pedagogical understanding by demonstrating how AI can reshape teacher roles, support more individualized learning pathways, and contribute to scalable models of high-quality instruction. These findings collectively indicate that AI-mediated task delivery can serve as a viable, scalable model for IELTS preparation in similar EFL contexts.

Pedagogical implications

The findings of this study offer several important implications for teachers, institutions, and policymakers seeking to integrate AI into IELTS preparation and broader EFL contexts.

Implications for teachers

The results indicate that AI tools are most effective when supported by active teacher mediation. Although the platform provided immediate feedback and adaptive practice opportunities, learners frequently depended on teacher explanations to interpret and apply this feedback, particularly in Writing and Speaking. Teachers therefore played a crucial role in clarifying and simplifying AI-generated comments when they were dense or overly technical, and in guiding learners toward more effective self-regulated learning practices. This included encouraging consistent engagement with the platform, helping students develop productive retry strategies, and assisting them in interpreting progress analytics. Teachers also monitored learners' emotional responses, such as frustration with strict pronunciation scoring, and offered the emotional and strategic support necessary to sustain motivation. Overall, the findings suggest that teachers should view AI not as a replacement for human instruction, but as a complementary resource that enhances their ability to facilitate personalized and targeted learning.

Implications for institutions and program design

The results underscore the potential of AI to expand access to high-quality IELTS preparation, particularly in settings where experienced instructors are scarce. To implement AI-supported learning effectively, institutions must ensure that the underlying technological infrastructure is stable and reliable, as technical disruptions can undermine learner confidence and reduce engagement. They also need to localize platform content and feedback, including providing bilingual explanations where appropriate, to help intermediate learners manage cognitive load. In addition, professional development is essential so that teachers can interpret learning analytics and integrate AI-generated insights into their instructional decision-making. Collectively, these measures highlight the importance of institutional support in developing sustainable human–AI learning ecosystems.

Implications for equity and access

The findings also point to important considerations regarding equity in AI-enhanced learning environments. While most learners demonstrated steady improvement, those who disengaged

or encountered technical barriers progressed more slowly, suggesting that the benefits of AI are not evenly distributed without adequate support. To ensure equitable access, institutions need to provide reliable devices and stable internet connectivity, particularly for learners in underserved areas. They should also incorporate motivational supports—such as structured practice routines or peer-based encouragement—to help sustain consistent engagement over time. These measures are essential to prevent disparities in digital learning outcomes and to ensure that AI integration contributes to broader goals of educational fairness.

Limitations and Future Directions

Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged when interpreting the findings of this study. First, the sample consisted of a single cohort of 30 intermediate-level learners at one private language center in Vietnam, which limits generalizability to other proficiency levels, institutions, or national contexts. Second, the 12-week duration captured short-term improvement but did not measure long-term retention or transfer beyond the immediate preparation period. An additional limitation concerns the use of different baseline measures across skill types, which restricts direct comparability of gains across skills. Third, although qualitative reflections enriched the analysis, learner self-reports carry the risk of bias, particularly regarding motivation and engagement. Finally, technical issues—such as recording time-outs and occasional platform instability—may have influenced engagement and learning outcomes, yet these disruptions were not systematically tracked.

Future directions

Future research could strengthen and extend the contributions of this study in several ways. Larger, multi-site studies involving diverse learner populations would help determine the broader applicability of AI-supported task delivery in high-stakes exam preparation. Longer-term interventions are needed to examine whether gains in receptive and productive skills are sustained over time. Research should also explore optimized feedback designs, including simplified or bilingual explanations, to address cognitive load challenges identified in this study. Additionally, studies incorporating motivational supports—such as gamification, adaptive reminders, or structured reflection tools—may help sustain engagement and learner autonomy across extended courses. Finally, future evaluations should systematically document the technical reliability of AI platforms to better understand its influence on learner trust, persistence, and outcomes.

Conclusion

This study examined how an AI-enhanced platform supported IELTS task delivery for intermediate learners in Vietnam, focusing on learner performance, engagement, and instructional change. The findings demonstrate that AI-mediated practice can lead to substantial improvements across all four IELTS skills, with measurable gains supported by both quantitative and qualitative evidence. Learners engaged actively with the platform, benefited from immediate feedback, and developed increasingly autonomous learning behaviors, although their engagement patterns evolved as the course progressed.

The results also illustrate that AI functions most effectively when embedded within a supportive instructional environment. Teachers played an essential role in mediating feedback, sustaining motivation, and helping learners interpret analytics, reinforcing the importance of human–AI synergy in language education. At the institutional level, the study highlights the need for technical reliability, localized feedback design, and professional development to ensure sustainable implementation.

More broadly, the findings contribute new evidence to the limited research on AI use in high-stakes exam preparation and offer a context-specific perspective from Vietnam, where teacher-centered approaches remain dominant. While challenges such as cognitive load, motivational fluctuations, and technical disruptions must be addressed, the overall results suggest that AI-supported task delivery presents a promising, scalable model for enhancing IELTS preparation. Future research should continue to explore long-term effects, diverse learner populations, and refined feedback mechanisms to further advance the effective integration of AI in EFL learning.

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