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Beyond Acceptance: A TAM-Informed Exploratory Study of Vietnamese Secondary Students' Attitudes Toward ChatGPT in IELTS Reading Pre-Class Preparation

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Abstract

Generative artificial intelligence has entered high-stakes test preparation faster than the evidence base that should guide it, and secondary-level learners remain under-represented in that evidence. This exploratory pilot study examined how 25 Vietnamese lower secondary IELTS learners (Grades 7–9) at a private language centre in Ho Chi Minh City perceived ChatGPT as a tool for IELTS Reading pre-class preparation, using the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) as an interpretive lens. Following a four-week exposure phase built around structured, bilingual preparation worksheets, students completed a 38-item Likert questionnaire, and two IELTS teachers took part in semi-structured interviews. Internal consistency was good to excellent across the four constructs ($\alpha = .818-.902$). Students reported high perceived usefulness ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 0.59$) and high perceived ease of use ($M = 3.75$, $SD = 0.76$), but only moderate attitude toward using ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 0.95$) and moderate behavioural intention ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 0.86$). Pearson correlations were consistent with the TAM structure, with perceived usefulness most strongly associated with attitude ($r = .841$, $p < .01$). Qualitative data explained the gap: usefulness was concentrated in vocabulary look-up and background-knowledge activation, while trust and habit-fit remained unsettled, and both teachers described an “answer-first” misuse pattern among less motivated learners. The study argues that acceptance and productive use are distinct outcomes, and that task design, not learner enthusiasm, is what separates them.

Keywords: ChatGPT; technology acceptance model; IELTS Reading; pre-class preparation; Vietnamese EFL learners

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1. Introduction

English proficiency testing occupies a central place in Vietnamese education, and the IELTS examination in particular has become a gatekeeping instrument for university admission, scholarship applications, and graduation requirements. Reading is widely regarded as one of the most demanding components of the test, requiring candidates to process dense academic prose under severe time pressure while deploying inference, discourse tracking, and rapid information retrieval (Fitria, 2024; Ghanizadeh et al., 2017). These demands fall especially heavily on lower secondary learners, who increasingly begin IELTS preparation in private language centres years before they encounter comparable texts in formal schooling.

One common instructional response is pre-class preparation: learners engage with the passage before the lesson so that classroom time can be reserved for strategy instruction and feedback. This logic mirrors flipped learning, where pre-class engagement has been shown to predict in-class performance and satisfaction (Chen et al., 2023; Murillo-Zamorano et al., 2019), and where reading-focused implementations report gains in inferential comprehension and reductions in reading anxiety (Gok et al., 2021; Samiei & Ebadi, 2021). In practice, however, pre-class reading is fragile. Learners who cannot decode the vocabulary or access the topic often arrive unprepared, and the intended efficiency gain is lost.

Generative AI has changed the shape of that problem. ChatGPT can define vocabulary, summarise a passage, explain an unfamiliar concept, and generate practice items on demand, and learners across contexts report finding it useful for exactly this kind of out-of-class support (Xiao & Zhi, 2023). Yet the same affordances make it trivially easy to bypass reading altogether. The literature has consequently settled into a dual framing: AI as scaffold and AI as shortcut, with the outcome depending less on the tool than on how learners interpret and regulate their use of it (Kasneci et al., 2023; Sohail et al., 2023).

If learner interpretation is decisive, then learner acceptance is a reasonable place to begin. The Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989) holds that perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use shape attitude toward using a technology, which in turn shapes behavioural intention. TAM has been applied productively to ChatGPT adoption among university-level EFL learners (Alsaedi, 2025; Liu & Ma, 2023; Vo & Nguyen, 2024), but three gaps persist. First, secondary-level learners are rarely studied, despite being the group whose metacognitive regulation is least developed. Second, most studies survey learners about a tool they use informally, rather than after a controlled, task-embedded exposure. Third, acceptance is typically treated as the terminal outcome, with little attention to whether accepted tools are used well.

This study addresses those gaps through a small-scale exploratory pilot conducted at a private language centre in Ho Chi Minh City. It asks five questions: (RQ1) How do secondary IELTS learners perceive the usefulness of ChatGPT for IELTS Reading pre-class preparation? (RQ2) How do they perceive its ease of use? (RQ3) What attitudes do they hold toward using it? (RQ4) What behavioural intentions do they report? (RQ5) What benefits and concerns do their teachers perceive? TAM is used here as an interpretive lens rather than a model to be tested statistically, consistent with the sample size and the exploratory purpose.

2. Literature Review

2.1 IELTS Reading demands and pre-class preparation

IELTS Academic Reading requires learners to combine linguistic knowledge with strategic competence: identifying main ideas, recognising discourse organisation, drawing inferences, and managing time across three long passages (Fitria, 2024; Shobeiry, 2020). Ghanizadeh et al. (2017) found inference-making and argument evaluation to be substantive contributors to reading achievement, which places the burden well beyond vocabulary recognition. For secondary learners, two prerequisites dominate: schema activation and academic vocabulary. Reading comprehension is an interactive process between text and prior knowledge, and

passages on unfamiliar subject matter impose disproportionate processing costs on learners with limited exposure to academic genres (Shobeiry, 2020; Zhang & Singh, 2025). Vocabulary knowledge remains among the strongest correlates of comprehension, and requires sustained rather than incidental attention (Kim et al., 2020; Trần et al., 2025).

Pre-class preparation is the standard instructional lever for both. Scaffolded pre-reading provides temporary support that allows learners to operate beyond their independent level (Zhang & Singh, 2025), and flipped designs that formalise this preparation have produced encouraging results in EFL reading (Pilu & Nur, 2023; Samiei & Ebadi, 2021). The persistent weakness is compliance: preparation that is unsupervised and unverified tends to be completed superficially, particularly in exam-oriented private tutoring settings where efficiency is prized (Bray, 2011; Green, 2007; Luu & Luu, 2022).

2.2 ChatGPT as scaffold and as shortcut

Reviews of ChatGPT in ESL/EFL education document genuine affordances alongside genuine risks (Kostka & Toncelli, 2023; Lo et al., 2024). On the affordance side, ChatGPT can supply contextualised definitions, paraphrases, and simplified restatements of complex sentences, functions that map closely onto the L1-gloss and code-switching literature showing vocabulary gains for lower-proficiency learners (Kim et al., 2020; Ong & Zhang, 2018). Classroom-based evidence is accumulating: Abdelhalim and Alsehibany (2025) reported significant vocabulary gains among EFL learners using ChatGPT interactively, Fadillah et al. (2025) found it particularly valued for activating prior knowledge before reading, and Kainta and Umarella's (2026) systematic review associates ChatGPT use with improved background-knowledge activation among EFL readers.

On the risk side, large language models are not instructional systems. Their outputs are probabilistic rather than pedagogically sequenced, and they are known to generate fluent but unfaithful content (Huang et al., 2023; Kasneci et al., 2023). More consequentially for reading instruction, instant explanation lowers the cost of not thinking. Farhat (2025) documented over-reliance among higher-education students where the availability of immediate answers reduced motivation for independent problem-solving, and Tian and Zhang (2026) describe a “reliance route” in which AI dependency mediates a negative relationship between perceived AI capability and critical thinking. Karamuk (2025) frames the same dynamic as an automation trap: cognitively demanding tasks are routinely outsourced once the shortcut is perceived as lower-risk than the effort.

2.3 The Technology Acceptance Model and its limits

TAM proposes that perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEOU) jointly shape attitude toward using (ATT), which in turn shapes behavioural intention (BI), with PU also acting directly on BI (Davis, 1989; Venkatesh & Davis, 2000). Its parsimony has made it the default framework for AI-adoption research in language education. Liu and Ma (2023) found PU and PEOU to structure EFL learners' informal ChatGPT use; Giray et al. (2025) and Vo and Nguyen (2024) reported comparable patterns in Philippine and Vietnamese higher-education samples; and Şimşek et al. (2025) extended the model with motivational variables.

Two limitations bear directly on the present study. First, TAM measures the likelihood of adoption, not the quality of the use that follows. Hsiao and Tang (2024) argue that ethical and individual determinants of GenAI-supported learning require investigation beyond acceptance, since acceptance alone does not guarantee productive engagement. Second, TAM scores obtained under scaffolded intervention conditions reflect the tool as delivered, not the tool as independently encountered. Both limitations are treated here as interpretive constraints rather than as reasons to abandon the framework.

3. Methodology

3.1 Design

The study adopted a small-scale exploratory pilot design with complementary quantitative and qualitative strands. A structured Likert questionnaire administered to secondary learners provided the primary data; semi-structured interviews with their two teachers provided contextual and interpretive complement. Because the qualitative strand draws on a different participant group rather than a subset of the survey respondents, it is framed as complementary triangulation rather than as an explanatory sequential follow-up (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The design is appropriate where the research area is new and the purpose is to generate contextually grounded insight and assess instrument feasibility (Hwang & Chang, 2021).

3.2 Context and participants

The study was conducted at a private English language centre in a suburban district of Ho Chi Minh City that offers IELTS Foundation courses to secondary learners alongside their compulsory schooling. Twenty-five lower secondary students (Grades 7–9) were recruited purposively against three criteria: enrolment in an IELTS Reading preparation course at the centre, secondary-school age, and prior experience with ChatGPT. All 25 confirmed prior use on a screening item. Written parental consent was obtained in advance, and students additionally gave verbal assent. Self-reported proficiency ranged from below Band 4.0 to Band 5.5 (Table 1).

Table 1. *Profile of student participants (n = 25)*

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Grade level	Grade 7	3	12.0
	Grade 8	11	44.0
	Grade 9	11	44.0
Estimated IELTS band	Below 4.0	12	48.0
	4.0–4.5	9	36.0
	5.0–5.5	4	16.0
Prior ChatGPT use	Yes	25	100.0

Note. Grade levels correspond to the Vietnamese lower secondary system. IELTS bands are self-reported on the basis of the most recent practice test and should be read as indicative only.

Two non-native EFL teachers (T¹, T²; pseudonyms) who taught the participating classes were interviewed. Both had approximately three years of teaching experience, held IELTS scores of 7.0 and 7.5 respectively, and were regular ChatGPT users in their own lesson preparation.

3.3 Intervention

Four topic-specific preparation worksheets were co-designed by the researcher and the participating teachers, one for each reading passage used during the exposure phase (three from Mindset for IELTS 1 and one from Cambridge IELTS 12). Each worksheet had three parts: a schema-activation task in which learners marked topic-related items against their own experience; a short personal-opinion prompt; and a guided ChatGPT exploration consisting of three to four sequenced questions moving from concept definition to cause-and-effect reasoning. Every question was accompanied by a pre-tested prompt in both English and Vietnamese. Learners were instructed to read the response, close the screen, and write a brief summary in their own words before proceeding. Worksheets were completed at home and were not collected; engagement was probed through one or two oral questions at the start of each lesson, which, given class size, reached only a subset of learners in each session.

3.4 Instruments

The questionnaire comprised 38 Likert items adapted from established TAM instruments (Davis, 1989; Liu & Ma, 2023; Teo, 2011) and reworded for the IELTS Reading pre-class context: 18 PU items, 9 PEOU, 6 ATT, and 5 BI, each rated from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Five demographic items and one open-ended item were also included, giving 44 items in total. Every item was presented in English with a Vietnamese translation. Content validity was established through review by the research supervisor and one experienced IELTS teacher, with minor wording revisions for accessibility. Four items were negatively worded (PU¹⁷, PU¹⁸, PEOU⁸, PEOU⁹); PU¹⁸, PEOU⁸ and PEOU⁹ were reverse-coded, while PU¹⁷ was handled separately as described in Section 4.1.

The teacher interview protocol comprised eight thematic sections aligned to RQ5, covering ChatGPT familiarity, awareness of student use, perceived benefits, perceived risks, usability, attitudes toward integration, pedagogical implications, and future outlook, with two to four guiding questions per section. It was piloted with one teacher not otherwise involved in the study.

3.5 Procedure and analysis

Implementation spanned approximately six weeks: four weeks of worksheet-based exposure (one session per week), one week of questionnaire administration, and one week of teacher interviews. The questionnaire was administered in class in 20–25 minutes with the researcher present; all 25 students completed it. Interviews lasted 30–40 minutes, were conducted in Vietnamese, and were audio-recorded with written consent. An informal member check was conducted at the close of each interview.

Quantitative data were analysed in JASP 0.19. Internal consistency was assessed with Cronbach's alpha, interpreted as $\geq .70$ acceptable, $\geq .80$ good, $\geq .90$ excellent (George & Mallery, 2003; Hair et al., 2019). Construct and item means were interpreted using a three-level classification for five-point scales: 1.00–2.33 low, 2.34–3.66 moderate, 3.67–5.00 high (Jamil et al., 2012). Pearson correlations were computed among the four constructs and interpreted with Cohen's (1988) conventions ($r < .30$ weak, $.30$ – $.49$ moderate, $\geq .50$ strong). Given $n = 25$, correlations are reported as associations for exploratory purposes; no causal or predictive claim is made, and structural modelling was not attempted (Field, 2018).

Qualitative data comprised the open-ended questionnaire responses and the two interview transcripts, analysed thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases. Interviews were transcribed in Vietnamese and translated into English with AI assistance, after which every translated passage used in analysis was checked against the original recording by the researcher (see Declaration of Generative AI). Coding was conducted by the researcher alone; no second coder was used. To mitigate this, reflexive memos were kept throughout and emerging themes were discussed in supervision. Themes are reported as patterns of perception rather than as definitive findings.

4. Results

4.1 Reliability and item screening

PU17 ("I prefer not to rely on ChatGPT when preparing reading topics") returned a corrected item-total correlation of $r = .03$, well below the conventional $.30$ retention threshold, and reversing it did not improve scale reliability. Retaining a negatively worded, non-reversed item within a construct score distorts the composite and attenuates the reliability estimate (Field, 2018). PU17 was therefore excluded from the PU construct score and is reported separately as a standalone descriptive indicator ($M = 3.28$, $SD = 0.98$). Alpha for PU rose from $.891$ with PU17 to $.901$ without it. All four constructs then showed good to excellent internal consistency (Table 2).

Table 2. Reliability and construct-level descriptive statistics ($n = 25$)

Construct	k	α	M	SD	Level
Perceived usefulness (PU)	17	.901	3.78	0.59	High
Perceived ease of use (PEOU)	9	.892	3.75	0.76	High
Attitude toward using (ATT)	6	.902	3.13	0.95	Moderate
Behavioural intention (BI)	5	.818	3.63	0.86	Moderate

Note. k = items contributing to the construct score. PU is reported after exclusion of PU17 ($\alpha = .891$ with PU17 included). Level follows Jamil et al. (2012): 1.00–2.33 low; 2.34–3.66 moderate; 3.67–5.00 high.

4.2 Perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use (RQ1, RQ2)

Perceived usefulness was high ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 0.59$), but the item-level pattern was narrow rather than diffuse. The two highest-rated items in the entire questionnaire concerned vocabulary: PU9, “I use ChatGPT to check the meaning of unfamiliar words” ($M = 4.32$, $SD = 0.99$), and PU10, “ChatGPT provides explanations that help me understand new vocabulary” ($M = 4.28$, $SD = 1.06$). Background-knowledge items followed closely (PU2 and PU3, both $M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.88$). Items touching higher-order functions clustered lower: explaining complex sentences (PU14, $M = 3.52$, $SD = 1.23$) and simplifying difficult passages (PU13, $M = 3.64$, $SD = 1.19$) both fell in the moderate band.

Perceived ease of use was likewise high overall ($M = 3.75$, $SD = 0.76$), and the highest-rated items were operational: interacting without help (PEOU3, $M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.97$), asking questions without difficulty (PEOU2, $M = 4.04$, $SD = 1.06$), and accessing the tool (PEOU1, $M = 4.00$, $SD = 0.91$). The two lowest were not operational but interpretive: clarity of explanations (PEOU5, $M = 3.28$, $SD = 0.84$) and comprehensibility of responses (PEOU4, $M = 3.32$, $SD = 0.95$). Selected items are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Highest- and lowest-rated items across constructs ($n = 25$)

Item	Abbreviated statement	M	SD	Level
PU9	Use ChatGPT to check meaning of unfamiliar words	4.32	0.99	High
PU10	Explanations help me understand new vocabulary	4.28	1.06	High
PEOU3	Can interact with ChatGPT without help from others	4.12	0.97	High
BI2	Will use ChatGPT when I meet unfamiliar topics	4.08	0.86	High
BI3	Will use ChatGPT to understand unfamiliar vocabulary	4.08	0.95	High
PEOU4	Responses from ChatGPT are easy to understand	3.32	0.95	Moderate
PEOU5	Explanations are clear when I ask about topics	3.28	0.84	Moderate
BI5	Would use ChatGPT even if the teacher did not require it	3.36	1.38	Moderate
ATT4	I trust the explanations provided by ChatGPT	3.00	1.04	Moderate

ATT6	Using ChatGPT fits well with my learning habits	2.84	1.14	Moderate
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Note. Statements are abbreviated for presentation; full wording is available from the corresponding author. Level follows Jamil et al. (2012).

4.3 Attitude and behavioural intention (RQ3, RQ4)

Attitude toward using was the lowest-rated construct ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 0.95$), and its two weakest items were diagnostic rather than incidental: trust in ChatGPT's explanations (ATT4, $M = 3.00$, $SD = 1.04$) and fit with existing learning habits (ATT6, $M = 2.84$, $SD = 1.14$) were the two lowest scores recorded anywhere in the questionnaire. The highest ATT item, comfort in using ChatGPT for English learning (ATT3, $M = 3.48$, $SD = 1.08$), still fell within the moderate band. Behavioural intention was somewhat higher ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 0.86$) but internally uneven. Conditional, need-driven intentions were rated high — using ChatGPT when meeting unfamiliar topics or vocabulary (BI2 and BI3, both $M = 4.08$) — whereas unprompted use scored moderate (BI5, $M = 3.36$, $SD = 1.38$), as did recommending it to classmates (BI4, $M = 3.24$, $SD = 1.16$).

4.4 Associations among constructs

All six inter-construct correlations were positive and statistically significant (Table 4). The strongest was between PU and ATT ($r = .841$, $p < .01$), followed by ATT and BI ($r = .674$, $p < .01$) and PU and BI ($r = .666$, $p < .01$). The weakest, though still significant, was PEOU and BI ($r = .473$, $p < .05$). This ordering is consistent with the TAM proposition that ease of use operates on intention indirectly, through usefulness and attitude, rather than directly.

Table 4. Pearson correlations among the four TAM constructs ($n = 25$)

Construct	PU	PEOU	ATT	BI
PU	—			
PEOU	.692**	—		
ATT	.841**	.660**	—	
BI	.666**	.473*	.674**	—

Note. ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$ (two-tailed). Coefficients are reported as exploratory associations; with $n = 25$ they support no causal or predictive inference. Interpretation follows Cohen (1988).

4.5 Qualitative findings (RQ5 and elaboration of RQ1–RQ4)

Four themes emerged from the student open-ended responses. The first was functional narrowness: students described using ChatGPT overwhelmingly for word meanings and topic overviews, and reported that this made in-class reading faster — a pattern that mirrors the item-level PU data precisely. The second was self-aware dependence management: several students described deliberately reverting to dictionaries or restricting ChatGPT to wholly unfamiliar topics in order to protect their own curiosity, echoing the self-regulation strategies observed by Kurniawaty (2025). The third, and the most frequently voiced frustration, was output length

and pitch: responses were described as too long, occasionally off-topic, and too advanced, with students requesting Vietnamese summaries in order to use them. The fourth was L1 mediation: many students routinely asked for explanations or translations in Vietnamese, a strategy that accelerated processing but raises the question of whether translation-dependent use develops English competence or substitutes for it (Karri et al., 2025; Nhan, 2024).

The teacher interviews produced four themes of their own (Table 5). Both teachers reported classroom-level gains for engaged learners — T1 reduced in-class reading time from roughly thirty minutes to fifteen, and T2 observed a marked drop in basic comprehension questions — but both insisted these gains were conditional on learner disposition. Both independently described an answer-first misuse pattern in which learners paste the preparation form into ChatGPT and copy the output. T2’s comparison is instructive: a traditional answer key forces some reconstruction because it supplies only the answer, whereas ChatGPT supplies the answer and the reasoning together, making the thinking step skippable. The teachers diverged on whether formal integration is appropriate at secondary level, but converged on the practical conclusion that supervised in-class use is safer than unsupervised use at home, and that the remedy lies in task design rather than in exhorting students to use the tool responsibly.

Table 5. *Teacher interview themes and illustrative evidence*

Theme	T1	T2
Benefits conditional on learner attitude	“Whether that happens really comes down to the individual student’s mindset.” Faster reading, better topic familiarity among motivated learners.	“Students who already have the right attitude will prepare whether or not they’re asked to use AI.” Fewer comprehension questions from engaged learners.
Answer-first misuse	Learners paste preparation forms into ChatGPT and copy the output: “They just become another vehicle for the same avoidance behaviour.”	Learners progressively request shorter output: “They’ll proactively ask for the shortest possible response to save reading time.”
Integration at secondary level	Conditionally supportive; sees value for less confident learners, but wants structured management.	More cautious: “For secondary school students, I don’t think it’s appropriate.” Favours integration at higher levels.
Locus of the remedy	Genuine motivation matters more than prompt technique; recommends short, collaborative in-class tasks.	Recommends training teachers to design activities that keep AI use under teacher control.

Note. T1 and T2 are pseudonyms. Quotations are translated from Vietnamese and were verified against the original recordings.

5. Discussion

5.1 A high-usefulness, moderate-attitude profile

The most informative result is not any single mean but the distance between two of them. Perceived usefulness sat at 3.78 while attitude sat at 3.13, and the correlation between them was the strongest in the dataset ($r = .841$). A gap of this size between two tightly associated constructs indicates that something outside the usefulness judgement is suppressing attitudinal endorsement. The item-level data name it: trust (ATT4, $M = 3.00$) and habit-fit (ATT6, $M = 2.84$). Students in this sample did not dislike ChatGPT; they had not yet decided whether to believe it, and had not yet made room for it in how they study.

Both conditions are time-dependent in ways four sessions cannot satisfy. Trust in an information source develops through repeated opportunities to check its output against an independent standard, and habit formation requires sustained rather than bounded use. Read this way, the moderate ATT scores are not a shortfall of the intervention but an accurate reading of where these learners stand early in adoption, consistent with Salainti et al. (2025), who found EFL students' appreciation of ChatGPT tempered by persistent accuracy and dependence concerns.

5.2 Operational ease is not pedagogical ease

The PEOU data separate two things that the construct usually merges. Learners had no difficulty operating ChatGPT — access, questioning, and independent interaction all scored at or above 4.00 — but rated the intelligibility of what came back a full three-quarters of a point lower. The interface was easy; the output was not. Notably, this gap persisted despite every worksheet prompt having been pre-tested by the teachers, because generative models do not reproduce equivalent output across users and sessions. A prompt that yielded a concise response during teacher testing can yield a longer and denser one for a Grade 7 learner at home. Sirita and Todd (2025) observed the same instability when comparing default ChatGPT with a customised GPT for reading scaffolding, and it is a system-level property that worksheet design alone cannot resolve (Kostka & Toncelli, 2023).

5.3 Acceptance is not the same as productive use

The clearest limitation surfaced by this study is one of the framework rather than the data. Students in the same class, working from the same pre-tested prompts, and reporting similar acceptance scores, engaged with the tool in fundamentally different ways: some read the output, closed the screen, and reconstructed it in their own words, while others copied it. Both teachers observed this split independently, and no TAM construct distinguishes the two groups. TAM captures whether a learner will use a tool; it is silent on whether that use constitutes learning. Hsiao and Tang (2024) make the same argument on different evidence, and the practical implication is that AI-adoption research in education should be paired with self-regulated learning constructs that address cognitive engagement directly (Lu et al., 2026; Tin, 2025).

This reframing changes what the pedagogical response should be. If the decisive variable is how learners process output rather than whether they accept the tool, then interventions aimed at enthusiasm or access will not move it. Three implications follow from the convergence of student and teacher data. First, in-class use should precede at-home use for this age group: at-home completion was structurally unverifiable in this study, and both teachers favoured supervised use — a short five-to-ten-minute background-activation micro-task at the start of a

reading lesson, with the teacher circulating and devices put away before reading begins, is realistic within centre timetables. Second, integration should be differentiated by learner maturity rather than applied uniformly, since effective AI use presupposes metacognitive capacity that develops gradually across adolescence (Ho et al., 2026; Kong et al., 2024). Third, verification should be built into the in-class phase rather than delegated to learner self-monitoring: two or three oral questions, or a few sentences written without the worksheet, create accountability at negligible cost. The same principle applies to prompt literacy, which both teachers found could not be established in a single session and which is better distributed across lessons with immediate feedback (Gilanlioğlu, 2025).

5.4 Limitations

Five limitations constrain these findings. The sample of 25 learners at a single private centre precludes generalisation and rules out structural modelling; results should be read as context-specific. The four-week exposure captures initial perceptions only, and the ATT and BI constructs in particular may look different after sustained use. Worksheet completion was unsupervised, so the intervention itself could not be verified, and self-report cannot distinguish learners who processed output from those who copied it. The teacher sample of two, both confident ChatGPT users, is too small to represent the range of teacher positions, and teacher AI self-efficacy is known to shape how student use is interpreted (Collie et al., 2024). Finally, coding and translation were carried out by a single researcher with AI assistance in translation, without a second coder or formal inter-rater check.

6. Conclusion

This study set out to describe how Vietnamese secondary IELTS learners perceive ChatGPT as a pre-class reading preparation tool, and what their teachers observe about that use. The quantitative picture is consistent and easily stated: the tool is judged useful and easy to operate, but attitudes remain moderate and intentions conditional, with perceived usefulness the construct most strongly associated with both. The qualitative picture explains why. Usefulness is real but narrow, concentrated in vocabulary and topic access; the barrier to warmer attitudes is trust and habit rather than utility; and the benefit teachers observe is contingent on a learner disposition that the tool amplifies but does not create.

The wider contribution is the distinction the data force between technology acceptance and technology-mediated learning. A learner who finds ChatGPT useful, easy, and worth returning to may still use it in a way that bypasses the reading it was meant to support. Acceptance frameworks measure the first and are silent on the second, and both matter if generative AI is to be integrated into test preparation responsibly. For private IELTS centres, the actionable conclusion is that access is not a strategy: introducing the tool under supervision, differentiating by learner maturity, building verification into the lesson rather than the homework, and extending autonomy only as learners demonstrate they can manage it are modest measures, but they are the ones that determine whether the learning stays harder to shortcut than the tool makes it easy to bypass.

Declarations

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Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Ethics statement: The study was conducted in accordance with institutional research ethics requirements and was approved by the relevant institutional authority of Ho Chi Minh City University of Economics and Finance prior to data collection [approval reference to be inserted].

Informed consent statement: Written informed consent was obtained from the parents or guardians of all student participants and from both teacher participants. Student participants additionally provided verbal assent. Participation was voluntary and withdrawal was permitted at any point without consequence.

Data availability statement: The anonymised questionnaire dataset and de-identified interview transcripts are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request. Data are not publicly archived because participants are minors.

Declaration of generative AI: Generative AI (Claude, Anthropic) was used to produce first-pass English translations of the Vietnamese interview transcripts and open-ended responses. All translated passages used in the analysis were subsequently verified against the original recordings and source texts by the first author. No generative AI tool was used to generate, analyse or interpret research data, or to draft the scholarly argument of this manuscript. The authors take full responsibility for the content of the article.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Author Contributions

The author contributed to the conception and design of the study, drafted and critically revised the manuscript, and approved the submitted version.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies

The authors declare that no generative AI or AI-assisted technology was used in the preparation of this manuscript.

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