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Best Practices for Drafting Reflective AI Usage Declarations in Language Teacher Education

Ilaria Compagnoni
Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italia

Abstract Drawing on current research on AI integration into language class planning, this study examines AI disclosure practices in teacher education and argues for the development of structured guidelines for declaration-making. It frames AI usage declarations as compliance tools and mechanisms for metacognitive reflection and professional growth. Proposing a framework grounded in the augmentation-substitution distinction, transparency-as-pedagogy, and AI literacy, it provides best-practice recommendations for designing reflective declaration templates that capture critical, adaptive human judgment in AI-assisted language lesson planning.

Keywords AI usage declarations. Generative AI in education. Teacher metacognitive reflection. AI literacy. Language teacher education.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Theoretical Framework. – 3 Study Overview and Key Findings. – 4 Conclusion.

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1 Introduction

The integration of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) into educational practices has produced an epistemological condition where teachers, and prospective teachers in particular, are now routinely required to plan instruction in dialogue with systems whose reasoning processes are opaque, whose outputs are probabilistic, and whose 'knowledge' of pedagogy, curriculum, and language is derived from patterns extracted from vast textual corpora (Kurtz et al. 2024). This shift raises questions that are foundational to our understanding of pedagogical knowledge. When a human teacher and an AI chat collaborate on lesson-planning tasks, such as compiling lists of activity ideas, reinforcement exercises, and evaluation rubrics, where does professional judgment reside? Is it distributed across the human-machine relationship, or does (and must) it remains anchored in the human agent? Such considerations have immediate and practical implications for how teacher education programs prepare future practitioners to plan, deliver, and evaluate language instruction. This article is situated within the pedagogical area of foreign language teacher education contexts and, more specifically, examines how prospective language teachers engage with GenAI when planning didactic content. The broader literature on AI in language education has tended to concentrate on learner-facing applications, such as AI-assisted feedback on learner writing, conversational practice with chatbots, or automated assessment, while comparatively little attention has been paid to AI declarations in the teacher-facing side of the equation. Hence, after examining the literature on AI disclosure statements and their pedagogical implications, the article will draw recommendations on how such statements could be structured to capture how prospective teachers use AI as a professional tool during training. As a terminological note, GenAI and AI will be used interchangeably throughout this article.

2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 AI as Augmentation versus Substitution of Professional Judgment

A distinction for understanding the role of GenAI in didactic planning is between augmentation and substitution, which is linked to the SAMR framework (Puentedura 2006), where two levels of tech integration are identified: substitution (technology acts as a direct substitute for a non-digital tool, with no functional change) and augmentation (technology substitutes for a tool with functional improvements that

make the task easier or more efficient). If this model's structure is integrated into the reflection on AI use, the augmentation model presents AI as an extension of the teacher's cognitive and creative capacities. It accelerates routine tasks, offers alternative phrasings and activity ideas, and finds resources that the teacher then evaluates, selects, and adapts according to professional criteria. In a substitution model, by contrast, AI displaces the teacher's judgment, producing outputs that are adopted with minimal critical mediation and that come to stand in for the teacher's own decision-making. However, in such a framework, the boundary between augmentation and substitution is not fixed by the tool itself but by the manner and depth of the teacher's engagement with it. For example, the same GenAI system that produces a vocabulary list can be used to spark ideas that the teacher subsequently reworks in light of their students' proficiency level and cultural context (augmentation), or to generate a finished worksheet that is used with minimal modification (substitution). It follows that any meaningful evaluation of AI use in teacher planning must attend to whether and how a chatbot was used, meaning what the teacher contributed before, during, and after the AI interaction, and what evidence exists of critical mediation.

In teacher education, the object of professional development is the production of instructional tools (lesson plans, worksheets, rubrics) and the cultivation of the underlying professional judgment that allows a teacher to produce, adapt, and justify such tools independently, including in situations where AI tools are unavailable, inappropriate, or misleading (Bao, Zeng 2026). A teacher education program that inadvertently rewards teachers' output without attending to such inquiry and the development of independent judgment risks producing underdeveloped pedagogical decision-making. The augmentation-substitution distinction thus provides a normative anchor for the design of transparency mechanisms, in the sense that declarations should be structured in ways that make visible, and ideally reinforce, augmentation rather than substitution.

2.2 Metacognitive Reflection and Transparency-as-Pedagogy

The second conceptual thread concerns the pedagogical function of transparency itself. In much institutional discourse, declaration requirements are framed primarily as instruments of academic integrity to document instances of AI use that might otherwise be concealed (Cheong et al. 2025). This framing, while not without merit, is pedagogically limited. Studies revealed that despite making AI declarations mandatory on coursework cover sheets, nearly three-quarters of respondents failed to complete them (Gonsalves 2025). A justification for this widespread non-compliance stemmed from

unclear rules and fear of being penalised, since AI declarations have been equated with a confession of plagiarism instead of being viewed as a routine transparency measure (Micallef, Petrovska 2026). This demonstrates that poorly designed declaration tools can discourage the very academic integrity they aim to promote, rather than act as a developing professional whose reflective capacities are being cultivated.

An alternative framing treats transparency as pedagogy in its own right (OECD 2019). When applied to the educational context, it is the act of articulating how, why, and to what extent AI was used in lesson planning as a form of metacognitive engagement. Metacognition, understood broadly as thinking about one's own thinking and learning processes, has long been recognized in educational psychology as a powerful lever for deepening and consolidating professional expertise (Stanton et al. 2021). When prospective teachers are asked to state whether they used AI in lesson planning, and explain what the AI's output prompted them to reconsider, what they rejected and why, and how their understanding of the pedagogical task evolved over the course of the interaction, the declaration becomes a structured occasion for reflective practice (Overono, Ditta 2024). This can be compared to the use of journals, portfolios, and post-lesson debriefs as tools for professional growth (Farrell 2022). In equal measure, AI usage declarations can be understood as an extension of this tradition, adapted to a context in which a significant portion of planning now occurs in dialogue with non-human interlocutors.

Framing transparency as pedagogy also has practical consequences for how declarations should be designed and evaluated. If the goal is detection, a binary disclosure ('I used AI: yes/no') suffices, even if not formative. If the goal is metacognitive development, however, declarations must be structured to elicit reflective content. In practice, they must ask why, with what result, and to what degree of critical engagement lesson-planning materials were conceived. This reframing is central to the best-practice recommendations developed in Section 3.

2.3 AI Literacy as a Professional Teaching Competency

The third conceptual thread situates AI usage declarations within the broader and rapidly consolidating construct of AI literacy as a professional competency for teachers. AI literacy, in this context, extends beyond the operational ability to use GenAI tools, as it encompasses a critical understanding of what such tools can and cannot reliably do, an awareness of their limitations with respect to accuracy, cultural and linguistic appropriateness, and pedagogical soundness, as well as the capacity to evaluate AI-generated content

against professional and curricular standards before incorporating it into instruction (Cox 2024; Deshen et al. 2026).

For prospective language teachers, AI literacy adds an additional layer of complexity, since the tools in question are themselves linguistic systems whose outputs must be evaluated with the expertise the teacher is being trained to develop (Karaduman 2025). These abilities include knowledge of register, dialectal and sociolinguistic variation, learner interlanguage, and level-appropriate lexical and grammatical complexity, as defined by a given proficiency level, such as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Therefore, a prospective teacher who receives an AI-generated dialogue or vocabulary list must be able to assess not only whether the language is grammatically correct, but whether it is idiomatically natural, culturally situated, and calibrated to their learners' developmental stage (Liu 2025).

Treating AI literacy as a professional competency implies that its development should be made visible, assessable, and subject to the same kind of structured feedback and iterative improvement as other core competencies in the teacher education curriculum, such as classroom management or assessment design. With this perspective, this article will examine a potential outlook on AI usage declarations as a concrete means to observe, over time, the development of critical AI engagement among their trainees.

3 Study Overview and Key Findings

The empirical study underpinning this article analysed AI usage declarations submitted by 30 prospective Italian language teachers as part of weekly lesson-planning assignments for Italian as a foreign language in a graduate-level online Master's course titled 'Teaching Methodologies, Language Technologies and Teaching Materials' at the University of Urbino Carlo Bo. The declarations were inserted at the end of assignments as a mandatory paragraph to be submitted together with teachers' production. The analysis of these declarations yielded a taxonomy of six distinct categories of AI usage: text refinement and editing, linguistic support, content generation and ideation, pedagogical decision-making and verification, research and resource discovery, and structural and organisational support. This section builds on these six principles to establish design models for such declarations, resulting in a template that translates these concepts into practical instruments for teacher education programs.

3.1 From Compliance to Metacognitive Reflection

The first and most fundamental principle follows directly from Section 2.2: an AI declaration should prompt reflection on professional growth, not merely register the binary fact that AI was used, thereby reducing transparency to a matter of institutional record-keeping. A more productive design incorporates what might be called a 'before and after' reflection, a brief narrative account of how the prospective teacher's initial conception of a lesson evolved over the course of their interaction with the AI tool. This element asks the teacher to articulate, in their own words, whether the AI made them reconsider their approach to a particular language target or whether it largely confirmed decisions they had already made independently. The value of this element lies precisely in its narrative framing: since such sections anticipate qualitative, open-ended answers, they require the teacher to trace a process and, in doing so, demand the kind of reflective distance from one's own planning that is central to professional metacognition.

A related design element addresses the dynamic, evolving nature of AI's role throughout a single planning task. Static usage categories can obscure the fact that a teacher's relationship with an AI tool may shift substantially within a single planning episode. A prospective teacher may begin by using AI for content generation, only to find the output too generic or culturally unspecific for their intended learners, and subsequently pivot to using the tool in a way tailored to specific activities. Declarations should therefore include a space for teachers to explicitly note such shifts, recognise when a given use of AI is not serving pedagogical goals, and adjust their approach accordingly.

3.2 Describing AI Involvement

The second principle targets a related failure mode: vagueness. Even a non-binary declaration that simply states 'AI was used to help plan this lesson' offers little diagnostic value if it isn't structured to elicit specifics. The study's taxonomy provides a ready-made, empirically grounded framework for inquiring which categories were engaged and to what degree, along with an example and a specification of the AI chatbot used **[tab. 1]**.

Table 1 Exemplifications of AI descriptors and related exemplifications

Usage Category	Specific Element to Disclose	Illustrative Example
Editing and polishing	Surface-level grammar corrections applied to teacher-authored material	"*Grammarly* was used to proofread the final worksheet instructions for clarity"
Linguistic support	Grading of language, scaffolding, or generation of vocabulary lists	"I used *Gemini* to generate a list of contextual synonyms appropriate for B2-level learners"
Content generation	Creation of texts, dialogues, or cultural scenarios from scratch	"I prompted *Perplexity* to draft a short dialogue simulating a café interaction"
Pedagogical decisions	Sourcing of activity ideas, curricular mapping, or instructional design choices	"I asked *Gemini* for several alternative ways to structure a jigsaw reading task"
Research and discovery	Locating authentic resources, cultural information, or idiomatic expressions	"I used *Gemini* to identify commonly used idioms in a specific regional variety"
Structural support	Formatting, template design, or organisation of rubrics and materials	"I used *ChatGPT* to reformat grading criteria into a clean, organised table"

The benefits of providing such descriptors are twofold. For teacher educators, it transforms a corpus of free-text declarations into data that can be compared, aggregated, and tracked over time, allowing programs to monitor patterns of AI use across cohorts and to identify, for instance, whether reliance on AI for pedagogical decision-making is increasing or decreasing as a program's AI literacy curriculum develops. For prospective teachers, being asked to categorise their own AI use according to a structured taxonomy requires them to become aware of the qualitative difference between, for example, using AI to polish the wording of a worksheet and using AI to generate the pedagogical logic of an activity from scratch.

3.3 Evidence of Adaptation and Human Judgment

The third principle addresses the 'proof of expertise' function of an AI declaration: the requirement that prospective teachers provide concrete, specific evidence that they actively intervened in, corrected, or adapted AI-generated output, the kind of augmentative engagement described in Section 2.1, which binary disclosures cannot capture.

One mechanism for eliciting this evidence is what might be called a 'rejected suggestions' log, a section of the declaration in which prospective teachers are asked to identify at least one specific instance in which the AI proposed something that they explicitly

declined to use, along with a stated pedagogical rationale for that rejection. For example, a prospective teacher planning a lesson for beginning learners might report that the AI suggested activities focused on communicative functions beyond the appropriate proficiency level for their class, and that it provided an alternative activity suitable for students' competence. This element cannot be satisfied through vague or generic language; it requires the prospective teacher to demonstrate, through a specific example, that they possess and exercise the disciplinary expertise, in this case knowledge of appropriate lexical complexity for a given learner level, needed to identify a shortcoming in the AI's output.

A complementary element addresses cultural and intercultural elements used as language materials. GenAI tools frequently produce content that reflects default cultural assumptions, for instance, an American or generically Anglophone frame, regardless of the language context. A prospective teacher planning to teach in a specific national or institutional context must therefore often actively modify AI-generated content to align with the cultural and linguistic specifics of their actual learners. Asking teachers to document this process of contextual adaptation in their AI declarations serves two purposes: it provides further concrete evidence of critical mediation, and it cultivates an explicit awareness of the cultural and contextual limitations inherent in generative AI output, an awareness that is itself a component of the AI literacy competency discussed in Section 2.3.

Another element might take the form of what could be called a pedagogical affirmation: a statement, to be completed by the prospective teacher, confirming that the core learning objectives and the fundamental assessment approach for the lesson were conceived independently, prior to any AI consultation, and that AI was subsequently used, if at all, in service of those independently determined objectives (Southworth et al. 2023). It is important to note that such an affirmation functions as a genuine point of reflection, consistent with the non-punitive framing developed throughout this article.

3.4 Institutional Dialogue and Iterative Refinement

The fifth principle concerns the institutional context within which AI usage declarations are situated. Teacher education programs should treat AI usage declarations as living instruments that generate an ongoing, iterative dialogue between prospective teachers and teacher educators about the appropriate role of AI in language teaching practice.

In practical terms, this implies that declarations collected across a cohort or successive cohorts should be periodically reviewed in aggregate to identify emerging patterns, whether new use cases or recurring points of uncertainty or disagreement among trainees

regarding the appropriate boundaries of AI use in pedagogical decision-making (Daher 2025). These aggregate patterns should, in turn, inform periodic revision of the guidelines and prompts that structure the declarations themselves, creating a feedback loop in which institutional guidance evolves in response to authentic, empirically documented practice.

3.5 In Synthesis: A Reflective Declaration Journal

The five preceding principles converge on an instructional tool that teacher education programs can adapt for their own use. In practice, it suggested that teacher education programs embed an AI reflection journal in their curricula, reframing the AI usage declaration as part of the trainee's broader teaching portfolio rather than as a separate compliance document. Such a template might be organised around four core components:

1. A part on metacognitive growth, asking the prospective teacher to reflect on how the process of collaborating with AI altered, challenged, or expanded their own understanding of language task design, as illustrated in Section 3.1.
2. A taxonomy of use, in which the prospective teacher identifies which of the six usage categories were engaged for a given planning task and to what degree, whether minor, moderate, or major, providing an at-a-glance summary that puts to practice the categories presented in Section 3.2.
3. A curation and critical adaptation section, in which the prospective teacher details what the AI's output got wrong, overcomplicated, or missed, and describes concrete changes made to ensure the output was pedagogically sound for the specific learner population in question, as discussed in Section 3.3.
4. A pedagogical rationale, addressing why AI was introduced at a particular stage of the design process and how its use was intended to serve the learners in question, operationalising the explicit justification principles developed in Section 3.2, in compliance with institutional guidelines (Section 3.4).

4 Conclusion

After establishing a theoretical framework that situates AI usage declarations at the intersection of the augmentation-substitution distinction in human-AI collaboration, the article has discussed the pedagogical function of transparency as a vehicle for metacognitive reflection and the emerging construct of AI literacy as a professional

competency for language teachers. The final part has translated the study's findings into a structured set of best practices for drafting AI usage declarations, organized around principles of reflective framing, evidence of human adaptation, explicit pedagogical justification, and institutional dialogue. Presented in this integrated form, the principles for designing AI declarations could be included in a teaching portfolio entry to be embedded in teacher training courses. They would serve as tools that document and support the trainee's professional development into the kind of critical, adaptive, and independent judgment that the integration of GenAI into language teaching most urgently requires. The study has lacked an analysis of the long-term implications of the proposed guidelines for teacher training programs, as well as empirical evidence of their effectiveness for teaching practices and the language curriculum developed in line with the disclosed AI use. Hence, future research could concentrate on the empirical evidence emerging from concrete applications of AI statements and analyse their diachronic impact on teachers' lesson plans and on the development of the critical skills necessary for a human-AI class-planning paradigm.

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