


# Chapter 8


## Empowering Learner Autonomy for Developing Writing Skills Through AI–Enhanced Reflective Journals

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This study aims to investigate the impact of traditional versus reflective journals, enhanced with artificial intelligence (AI), on developing learner autonomy in writing skills among EFL learners. Following a quasi-experimental design, the data collection involved 36 college students in an English preparatory program. A demographic information questionnaire and the Learner Autonomy Scale (LAS) were used to collect the data. While the control group kept traditional reflective journals after each writing task, the experimental group wrote AI-assisted reflective journals using AI chatbot software for five weeks. The findings revealed that traditional reflective journaling had a negligible impact on students' autonomy. However, the implementation of AI-enhanced reflective journals showed a noticeable change in students' self-evaluation skills.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Writing has an essential place in English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching and learning since it serves as a versatile and indispensable tool, crucial for facilitating global communication (Marlina & Giri, 2014), conveying diverse messages (Celce-Murcia, 2001), and supporting various objectives, including professional, academic, and social contexts (Cook, 2014). Improving writing skills is correlated with overall language development (Hyland, 2003), as it supports the development of other skills, such as listening, speaking, and reading (Javed et al., 2013). Regarding the development of writing skills, learner autonomy plays a significant role. It enables learners to develop personalized learning strategies that they can adapt to align with their specific needs and interests (Dam, 1995). It can also boost learners' motivation and eagerness for learning by allowing them to make decisions about their language proficiency (Littlejohn, 1985), as notably developing abilities such as self-discipline and responsibility can enhance their efficacy as productive learners when writing. Regarding the fostering of learner autonomy, reflective journal writing is essential. For instance, keeping a reflective journal provides an opportunity to foster learner autonomy by encouraging learners to take charge of their learning paths independently (Çakıcı, 2015). It is a useful tool that helps learners engage in reflective thinking as they assess their thoughts, activities, and experiences (Kim & Park, 2019). The use of AI-supported reflective tools in developing EFL writing skills may offer a range of opportunities that can benefit both learners and instructors. These tools can provide instant feedback as well as individual guidance on how to use certain words or phrases correctly in a sentence; hence, they are helpful in developing students' writing skills (Okonkwo, 2011). Moreover, they can increase student participation throughout their time in class by providing an all-inclusive and dynamic writing platform (Sharma & Sharma, 2022), which retains learners' interest and boosts their motivation for writing.

While developing learner autonomy can help learners improve their writing skills, several potential issues must be addressed. To begin with, learners may encounter challenges when they lack the ability to make independent decisions. Moreover, their autonomy is unlikely to develop without learners' desire to take responsibility for their education (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012). According to Yildiz and Yucedal (2020), the absence of motivation and interest is another factor that hinders the development of learner autonomy. Considering that developing learner autonomy relies on the presence of motivation in learners, without motivation, learners are likely to experience failure in their efforts to become autonomous. Another key issue is that some learners may lack the confidence to engage in more active learning, which can lead to a passive and dependent learning style. Considering the aforementioned problems, AI-enhanced reflective journals may provide possible effective solutions

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