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The Impact of AI-powered Assistants and Automated Writing Corrective Feedback on Learners' Engagement in Writing

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ABSTRACT:

The current research aims to uncover the role of AI-powered Assistants and Automated Writing Corrective Feedback (AWCF) in fostering EFL learners' engagement in writing. Large Language Models (LLMs) have increased learners' performance in writing by offering unprecedented support including generating ideas and providing corrective feedback. It is hypothesized that AI assistants and Automated Writing Corrective Feedback increase learners' writing engagement. To test the hypothesis, this research was conducted through the quantitative descriptive method by administering a five-point Likert scale questionnaire to 150 third-year students enrolled in the Department of English at 8 May 1945 University-Guelma (Algeria). The results revealed that AI-powered assistants have substantially raised learners' engagement in writing. However, there is a potential risk of overreliance on AI applications, which threatens academic integrity and undermines learners' critical thinking and creativity.

Keywords:
AI-powered Assistants, Automated Writing Corrective Feedback (AWCF), Large Language Models, Writing Engagement.

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Introduction

Engagement in writing is essential as it enhances the foundational skills learners need to thrive academically in Higher Education. Active involvement in the writing process improves foreign language learners' critical thinking and problem solving. Recently, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has changed the nature of education substantially, especially in academic writing. Emerging technologies have provided learners with the opportunity to interact with digital tools, thereby fostering deeper engagement in writing. Specifically, AI-powered assistants have significantly changed learners' style in writing by improving both language and content. Large Language Models (LLMs) have facilitated EFL learners' generation of ideas in foreign language writing either in online or onsite contexts. For example, learners increasingly rely on Generative AI tools such as ChatGPT, Gemini, and perplexity to produce written texts. Accordingly, Natural Language Generation (NLG) has increased learners' performance and quality in writing. They have offered unprecedented assistance to EFL learners by generating ideas and providing corrective feedback.

This research paper endeavors to investigate whether AI-powered assistants and Automated Writing Corrective Feedback (AWCF) can increase EFL learners' engagement in writing. Within this scope, this research addresses the following two main research questions:

-Can AI-powered Assistants and Automated Writing Corrective Feedback (AWCF) increase EFL learners' engagement in Writing?

-Which one is better: human feedback or Automated Writing Corrective Feedback (AWCF)?

1. Literature Review

1.1. Engagement in Writing

Engagement is defined as "a condition of emotional, social, and intellectual readiness to learn characterized by curiosity, participation, and the drive to learn more" (Abla & Fraumeni, 2019, p. 2). It is viewed as "a psychological process, specifically, the attention, interest, investment, and effort students expend in the work of learning" (Marks, 2000, pp. 154-155). The word 'involvement' is used interchangeably with engagement to refer to "the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (Astin, 1984). Overall, engagement is about "how involved or interested students appear to be in their learning and how connected they are to their classes, their institutions" (Axelson & Flick, 2010, p. 38). In short, engagement is to be involved in a class and to show motivation and interest in learning a specific

subject. Accordingly, motivation and engagement are highly interrelated since motivation can increase engagement (Lavoué et al., 2021).

Engagement has three main dimensions: behavioral, affective (emotional), and cognitive engagement (Fredricks et al., 2004). Behavioral engagement is the active reaction to learning activities and is indicated by communication, participation, and interaction. It reflects learners' involvement and attention. Affective engagement denotes emotional investment in learning; it is indicated by positive response to the learning context, classmates, and teachers (confidence, positive attitudes, and motivation…). Cognitive engagement includes mental effort in learning and is indicated by in-depth learning, comprehension, and high scores in tests. Another important dimension is social engagement (Wang et al., 2017) which indicates learners' interaction, support and collaboration with each other. Moreover, Ives et al. (2022) maintained that teachers' support and guidance are needed in all the writing stages: prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing to foster learners' engagement and participation in the writing process. They further stressed the effective role of culturally-relevant instruction in raising learners' engagement in writing.

Boubih et al. (2023) investigated the factors that influence learners' engagement in Middle and High Schools in Morocco. They found that engagement is affected by positive teacher-learner relationships, relevance of schoolwork, peer support, and future goals. They further claimed that females are more engaged than males. Furthermore, learners who have positive attitudes towards the writing class often show greater engagement; however, those who have negative attitudes towards it are more likely to feel disengaged in writing. Learners who struggle to maintain interest and effort during classroom sessions because of the lack of motivation and interest are usually considered as low achievers. In this respect, researchers found a direct link between high engagement and high grades or better performance (Bergdahl et al. 2019; Marks, 2000).

1.2. Corrective Feedback and AI-powered Writing Assistants

Feedback plays a pivotal role in shaping EFL learners' improvement in writing. It is considered as "the listener's or reader's response given to the learner's speech or writing" (Dulay et al., 1982, p. 34). Feedback is "any of the numerous procedures that are used to tell a learner if an instructional response is right or wrong" (Kulhavy, 1977, p. 211). It is also defined as:

> [A]ny information about a performance that learners can use to improve their performance or learning. Feedback might come from teachers, peers,

> or the task itself. It may include information on where the learner is, where the learner is going, or what steps should be taken and strategies employed to get there. (Lipnevich et al., 2013)

From the previous definitions, feedback is information provided to learners regarding their performance on a particular task, aimed at improving their skills, knowledge, and understanding. The most common form of feedback in language classes is corrective feedback. Based on errors' correction, corrective feedback facilitates improvement in learners' accuracy by providing them with directions and guidelines (Ur, 1999). Corrective feedback is also called negative feedback, as opposed to positive feedback. Unlike positive feedback which denotes praise and encouragement, negative feedback is given to students to specify their errors in writing.

Engagement in writing necessitates engagement with teachers' feedback first. Taguba and Plata (2025) argued that learners should engage with teachers' feedback to improve their writing. This engagement is cognitive, behavioral, and affective. Cognitive engagement with feedback is the ability to comprehend and apply feedback. Behavioral engagement implies learners' reaction to feedback, while affective engagement encompasses learners' feelings towards feedback (Chong, 2020). The emergence of AI technologies have fostered learners' writing proficiency and changed the process of feedback significantly. Learners have used different AI-powered assistants either to generate new ideas and sentences through the use of Automated Writing Evaluation (AWE) and Automatic Text Generation (ATG), or to ask for feedback and evaluation by using Automated Writing Corrective Feedback (AWCF). Thus, these technologies have resulted in learners' overreliance, diminished autonomy, and limited creativity (Ding et al., 2024).

AI-powered assistants have improved academic writing significantly. Fitria (2021) investigated the use of 'grammarly' in writing, she found that it increased learners' writing performance. Burkhard (2022) conducted a survey to 365 students to explore their perception of AI tools. He found that their attitudes ranged from non-users, limited users, and general users. He further confirmed that the use of AI tools can lead to unintentional academic dishonesty. Raheem et al. (2023) explored the impact of AI applications, namely Qillbot, Grammarly, and ChatGPT on English academic writing. They concluded that these applications helped learners produce high-quality writing. However, they resulted on learners' overreliance on them and lack of creativity and critical thinking. They further insisted that AI technologies cannot replace human judgement and creative

thinking. Khalifa and Elbadawy (2024) described AI as 'an essential productivity tool' that should be integrated in academic writing. Within this scope, Laher (2025) differentiated between *AI-assisted* and *AI-generated content* by explaining that:

> AI-assisted content refers to work that is predominantly written by an individual but has been improved with the aid of AI tools. For example, an author might use AI to assist with grammar checks, enhance sentence clarity, or provide style suggestions… AI-generated content is produced by the AI itself, typically but not always with little to no input from the individual author…This raises ethical concerns, especially regarding authorship and originality. (pp. 155-156)

As explained in Laher's quotation, there is a difference between texts written by humans and corrected by AI, and those entirely generated by AI. Consequently, the issue of content creation may result in lack of originality and academic dishonesty which is a serious issue that needs to be solved.

2. Research Methodology and Design

The current research adopts a mixed-method approach to investigate the impact of AI-powered assistants and Automated Writing Corrective Feedback (AWCF) on learners' engagement in writing. It is hypothesized that EFL learners' use of AI-powered Assistants and AWCF increases their engagement in writing. To test the hypothesis, the quantitative approach was adopted through the administration of an online five-point Likert scale questionnaire targeting one hundred fifty (N =150) third-year students enrolled in the Department of English, 8 May 1945 University-Guelma (Algeria). As reported by Creswell (2014), the structured questionnaire can be used to test the hypothesis. To reach this goal, a random sampling technique was followed to ensure the generalization of the results and reduce selection bias. A high level of internal consistency exists among the items as Cronbach's Alpha is between 0.8 and 0.9 ($\alpha = 0.893$) as shown below:

Table n° 01: Cronbach's Alpha for Questionnaires' Items

Number of Items	Average Covariance	Cronbach's Alpha
16	1.62	0.893

To ensure results' corroboration through methodological triangulation, the qualitative approach was adopted through qualitative content analysis of ten (10) Master's Dissertations by analyzing mainly lexis, grammar and syntax in

students' paragraphs. The aim of using content analysis as an additional research tool is to uncover structural patterns related to the use of AI-powered assistants and Automated Writing Corrective Feedback (AWCF).

3. Results and Discussion

Quantitative data from the five-point Likert scale questionnaire is displayed in Table n° 02. It is observed that participants' agreement continuum ranges from Strongly Disagree (SD) to Strongly Agree (SA). Numerical values were assigned as follows: Strongly Disagree =1, Disagree =2, Neither Agree nor Disagree =3, Agree =4, Strongly Agree =5. Numerical data was treated at the interval level by using descriptive statistics. To assess responses' variability and consistency, the Mean (M) and the Standard Deviation (SD) were counted for each item. Nearly all the items have received a high agreement (either Agree or Strongly Agree), with mean scores ranging from 4.11 to 5, and Standard Deviation scores varying between 0.30 to 0.50, which reflects consistency in the participants' responses and a strong consensus on the content of the items. However, for item 1, agreement was moderate (M = 3.79; SD = 0.79) since there is a deviation from the overall range due to disagreement. For item 16, agreement was low (M = 3.44; SD = 1.56) because of disagreement and the neutral pattern.

As shown in item 1 which received a moderate agreement, 13.33% of the informants strongly disagreed that AI assistants have increased their engagement in writing. Conversely, 86.66% of the informants agreed or strongly agreed with the same statement, which aligns with the findings of Chan et al.' (2024) who confirmed that generative AI has increased learners' engagement in writing. Furthermore, the entire sample (100%) acknowledged that AI assistants have increased their motivation to write as well as their performance in writing. This corresponds to the results reported by Nikitina and Ishchenko (2024) who conducted their research in China to investigate the impact of Large Language Models (LLMs) on essay writing. High performance in writing is due mainly to AI-generated feedback that has contributed to the improvement of learners' linguistic competence by enhancing grammar, vocabulary, cohesion, coherence, and mitigating the effect of the first (Arabic) and second language (French), as confirmed by 100% of the participants. This concurs with the study conducted by Karagoz (2025) who confirmed that AI is excellent in fostering lexical and grammatical competence. Based on the aforementioned statistical results, we confirm our hypothesis that AI assistants increase learners' writing engagement.

Table n° 02: Results of Students' Five-point Likert Scale Questionnaire

Questionnaire's Items	SD	D	N	A	SA	M	SD

1-AI-powered assistants have increased my engagement in writing	20	0	0	101	29	3.79	0.79
2-AI-powered assistants have raised my motivation to write	0	0	0	67	83	4.56	0.50
3-AI-powered assistants have improved my vocabulary and grammar	0	0	0	0	150	5	0
4-AI-powered assistants have influenced my cohesion and coherence positively	0	0	0	28	122	4.81	0.39
5-AI-powered assistants have limited French interference	0	0	0	48	102	4.68	0.46
6-AI-powered assistants have limited Arabic interference	0	0	0	133	17	4.11	0.30
7-AI-powered assistants have provided me with immediate guidance and support	0	0	0	110	40	4.27	0.45
8-AI-powered assistants' support is better than teachers' support since the former is instant	0	0	0	55	95	4.63	0.48
9-Automated Writing Corrective Feedback (AWCF) is better than human feedback because AWCF is instant	0	0	3	127	20	4.11	0.34
10-Automated Writing Corrective Feedback (AWCF) is better than human feedback because there is no anxiety and shyness	0	0	0	0	150	5	0
11-Large Language Models (LLMs) like ChatGPT have contributed to high scores in writing	0	0	0	117	33	4.22	0.33
12-Unlike teachers' and peers' feedback, AI-powered assistants cannot provide me with emotional support	0	0	0	89	61	4.41	0.49
13-Self-assessment is influenced negatively by using AI-powered assistants	0	0	0	46	104	4.69	0.45
14-Peer collaboration is influenced negatively by using AI-powered assistants	0	0	6	105	39	4.22	0.38
15-AI-powered assistants have resulted in overreliance on automated digital support	0	0	0	74	76	4.51	0.49
16-Large Language Models (LLMs) like ChatGPT have increased plagiarism	12	60	2	2	74	3.44	1.56

All the informants maintained that the support of both AI-powered assistants and Automated Writing Corrective Feedback (AWCF) is better than teachers' support because AI offers immediate guidance and reduces feelings of anxiety and shyness. Nonetheless, the whole population asserted that these assistants lack emotional support, which was confirmed by Nikitina and

Ishchenko (2024) who questioned AI's role vis-à-vis teachers' role. Specifically, they wondered whether AI is supporting or replacing the teacher. They concluded that AI cannot replace the teacher due to a considerable lack of interaction, emotional intelligence, and empathy. Hence, to answer the second research question, we cannot say that human feedback is better than Automated Writing Corrective Feedback (AWCF) or vice versa. Adopting a hybrid approach by integrating both types of feedback can be highly effective.

The majority of the participants (96%) maintained that peer collaboration is negatively affected by AI assistants, while 4% were neutral. This implies that AI is replacing peers because learners rarely collaborate with peers when they use AI tools. As proposed by Schmutz et al. (2024), there is an urgent need to redefine collaboration in the digital age because of the emergence of human-AI teams. Evidently, not only peers' support is underestimated but also self-reliance and self-assessment. Overreliance on AI-powered assessment and automated feedback can certainly diminish self-assessment due to laziness and lack of self-reliance. In this regard, the whole population indicated that automated digital support has resulted in overreliance on AI tools. This is consistent with the findings of Ding et al. (2024) who asserted that learners are suffering from overreliance on AI technologies.

As indicated in item 16 which received a low agreement, 49.33% of the respondents agreed that LLMs have contributed to academic dishonesty. In contrast, 48% of the informants disagreed that LLMs have increased plagiarism, while 1.33% remained neutral. In this regard, numerous scholars examined the issue of plagiarism as a potential consequence of integrating new technologies in academic writing. For example, the results of research conducted by Rogerson and McCarthy (2017) confirmed that online text generation tools have facilitated plagiarism. They further explained that some textual features- referred to as 'linguistic markers'- can serve as indicators of automatic paraphrasing, which can help teachers discover plagiarism. Similarly, Prentice and Kinden (2018) analyzed students' essays to investigate the use of online paraphrasing tools. They concluded that students are struggling to preserve academic integrity, and that anti-plagiarism software such as Turnitin is not always effective in detecting plagiarized content. In the same line, Babu (2024) argued that it is hard to reveal plagiarism in AI-assisted content generation although AI can be used to detect it through different tools such as: Turnitin, Grammarly, and Unicheck. To deter academic dishonesty, Hutson (2024) advised teachers to focus on assignments that encourage problem solving, critical thinking, and creativity.

Qualitative content analysis of students' paragraphs from Master's dissertations' has yielded the following qualitative data:

Table n° 03: Structural Patterns in Master's Dissertations

Patterns	Observation	Examples
Lexis	-Complicated vocabulary	-...there is a kind of ***internal censorship*** at work... -...points out ***the fluid*** and adaptive nature of... -There exists a ***discernible*** gap in understanding how... -***Curated*** content ensures that... -....exhibit ***uneven*** confidence -The interpretation that emerges is ***one of convergence***, as students' stated needs align closely with the affordances of these tools.
Grammar	-Absence of grammatical errors -Extensive use of gerunds	-..., ***highlighting*** its role in daily interaction. -..., ***suggesting*** that it enhances learners' ability...
Syntax	-Excessive use of 'and' and 'but' -Long sentences	-....highlights the frequency and importance of spoken communication in daily interactions ***and*** suggests that speaking is not only a language skill ***but*** also a fundamental part of humans' social behavior. -Overall, digital reading is not just about the consumption of information ***but*** also about the active participation ***and*** exploration that it enables, ultimately enhancing the overall reading experience. -The study reinforces the need to place speaking at the center of language education and to explore how these tools might support, not replace, teacher-led instruction.

As displayed in Table n° 03, students' use of AI-powered assistants and AWCF is apparent from their Master's Dissertation writing style. Lexical patterns reflect students' use of complicated vocabulary and AI-generated language. The use of AI-powered grammar correction tools is evident in the extensive use of gerunds and the absence of grammatical errors. Syntactic patterns reveal a

tendency towards an excessive use of long sentences, and a recurrent utilization of 'and' and 'but'. The observed structural patterns validate the quantitative results collected from the students' questionnaire: students' writing style has improved thanks to the use of AI-powered assistants; however, it has led to overreliance on automated paraphrasing and AI-generated vocabulary. This implies that students' engagement in writing has increased because of their reliance on AI support, not because of their cognitive engagement and intrinsic motivation. Writing has become an easy task done completely by machine-assisted tools; hence, students' motivation to engage in writing activities has increased. In this respect, students' role is solely limited to giving instructions to AI which is always ready to help and provide feedback. Consequently, we may now speak of *AI-learner collaboration* as an alternative to traditional teacher-learner collaboration.

In the age of AI, deterring academic dishonesty has become increasingly challenging; therefore, teachers have to raise learners' awareness of the benefits and potential drawbacks of AI-powered assistants and automatic feedback systems. A new definition of plagiarism is needed to reinforce integrity and direct students towards an effective and responsible use of AI-powered tools. Automatic tools should be considered as supportive tools that should not violate ethics and exclude the humanistic educational dimension. Accordingly, students' human touch is a reflection of their personal insights and emotional engagement.

Conclusion

Overall, the study reveals that AI-powered assistants boost EFL learners' engagement and enhance their linguistic competence. Nonetheless, this research raises critical concerns, including emotional support, lack of self-assessment, limited critical thinking, overreliance, and risks of plagiarism. Consequently, there is a need for a hybrid feedback model that mixes human insights and guidance with automated feedback. To diminish overreliance, learners should be encouraged to use AI technologies primarily for correction and revision rather than for generating texts. Finally, this study highlights the following pedagogical implications:

-The teacher should integrate cooperative learning in AI-assisted environments to raise peers collaboration.

-Learners can develop their critical thinking by comparing peers or teachers' feedback with AI feedback, which can foster self-assessment and self-reflection.

-The teacher should prioritize in-class activities over homework to achieve a more authentic assessment of the learners' level.

-Automated assessment can help teachers personalize instruction and digitalize learning.

Although the five-point Likert scale questionnaire has yielded valuable quantitative data, future research should incorporate corpus analysis to compare pre-AI and post-AI texts written by EFL learners. Corpus analysis can help researchers specify linguistic features in learners' writing and identify changes in grammar, lexis, morphology, and syntax.

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