The Lingua Spectrum Journal has been officially included in the list of recommended national scientific publications by the Higher Attestation Commission (HAC), according to Resolution No. 366/5, dated January 4, 2025.

ENHANCING LEARNER AUTONOMY THROUGH ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION

Asal Shukhratovna KARIMBAEVA
Trainee-teacher,
Karimovaas02@icloud.com

Abstract. *Learner autonomy has become a key priority in modern English language education as students are increasingly expected to take responsibility for their own learning. With the rapid development of Artificial Intelligence (AI), teachers now have new opportunities to support learners in becoming more independent, reflective, and self-directed. This paper explores how AI-powered tools such as adaptive learning platforms, intelligent tutoring systems, conversational chatbots, and automated feedback applications - can encourage and strengthen learner autonomy. It also discusses the mechanisms through which AI promotes independent learning, including personalized instruction, support for self-regulation, and immediate feedback. While the benefits are significant, challenges such as over-dependence on technology, data privacy concerns, and unequal access must also be considered. The paper concludes with practical suggestions for integrating AI into university English programs in ways that genuinely enhance learner autonomy rather than replace human instruction.*

Keywords: *Artificial Intelligence, learner autonomy, adaptive learning, self-regulated learning, automated feedback, conversational AI, English language teaching, digital literacy, higher education, independent learning.*

The idea of learner autonomy, broadly understood as the learner's ability to take charge of their own learning, has long been associated with effective language education. Researchers such as Holec and Benson argue that autonomy helps learners become more flexible, motivated, and capable of lifelong learning (Holec, 1981) (Benson, 2011). This concept has gained even greater relevance today, as students navigate a rapidly changing digital world. Artificial Intelligence has introduced a wide range of tools and platforms that offer new opportunities for students to work independently, monitor their progress, and make informed decisions about their learning.

One of the most significant contributions of AI to learner autonomy is personalization. Traditional classroom teaching often follows a single curriculum for all students, regardless of their individual learning styles or needs. AI-driven adaptive learning systems, however, can adjust content automatically based on a learner's performance. Platforms analyze how quickly a learner completes tasks, what types of mistakes they make, and which skills require more attention (Godwin-Jones, 2019). As a result, students receive individualized learning pathways that are shaped by their own progress rather than a predetermined plan. This kind of personalization encourages students to engage more actively with their learning because they feel that the content directly responds to their strengths and weaknesses (Lu, 2022).

Another important way AI supports autonomy is by helping learners develop self-regulation. Effective autonomous learners must be able to plan their learning, monitor

their performance, and evaluate their results. AI can assist at each stage. Many digital platforms offer tools that help learners set goals, track their achievements, and reflect on their progress (Godwin-Jones, 2019). For example, learners might use a dashboard that shows how many new vocabulary items they have mastered or how their writing accuracy has improved over time. Instead of relying solely on the teacher, students learn to interpret this information themselves and make decisions about what to study next. This process strengthens metacognitive awareness, which is essential for long-term autonomous learning.

Immediate feedback is another major advantage of AI in promoting autonomy. In traditional classroom settings, students often have to wait for a teacher to review their assignments or listen to their spoken output. AI systems, however, can analyze writing or speech instantly. Writing assistants provide corrections for grammar, vocabulary, coherence, and even style. Speech recognition tools offer feedback on pronunciation, intonation, and fluency. Because this feedback is available at any time, learners can repeat tasks, revise their work, and practice independently without feeling dependent on the teacher. This cycle of trial, feedback, and improvement helps students internalize responsibility for their own progress.

In addition to these features, conversational AI has become an especially powerful tool for independent learning. Modern chatbots can simulate real-life communication, allowing learners to practice speaking or writing in English without fear of embarrassment or anxiety. Many students feel more comfortable experimenting with language when they are interacting with an AI agent rather than a teacher or peer (Zawacki-Richter, 2019). They can ask questions, request explanations, or practice specific situations such as job interviews or travel conversations. The constant availability of AI makes it possible for learners to practice whenever they choose, which supports the development of autonomous study habits.

AI tools have also expanded access to independent reading, listening, and pronunciation practice. Recommended systems suggest articles or videos that match a learner's level and interests, making extensive reading and listening more enjoyable and accessible. Speech-recognition technology allows learners to compare their pronunciation with native models and receive detailed suggestions for improvement. These functions not only help learners build linguistic skills but also encourage them to take initiative and explore materials on their own.

Despite these clear advantages, the use of AI to support learner autonomy comes with challenges. One potential risk is that learners may become too dependent on technology. If students rely heavily on AI-generated suggestions, they may not fully develop the critical thinking and problem-solving skills needed for independent learning. Teachers therefore play an important role in helping students use AI tools responsibly and thoughtfully. Another concern relates to data privacy. AI-based platforms collect large amounts of user data, and institutions must ensure that this information is stored and used ethically (Zawacki-Richter, 2019). Access and equity issues also pose challenges, as not all students have equal access to devices or stable internet connections. Without proper institutional support, AI may inadvertently increase educational inequalities.

These challenges highlight the continuing importance of teachers in AI-supported learning environments. Teachers guide learners in choosing appropriate AI tools, interpreting feedback, and understanding the limitations of automated systems. They help students reflect on their learning and integrate AI-based tasks with broader communicative and academic activities. Teachers also play a crucial role in fostering digital literacy and ethical awareness. Rather than replacing teachers, AI should be seen as a partner that can enrich the learning environment and free teachers to focus on higher-level pedagogical goals.

In conclusion, Artificial Intelligence offers powerful opportunities to enhance learner autonomy in English language education. By providing personalized learning experiences, supporting self-regulation, delivering immediate feedback, and enabling independent practice across all language skills, AI empowers learners to take charge of their own development (Lu, 2022). At the same time, thoughtful implementation is essential to address challenges related to dependence, privacy, and access. When used responsibly and combined with strong teacher guidance, AI has the potential to cultivate not only improved language proficiency but also the autonomy and critical thinking skills that learners need to succeed in the digital age.

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