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Developing Students' Self-Determination through Integration of Generative AI in English for Academic Purposes Courses

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Abstract

As Generative AI transforms higher education, AI literacy and academic literacy have emerged as essential competencies for university students. Yet, limited research has explored how GenAI-enhanced tasks in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses address students' psychological needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy subsumed under the self-determination theory. This mixed-methods study investigated how GenAI tasks integrated with AI literacy instruction fulfilled these three needs among EAP students across four universities in Hong Kong. Drawing on pre- and post-surveys from over 200 participants and semi-structured interviews with 19 participants, the research revealed that participants reported moderate gains in relatedness and competence but they experienced substantial increases in autonomy. This presentation focuses on the interview findings derived from thematic analysis, which identified six key themes: enhanced AI literacy (including increased familiarity with AI tools, improved prompting skills, heightened ethical awareness, and stronger critical evaluation abilities); moderate improvements in academic writing competence and social engagement; considerable growth in autonomy and self-efficacy; modest gains in cognitive-behavioural engagement; and the importance of human interaction and empathy in the learning process. These findings offer insights for educators and researchers seeking to design curricula and improve teaching practice that enhance student autonomy and shape institutional AI policies that support meaningful learning.

Keywords: Generative AI; Self-determination; English for Academic Purposes courses; Higher Education