



LOW-STAKES WRITING AS A PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGY TO MITIGATE AI OVERRELIANCE IN EFL WRITING: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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Abstract:

The increasing availability of AI-assisted writing tools has raised important pedagogical questions regarding student overreliance on AI and its potential impact on independent thinking and writing development in EFL contexts. This qualitative study explores Moroccan EFL students' perceptions of low-stakes writing as an AI-responsive pedagogical approach. That said, how low-stakes writing can function as a pedagogical tool for reducing AI overreliance in EFL classrooms. Low-stakes writing tasks were designed to emphasize idea generation, reflection, and meaning-making rather than accuracy or polished output. This investigation was guided by semi-structured interviews, reflective writing samples, and focus group discussions. A qualitative study was conducted with purposive sampling of 20 EFL University students at Ibn Tofail University. The findings were organized into 3 thematic areas: (1) low-stakes writing Reduced Writing Anxiety and Increased Willingness to Write, (2) Development of Learner Agency, and (3) Selective and Reflective Use of AI Tools. The study reveals that low-stakes writing can strengthen learner agency and encourage reflective, ethical engagement with AI in EFL writing instruction, especially as students reported using AI tools more selectively, primarily for language refinement and feedback after drafting, rather than as a substitute for thinking or authorship. This highlights the need for educators to design AI-responsive pedagogies that balance technological support with the cultivation of higher-order writing skills.

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1. Introduction

The explosive growth and widespread availability of AI-assisted writing tools, particularly generative AI systems like ChatGPT, have dramatically influenced writing practices in EFL contexts. Recent research has shown that these tools offer considerable benefits for language learners, including improved writing productivity, linguistic accuracy, and access to immediate feedback (Alwasidi & Al-Khalifah, 2025; Amoush & Alhosban, 2025; Moussa & Belhiah, 2024).

Nevertheless, despite these advantages, growing attention has been devoted to pedagogical challenges related to AI use in writing instruction. One of the primary concerns is student overreliance on AI, which may limit opportunities for independent thinking, idea generation, and the development of authentic authorial voice, and stifle learners potential (Neshkovska, 2025; Na *et al.*, 2025). Studies (e.g. Chankob, 2026) have revealed that while AI tools can support revision and language refinement, uncritical or excessive reliance may reduce learners' cognitive engagement with the writing process and this eventually can blur boundaries between assistance and substitution. These concerns are particularly relevant in EFL contexts, where students may be more inclined to depend on AI to compensate for perceived linguistic deficits.

In response to AI invasion, current studies have emphasized the need for instructional approaches that critically respond to AI generated language and feedback (Chankob, 2026; Amoush & Alhosban, 2025; Neshkovska, 2025). That said, AI-responsive pedagogies that do not simply regulate or restrict AI use, but instead redesign instructional practices to promote critical engagement, ethical awareness, and learner agency. Within this context, One promising yet underexplored approach is low-stakes writing which involves frequent, informal writing tasks. Low-stakes writing can serve as an AI-responsive pedagogy that prioritizes idea development, reflection, and meaning-making over grammatical accuracy or polished final products (Muborak, 2019). By minimizing evaluative pressure, low-stakes writing creates a learning space in which students are encouraged to generate ideas independently, experiment with language, and reflect on their thinking without immediate reliance on AI tools. Rather than positioning AI as the default solution for writing tasks, low-stakes writing delays or limits AI engagement, thereby fostering conditions in which learners can exercise agency and develop confidence in their own linguistic resources (Ruegg, 2023; Begum, 2025).

In AI-mediated writing environments, low-stakes writing can help reduce AI overreliance by encouraging students to first generate ideas on their own before consulting AI tools. Studies on learners' perceptions of AI in writing classrooms indicate that students value AI most when it complements, rather than replaces, their own thinking and authorship (Sumakul *et al.*, 2022; Na *et al.*, 2025). However, limited research

has examined how specific pedagogical practices, such as low-stakes writing, shape students' orientations toward AI use, particularly in EFL higher education contexts.

This study is situated in Moroccan EFL higher education, where AI-assisted writing tools are increasingly accessible, yet pedagogical guidance on their effective integration remains limited. Understanding students' perceptions of low-stakes writing in this context can provide valuable insights into how instructional design influences AI use, learner agency, and writing development. Accordingly, the purpose of this qualitative study is to explore Moroccan EFL university students' perceptions of low-stakes writing as an AI-responsive pedagogical approach, with particular attention to how such practices may reduce AI overreliance in EFL writing classrooms.

1.1 Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

- 1) How do Moroccan EFL students perceive low-stakes writing activities?
- 2) In what ways do students believe low-stakes writing influences their independent thinking?
- 3) How do students perceive the role of low-stakes writing in shaping their use of AI-assisted writing tools?

2. Literature Review

2.1. AI-Assisted Writing in EFL Contexts

The integration of AI-assisted writing tools, particularly generative AI such as ChatGPT, has gained increasing attention in EFL writing research. A growing body of studies highlights the potential of these tools to enhance writing productivity, linguistic accuracy, and learner motivation. For instance, Alwasidi and Al-Khalifah (2025) found that ChatGPT-supported writing activities positively influenced EFL students' writing productivity and proficiency, particularly in vocabulary use and sentence structure. Similarly, Nguyễn (2025) reported improvements in Vietnamese English majors' writing performance and motivation when AI tools were integrated as learning support.

Systematic reviews further confirm these benefits. Amoush and Alhosban (2025) synthesized findings from recent studies and concluded that AI-assisted writing tools can support idea development, revision, and feedback, particularly for learners with lower proficiency. Warschauer (2023) also emphasized the affordances of AI-generated text for second and foreign language writers, noting its potential to scaffold language production and reduce cognitive load during writing.

In addition to linguistic support, AI tools have been associated with creativity and exploratory writing. Moussa and Belhiah (2024), in their study of Moroccan undergraduates, found that AI-assisted writing extended students' engagement beyond syntactic accuracy, enabling richer content development. Similarly, Chankob (2026) reported that Moroccan EFL university students perceived AI tools as both a creative catalyst and a practical resource for idea generation during guided reading activities,

though they also expressed concern about overdependence. These findings suggest that AI tools can play a constructive role in EFL writing when used as supportive resources.

2.2. Risks of AI Overreliance and Pedagogical Concerns

Despite these advantages, scholars have raised concerns regarding the risks associated with excessive or uncritical use of AI in writing instruction. One major concern is AI overreliance, which may undermine learners' driven thinking, authorship, and engagement with the writing process. Neshkovska (2025) warned that AI-assisted academic writing can blur boundaries between support and substitution, potentially weakening learners' cognitive involvement in writing tasks. As learners depend on AI-generated texts, their own ideas and much of their creativity can gradually slip away.

Empirical studies indicate that students may rely on AI tools to generate ideas or complete entire texts, especially when faced with challenging writing tasks. Na *et al.* (2025) reported that ESL learners frequently used ChatGPT for content generation, raising questions about originality and learning outcomes. In the same vein, Zhang (2025) identified challenges related to dependency, limited critical evaluation of AI output, and reduced opportunity for developing writing strategies. Moreover, concerns about academic integrity further complicate AI integration. Thorp (2023) argued that while ChatGPT can be a useful tool, it should not be considered an author, highlighting ethical issues related to authorship and responsibility. Yeo (2023) emphasized the need for pedagogical approaches that address integrity and ethical decision-making in AI-mediated writing environments. In the Moroccan context, Chankob (2026) highlighted students' ambivalence toward AI, noting that while AI can stimulate creative thought, it also poses risks if learners come to view it as a substitute for deeper cognitive engagement.

2.3. Learner Agency and AI Use

Learner agency and autonomy have long been recognized as central to effective language learning and writing development. Research suggests that learners who exercise control over their learning processes are more likely to engage deeply with writing tasks and develop self-regulated skills (Ruegg, 2023; Mansooji *et al.*, 2022). Begum (2025) further emphasized that instructional practices play a crucial role in fostering learner autonomy at the tertiary level.

In AI-mediated contexts, learner agency becomes particularly important. Lee (2024) found that students perceived AI tools as most beneficial when used to polish or refine their writing after generating ideas independently. Similarly, Ibrahim and Kirkpatrick (2024) argued that AI tools should be positioned as assistants rather than replacements, enabling learners to maintain ownership of their writing.

Studies also suggest that students are aware of the need to balance AI use with learner-initiated effort. Sumakul *et al.* (2022) reported that learners valued AI feedback but expressed concerns about overdependence. Chankob (2026) similarly documented Moroccan students' reflections on AI usage, with many learners noting that responsible

AI engagement required them to make intentional choices about when to rely on technology and when to trust their own cognitive processes. These findings highlight the importance of pedagogical designs that guide students toward reflective and purposeful AI use.

2.4. Low-Stakes Writing in EFL Contexts

Low-stakes writing has been widely recognized as an effective pedagogical practice for promoting engagement, reducing anxiety, and supporting writing development. Low-stakes tasks are typically informal, minimally graded, and frequent, focusing on idea exploration rather than polished output (Muborak, 2019). Research indicates that such tasks encourage experimentation and sustained writing practice.

Empirical studies demonstrate the benefits of low-stakes writing in EFL contexts. Delfira *et al.* (2025) found that free writing activities enhanced students' writing confidence and willingness to express ideas. Wilson (2024) similarly reported that low-stakes writing helped create a supportive classroom environment and reduced fear of evaluation. Freitas (2022) emphasized that when accompanied by focused feedback, low-stakes writing can significantly support learning. Related pedagogical interventions, such as writing circles, have also shown positive effects on writing competence and engagement (Alhazmi & Elamin, 2023; Zhang *et al.*, 2023; Ismail & Mustafa, 2025). Clark (2024) further highlighted the value of writing-to-learn approaches in fostering deeper engagement with course content.

2.5. Low-Stakes Writing as an AI-Responsive Pedagogical Approach

While extensive research exists on AI-assisted writing and low-stakes writing as separate areas of inquiry, limited attention has been given to their intersection. Existing studies suggest that pedagogical strategies emphasizing process, reflection, and learner agency may help mitigate the risks of AI overreliance. Pavlik (2023) argued that AI collaboration in education requires intentional instructional design to preserve human judgment and creativity.

Given that low-stakes writing encourages autonomous idea generation and reduces performance pressure, it may offer a promising approach to guiding students toward balanced AI use. By foregrounding process over product, low-stakes writing aligns with calls for AI-responsive pedagogies that support ethical and reflective engagement with AI tools (Warschauer, 2023; Neshkovska, 2025). However, empirical research exploring students' perceptions of low-stakes writing as a means of reducing AI overreliance, particularly in EFL higher education contexts such as Morocco, remains limited.

2.6 Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in two complementary theoretical perspectives, namely AI-responsive pedagogy and the process-oriented theory of writing. AI-responsive pedagogy emphasizes adapting teaching practices and assessment designs in response to

the increasing presence of AI tools in education (Ndlovu, 2024). Rather than prohibiting AI use, this approach encourages instructional designs that support critical engagement, ethical awareness, and learner agency, enabling students to make informed decisions about how and when to use AI tools in their writing (Li & Wilson, 2025). Research suggests that thoughtfully integrated AI tools can reduce cognitive load and scaffold student learning while preserving autonomy and decision-making capacity (Li & Wilson, 2025). Moreover, global policy guidance calls for AI implementation in education that is human-centered and supports ethical, meaningful learning (UNESCO, 2025).

The process-oriented theory of writing conceptualizes writing as a recursive activity that involves planning, drafting, revising, and reflection. Classic cognitive models view writing as a series of decisions and mental processes, emphasizing the importance of idea generation and revision over a focus on final products. This perspective supports instructional practices that engage students in sustained cognitive effort and personal meaning-making rather than prioritizing accuracy or surface-level correction (Flower & Hayes, 1981).

Together, these perspectives provide a theoretical foundation for examining how low-stakes writing tasks can function as an AI-responsive pedagogical practice that encourages cognitive engagement, supports self-directed thinking, and fosters appropriate use of AI tools in EFL writing contexts. By integrating process-oriented principles with adaptive AI pedagogy, this framework positions learner agency at the center of instruction in AI-rich environments.

2.7. Conceptual Framework: Low-Stakes Writing, Learner Agency, and AI Use

This study is guided by a conceptual framework that positions low-stakes writing as a mediating pedagogical practice between learner agency and AI use in EFL writing contexts. The framework assumes that instructional design plays a decisive role in shaping how learners engage with AI tools while developing higher-order writing skills. At the core of the framework, low-stakes writing provides a low-pressure learning environment through frequent, informal, and minimally evaluated tasks such as free writing, reflection activities and free writing tasks. These tasks emphasize idea generation, reflection, and personal expression rather than linguistic perfection, allowing learners to focus on process and meaning (Delfira *et al.*, 2025; Clark, 2024). These conditions reduce performance anxiety, promote experimentation, and create opportunities for students to take ownership of their writing and engage cognitively with language. That said, as learners repeatedly engage in such tasks, they develop greater confidence, fluency, and willingness to write independently.

Sustained engagement in low-stakes writing fosters learner agency, defined as students' capacity to make intentional choices, regulate their learning, and assume responsibility for their writing (Ruegg, 2023; Mansooji *et al.*, 2022). Learner agency, in turn, influences how students interact with AI tools. Rather than relying on AI as a substitute for thinking or authorship, agentic learners tend to employ it selectively, for example, to refine language, clarify ideas, or receive feedback after drafting their work

(Amoush & Alhosban, 2025). In this framework, AI use is reflective, purposeful, and ethically informed, as learners must navigate the tension between assistance and dependency (Yeo, 2023). Grounded in process-oriented writing theory, this framework positions low-stakes writing as an AI-responsive pedagogical practice in EFL classrooms.

Table 1: Conceptual Framework Linking Low-Stakes Writing, Learner Agency, and AI Use in EFL Writing

Core Component	Key Features	Role in the Framework	Expected Influence on AI Use
Low-Stakes Writing	- Minimal grading - Frequent practice - Informal tasks (e.g. free writing) - Emphasis on process and meaning	Creates a low-pressure environment that encourages experimentation, idea generation, and sustained engagement with writing	Encourages initial human-generated writing; delays immediate reliance on AI
Learner Agency	- Independent thinking - Writing confidence - Self-regulation - Metacognitive awareness - Willingness to write without AI assistance	Enables learners to make intentional, informed learning choices	Promotes selective, reflective, and ethical AI use rather than dependency
AI Use Orientation	- AI as a supportive aid - Post-writing consultation - Critical evaluation of AI output - Awareness of overreliance risks	Represents students' perceptions and practices regarding AI in writing tasks	Reduces overreliance; positions AI as a complement to, not a replacement for, cognitive effort

3. Methodology

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to explore Moroccan EFL university students' perceptions of low-stakes writing as an AI-responsive pedagogical tool for reducing overreliance on AI in writing tasks. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for in-depth understanding of learners' experiences, attitudes, and reflections (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The design aligns with the study's conceptual framework, which positions low-stakes writing as an instructional condition influencing learner agency and orientations toward AI.

The study was conducted in guided reading classes at Ibn Tofail University. These courses integrate regular writing activities and tasks aimed at supporting language development, critical engagement with texts, and idea generation. In response to the

increasing presence of AI tools such as ChatGPT, low-stakes writing activities were incorporated into classroom practice to encourage independent thinking and reduce performance-related pressure. Students were informed that these tasks were designed to support learning rather than to be evaluated for accuracy or linguistic perfection.

Participants were 20 Moroccan EFL university students enrolled in undergraduate English studies. The students ranged in age from 18 to 22 years and included both male and female participants. All participants had prior experience with AI-assisted writing tools and had engaged in low-stakes writing activities as part of their academic coursework.

Purposive sampling was employed to ensure that participants could provide rich and relevant insights into the research questions. All 20 students initially participated by responding to open-ended survey questions. Following this phase, eight volunteers were purposefully selected to take part in a focus group interview, allowing for a deeper exploration of shared and divergent perspectives regarding low-stakes writing and AI use in EFL writing contexts.

Low-stakes writing tasks were implemented as part of regular classroom instruction over the course of the semester. These tasks included free writing, quick writes, and reflective writing prompts, all characterized by informal structure and an emphasis on idea development. Students were encouraged to complete these tasks without immediate reliance on AI tools. This instructional approach was designed to foster learner agency by encouraging students to generate ideas independently, reflect on their writing processes, and make intentional decisions about when and how AI tools could be used as support.

Data were collected using multiple qualitative instruments to gain a comprehensive understanding of students' perceptions of low-stakes writing and AI use in EFL writing contexts. Employing multiple data sources allowed for methodological triangulation, thereby enhancing the credibility of the findings.

First, open-ended survey questions were administered to all 20 participants. These questions invited students to reflect on their experiences with low-stakes writing tasks, their writing processes, and their use of AI tools in academic writing. The open-ended format enabled participants to articulate their views freely and provided an initial overview of recurring perceptions and concerns.

Second, reflective writing samples were collected from selected low-stakes writing tasks. These texts offered insight into students' idea development, metacognitive awareness, and engagement with writing processes. The reflective samples complemented self-reported data by capturing learners' thinking as it emerged through writing.

Third, a focus group interview was conducted with eight purposefully selected participants. The focus group was designed to encourage interaction and collective reflection, allowing participants to compare experiences and negotiate meanings related to low-stakes writing and AI use. A semi-structured interview guide was used to ensure consistency while allowing flexibility to pursue emerging topics. The discussion focused

on students' perceptions of autonomy, writing confidence, and decision-making regarding AI use before and after engaging in low-stakes writing activities.

All qualitative data were collected over a period of 6 weeks and were recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Pseudonyms were assigned to participants to ensure confidentiality.

4. Findings

Analysis of the open-ended survey responses (n = 20), reflective writing samples, and focus group discussions (n = 8) revealed three interrelated themes that capture students' perceptions of low-stakes writing as an AI-responsive pedagogical practice. Together, these themes illustrate how low-stakes writing influenced learners' engagement with writing, their sense of agency, and their patterns of AI use.

4.1. Reduced Writing Anxiety and Increased Willingness to Write

A substantial majority of participants (approximately 80%, 16 out of 20 students) reported that low-stakes writing tasks created a low-pressure environment that reduced writing anxiety and encouraged more frequent engagement with writing. Because these tasks were minimally evaluated and focused on idea development rather than linguistic accuracy, students felt less constrained by fear of error.

One participant explained how the absence of strict assessment lowered affective barriers:

"When the writing is not graded strictly, I feel more relaxed and can write my ideas without fear of mistakes." (P6, survey)

Similarly, another student noted that reduced pressure led to increased writing practice:

"I started writing more often because I wasn't worried about being perfect" (P2, focus group).

Analysis of reflective writing samples further supported these perceptions, revealing greater fluency, longer texts, and more exploratory idea development over time. These patterns suggest that low-stakes writing reduced performance anxiety and shifted students' attention from surface-level correctness toward meaning-making and sustained engagement with writing.

4.2. Development of Learner Agency

A second prominent theme concerned the development of learner agency through repeated participation in low-stakes writing activities. Approximately 70% of

participants (14 out of 20) described increased confidence in generating ideas and greater awareness of their own writing processes.

Several students reported a deliberate shift toward relying on their own thinking before seeking external assistance:

"I try to think and write my ideas first, even if they are not good." (P4, survey)

Others emphasized a growing sense of responsibility and control over their writing decisions:

"Writing regularly helped me organize my thoughts by myself. I feel more responsible for my writing now." (P1, focus group)

These accounts indicate that low-stakes writing encouraged learners to engage more deeply with planning, reflection, and idea development. As students became more comfortable writing without immediate correction or evaluation, they demonstrated greater self-regulation and ownership of the writing process, often cited as key indicators of learner agency.

4.3. Selective and Reflective Use of AI Tools

The third theme relates to changes in students' orientations toward AI-assisted writing tools. About 75% of participants (15 out of 20) reported modifying how they used AI as a result of engaging in low-stakes writing. Rather than relying on AI at the outset of writing, students increasingly described drafting ideas first and consulting AI at later stages.

One participant articulated this shift clearly:

"Now I write first, then I use AI to improve language or check some sentences." (P7, survey)

Another student reflected on heightened awareness of authorship and cognitive ownership:

"If I use AI from the beginning, the ideas don't feel like mine. Writing first helped me understand that." (P3, focus group)

Table 2: Summary of Themes, Prevalence, and Illustrative Evidence

Theme	Approximate Prevalence	Key Outcomes	Illustrative Evidence
Reduced Writing Anxiety	~80% of participants	Lower anxiety, increased writing frequency, greater fluency	<i>"I feel more relaxed and can write my ideas without fear of mistakes."</i> (P6)
Development of Learner Agency	~70% of participants	Increased confidence, self-regulation, ownership of writing	<i>"I feel more responsible for my writing now."</i> (P1)
Selective AI Use	~75% of participants	AI used for refinement and feedback after drafting	<i>"Now I write first, then I use AI."</i> (P7)

These reflections suggest that strengthened learner agency contributed to more selective, purposeful, and ethically informed AI use, with AI positioned as a supportive resource rather than a substitute for thinking or authorship.

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that low-stakes writing played a mediating role in shaping students' writing experiences and engagement with AI. By reducing anxiety and emphasizing process and reflection, low-stakes writing fostered learner agency, which in turn encouraged balanced and reflective AI use. These patterns align closely with the study's conceptual framework and underscore the potential of low-stakes writing as an effective AI-responsive pedagogical practice in EFL writing classrooms.

Table 3: Shifts in Writing and AI Practices Reported by Students

Dimension	Before Low-Stakes Writing	After Low-Stakes Writing
Writing anxiety	Great concern about errors and evaluation	Reduced fear; relaxed engagement
Writing behavior	Infrequent, perfection-oriented	More frequent, exploratory
Idea generation	Often outsourced to AI	Initiated independently
AI use	Early-stage content generation	Later-stage refinement and feedback

5. Discussion

This study examined Moroccan EFL university students' perceptions of low-stakes writing as an AI-responsive pedagogical practice. The findings indicate that low-stakes writing shaped students' writing experiences by reducing anxiety, strengthening learner agency, and promoting more selective and reflective use of AI tools. Together, these patterns suggest that low-stakes writing plays a mediating role between instructional design and students' orientations toward AI-assisted writing.

The findings show that low-stakes writing created a low-pressure environment that reduced writing-related anxiety and increased students' willingness to write. Because these tasks emphasized idea development rather than linguistic accuracy or formal evaluation, students felt freer to express their thoughts without fear of error. This affective shift was accompanied by increased writing frequency and greater fluency in students' reflective writing samples, indicating sustained engagement with the writing

process. These results confirm previous research demonstrating that minimally graded writing tasks foster psychological safety and support early stages of writing, particularly idea generation and planning (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Wilson, 2024). In writing contexts, reduced anxiety is especially important, as performance pressure can encourage premature reliance on AI for content generation. Low-stakes writing appears to counter this tendency by allowing students to engage cognitively with writing before seeking external support.

A second key finding concerns the development of learner agency through repeated engagement in low-stakes writing. Students reported increased confidence in generating ideas, greater awareness of their writing processes, and a stronger sense of responsibility for their work. Many described a deliberate shift toward drafting before seeking assistance, reflecting increased self-regulation and ownership of the writing process. These findings are consistent with research highlighting the role of learner agency in writing development and autonomy (Ruegg, 2023; Mansooji *et al.*, 2022). By providing opportunities for planning, reflection, and experimentation without immediate correction, low-stakes writing supports metacognitive engagement and positions learners as active contributors rather than passive recipients of feedback. Within the study's conceptual framework, learner agency emerges as a central mechanism through which instructional practices influence AI engagement.

Furthermore, strengthened learner agency contributed to more selective and reflective use of AI tools. Students increasingly reported writing first and using AI later for language refinement or clarification. This shift was accompanied by heightened awareness of authorship and cognitive ownership, with students expressing concern that early AI use diminished their connection to their ideas. These perceptions reflect broader scholarly concerns regarding AI overreliance and reduced cognitive engagement (Yeo, 2023; Thorp, 2023). At the same time, the findings align with emerging research in Moroccan EFL contexts (e.g. Chankob, 2026) showing learners' ambivalence toward AI as both a support and a potential constraint on independent thinking. Low-stakes writing appears to offer a pedagogical space in which students can negotiate this tension by integrating AI in ways that preserve agency and authorship.

Therefore, the analysis of students' perceptions reveals that low-stakes writing is a viable AI-responsive pedagogical practice in EFL writing classrooms. By reducing anxiety and foregrounding process and reflection, low-stakes writing fosters learner agency, which in turn supports balanced and purposeful AI use. Rather than restricting AI, this approach addresses concerns about overreliance through instructional design that encourages independent thinking before AI consultation. As such, low-stakes writing offers a practical pathway for integrating AI into writing instruction while maintaining cognitive engagement and ethical use.

6. Conclusion

This qualitative study aimed to examine Moroccan EFL students' perceptions of low-stakes writing as an AI-responsive pedagogical approach aimed at reducing overreliance on AI tools. The findings indicate that low-stakes writing supports students in achieving learning objectives by creating a low-pressure environment that fosters idea generation, reflection, and engagement with language for the purpose of learning rather than performance. Low-stakes writing emerged as a strategic antidote to AI overuse, encouraging students to produce language on their own rather than merely parroting AI-generated content. By emphasizing process and cognitive effort, low-stakes writing helps learners develop original thought, personal voice, and metacognitive awareness while maintaining responsibility for their writing. In doing so, it positions AI tools as supportive aids for refinement and feedback rather than substitutes for thinking or authorship. Through repeated practice in low-stakes tasks, students strengthened their learner agency, enabling them to make deliberate decisions about when and how to use AI tools. This agency not only reduces overreliance but also promotes reflective, ethical engagement with technology, aligning with the goals of AI-responsive pedagogy.

In sum, low-stakes writing offers a practical, learner-centered approach for EFL classrooms that balances the benefits of AI with the need for meaningful learning. By supporting student growth, fostering independent language use, and mitigating the risks of regurgitating AI-generated content, low-stakes writing provides a pathway for cultivating critical thinking, creativity, and lifelong writing skills in AI-rich educational contexts.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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