CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN IMPLEMENTING HEUTAGOGY IN EFL ACADEMIC WRITING: TOWARD A SCAFFOLDED LEARNING FRAMEWORK

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the application of heutagogy, or self-directed learning, in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) academic writing courses at Universitas Islam Negeri Palopo. Although heutagogy fosters learner autonomy and critical thinking, its implementation in environments shifting from teacher-centered education presents difficulties. This study seeks to investigate the problems and opportunities associated with the implementation of heutagogy in academic writing and to offer a scaffolded learning framework to facilitate its effective application. This qualitative case study included four lecturers and twenty-one students, utilizing semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and focus group discussions. Thematic analysis revealed that heutagogy offers significant opportunities, including enhanced learner autonomy, increased engagement, and improved critical thinking. However, several challenges persist, such as limited readiness for autonomy, language proficiency constraints, uneven participation, and institutional limitations. The findings indicate that heutagogy cannot be implemented as an immediate shift but requires a gradual and structured transition. Based on these insights, this study proposes a Scaffolded Heutagogical Learning Framework consisting of four stages: guided, supported, independent, and reflective learning. This framework contributes both theoretically and practically by bridging self-determined learning and scaffolding theory and offering a context-sensitive model for EFL academic writing instruction.

Keywords: Academic Writing, Heutagogy, Learner Autonomy, Scaffolding, Self-Determined Learning.

1) INTRODUCTION

The transformation of higher education in the 21st century has been characterized by a shift toward learner-centered pedagogies that prioritize autonomy, adaptability, and critical thinking (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015; Ryan & Deci, 2017; Schunk & Greene,

2018). This shift is driven by the increasing complexity of knowledge production and the growing demand for graduates who are capable of navigating dynamic, technology-mediated environments (Blaschke, 2021; Panta, 2025). Within this evolving landscape, traditional instructional models rooted in pedagogy, where learning is primarily teacher-directed, have been complemented by more flexible approaches such as andragogy and heutagogy. Among these, heutagogy, or self-determined learning, represents an advanced form of learner-centered education that positions learners as active agents who define their own learning pathways, goals, and evaluation criteria (Blaschke, 2021; Hase & Kenyon, 2000).

Heutagogy extends beyond the notion of learner autonomy by emphasizing capability rather than mere competency (Blaschke, 2021; Ecclesfield & Garnett, 2021; Hase & Blaschke, 2021). Capability encompasses the acquisition of information and skills, the application of these in novel circumstances, reflection on learning processes, and adaptation to new difficulties (Blaschke & Hase, 2019). In this sense, heutagogy aligns closely with contemporary educational goals that emphasize lifelong learning, metacognitive awareness, and the ability to learn how to learn. Recent studies have highlighted that heutagogical approaches are particularly relevant in digital and blended learning environments, where learners must independently navigate resources, evaluate information, and construct knowledge (Blaschke & Hase, 2019; Lee et al., 2019). Moreover, heutagogy has been linked to enhanced learner autonomy, increased engagement, and superior reflective practices, all of which are crucial for academic achievement in higher education (Hase & Blaschke, 2021).

However, while heutagogy offers a compelling theoretical framework, its implementation in real educational contexts remains complex and often problematic. One critical issue lies in the assumption that learners are inherently ready to engage in self-determined learning. In reality, many learners—particularly those in contexts where teacher-centered instruction predominates—lack the necessary skills and dispositions to manage their own learning effectively (Ismail et al., 2023; Little, 2022). This raises important questions about the conditions under which heutagogy can be successfully implemented and the types of support required to facilitate learner autonomy.

These issues are particularly noticeable in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) academic writing. Academic writing is acknowledged as one of the most intellectually challenging language abilities, necessitating the amalgamation of linguistic proficiency, critical analysis, and subject-specific knowledge (Hyland, 2019; Sun & Zhang, 2023). Writing, in contrast to other language abilities, necessitates not just the formulation of grammatically accurate sentences but also the capacity to systematically arrange ideas, formulate arguments, and participate in intellectual conversation. For EFL learners, these challenges are exacerbated by poor language skills, constrained exposure to academic texts, and inadequate opportunities for substantive writing practice (Guo & Bai, 2022; Soedjatmiko & Widiati, 2003).

From a pedagogical perspective, traditional approaches to teaching academic writing have often emphasized form over meaning, focusing on grammatical accuracy, structural conventions, and teacher feedback (Hidayati & Widiati, 2019; Suryani et al., 2024). While these approaches may help students develop basic writing skills, they often fail to foster higher-order thinking and independent learning. In contrast, learner-centered approaches, including heutagogy, offer the potential to transform writing instruction by encouraging students to take ownership of their writing processes, explore ideas, and engage in critical reflection.

Empirical studies validate the efficacy of learner autonomy and self-regulated learning in enhancing writing performance (Guo & Bai, 2022; Mahayasa et al., 2021; Teng, 2020). Teng (2020) revealed that self-regulated writing procedures, including planning, monitoring, and revising, substantially improve students' writing ability and metacognitive awareness. Guo and Bai (2022) similarly discovered that students who practice self-regulated learning demonstrate enhanced writing quality and autonomy. Anggraeni et al. (2025) have reported that training grounded in self-regulated learning enhances academic writing skills across various competency levels, underscoring the significance of learner agency in writing growth.

Despite these promising findings, the transition from teacher-centered to learner-centered approaches in writing instruction is not straightforward. One major challenge is the issue of learner readiness. Numerous students are habituated to receiving clear guidance and may experience uncertainty or overload when required to assume responsibility for their

learning. This is especially apparent in EFL environments, where linguistic restrictions can further restrict students' capacity for autonomous learning (Ismail et al., 2023). The introduction of autonomy without enough direction can lead to confusion, anxiety, and cognitive overload in students, stemming from the constraints of working memory and the intricate interactivity of complicated tasks like academic writing (Sweller, 2011, 2024).

This tension between autonomy and support highlights a fundamental dilemma in the implementation of heutagogy: how to promote self-determined learning while ensuring that learners are adequately supported. In this regard, scaffolding provides a critical theoretical and pedagogical lens. Grounded in Vygotsky's (1978) notion of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), scaffolding denotes the provisional assistance offered by educators to enable learners to do tasks beyond their independent capabilities. As learners gain proficiency, this assistance is progressively diminished, enabling them to take on increased responsibility for their education.

In academic writing, scaffolding can manifest in several ways, such as modeling, guided practice, feedback, and collaborative learning. Studies indicate that scaffolding tactics can markedly improve students' writing proficiency, especially in EFL environments. Mahayasa et al. (2021) demonstrated that scaffolding training enhances students' capacity to structure ideas, formulate arguments, and refine their writing. Furthermore, scaffolding has demonstrated its efficacy in promoting learner autonomy by offering a systematic route to independence.

Recent research has begun to investigate the junction between heutagogy and scaffolding, indicating that these two techniques are complementary rather than mutually exclusive. Heutagogy prioritizes learner autonomy and self-determination, while scaffolding offers essential support to facilitate the attainment of these objectives. Lee et al. (2019) contend that organized scaffolding is crucial for facilitating effective engagement in heutagogical learning settings, especially when learners are inadequately equipped for autonomous learning.

Nevertheless, despite growing attention to heutagogy, several critical gaps remain. First, there is limited empirical research examining how heutagogy is implemented in EFL academic

writing classrooms. Second, few studies have explored the integration of heutagogy and scaffolding as a unified pedagogical approach. Third, research in Islamic higher education contexts remains underrepresented. Moreover, learner autonomy is often treated as an outcome rather than a developmental process, leaving limited understanding of how autonomy evolves in practice.

Furthermore, prior research tends to conceptualize learner autonomy as an outcome rather than a developmental process. This perspective overlooks the gradual and iterative nature of autonomy development, where learners move through different stages of dependence and independence. There is limited empirical evidence explaining how learners' transition from guided learning to self-determined learning, what challenges they encounter at each stage, and how instructional support can be optimized to facilitate this transition. As a result, there is a need for a process-oriented and context-sensitive framework that captures the dynamic interplay between autonomy and support in heutagogical learning.

This study seeks to investigate the problems and opportunities associated with integrating heutagogy in EFL academic writing and to create a Scaffolded Heutagogical Learning Framework that facilitates the progressive enhancement of learner autonomy. This study aims to address the following research questions:

a. What opportunities emerge from the implementation of heutagogy in academic writing?
b. What challenges are encountered in implementing heutagogy?
c. How can heutagogy be effectively implemented through a scaffolded learning framework?

This study provides three significant contributions to the existing literature. Initially, it offers empirical insights into the application of heutagogy in EFL academic writing classrooms, transcending outcome-oriented research. Second, it offers a context-specific analysis within an Islamic higher education institution in Indonesia, thereby addressing an underrepresented research setting. Third, it proposes a novel Scaffolded Heutagogical

Learning Framework that integrates principles of self-determined learning and scaffolding, offering both theoretical advancement and practical guidance for educators.

In doing so, this study not only contributes to the growing body of research on learner autonomy and academic writing but also responds to the need for pedagogical models that are both theoretically grounded and practically applicable in diverse educational contexts.

2) METHODS

Research Design

This research utilized a qualitative case study methodology to examine the challenges and opportunities associated with the implementation of heutagogy in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) academic writing classrooms. A case study methodology is highly suitable for analyzing intricate educational phenomena within their authentic contexts, particularly when the distinctions between the phenomenon and its context are not distinctly defined. (Yin, 2018). In the present study, the implementation of heutagogy is conceptualized as a multifaceted process shaped by pedagogical practices, learner characteristics, and institutional conditions. Therefore, a qualitative case study enabled an in-depth and context-sensitive exploration of these interrelated elements.

In addition, this study is grounded in an interpretive qualitative paradigm, which seeks to understand participants' experiences and meaning-making processes rather than to test predetermined hypotheses. This approach allows for a nuanced understanding of how heutagogical principles are enacted, negotiated, and experienced within specific classroom contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Research Context

The study was conducted at Universitas Islam Negeri Palopo, within the English Language Education Study Program under the Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training. The research focused on academic writing courses, which aim to develop students' competencies in paragraph and essay writing, including organization, argumentation, and critical thinking. In

this context, academic writing serves not only as a linguistic skill but also as a means of constructing and communicating knowledge within academic discourse (Hyland, 2019).

The institutional setting reflects a transitional pedagogical environment where traditional teacher-centered practices coexist with emerging learner-centered approaches. Students demonstrate diverse levels of English proficiency and learning readiness, often shaped by prior experiences with directive instruction. These conditions create both opportunities and challenges for implementing heutagogy, particularly in balancing learner autonomy with necessary instructional support (Ismail et al., 2023). As such, this context provides a relevant setting for examining how scaffolded heutagogical practices can facilitate the development of learner autonomy in EFL academic writing.

Participants

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, which enables the selection of individuals who possess relevant knowledge and experience related to the research focus (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study involved four lecturers who were responsible for teaching academic writing courses, as well as 21 of students from two academic writing classes.

The lecturers varied in their teaching experience, ranging from early-career to senior educators, which allowed for a diverse range of perspectives on the implementation of heutagogical practices. Their inclusion was based on their involvement in academic writing instruction and their engagement with learner-centered teaching approaches.

Student participants were selected based on their enrollment in academic writing courses and their exposure to learning activities that reflect heutagogical principles. The inclusion of students from different classes enabled the researcher to examine variations in learner autonomy, engagement, and readiness across different learning contexts.

Data Collection

Data were gathered over a six-month duration utilizing three complementing qualitative methodologies: semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and focus group discussions. The utilization of several data sources facilitated methodological triangulation,

consequently augmenting the reliability and profundity of the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Semi-structured interviews were performed with the lecturers to investigate their perceptions, experiences, and teaching methodologies concerning heutagogy. Each interview lasted between 30 to 60 minutes, was audio-recorded, and subsequently transcribed. This method provides a balance between structure and flexibility, allowing the researcher to guide the conversation while also probing deeper into participants' responses (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interview protocol focused on key themes such as learner autonomy, instructional strategies, challenges in implementation, and institutional support.

Classroom observations were carried out to examine how heutagogical principles were enacted in actual teaching and learning situations. The observations focused on aspects such as learning design, the role of the lecturer, student autonomy, and patterns of engagement. Observational data enabled the researcher to capture real-time interactions and classroom dynamics, providing direct evidence of pedagogical practices and learner behavior (Yin, 2018). Field notes were systematically recorded to document both descriptive and reflective elements of the observed sessions.

Focus group discussion were held to obtain collective insights from students and instructors about their experiences with heutagogical learning. This approach is very effective for examining collective insights and producing interactive data, as participants react to and expand upon one another's inputs (Morgan, 1997). The discussions addressed themes such as experiences of autonomy, engagement in writing activities, perceived challenges, and suggestions for improvement.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed by thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019), following the interactive approach established by Miles et al. (2014), which encompasses data reduction, data display, and conclusion formulation and validation. This analytical method facilitates a systematic and iterative analysis of qualitative data.

The analysis commenced with data reduction, wherein pertinent data segments were selected, coded, and systematically structured. Initial open coding was succeeded by axial coding to consolidate categories into overarching themes. An inductive coding methodology was utilized to facilitate the emergence of themes from the data, concurrently informed by theoretical frameworks including heutagogy, scaffolding, and learner autonomy. This method guaranteed that the analysis was anchored in the data while being theoretically guided.

Following this, data display was conducted by organizing the coded data into thematic categories. This process facilitated comparison across data sources and enabled the identification of patterns related to opportunities, challenges, and learning processes. Visual and textual representations of data were used to support interpretation.

The final stage involved conclusion drawing and verification, where patterns and relationships were interpreted to generate meaningful insights. This process was iterative, with findings continuously refined and validated through cross-checking with the data and triangulation across sources (Miles et al., 2014). This ensured that the conclusions were both credible and well-supported.

Trustworthiness

To guarantee the study's integrity, multiple procedures were implemented in accordance with accepted qualitative research criteria (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Credibility was established by data triangulation and member checking, wherein participants were solicited to review and authenticate the interpretations of the findings. The transferability was improved by offering comprehensive descriptions of the research context and participants, enabling readers to assess the relevance of the findings to alternative situations.

Dependability was guaranteed through the meticulous documenting of the research process, encompassing data gathering and analytic methodologies. Confirmability was ensured by the maintenance of an audit trail and the implementation of reflective techniques to mitigate researcher bias. These measures jointly enhance the credibility of the study.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were carefully addressed during the research process. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was acquired from all participants before data collection commenced. Participants were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity, with all data utilized exclusi vely for study reasons. These procedures adhere to ethical standards in qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

3) RESULTS

This study's findings are categorized into two primary themes: opportunities and obstacles associated with the implementation of heutagogy in EFL academic writing. The findings are from triangulated data sources, comprising lecturer interviews, classroom observations, and focus group discussions (FGDs). The amalgamation of several data sources facilitates a more thorough comprehension of the implementation and experience of heutagogical learning in practice.

Opportunities in Implementing Heutagogy

a. Learner Autonomy as a Developmental Process

Across all data sources, learner autonomy emerged as a central opportunity, although its development was found to be gradual rather than immediate. Classroom observations indicate that autonomy initially appeared in limited forms, such as topic selection. For instance, students were "asked to choose their own paragraph topic (e.g., daily life, campus experience, hobbies)," suggesting an early stage of decision-making.

Interview data confirm this pattern. One lecturer stated that heutagogical learning "offers significant opportunities for developing student independence" and encourages students "to take ownership of their learning." Similarly, another lecturer emphasized that the approach allows students to "become more active participants" and connect writing tasks to their personal interests.

In more advanced classroom sessions, autonomy became more evident. Observations revealed that students "independently structured essays" and "explained why they chose

certain arguments." In FGDs, students reflected this progression, noting that they gradually became more confident in making decisions about their writing, although some still required guidance. This suggests that learner autonomy is developmental in nature rather than an immediate outcome, emerging progressively through structured learning experiences.

b. Enhanced Engagement Across Behavioral, Cognitive, and Emotional Dimensions

The data show a clear increase in student engagement as heutagogical practices were implemented. Observational data demonstrate that engagement evolved from moderate participation in early sessions to high engagement in more autonomous environments. For example, while initial sessions showed that "around 60% responded actively," later sessions indicated that "~75% actively engaged" and even "~80% actively contributed" in student-led discussions.

Behaviorally, students were observed to remain on task, participate in peer discussions, and persist in completing writing tasks. Cognitively, students demonstrated improved understanding of writing structures and began to use strategies such as outlining, drafting, and revising. Emotionally, students showed increased interest and motivation, particularly when they were allowed to choose their own topics. Observations noted that students displayed "high interest in chosen topics" and were "enthusiastic during discussions."

Interview data further support these findings. One lecturer stated that heutagogy "increases engagement because students can connect writing tasks with their interests." Similarly, FGD participants expressed that they felt more motivated when they were given flexibility in learning tasks. This suggests that learner autonomy is developmental in nature rather than an immediate outcome, emerging progressively through structured learning experiences.

c. Development of Critical Thinking and Argumentation Skills

The findings indicate a progression in students' critical thinking abilities, particularly in relation to argumentation. In early stages, students' writing was largely descriptive, with limited

analytical depth. However, as learning progressed, students began to develop arguments supported by reasons and examples.

In advanced sessions, observational data revealed that students "challenged peers' ideas," produced "counter-arguments," and asked "why" and "how" questions. These behaviors indicate the emergence of higher-order thinking skills. Students also demonstrated the ability to justify their arguments, as observed in statements where they explained their reasoning during peer discussions.

Interview data align with these observations. One lecturer noted that heutagogy "promotes capability development rather than simple knowledge acquisition," highlighting its role in fostering deeper learning. In FGDs, students reported that they became more aware of how to construct arguments and evaluate their ideas, indicating the development of metacognitive awareness. This implies that heutagogical learning environments facilitate higher-order thinking by encouraging students to actively construct, evaluate, and refine their arguments.

d. Emergence of Self-Directed and Reflective Learning Practices

Another key opportunity identified in the data is the emergence of self-directed learning behaviors. Observations show that students increasingly used external resources independently, including "Google Translate, dictionaries, and notes." This reflects a shift toward self-directed learning, where students take initiative in managing their learning resources.

In addition, students engaged in reflective practices, such as reviewing their drafts and identifying weaknesses. Observations noted that students compared drafts during peer review and engaged in self-correction. Statements such as "my argument is weak" indicate an awareness of their own learning processes.

Lecturers also highlighted this development. One lecturer stated that heutagogy "encourages independent research tasks and reflective exercises," while another emphasized the importance of "feedback cycles" in supporting student independence. FGD participants similarly reported that reflection helped them improve their writing over time. This finding

suggests that heutagogy supports the development of self-regulated learning behaviors, particularly in fostering students' ability to monitor, evaluate, and adjust their own learning processes.

Challenges in Implementing Heutagogy

a. Limited Readiness for Autonomous Learning

Despite the identified opportunities, the data reveal that students' readiness for autonomy remains a significant challenge. Observational data show that students frequently struggled when given open-ended tasks, as indicated by questions such as "what to write?" This suggests a lack of familiarity with independent learning.

Interview data strongly support this finding. One lecturer stated that "many students are accustomed to teacher-centered instruction and struggle when given greater responsibility" (Lecturer 2, Interview), while another noted that students often feel "overwhelmed by independent learning expectations" (Lecturer 1, Interview). Similarly, students in FGDs acknowledged that they initially found it difficult to learn without clear instructions (Student 3, FGD), indicating a gap between pedagogical expectations and learner readiness. This suggests that learner readiness remains a critical prerequisite for the successful implementation of heutagogy.

b. Language Proficiency as a Constraint on Autonomy

Language proficiency emerged as a critical barrier affecting students' ability to engage in heutagogical learning. Observations revealed frequent "vocabulary issues" and "grammatical errors," particularly in writing tasks. Students often relied on code-switching, as "several students used Bahasa Indonesia when stuck."

Lecturers emphasized this issue, noting that "language proficiency limitations reduce student confidence" and "affect outcomes." In FGDs, students expressed that limited vocabulary made it difficult to express their ideas, particularly in more complex writing tasks. This suggests that linguistic competence plays a fundamental role in enabling learner autonomy, as limited proficiency can constrain both participation and self-expression.

c. Uneven Participation and Confidence Levels

The data also indicate uneven participation among students. Observations consistently showed that "a few dominant students" actively participated, while others remained passive. This pattern was evident across different classroom contexts.

In discussion sessions, it was observed that "same students speaking repeatedly," indicating an imbalance in participation. Interview data suggest that this may be related to differences in confidence and proficiency. One lecturer noted that "managing diverse learner needs is challenging," particularly in mixed-ability classes.

FGD data further highlight this issue, as some students reported feeling hesitant to participate due to lack of confidence. This implies that autonomy does not automatically ensure equitable participation, as differences in confidence and proficiency may lead to unequal engagement among students.

d. Persistent Dependence on Lecturer Support

Although heutagogy emphasizes independence, many students continued to rely on lecturer support. Observations revealed "frequent help requests" and students seeking confirmation before proceeding with tasks. Even in more advanced stages, some students "looked to the lecturer" for guidance.

Lecturers addressed this issue by implementing scaffolding strategies. One lecturer explained, "I provide staged tasks and guided checkpoints," while another emphasized the importance of "clear rubrics and examples." Despite these efforts, dependence on lecturer support remained evident, particularly among less confident students. This indicates that the transition toward learner autonomy is non-linear, requiring continuous adjustment of instructional support to accommodate varying learner needs.

e. Cognitive and Task-Related Difficulties

Students also faced difficulties related to the cognitive demands of academic writing. Observations indicate that some students "struggled to generate ideas" and had "difficulty

linking paragraphs coherently." In discussion activities, students showed challenges in "structuring arguments logically."

Time constraints further compounded these difficulties. Observations noted that "writing not fully completed" and "discussion cut due to time," suggesting that students required more time to engage in complex tasks. Interview data support this finding, as lecturers highlighted that writing tasks often require extended time and support. This suggests that the cognitive demands of academic writing may exceed students' current capacities, highlighting the importance of structured support in heutagogical learning environments.

Summary of Findings

The triangulated findings demonstrate that heutagogy offers substantial opportunities for enhancing learner autonomy, engagement, critical thinking, and self-directed learning. However, these opportunities are accompanied by significant challenges, particularly related to learner readiness, language proficiency, participation, and cognitive demands.

Importantly, the findings suggest that the implementation of heutagogy is a gradual and developmental process, rather than an immediate shift. The coexistence of opportunities and challenges underscores the need for structured support, which informs the development of a scaffolded approach to heutagogical learning. Overall, these findings reinforce that heutagogy operates as a developmental process shaped by the dynamic interplay between autonomy and instructional support.

4) DISCUSSION

This study's findings offer significant insights into the application of heutagogy in EFL academic writing, especially in a transitional higher education setting. The findings indicate that heutagogy possesses considerable educational potential; yet, its efficacy is mostly dependent on learners' preparedness, linguistic proficiency, and the availability of organized instructional support. This section examines these findings in connection to the current theoretical and empirical literature, emphasizing the interaction between autonomy and scaffolding.

A key finding of this study is that learner autonomy does not emerge as an immediate outcome of heutagogical implementation but develops gradually through staged learning experiences. This challenges the assumption that learners can readily assume responsibility for their learning (Blaschke, 2021). Instead, autonomy appears to be developmental and context-dependent (Benson, 2013; Ismail et al., 2023). These findings reinforce the argument that learner autonomy is not inherent but is constructed through guided and scaffolded learning processes. This aligns with Ismail et al. (2023), who argue that learners in traditionally teacher-centered contexts often lack the skills required for self-directed learning. As the learning process progressed, students gradually demonstrated greater independence, including the ability to structure arguments, justify ideas, and engage in peer evaluation. These findings reinforce the argument that autonomy is not inherent but constructed through guided learning processes.

This development can be understood through Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, specifically the notion of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The findings indicate that students function within a domain conducive to the development of autonomy when provided with suitable assistance. Without such support, however, learners may experience cognitive overload and disengagement. This is evident in the present study, where students expressed confusion and hesitation when faced with open-ended tasks. These findings are consistent with cognitive load theory (Sweller, 2011), which posits that excessive cognitive demands can hinder learning, particularly when learners lack sufficient prior knowledge or strategies.

The role of scaffolding therefore emerges as central to the successful implementation of heutagogy. While heutagogy emphasizes learner autonomy, the findings demonstrate that autonomy must be supported through structured guidance, particularly in EFL academic writing contexts where linguistic and cognitive demands are high. This supports previous research suggesting that scaffolding enhances both learner autonomy and academic performance (Mahayasa et al., 2021). In this study, lecturers employed various scaffolding strategies, including guided questioning, staged tasks, feedback cycles, and the use of rubrics.

These strategies enabled students to gradually assume greater responsibility for their learning while maintaining academic standards.

Importantly, the findings highlight that scaffolding and heutagogy should not be viewed as opposing approaches but as complementary. While heutagogy provides the overarching framework for self-determined learning, scaffolding serves as the mechanism that enables this process. This integration is consistent with recent studies emphasizing the importance of "structured autonomy" in learner-centered environments (Lee et al., 2019). The findings further demonstrate how scaffolding can be systematically embedded within heutagogical practices to support the gradual development of learner autonomy. This study thus extends heutagogical theory by empirically demonstrating that learner autonomy must be scaffolded, particularly in linguistically demanding contexts such as EFL academic writing.

Another significant finding is the strong relationship between autonomy and student engagement. The data show that as students were given more control over their learning, their behavioral, cognitive, and emotional engagement increased. This supports the argument that autonomy is a key driver of motivation and engagement in learning (Ryan & Deci, 2020; Teng, 2020). When students were allowed to choose topics, explore ideas, and participate in peer discussions, they demonstrated higher levels of interest and persistence. This finding aligns with self-regulated learning (SRL) theory, which emphasizes the role of learner agency in fostering motivation and effective learning strategies (Guo & Bai, 2022; Schunk & Greene, 2018).

However, the study also reveals that engagement is unevenly distributed, with more confident or proficient students participating more actively than others. This suggests that autonomy alone is insufficient to ensure equitable engagement. These challenges may also be influenced by individual differences in prior knowledge and expertise, which determine how learners process information and manage cognitive load (Sweller, 2024). Differences in language proficiency and confidence can create disparities in participation, particularly in EFL contexts. This finding reinforces the need for differentiated scaffolding strategies that address

diverse learner needs. Lecturers must not only provide autonomy but also actively support less confident students to participate and develop their skills.

Language proficiency emerged as another critical factor influencing the effectiveness of heutagogical learning. Students' difficulties with vocabulary, grammar, and expression limited their ability to engage fully in autonomous tasks. This finding highlights an important limitation of heutagogy in EFL contexts: autonomy presupposes a certain level of linguistic competence. Without this foundation, learners may struggle to express their ideas and participate in meaningful learning activities. This supports previous research indicating that language proficiency is closely linked to learners' confidence and engagement in writing (Guo & Bai, 2022; Hyland, 2019).

The results indicate a continual reliance on instructor assistance, even within more independent learning contexts. This indicates that the shift from teacher-centered to learner-centered education is not linear but rather iterative. Students may oscillate between dependency and independence, contingent upon task complexity and their confidence levels. This substantiates the assertion that autonomy ought to be regarded as a dynamic process rather than a static condition. Instructors are pivotal in overseeing this process by calibrating the level of assistance based on students' need.

Collectively, these findings indicate the necessity for a more systematic and process-driven methodology in the implementation of heutagogy. This study presents a Scaffolded Heutagogical Learning Framework, which delineates the progression of learner autonomy as a sequential process comprising guided, supported, independent, and reflective phases, grounded in empirical evidence. In the guided phase, learners rely heavily on lecturer support to understand basic concepts and tasks. In the supported phase, learners begin to exercise autonomy with structured guidance, such as feedback and checkpoints. In the independent phase, learners take greater responsibility for their learning, demonstrating self-directed behaviors. Finally, in the reflective phase, learners engage in metacognitive practices, evaluating and refining their learning processes.

This framework contributes to the literature in several ways. First, it addresses the gap between the theoretical ideals of heutagogy and the practical realities of classroom implementation by providing a concrete model for integrating autonomy and support. Second, it reconceptualizes learner autonomy as a developmental process, rather than an immediate outcome. Third, it offers a context-sensitive approach that accounts for the specific challenges of EFL academic writing in higher education.

In summary, the findings of this study underscore the importance of balancing autonomy and scaffolding in heutagogical learning. While heutagogy provides a powerful framework for promoting learner agency and critical thinking, its successful implementation requires careful consideration of learner readiness, language proficiency, and instructional design. By integrating heutagogy with scaffolding, educators can create learning environments that support both independence and structure, ultimately enhancing students' academic writing development.

5) CONCLUSION

This study examined the implementation of heutagogy in EFL academic writing within an Islamic higher education context and identified both its opportunities and challenges. The findings demonstrate that heutagogical learning has considerable potential to enhance learner autonomy, engagement, critical thinking, and self-directed learning. Students increasingly took ownership of their learning, participated more actively in writing processes, and demonstrated higher-order thinking skills, particularly when they were given meaningful choices and opportunities for reflection. These findings reinforce the pedagogical value of heutagogy as an approach that supports deeper and more meaningful learning in academic writing contexts.

At the same time, the study reveals that the implementation of heutagogy is constrained by several critical factors, including students' limited readiness for autonomous learning, language proficiency barriers, uneven participation, and continued dependence on lecturer support. These challenges indicate that learner autonomy cannot be assumed as an immediate outcome but should be understood as a gradual and developmental process. In contexts where students are transitioning from teacher-centered learning traditions, the shift toward self-

determined learning requires careful pedagogical design to avoid confusion, cognitive overload, and disengagement.

Building on these insights, this study argues that the effectiveness of heutagogy depends on the integration of structured scaffolding. The proposed Scaffolded Heutagogical Learning Framework conceptualizes autonomy development as a staged progression from guided to supported, independent, and reflective learning. Through this framework, learners are gradually supported in developing the skills, confidence, and metacognitive awareness necessary for self-determined learning. In this way, scaffolding does not contradict heutagogy but instead enables its practical and effective implementation, particularly in linguistically demanding contexts such as EFL academic writing.

This study optimizes the literature by delivering empirical insights into the implementation of heutagogy in academic writing, presenting a context-specific analysis within Islamic higher education, and proposing a theoretically informed and pedagogically relevant framework that amalgamates heutagogy and scaffolding. The study ultimately emphasizes that the efficacy of heutagogy is rooted not on immediate autonomy, but in its meticulous scaffolding, converting learner independence from a mere expectation into a feasible learning trajectory.

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