

STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF GRAMMARLY AS AN AI-ASSISTED WRITING TOOL IN ACADEMIC WRITING

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ABSTRACT

The growing use of artificial intelligence in language learning has encouraged the development of digital tools that support academic writing, and Grammarly is one of the most widely used applications. This study explored EFL students' perceptions of Grammarly as an AI-assisted writing tool in academic writing. A qualitative case study was conducted with seventeen fourth-semester students from the English Language Education Study Program at Universitas PGRI Ronggolawe Tuban during the 2025/2026 academic year. Data were collected through classroom observation, questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews, then analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. The findings show that students generally perceived Grammarly positively because it helped them identify grammatical errors, improve sentence structure, and revise writing more efficiently. Grammarly also increased students' confidence and supported more independent learning through immediate feedback. However, participants also reported several challenges, including inaccurate suggestions, dependence on internet connectivity, and the need to evaluate AI-generated feedback critically. The study concludes that Grammarly is a useful complementary tool that should support, not replace, instructors' guidance. Integrating Grammarly into EFL writing instruction with appropriate pedagogical support may help improve students' academic writing skills and promote learner autonomy.

Keywords: *Grammarly, AI-assisted writing, students' perceptions, academic writing, EFL students.*

A. INTRODDUCTION

Academic writing is an essential skill that enables university students to communicate ideas in a clear, logical, and structured way. For English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students, however, academic writing is often challenging because it requires not only language proficiency but also the ability to

organize ideas, choose appropriate vocabulary, and produce grammatically accurate texts. Previous studies have shown that university EFL learners often experience difficulties in developing thesis statements, organizing ideas, using cohesive devices, and writing coherent paragraphs (Aldabbus, 2022) (Bacha, 2002). In the

Indonesian context, students' attitudes toward writing are also shaped by the difficulties they face in grammar, paragraph organization, and psychological barriers such as anxiety and low confidence. These challenges make writing instruction more demanding and highlight the need for tools that can provide timely support.

The development of artificial intelligence has introduced new writing tools that assist learners during drafting, revising, and editing. Among these tools, Grammarly has become one of the most familiar applications because it provides immediate feedback on grammar, spelling, punctuation, clarity, and style. A systematic review by (Dizon & Gayed, 2024) found that Grammarly has been widely studied in L2 writing contexts and generally supports writing development, although feedback-related issues remain a limitation. More recent studies also show that AI-assisted feedback can improve revision frequency, confidence, and writing quality when combined with pedagogical support (Mekheimer, 2025). These findings suggest that Grammarly is not only a proofreading

tool but also a learning aid that may help students revise more independently.

From a theoretical perspective, Grammarly can be understood through Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). (Bodrova & Regional, 1998) describe ZPD as the space between what learners can do independently and what they can accomplish with assistance. (Stuyf, 2002) further explains that scaffolding provides temporary support that helps learners complete tasks beyond their current ability and gradually become independent. In this sense, Grammarly can function as digital scaffolding by offering immediate feedback that helps students notice and correct errors during writing. This idea is also consistent with the Output Hypothesis, which argues that producing language pushes learners to process language more deeply and refine their output through revision (Wei et al., 2018). Therefore, AI-assisted writing tools such as Grammarly may support writing development by helping students notice gaps in their language use and revise their work more effectively.

Although many studies have reported positive effects of

Grammarly and other AI-assisted writing tools, less attention has been paid to students' perceptions in Indonesian higher education, particularly in qualitative settings. Understanding students' perceptions is important because technology use in learning depends not only on effectiveness but also on students' experiences, confidence, and perceived usefulness. In addition, little is known about how students at Universitas PGRI Ronggolawe Tuban experience Grammarly in academic writing tasks. This study addresses that gap by exploring EFL students' perceptions of Grammarly as an AI-assisted writing tool, including its perceived benefits and challenges. The findings are expected to enrich the discussion of AI-assisted language learning and provide practical implications for EFL writing instruction.

Research Questions:

1. What are students' perceptions of Grammarly in academic writing?
2. What benefits and challenges do students experience when using Grammarly?

B. METHOD

This study used a qualitative case study design to explore EFL students' views on Grammarly as an AI-assisted writing tool in academic writing. The research was conducted in the English Language Education Study Program at Universitas PGRI Ronggolawe Tuban during the 2025/2026 academic year. The participants were seventeen fourth-semester students who had experience using Grammarly in their writing activities. Purposive sampling was used to select participants who met the study criteria. To obtain deeper qualitative data, thirteen students representing different writing proficiency levels were selected for semi-structured interviews.

Data were collected through classroom observation, questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews. Observation focused on how students used Grammarly during writing tasks. The questionnaire contained close-ended and open-ended items to examine students' perceptions, perceived benefits, and challenges related to Grammarly. The interviews provided richer explanations of students' experiences. The data were analyzed

using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which involves data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., n.d.). Methodological triangulation was used to strengthen the trustworthiness of the findings by comparing the three data sources.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

1. Students' Perceptions toward Grammarly in Academic Writing

The findings from classroom observation, questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews show that students generally perceived Grammarly positively as an AI-assisted writing tool in academic writing. Most participants believed that Grammarly helped them identify errors, improve sentence structure, and revise their writing before submitting assignments. The questionnaire results also indicated positive responses in the perceived usefulness section, showing that students felt Grammarly improved their writing and supported independent learning. Many students also reported that Grammarly made them feel more confident because they could identify and correct

language mistakes before receiving feedback from the lecturer.

These findings were consistent with classroom observation. During writing activities, students used Grammarly to check grammar, spelling, punctuation, and clarity before revising their drafts. Rather than accepting every suggestion automatically, some students compared Grammarly's advice with the meaning they intended to express before making changes. This shows that Grammarly functioned not only as an editing tool but also as a support for students' reflective writing decisions.

The interview data strengthened these findings. Most students stated that Grammarly made the revision process easier because it provided feedback on language errors. Several students also explained that repeated exposure to Grammarly's suggestions helped them notice recurring grammar problems and avoid making the same mistakes in future writing tasks. Overall, the results indicate that students viewed Grammarly as a tool that improved writing quality and increased confidence in academic writing.

2. Perceived Benefits and Challenges of Using Grammarly

Although participants generally expressed positive perceptions of Grammarly, the findings also revealed several benefits and challenges. The most frequently mentioned benefit was Grammarly's ability to improve grammatical accuracy by identifying errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation, and sentence structure. Students also felt that Grammarly simplified the revision process because it highlighted mistakes automatically and provided suggestions for improvement. In addition, many participants believed that Grammarly helped them organize ideas more clearly and reduced anxiety when completing academic writing tasks.

Despite these advantages, some challenges also emerged from the interviews and questionnaires. Several participants stated that Grammarly sometimes suggested vocabulary or sentence changes that did not fully match the intended meaning of their writing. As a result, students still needed to evaluate the suggestions carefully before using them. Another common challenge

was internet connectivity, since Grammarly requires a stable connection to function effectively. Some participants also worried that overreliance on Grammarly could reduce their ability to identify and correct writing errors independently. For this reason, they emphasized that Grammarly should be used as a supporting tool, not as a replacement for lecturer feedback or students' own language competence.

Taken together, the findings suggest that Grammarly is positively perceived by EFL students because it supports the writing and revision process while increasing confidence in academic writing. At the same time, students recognize that Grammarly works best when they evaluate its feedback critically and combine it with guidance from lecturers. These findings show that Grammarly functions most effectively as a complementary learning tool that supports the development of students' academic writing skills.

DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that EFL students generally hold positive perceptions of Grammarly as an AI-assisted writing tool in academic

writing. Students viewed Grammarly as useful because it helped them identify grammatical errors, improve sentence structure, and revise their work more effectively. The immediate feedback provided by Grammarly also increased their confidence and encouraged them to become more independent during the writing process. This result is consistent with (Dizon & Gayed, 2024), whose systematic review showed that Grammarly generally supports L2 writing, even though feedback-related issues remain a concern. It also aligns with (Mekheimer, 2025), who found that AI-assisted feedback can improve writing proficiency, revision frequency, and students' confidence when used alongside instruction.

The findings can also be interpreted through the lens of ZPD and scaffolding. (Bodrova & Regional, 1998) emphasize that learners develop best when they receive support that helps them move from assisted performance to independent performance. (Stuyf, 2002) similarly explains that scaffolding is temporary support that gradually disappears as learners gain competence. In this study, Grammarly acted as a form of digital scaffolding because it provided

immediate feedback that helped students notice and correct language problems during writing. In addition, the results are in line with (Wei et al., 2018), who notes that writing as output can push learners to process language more deeply and improve through revision. Thus, Grammarly appears to support learning by helping students notice gaps in their language use and refine their written output.

Despite these positive perceptions, the participants also identified several challenges in using Grammarly. Some students reported that the application occasionally offered suggestions that did not fully match their intended meaning, and that a stable internet connection was necessary for optimal use. These concerns are similar to those reported by (Kim et al., 2025), who found that students appreciated GenAI-assisted writing but also encountered AI-related, student-related, and task-related challenges. Likewise, (*European Journal of Educational Research*, 2025) reported that students valued AI tools such as Grammarly for timely feedback and personalized support, but they also stressed the need for critical

evaluation and ethical use. Therefore, Grammarly should be integrated into writing instruction as a complementary tool rather than a substitute for lecturers' guidance.

Overall, this study contributes to the growing literature on AI-assisted language learning by showing that Indonesian EFL students perceive Grammarly positively while still recognizing its limitations. The findings suggest that combining AI-generated feedback with human pedagogical support can help students improve academic writing more effectively. Furthermore, the integration of Grammarly into EFL writing instruction should be accompanied by clear pedagogical strategies. Lecturers should encourage students to critically evaluate AI-generated feedback rather than accepting every suggestion automatically. This approach can promote learner autonomy, critical thinking, and responsible use of AI-assisted writing tools in academic writing.

D. CONCLUSION

This study investigated EFL students' perceptions of Grammarly as an AI-assisted writing tool in

academic writing. The findings show that students generally had positive perceptions because Grammarly helped them identify grammatical errors, construct better sentences, and revise their writing more efficiently. Grammarly also increased students' confidence and supported independent learning through immediate feedback. However, the study also found several limitations, including contextual inaccuracy in suggestions, dependence on internet access, and the need for critical evaluation of AI-generated feedback. Therefore, Grammarly should be viewed as a supplementary tool rather than a replacement for lecturers' guidance. Integrating Grammarly into EFL writing classes with appropriate pedagogical support may help students develop greater linguistic accuracy and stronger academic writing skills.

This study has several limitations. The participants consisted of only seventeen fourth-semester EFL students from one university, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Therefore, future studies should involve participants from different universities, study programs, or proficiency levels to provide

broader insights into students' perceptions of AI-assisted writing tools. Future studies are also encouraged to compare students' experiences when using Grammarly Free and Grammarly Premium. Since the two versions offer different writing support features, such comparisons may provide a more comprehensive understanding of how AI-assisted writing tools influence students' writing development. In addition, future research should develop and evaluate pedagogical frameworks that guide lecturers in integrating AI-assisted writing tools into classroom instruction. Such frameworks may help students use Grammarly critically and responsibly while maintaining their independent writing abilities. Longitudinal or experimental studies are also recommended to examine the long-term effects of Grammarly on students' writing performance. Measuring students' writing ability before and after using Grammarly over one or more semesters would provide stronger empirical evidence regarding its effectiveness in improving grammatical accuracy and overall writing quality.

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