Exploring Grammarly's Effectiveness in EFL Writing through a Student Perception Study

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Abstract. The study explored the effectiveness of Grammarly as a supportive tool in enhancing English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing skills, based on students' perceptions. The research aimed to identify the advantages and disadvantages experienced by students using Grammarly in students writing activities. Data were collected from 30 higher education students at UIN Sumatera Utara Medan, who participated in EFL writing classes. The methodology involved questionnaires and interviews, with the questionnaires comprising 12 statements on Grammarly's usage intensity and effectiveness. Five students were selected for in-depth interviews to gain further insights into the students' experiences. The results indicated that students generally had positive perceptions of Grammarly, appreciating its ability to minimize grammatical errors, improve language style, and enhance word choice and punctuation. However, some drawbacks were noted, such as the need for a stable internet connection and the limited functionality of the free version. The conclusion of the study affirmed that Grammarly is a valuable tool for supporting EFL writing, providing clear and detailed feedback that helps students produce more accurate and polished written work. The research contributes to the understanding of technology-assisted language learning tools and their impact on student writing proficiency.

Key words: grammarly, efl writing, student perceptions, writing assistance tool, language learning technology

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INTRODUCTION

Writing has played a crucial role in human communication. Writing is an essential skill that allows individuals to express ideas, share opinions, and convey messages effectively (Yu et al., 2021). According to Shang (2022), writing is a complex process involving several stages, including discovering and organizing concepts, writing them down, and revising the work (Wu et al., 2020). Despite its importance, writing remains a challenging skill to master, particularly for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students who often struggle with grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure (Villar Faller, 2018). One of the significant issues faced by EFL students is the difficulty in producing grammatically correct and well-structured written work. The challenge is exacerbated by the differences between their native language and English, making it hard to generate quality writing (Karyuatry, 2018). Students often lack the necessary vocabulary and grammar knowledge, leading to frequent errors and a lack of confidence in their writing abilities (Dewi, 2023). Traditionally, students relied on repeated practice to improve their writing, but this method is time-consuming and often ineffective in identifying and correcting specific errors (X. Zhang et al., 2022).

The rapid advancement of technology, various tools have been developed to assist students in their writing activities (Castillo-Cuesta, 2020). One such tool is Grammarly, a grammar checker founded in 2009 by Max Lytvyn and Alex Shevchenko. Grammarly checks for a wide range of errors, including grammar, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling, and style, offering both free and premium versions with varying features (Ummah & Bisriyah, 2022). Grammarly provides detailed feedback, helping students to improve their writing accuracy and style efficiently. Despite the widespread use of Grammarly, there is limited research on students' perceptions of its effectiveness as a writing aid. While some studies have suggested that Grammarly is beneficial for improving writing skills, others have highlighted its limitations, such as the need for a stable internet connection and the high cost of the premium version (R. A. Fitria, 2021; Fitriana & Nurazni, 2022). The study aims to fill this research gap by exploring the perceptions of EFL students regarding the use of Grammarly as a supporting tool in their writing activities.

The research objectives are to identify the perceived advantages and disadvantages of using Grammarly, assess its overall effectiveness in enhancing writing skills, and determine how it can be

integrated into EFL writing classes. The study's rationale lies in the need to understand students' experiences and perceptions to improve the effectiveness of technology-assisted language learning tools (Lin et al., 2022). By providing insights into students' perceptions of Grammarly, the study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on language learning technologies and their impact on writing proficiency. Furthermore, the findings can help educators and institutions make informed decisions about incorporating such tools into their teaching practices, ultimately enhancing the quality of language education.

Grammarly has primarily focused on its technical features and general user feedback (Tian & Zhou, 2020). However, there is a lack of comprehensive studies examining its specific impact on EFL students' writing skills. The research aims to address the gap by providing a detailed analysis of students' experiences and perceptions, offering a more nuanced understanding of Grammarly's role in language learning. Research question is how do EFL students perceive the effectiveness of Grammarly as a supportive tool in enhancing their writing skills, and what are the perceived advantages and disadvantages of using this tool in their writing activities?

METHODS

The study aimed to explore the effectiveness of Grammarly as a supportive tool in enhancing EFL writing skills based on students' perceptions. To achieve this objective, a qualitative research design was employed, specifically utilizing a case study approach. This method allowed for an in-depth exploration of students' experiences and perceptions regarding the use of Grammarly in their writing activities (Islam et al., 2022; Leavy, 2020; Munck et al., 2014). The research was conducted with 30 higher education students from UIN Sumatera Utara Medan, all of whom were enrolled in EFL writing classes. Purposive sampling was used to select participants, ensuring that the selected students were familiar with and had used the premium version of Grammarly. This approach ensured that the data collected would be relevant and insightful.

Data collection involved two main instruments: questionnaires and interviews. Initially, a questionnaire consisting of 12 statements was distributed to all 30 students. The statements focused on various aspects of Grammarly's usage, including its intensity and effectiveness as a writing aid. The students responded using a Likert scale to express their agreement or disagreement with each statement. The responses were then analyzed using percentage calculations to determine the overall perception of Grammarly among the participants.

To gain deeper insights, five students were selected for in-depth interviews. These students were chosen based on their questionnaire responses and their willingness to participate further. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured format, allowing for flexibility in exploring specific areas of interest. The interview questions were designed to elicit detailed responses about the perceived advantages and disadvantages of using Grammarly, as well as its impact on the students' writing skills.

The data from the questionnaires were analyzed quantitatively using percentages to provide a clear picture of the overall student perceptions. The interview data were analyzed using content analysis, with responses categorized into themes to identify common patterns and insights. This dual approach ensured a comprehensive understanding of students' experiences and perceptions regarding Grammarly.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results
The study aimed to explore the perceptions of EFL students regarding the use of Grammarly as a supportive tool in their writing activities. Data were collected through questionnaires and interviews with 30 higher education students from UIN Sumatera Utara Medan. The findings from the questionnaires and interviews were analyzed to determine the overall effectiveness of Grammarly and to identify the advantages and disadvantages perceived by the students.

The results from the questionnaires revealed that the majority of students had a positive perception of Grammarly. As shown in Table 1, a significant proportion of students strongly agreed or agreed with statements about the ease of use, accessibility, and effectiveness of Grammarly in improving their writing skills. Specifically, 90% of students found Grammarly easy to use, and 83% agreed that Grammarly could be accessed easily and at any time.

Table 1. Students' Perception of Grammarly as a Supporting Tool in Writing

No	Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
1	Grammarly is easy to use	40	50	10	0	0
2	Grammarly can be accessed easily and can be accessed anytime and anywhere	43.3	40	13.3	3.3	0
3	Grammarly helps with English writing activities in class	46.7	46.7	6.7	0	0
4	Grammarly helps to understand sentence structure	40	43.3	16.7	0	0
5	Grammarly helps to check grammar errors	43.3	56.7	0	0	0
6	Grammarly helps to check incorrect word choices and punctuation	46.7	46.7	6.7	0	0
7	Grammarly helps correct language style in writing	30	56.7	13.3	0	0
8	Grammarly helps correct spelling in writing	33.3	53.3	16.7	6.7	0
9	Grammarly provides detailed feedback	26.7	40	26.7	6.7	0
10	Grammarly saves its users time in correcting errors	40	46.7	16.7	0	0
11	The error is easy to understand because the explanation given is clear	23.3	33.3	36.6	6.7	0
12	Grammarly has accurate, precise, and detailed grammar	26.7	36.7	33.3	3.3	0

In addition to the quantitative data, the interviews provided qualitative insights into the students' experiences with Grammarly. The majority of students appreciated Grammarly's ability to identify and correct grammatical errors, improve sentence structure, and enhance their overall writing quality. Students noted that Grammarly's detailed feedback helped them understand students' mistakes and learn from them, making students writing more accurate and polished.

The students reported that Grammarly's free version had limited functionality, which sometimes hindered their ability to fully utilize the tool. Additionally, the requirement for a stable internet connection was seen as a significant disadvantage, particularly in areas with unreliable internet access. The students mentioned that while Grammarly was effective in identifying errors, it sometimes failed to provide context-specific corrections, leading to occasional inaccuracies.
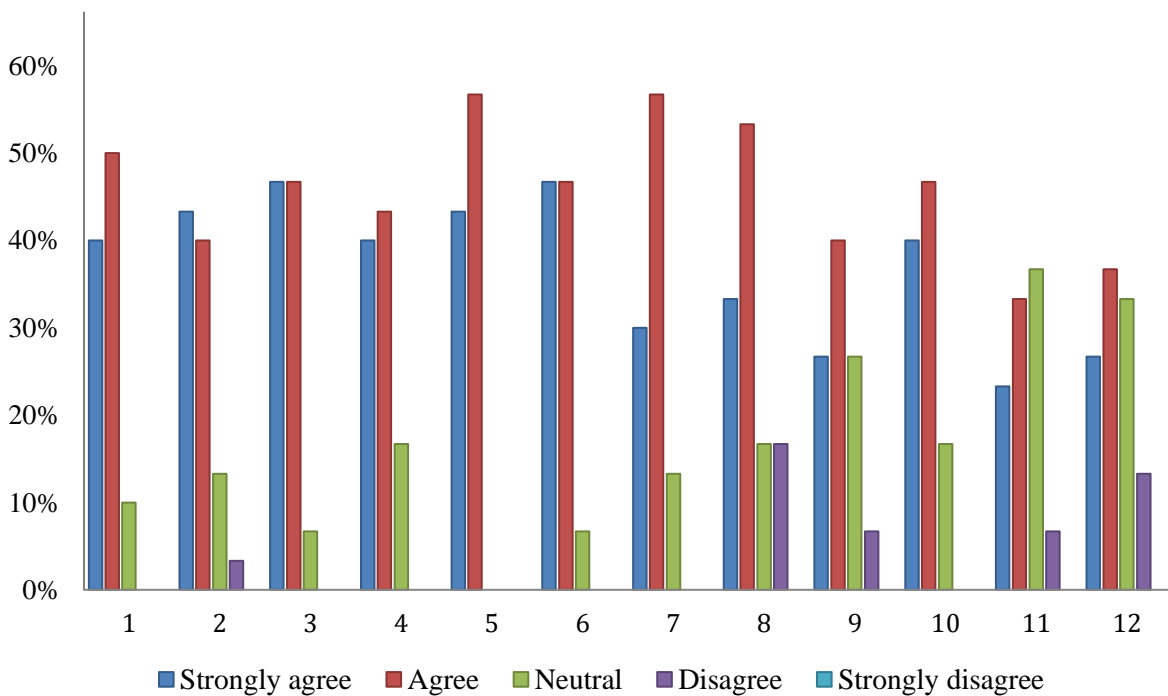

Figure 1. Students' Perception of Grammarly's Accessibility and Usefulness

The results indicate that Grammarly is perceived as a valuable tool for enhancing EFL writing skills. The majority of students found it easy to use and effective in improving various aspects of their writing, such as grammar, punctuation, and sentence structure. Despite some limitations, the positive perceptions and benefits identified by the students suggest that Grammarly can be a useful addition to EFL writing instruction.

The detailed feedback provided by Grammarly helped students understand their mistakes and learn from them, which contributed to students' overall improvement in writing skills. The study's findings highlight the importance of incorporating technology-assisted tools like Grammarly in language learning to support students' writing development. By addressing the limitations and enhancing the tool's functionality, educators and developers can further optimize its effectiveness for EFL students (T. Zhang & Zhang, 2021).

The researcher is conducting interviews to learn more about how students regard Grammarly as a helpful tool for students writing assignments and classes. Students participate in a structured interview to discuss the advantages and drawbacks of using Grammarly as a supporting tool shown in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3. The Advantages Of Grammarly

No	Theme Categories	Transcription of Students' Interview
1	Grammarly helps to identify the errors in grammar, punctuation, spelling and word choices in writing	Because Grammarly is very easy to use and really helps me in correcting the grammar of my English writing (DRA)
		By using Grammarly you can analyze words that are not appropriate to use in a sentence and then Grammarly also corrects inappropriate punctuation (DA)
		By using Grammarly we can see incorrect vocabulary and sentences, thus making our text more perfect (PA)
		There is a feature to correct incorrect punctuation, or I forgot to put it (LB)
		Sometimes I misplace punctuation and word choices used in sentences, and Grammarly is able to correct them. (ASS)
2	Grammarly is easy to use and access	Grammarly is easy to access if you use a good network and to find it on the web you only need to type "Grammarly" then the web version of Grammarly will appear (LB)
		Not really, because not all versions of Grammarly can be accessed for free (PA)
		Yes, very easy to use. Grammarly immediately detects errors in writing and immediately provides a more correct option (DA)
		Grammarly is very easy to use, especially for the web version which is very easy to access. When used, you don't have to go through many steps, just copy the text you want to check and Grammarly can immediately produce the results (ASS)
		Grammarly is very easy to use on a PC (laptop) or cellphone, therefore I highly recommend Grammarly for use because it can be used on any device as long as it has a good internet connection to access. (DRA)

3	Grammarly is very helpful in the process of writing	Very helpful, because Grammarly is able to correct mistakes in writing and perfect our writing. (PA) Grammarly is very helpful for correcting incorrect grammar in writing and doesn't take a long time to do it (LB) I think Grammarly is the most useful application that I have ever tried. Grammarly really helps me in my writing activities and improves my writing skills because the explanations are easy for me to understand. (ASS)

Table 4. The Drawbacks Of Grammarly

No	Theme Categories	Transcript of Students' Interview
1	The Fitur on the Grammarly is limited if you do not upgrade it to premium version/paid version	Yes, very limited. For example, in the non-premium version, we can only fix around 20-30%, but if we use the premium version, errors in writing will be corrected in detail. (LB) Yes, you have to pay or upgrade first to the premium version before you can use all the features. (DRA) The Grammarly I use is the free version of Grammarly, so the existing features are still limited, and to use all the existing features you have to upgrade to the premium or paid version. (PA)
2	The cost to upgrade it on the paid version is expensive for students	If you subscribe directly from the Grammarly website, I think Grammarly is quite expensive for students (LB) I think expensive or cheap is relative, but for me it's expensive (DRA)
3	Grammarly cannot accessed offline	Grammarly cannot be accessed offline, maybe there are times when we don't have a quota or a bad signal so we need to use it offline, but Grammarly cannot be accessed offline (LB)

Discussion

The results of the study indicate that Grammarly is perceived as a valuable tool for enhancing EFL writing skills (Barrot, 2022; Fathi & Rahimi, 2022; Jiang & Zhang, 2020). Students found it easy to use and effective in improving various aspects of their writing, such as grammar, punctuation, and sentence structure. The positive perceptions and benefits identified by the students suggest that Grammarly can be a useful addition to EFL writing instruction. The study aimed to fill the gap in understanding students' perceptions of Grammarly's effectiveness as a writing aid. While previous research has focused on the technical aspects and general user feedback of Grammarly, this study provides a deeper insight into the specific experiences of EFL students (Bai & Wang, 2021; Lv et al., 2021; Xu, 2021). By highlighting the perceived advantages and disadvantages, the research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of Grammarly's role in language learning (Guo & Bai, 2022).

The novelty of the research lies in its focus on the detailed perceptions of EFL students using both the free and premium versions of Grammarly. The findings reveal that while students appreciate the tool's ability to identify and correct errors, they also face challenges related to its limited functionality in the free version and the need for a stable internet connection. This dual perspective is crucial for educators and developers looking to improve the tool's accessibility and effectiveness (Li et al., 2020; Prasetyawati & Ardi, 2020; Waer, 2023). Grammarly helps students identify and correct grammatical errors, which directly addresses one of the main challenges EFL students face (Cheng & Zhang, 2021;

Farahian et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2023). By providing detailed feedback, Grammarly enables students to understand their mistakes and learn from them, thereby improving their writing skills over time. This benefit aligns with the study's objective to explore how technology-assisted tools can support language learning (Jiang et al., 2021; Nguyen et al., 2022; Pham et al., 2020; F. Teng, 2020; L. S. Teng, 2024).

The study highlights the importance of accessibility. While 83% of students agreed that Grammarly could be accessed easily and at any time, the requirement for a stable internet connection remains a barrier. This issue is particularly relevant in regions with unreliable internet access, suggesting that future developments of Grammarly should consider offline capabilities to enhance its utility (Al-Ahdal, 2020; Cheng et al., 2021; Sun & Hu, 2023; M. F. Teng, 2021; Yoon, 2021). The ability to access Grammarly offline would make it more versatile and reliable for users, ensuring that students can receive feedback on their writing regardless of their internet situation. In terms of broader implications, the study suggests that incorporating Grammarly into EFL writing instruction can significantly benefit students. The tool's ability to provide immediate feedback helps students produce more accurate and polished written work (Alharbi, 2020; Dewi, 2023; Huang & Renandya, 2020; Lam, 2020; Tsai, 2022; Zou et al., 2021). Educators can leverage this by integrating Grammarly into their teaching practices, thereby supporting students' writing development more effectively. The immediate feedback provided by Grammarly allows students to make real-time corrections, reinforcing learning and helping them internalize grammatical rules and writing conventions more effectively.

The research underscores the need for high-quality feedback in language learning (Amin & Ahmad, 2020; R. A. Fitria, 2021; T. N. Fitria, 2021; Fitriana & Nurazni, 2022; Karyuatry, 2018). The detailed and specific corrections provided by Grammarly help students understand their errors, which is essential for effective learning. This finding supports the broader educational principle that constructive feedback is crucial for skill development (Oktaviani et al., 2022; O'Neill & Russell, 2019; Qiong, 2017; Rahma Hakiki, 2021). Effective feedback not only corrects mistakes but also guides students towards better writing practices, encouraging self-reflection and continuous improvement. The study's findings have implications for the design and implementation of language learning technologies. By identifying the strengths and weaknesses of Grammarly, this research provides valuable insights for developers. Enhancing the tool's functionality, particularly for the free version, and addressing connectivity issues could make Grammarly more accessible and effective for a wider range of students (Richards & Renandya, 2022; Ummah & Bisriyah, 2022; Villar Faller, 2018; Visser & Sukavatee, 2020; Yurika & Farahdiba, 2023). Developers could consider incorporating more advanced features into the free version to ensure that all students, regardless of their financial situation, can benefit from comprehensive writing assistance.

The study also emphasizes the role of Grammarly in fostering independent learning. Students reported that using Grammarly helped them become more aware of their common mistakes and learn how to avoid them in future writing tasks. This aligns with the principles of self-regulated learning, where students take an active role in managing their learning processes and outcomes. By using Grammarly, students can receive immediate feedback and corrections, allowing them to learn from their errors and improve their writing skills over time. The integration of Grammarly into classroom instruction can also facilitate a more collaborative learning environment. Teachers can use Grammarly's feedback to tailor their instruction to address common issues identified in students' writing. This targeted approach can help teachers provide more personalized and effective support to their students, enhancing the overall learning experience. Additionally, Grammarly's feedback can serve as a basis for peer review activities, where students can learn from each other's mistakes and successes, fostering a collaborative and supportive learning community.

Furthermore, the study highlights the potential of Grammarly to bridge the gap between in-class instruction and independent practice. By using Grammarly, students can continue to receive guidance and support outside the classroom, ensuring that their learning is continuous and not limited to the confines of the classroom. This can be particularly beneficial for students who need extra practice or who are working on complex writing tasks that require ongoing feedback and revision. The findings also suggest that Grammarly can play a significant role in promoting digital literacy among students. As students use Grammarly, they become more proficient in using digital tools to enhance their writing. This digital literacy is an essential skill in today's technology-driven world, where the ability to effectively use digital tools can significantly impact academic and professional success.

CONCLUSION

The study aimed to explore the perceptions of EFL students regarding the use of Grammarly as a supportive tool in their writing activities. The findings indicate that Grammarly is widely perceived as a valuable aid for improving grammar, punctuation, and sentence structure, thus enhancing overall writing quality. Students appreciated Grammarly's ability to provide immediate, detailed feedback on their writing, which allowed them to identify and correct their mistakes efficiently. The tool's accessibility and ease of use were highlighted as significant advantages, making it a convenient tool for students to use anytime and anywhere. However, limitations such as the restricted functionality of the free version and the requirement for a stable internet connection were noted as areas needing improvement. These issues can hinder students, especially those who cannot afford the premium subscription or live in areas with unreliable internet access. The research contributes to the understanding of technology-assisted language learning tools, emphasizing the importance of incorporating such tools into EFL writing instruction to support students' development. Moving forward, educators and developers should focus on addressing the identified limitations and enhancing Grammarly's functionality to maximize its effectiveness and accessibility for all students. For educators, this could involve integrating Grammarly into the curriculum and negotiating institutional licenses for the premium version. For developers, improving the tool's offline capabilities and expanding the features available in the free version could make Grammarly more inclusive. By addressing these issues, Grammarly can continue to be an effective aid in improving EFL writing skills, contributing to better academic outcomes and greater student confidence in their writing abilities.

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