



## EXPLORING FACTORS BEHIND THE USE OF WRITING TOOL ASSISTANT: A TENDENCY AMONG EFL LEARNERS

Amira Wahyu Anditasari 1), Siti Kholija Sitompul 2).  
State University of Malang, English Department 1,2)  
Malang, Indonesia

e-mail address: [amira.wahyu.2002218@students.um.ac.id](mailto:amira.wahyu.2002218@students.um.ac.id)

Article History	Abstract
<p>Submitted date: 2022-11-05 Accepted date: 2022-12-25 Published date: 2023-02-01</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> Grammarly, students' tendency, writing skills</p>	<p>This present study aimed at identifying the students' tendency to use Grammarly to check and improve their writing texts. Various factors contributed to the use of Grammarly thus, this study emerges to explore the English Department students' responses toward the use of Grammarly. The responses were explored through a descriptive qualitative study using a semi-structured interview involving seven students from the English Department in a state university located in Malang who were Grammarly users for approximately two semesters. The interview was held online through the Zoom application to easily access the students' locations. The interview results were qualitatively analyzed using a thematic design consisting of transcribing, coding, and categorizing the data. The results were categorized into three main aspects of consideration: (1) using Grammarly, (2) selecting Grammarly features to be checked, (3) accepting Grammarly's feedback. Referring to the first aspect, the students affirmed that they checked their writing products to check grammar correctness and vocabulary appropriateness. Moreover, lack of confidence influences the students to use Grammarly. The second aspect related to Grammarly features turned out that correctness and clarity aspects were the most features checked by the students to ensure the appropriateness of sentence structures, wording, clarity of sentences, and punctuation. The last aspect refers to how the students deal with Grammarly feedback. The students contended that they never entirely accepted the detections from Grammarly because sometimes it contained inappropriate detection and irrelevant feedback. Therefore, this study has a significant contribution to diminishing the dependency of students on using Grammarly as a way to improve writing skills and increase writing confidence.</p>

### Introduction

Technology advancement in language learning has driven benefits for teachers and students, as proven by many studies (Amin & Sundari, 2020; Nova, 2018; Wen & Walters, 2022). Technology grants students with accelerated learning and excellent opportunities to practice what students have learned. It was assumed that technology might contribute to learning improvement if appropriately used. However, several educational practitioners argue that technology cannot significantly improve students' learning if it is not appropriately used, but the existence of technology, especially in the last ten years in Indonesian schools and universities, is widely employed. Grammarly, in this present study, is one of the technological assistant tools in writing that is believed to be a machine writing consultant to proofread and check the contents of a piece of writing (Soegiyarto et al., 2020). Grammarly's presence has contributed to students' process and performance in writing skills by assisting them in revising their writing aspects.

Grammarly was one of the solutions for students while undergoing the writing process through its features. The features provided in Grammarly reduce the errors in writing, improve writing quality, writing confidence, and also encourage self-proofreading (O'Neill & Russell, 2019). Reducing errors and improving the writing quality promote the betterment of the writing text produced by students. Moreover, Grammarly improves writing confidence; the fewer mistakes the students make, the more writing confidence they will have. Besides that, Grammarly provides a feature to adjust the goal of writing, whether academic, casual, or creative writing. In the same way, it provides self-proofreading to which students could accept or decline the given feedback.

Grammarly's features also provide beneficial help for students, such as checking the correctness and appropriateness of linguistic elements, for instance, grammar, wording, and mechanisms errors, and offering suggestions for checking text with a different writing genre and goal, academic or non-academic (Bailey & Lee, 2020; Fitria, 2021; Vo & Nguyen, 2020). The tool provides the students a feeling at ease in improving their writing skill. The ability to check incorrectness in technical content absolutely raises students' engagement in writing since they earn feedback for measuring their writing's quality. Although Grammarly has its limitation, such as limited detection of some technical and cultural words, as perceived by several studies (Bailey & Lee, 2020; Soegiyarto et al., 2020), thus far Grammarly functions as a practical and useful grammatical checker (Fahmi & Cahyono, 2021).

Pedagogically speaking, Grammarly promotes accuracy correctness that made students interested in using the tool (Aidil, 2019). The accuracy gives students the confidence that their writings have been well checked. In addition, Aidil (2019) confirmed that the tool also shows rapid error detection for saving the students' time in accomplishing the writing. Fahmi and Cahyono (2021) asserted that Grammarly is a comprehensible tool since the feedback explains the errors that should be replaced with the suggested answer. Other than a writing tool assistant, Grammarly becomes a self-correction before teachers give feedback on students' writing. The tool may encourage better writing performances when the task is being checked regularly (Daniels & Leslie, 2013). This means that Grammarly raises the students' awareness of noticing the corrections found in the writing products produced by the students.

In relation to writing skills, the writing intricacies for students attaining the writing goals were replicated by many previous researchers. Scientifically proven, Gray et. al., (2017) revealed that writing complexity goes to grammar because of the number of words, phrases, and clauses produced in a written text. The way these linguistic elements are composed matters to how the students correctly communicate them in a text. Besides, the writing approaches also make writing more complicated since writers need to undergo a back-and-forth process to produce a final draft. For instance, students may experience a pre-writing, writing, proofreading, and revising process and dare to submit the composed writing product (Sitompul & Anditasari, 2022; Suprpto et.al, 2022). Pedagogically speaking, Hamer (2003, p. 258) highlights that factual writing skill is beyond complicated as students must reconsider, re-compose, re-edit, re-proofread, and revise again until having a piece of writing product. Due to its complexity, Grammarly helps a lot of students in undergoing the writing process (Daniels & Leslie, 2013; Ghufon & Rosyida, 2018).

Due to its complexity, the urgency to provide students with adequate language input was agreed upon by some scholars (Cavaleri & Dianati, 2016; Knoch et al., 2014). Students cannot improve their language and linguistic skills without sufficient relevant input. The input was in the form of the feedback given by teachers or from a writing tool assistant named Grammarly. It is substantial that teachers' feedback is not automatically given, whereas Grammarly does. Grammarly is powered by an interconnected system related to artificial intelligence (AI) to show and perform tasks based on what is programmed by the users. Thus, the students just need to write or upload the text, and the automated feedback is given into account.

The automated feedback is related to the writing inputs concerning sentence correctness, clarity, engagement, and delivery. Nonetheless, different arguments among scholars related to automated feedback have surfaced (Cavaleri & Dianati, 2016; Chen & Cheng, 2008). Chen and Cheng (2008) affirmed that accurate feedback is more beneficial for beginner and intermediate students. On the contrary, Cavaleri and Dianati (2016) believed that automated feedback is favorable for more-able writers since they have sufficient grammatical understanding, so they could filter the suggestions that are correct or deemed unnecessary. Despite that automated feedback only benefits students with a certain level, it is unquestionable that Grammarly turns into the utmost helpful writing tool.

Therefore, the effectiveness of Grammarly has been explored by scholars such as (Bailey & Lee, 2020; Nova, 2018; Soegiyarto et al., 2020; Syafi'i, 2020; Vo & Nguyen, 2020). The studies ascertained that Grammarly assists the students in identifying and revising the incorrect aspects of writing. According to Nova (2018), some benefits of utilizing Grammarly were including useful feedback for learning sentence structure and punctuation, high rate of evaluation speed and ease of access to download the feedback. Likewise, Vo and Nguyen (2020) reported that students feel more convenient after checking writing in Grammarly. Grammarly eventually improved the students' awareness and provided instant and consistent feedback. However, the studies also revealed Grammarly's drawback that the suggested feedback from Grammarly was not always precise.

Although Grammarly has widely been investigated in language learning, previous studies regarding Grammarly's use and effectiveness in writing skills were only replicated from year to year (Bailey & Lee, 2020; Nova, 2018; Soegiyarto et al., 2020; Syafi'i, 2020; Vo & Nguyen, 2020). To the best of our knowledge, fewer studies investigated the tendency factors of using Grammarly. Thus, breaking the factors behind the use of Grammarly used by EFL students' needs to be undertaken. This present study emerges that exploring the students' responses regarding the use of Grammarly will benefit in two aspects. First, this study will reveal students' comprehension of writing skills as writing is used as a self-practice and development in learning a language. Second, investigating the factor may contribute to reducing the dependence on using Grammarly to promote students' self-autonomous learning. As a result, students are able to produce language without any assistance either from teachers or tools. Therefore, this study proposes "how is Grammarly used in writing skills by English Department students?" will significantly contribute in documenting the extent of Grammarly used by the students and empirically prove the students' reliance on using the tool when they have writing tasks.

## **Methodology**

This present study was carried out through a descriptive qualitative since the study aimed to describe the students' tendency to use Grammarly as a writing tool assistant. Descriptive qualitative concerns in describing why a particular phenomenon happens in-depth understanding (Borg & Gall, 2007). The subject was seven English Department students in a state university located in Malang who were Grammarly users for approximately two semesters. The data on the students' tendency to use Grammarly, which was in the form of transcription, was obtained through a semi-structured interview. The interview consisted of eight open-ended questions. Since the students involved have different locations from the researchers, they were interviewed through a zoom meeting application to maintain easy access. Table 1 shows the description of the interview guidelines.

**Table 1.** The Blueprint of the Interview

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Variables' Codes</b>	<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Total Questions</b>
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<b>Writing aspects</b>	Content Organization Grammar Vocabulary Mechanism Self-in confidence	The questions aimed to identify the writing aspects checked and the reasons.	3
<b>Grammarly in use</b>	Correctness Clarity Engagement	The questions aimed to find the most dominant feature of Grammarly in use	2
<b>Students' decisions</b>	Accept Revise	The questions aimed to know the students' decision toward Grammarly's correction	2
<b>Students' reasons</b>	Students' dependency Grammarly's effectiveness	The question aimed to know the students' reasons for using Grammarly	1

Overall, the questions were intended to find the students' responses regarding how they utilized Grammarly in writing and how they considered using a writing tool assistant. The interview results were analyzed qualitatively using the themes designed, which were adapted from the theory proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The steps were transcribing, coding, and categorizing the data. The first step was transcribing the obtained data from Zoom into transcribed sentences. It was continued to code the transcription. Then, the transcription was categorized based on the variables' codes consisting of three aspects dealing with how the students; use Grammarly, select Grammarly features, and accept Grammarly feedback.

### **Finding and Discussion**

The results of the interview were categorized based on three aspects of using Grammarly; the aspects deal with how the students; (1) use Grammarly, (2) select Grammarly features to be checked, (3) and accept Grammarly's feedback. The aspects were categorized based on the blueprint of the interview in Table 1 to maintain its organization in presenting the results.

### **Students' Reasons for Using Grammarly**

The first result deals with the reasons of the students for using Grammarly. Based on the interview results, most students confirmed that they are free Grammarly users and have been using it for six months, but one student has already used premium Grammarly for a month. Both free and premium Grammarly users confirmed the usefulness of this tool with various considerations of using it. The students highlighted the main reasons for using Grammarly, which is because of the teacher's suggestion. The result is shown in the following interview transcript.

*Excerpt 1: The writing task was done in a short time; therefore, the students were encouraged to use Grammarly by the teacher. Due to this encouragement, I myself get accustomed to checking my writing in that tool (St 1 & St 6).*

*Excerpt 2: I used Grammarly for checking grammar and punctuation. I considered using the tool because of its ease (St.2 & St.3).*

*Excerpt 3: Checking grammar and vocabulary (St.4).*

*Excerpt 4: Because I'm not sure my grammar is correct and less confident with my writing (St.5 & St 7).*

The excerpts provide a new expansion from other studies about the use of Grammarly in writing skills. This finding confirmed that the teacher's encouragement led them to use the tool. The teacher wished to find how their writing products were composed regarding the contents and the linguistic elements used. This means that students were demonstrated to self-correct their

writing products before submission to their teacher as a means of having good writing quality. This differs from a study (Andina et al., 2019) in that students' consideration for using writing assistant tools was to detect their writing errors and to expect improvement by the tool. The students highlighted that the tool might help them in checking grammar correctness.

There are various reasons obtained from the students for using Grammarly as their writing tool; lack of confidence in writing turned out to be the primary factor that contributed to the checking preferences. As a result, some of them became addicted to using Grammarly, and they were not sure about their writing results. However, one student stated that Grammarly helped her with self-correction and did not try to depend on it. See the detailed transcript in the following excerpts.

***Excerpt 1:** I was not confident enough if my writing was not checked by Grammarly. I always overthink whether my writing reaches its correctness. This checking was also affected by my habit of using the tool, and I feel convenient (St.1,4,5 &7).*

***Excerpt 2:** I am now dependent on using Grammarly. Besides, I'd like to acquire a good writing score from my teacher, so I consider using it (St.2)*

***Excerpt 3:** I attempt to not be dependent on Grammarly. I am using because just to ensure that my self-correction is good (St. 3).*

***Excerpt 4:** Sometimes I was unsure about my own writing, so I need to check my writing in Grammarly (St. 6).*

It was proven that most students were addicted to Grammarly use due to their lack of writing confidence and knowledge. On the other hand, two out of eight students realized that Grammarly also promotes self-improvement, which means students also study the given feedback. The students' statements can be shown in the following transcripts.

***Excerpt 1:** I do not have any anxiety, but a little unconfident. However, I intentionally check whether my writing is good enough after self-checking the content and grammar. Thus, I attempt to not being dependent in Grammarly. I am using because just to ensure that my self-correction is good (St.1).*

***Excerpt 2:** I feel that Grammarly allows me to improve myself and my writing, I don't only check my writing but also study the correction such as passive voice, sentence fragments, parallel verbs, etc. Thus, I got a piece of new knowledge and it can be applied to the betterment of my other writing. (St. 6)*

Another feature found in this present study was students' dependence. Many previous studies (Fitria, 2021; Pratama, 2020; Hakiki, 2021) confirmed that Grammarly found its effectiveness in helping students detect the students' writing errors. However, the fact showed that this study found a different result from other studies that Grammarly tends to make students dependent on using the tool. This means that Grammarly may demonstrate the students to always ask for help with the tool without putting effort to get improved. Besides, the students were dependent on Grammarly since they did not get enough feedback from their teachers. This inhibits students from conducting an ideal classroom practice in that they cannot explore and make progress in learning.

Surprisingly, this study revealed that the students used Grammarly to expect a good writing score. This emerges as a new result since the students admitted their fair response to using the tool. The tendency to use the tool needed to be critically controlled by both teachers and students. This means that students could find the essence of the writing assistant tool because there is no good effort to self-reflect on their capability in writing aspects, such as mastering grammar rules and using various vocabularies.

### **Grammarly's Features Checked by the Students**

The second aspect is related to the features that are mostly being checked by the students in Grammarly. To its name, most students confirmed that grammar became the main aspect that they checked, such as checking the sentence structures' correctness. The other writing aspects, such as mechanism and vocabulary, are also being checked. The detailed results can be seen in the following excerpts:

*Excerpt 1: My concern about using Grammarly was to check organization and punctuation. When my writing got detected as less than 80% by Grammarly, I always attempted to check to which aspect my writing was not good enough (St.3 &4).*

*Excerpt 2: I was not confident with my writing, especially in grammar and sometimes vocabulary (St.2 & 1).*

*Excerpt 3: I checked all aspects but focused more on the grammar (St.5)*

*Excerpt 4: I focused on checking the grammar and writing mechanics, such as punctuation and spelling, since I realized that my writing mistakes were not only grammar (St.6 &7).*

The most checked aspect showed that grammar is problematic for students; their difficulties made them less confident with their own writing unless checking it to Grammarly. Due to the students' lack of grammar, they perceived that Grammarly aids them in checking the incorrect sentence structures, such as the use of passive voice, pronoun, preposition, and conjunction. With the provided features in Grammarly, it was assumed that Grammarly becomes their choice in helping them comprehend grammar components. The result was in line with Andina et al., (2019) that Grammarly helped students to understand linguistics aspects, including choosing the correct diction, sentence structures, and paraphrasing.

Other than that, Grammarly also assists the students in checking writing mechanisms such as the correctness of punctuation and spelling. The correctness of the writing mechanism also affects the quality of writing in terms of paragraph coherence and cohesion, referring to texts' organization. The role of Grammarly fills the space to notify the students about the appropriate aspects of writing. With this in mind, the above-mentioned results concluded that Grammarly contributes as a valuable writing tool assistant for students. The results of this study were not different from previous studies (Hakiki, 2021; Soegiyarto et al., 2020; Syafi'i, 2020) and agreed that Grammarly is believed to be a practical and advantageous writing tool in supporting students' writing paragraphs.

Eventually, we also believed that Grammarly encourages students to acquire instant knowledge without exploring the learning process. Exploring the learning process may help students to avoid the same mistakes in the next writing, which affect their writing performance and skills. It was considered that Grammarly could be used effectively within the condition that students had to acquire and acknowledge the process of correctness and be responsible for the feedback they accepted. Through the condition, the writing product genuinely represents the actual students' writing skills, not because of the role of Grammarly, but it was the result of acquiring and acknowledging the feedback.

### **Students' Decisions of Grammarly's Feedback**

The third aspect is related to how the students deal with feedback from Grammarly. Grammarly features provide the users with optional suggestions consisting of four categories; correctness, clarity, engagement, and delivery. Students might have different options related to the

suggestions offered by Grammarly; thus they could consider which of the four suggestions categories they were concerned on. The interview results showed that students mostly focused on the correctness and clarity of suggestions due to the lack of grammar knowledge. The following excerpts show the detailed results.

*Excerpt 1: My concerns on checking my writing were correctness and clarity because I think both aspects are the most important in writing (St.1,2 &5).*

*Excerpt 2: I checked clarity and engagement in order to see appropriate wordings in use. I checked my text many times until finding the correctness and feeling sure about my text (St.3).*

*Excerpt 3: Concerning correctness (St 4&7).*

*Excerpt 4: R: I am honestly concerned with all of the suggestions, but I often reread them to check whether they are appropriate suggestions or not (St. 6).*

Even though Grammarly provides useful feedback in many writing aspects, not all students take all the feedback. Some students explained that the feedback provided in Grammarly sometimes is not always valid and appropriate in certain writing contexts. Thus, students deal with the given feedback differently. The following excerpts show the way students decide the revision from Grammarly.

*Excerpt 1: I always re-consider accepting the revisions by checking the suggested feedback from Grammarly. Somehow, Grammarly does make errors or inappropriate feedback (St.1, 2 & 7).*

*Excerpt 2: Grammarly is a robot; sometimes, I could not accept some revisions because Grammarly cannot give appropriate answers responding to my writing intention (St 3)*

*Excerpt 3: I corrected one by one first; if I think it is suitable and correct, I will take the correction. If I am doubted, I recheck it with others' writing tools (St.5)*

*Excerpt 4: Yes, I take it all, but I recheck it because sometimes some of the suggestions don't match the context of my writing (St.6 & 4)*

Despite the fact that Grammarly offers useful feedback, the students still contemplate in accepting the revision of their mistakes, in which they did not merely take the whole suggestions but check them again to guarantee the correctness. To its results, the study highlighted that the finding related to Grammarly's feedback decision was the indication of students' choice to rationally use the writing assistant tool. Whatever the suggestions are offered, the writing topics, the audience of the writing, and the writing styles cannot be specifically detected by Grammarly. In the light of above-mentioned results, it was concluded that the students' process in deciding the Grammarly's feedback was underexplored compared to a lot of research (Andina et al., 2019; Fitria, 2021; Halim et al., 2022; Nova, 2018; Rahma Hakiki, 2021; Soegiyarto et al., 2020)

## **Conclusion**

As a whole, the complexities of writing skills encourage the students to apply a writing assistant tool. This study exploring the students' tendency to use Grammarly affirmed that students had three considerations. Initially, this study empirically uncovered that the reasons to use the tool were because of several attributes, such as teacher's encouragement and students' less confidence towards the writing quality. The students confirmed that the writing quality should be ensured by checking it with a writing tool like correctness, clarity, and engagement. Besides, the students believed that Grammarly grants writing improvement and confidence after checking their writing; most of the feedback assisted them in learning the correct form of

grammar and other writing aspects such as mechanism and organization. Yet, they have to acquire the process of accepting the feedback as a reflection of their own ability. The last aspect refers to the students' dependence on the various features offered in Grammarly. The students affirmed that fully accepting Grammarly should not be done because the tool is just a tool that cannot understand the clear intention of the writers. Thus, Grammarly will be significantly beneficial for the students only if it is relevant to their writing style and intention. It was assumed that having investigated the three aspects of Grammarly used by the students, this study recommended that further explorations should be conducted on how teachers should allow the students to use writing assistant tools and how teachers consider the writing scores after checking Grammarly.

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