# THE STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF USING GRAMMARLY AS A LEARNING TOOL IN WRITING SKILLS

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| Article Info | ABSTRACT |
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| | Writing is one of the most challenging skills for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, especially for first-semester students who are still adapting to academic writing. Technological tools such as Grammarly have been widely used to support students in improving writing accuracy and providing immediate feedback. This study aims to explore first-semester students' perceptions of using Grammarly in English writing at STAIN Madina. A qualitative descriptive research design was employed, involving ten students from the English Education Department selected through purposive sampling. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and documentation of students' writing drafts and Grammarly feedback. The data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that students generally have positive perceptions of Grammarly as a writing support tool. Grammarly helps students identify grammatical errors, increases their confidence in writing, and promotes learner autonomy. However, the study also found challenges such as overdependence on the tool and occasional inaccuracies in feedback. The study concludes that Grammarly is effective as a supportive tool in EFL writing instruction when used critically and combined with lecturer guidance. |

## Introduction

Writing is widely recognized as one of the most important yet challenging skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning. Unlike listening or reading, writing requires learners to actively produce language while simultaneously paying attention to grammatical accuracy, appropriate vocabulary use, and coherent organization of ideas. According to Hyland (2003), writing is a complex cognitive and social process that involves not only mastering linguistic forms but also constructing meaning and communicating ideas effectively within a particular context. In higher education, writing plays a central role in academic success, as students are expected to produce essays, reports, reflections, and research papers that meet academic conventions and standards. However, despite years of English instruction, many EFL students continue to experience difficulties in developing effective writing skills.

In the Indonesian EFL context, writing is often perceived as one of the most difficult skills to master. Students are required to apply grammar rules accurately while expressing ideas logically and clearly. This challenge becomes more apparent at the tertiary level, where academic writing demands higher levels of language proficiency and critical thinking. At STAIN Madina, many students encounter problems in writing English accurately, including limited vocabulary, grammatical errors, and weak paragraph organization. These difficulties often result in low confidence, anxiety, and reluctance to write in English. Harmer (2007) explains that EFL learners frequently struggle with

writing because they must generate ideas, organize content, and apply correct linguistic forms at the same time, which can be cognitively demanding, especially for beginner or first-semester students.

Another challenge faced with writing instruction is the limited opportunity for students to receive detailed and immediate feedback. In many higher education contexts, lecturers handle large classes and tight schedules, making it difficult to provide individualized feedback for every student's writing. As a result, students may not fully understand their writing errors or how to revise their work effectively. This situation can hinder students' writing development and reduce their motivation to improve. Therefore, alternative forms of feedback that support students' writing practice are increasingly needed.

In recent years, technological advancements have provided new opportunities to support language learning, particularly in writing instruction. Digital tools have been widely integrated into EFL classrooms to enhance learning effectiveness and learner autonomy. One of the most popular tools used by students is Grammarly, an online writing assistant designed to provide instant feedback on grammar, spelling, punctuation, and writing clarity. Grammarly allows learners to receive immediate corrective feedback while writing, which can help them identify errors and revise their texts more efficiently. Li, Link, and Hegelheimer (2015) argue that automated written corrective feedback plays an important role in helping learners notice language errors and improve accuracy through independent revision. By offering explanations and suggestions, Grammarly also supports students' metalinguistic awareness and encourages self-editing.

The use of Grammarly in academic writing has become increasingly common because it offers immediate feedback without requiring students to wait for a lecturer's correction. This feature promotes learner autonomy, as students take greater responsibility for revising and improving their own writing. Moreover, Grammarly is accessible through various devices, such as laptops and smartphones, making it convenient for students to use both inside and outside the classroom. These features can motivate students to write more frequently and engage more actively in the revision process. However, despite its advantages, the effectiveness of Grammarly also depends on how students perceive and use the tool.

Students' perceptions play a crucial role in determining the success of technology integration in language learning. According to Davis (1989), in the Technology Acceptance Model, users' perceptions of usefulness and ease of use influence their attitudes toward adopting and using technology. In the context of writing instruction, students may perceive Grammarly as a helpful learning tool that supports their writing development, or they may view it merely as an automatic error-correction application. Some students may become overly dependent on Grammarly, relying on it without fully understanding the corrections, while others may question the accuracy of its feedback. These different perceptions can influence how effectively students use Grammarly and how much they benefit from it in improving their writing skills.

The integration of technology into English language learning continues to develop as part of efforts to promote digital literacy and independent learning. However, students' familiarity and confidence in using digital writing tools vary significantly. While some students enthusiastically adopt Grammarly as a writing assistant, others still prefer traditional feedback from lecturers. This variation in students' responses highlights the importance of understanding how students perceive Grammarly in their writing process.

Therefore, this study aims to explore first-semester students' perceptions of using Grammarly in English writing at STAIN Madina. By examining students' experiences, opinions, and attitudes toward Grammarly, this research seeks to provide insights for educators regarding the role of automated writing tools in EFL writing instruction. The findings are expected to contribute to the broader

discussion on technology-enhanced learning and offer practical implications for integrating Grammarly effectively into academic writing courses.

## Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore students' perceptions of using Grammarly in writing activities. Qualitative research was chosen because it allows the researcher to understand participants' experiences, opinions, and interpretations in depth and within their natural learning context (Creswell, 2014). The descriptive approach was used to portray students' perceptions without manipulating variables or measuring cause-and-effect relationships.

The research was conducted at STAIN Madina, North Sumatra, Indonesia, during the first semester of the 2025/2026 academic year. The setting was selected because Grammarly had been introduced as a supplementary tool in writing instruction for first-semester students in the English Education Department. The participants of this study were ten first-semester students from the English Education Department who had used Grammarly for at least one month in their writing activities. A purposive sampling technique was applied to select participants who met specific criteria: (1) being first-semester students, (2) having experience using Grammarly in writing tasks, and (3) being willing to participate voluntarily and share their experiences. This sampling technique was considered appropriate to obtain rich and relevant data related to the research focus.

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and documentation. The semi-structured interviews were conducted individually and focused on students' experiences, perceived benefits, challenges, and overall perceptions of using Grammarly in writing. Classroom observations were carried out to examine how students interacted with Grammarly during writing activities and how they responded to feedback provided by the tool. Documentation included students' writing drafts, Grammarly feedback screenshots, and related learning materials, which supported data triangulation.

The data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), consisting of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. During data reduction, irrelevant and repetitive data were eliminated, and key themes were identified. In the data display stage, the organized data were presented in narrative form to identify patterns and relationships. Finally, conclusions were drawn up and continuously verified by comparing findings across different data sources.

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the data, triangulation was applied by comparing information obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation. Ethical considerations were also maintained throughout the study. Participants were informed about the research purpose, their participation was voluntary, and confidentiality was assured.

## Findings and Discussions

## Findings

This section presents the main findings of the study based on data collected from semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and documentation. The findings focus on first-semester students' perceptions of using Grammarly in English writing at STAIN Madina.

### 1. Positive Perceptions of Grammarly as a Writing Tool

The findings indicate that most students had positive perceptions of using Grammarly in their writing activities. Students reported that Grammarly helped them identify grammatical errors that they were often unaware of, such as errors in tense usage, subject–verb agreement, articles, and prepositions. The instant feedback provided by Grammarly allowed students to revise their writing immediately without waiting for lecturers' corrections.

Students also expressed that Grammarly made the writing process easier and less stressful. For first-semester students, who are still adjusting to academic writing in English, Grammarly provided a sense of security and support during writing tasks.

### 2. Increased Confidence in Writing English

Another key finding is that Grammarly contributed to an increase in students' confidence when writing in English. Students stated that they felt more confident submitting their assignments because Grammarly had checked their grammar and spelling. This confidence encouraged them to write more freely and to complete writing tasks without excessive fear of making mistakes. Classroom observations supported this finding, showing that students were more active in writing and revising their drafts compared to earlier writing activities without Grammarly.

### 3. Development of Learner Autonomy

The findings also reveal that Grammarly promoted learner autonomy. Students did not rely solely on lecturers to identify errors but instead took the initiative to revise their writing independently using Grammarly's feedback. Many students reported comparing their original sentences with Grammarly's suggestions to understand their mistakes. This process helped students recognize recurring errors in their writing, indicating increased awareness of their own language use.

### 4. Challenges in Using Grammarly

Despite the positive perceptions, the findings show several challenges in using Grammarly. Some students admitted that they tended to accept Grammarly's suggestions automatically without critically evaluating them. In addition, students noted that Grammarly occasionally provided suggestions that did not fully match the intended meaning of their sentences. These challenges confused some students, especially when Grammarly's feedback differed from lecturers' explanations.

## Discussion

This section discusses the findings by relating them to relevant theories and previous studies on writing, technology-assisted learning, and students' perceptions.

The positive perceptions of Grammarly found in this study support Hyland's (2003) view that writing is a complex process requiring both linguistic accuracy and idea organization. Grammarly assists students by reducing difficulties related to grammar and mechanics, allowing them to focus more on developing ideas. This explains why students perceived Grammarly as helpful and supportive in their writing process.

The increase in students' confidence aligns with studies on automated written corrective feedback, which suggests that immediate feedback can reduce writing anxiety and increase learners' motivation. From a Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) perspective, technology creates a low-anxiety learning environment where students feel safe to learn from their mistakes. Grammarly's instant feedback appears to play an important role in building students' confidence, particularly among beginner-level EFL learners.

The development of learner autonomy observed in this study is consistent with constructivist learning theory. By revising their writing independently and reflecting on Grammarly's feedback, students actively constructed their knowledge. Grammarly functioned as scaffolding that supported students within their Zone of Proximal Development, gradually helping them become more independent writers.

However, the challenges identified in the findings highlight the limitations of automated writing tools. Students' tendency to accept suggestions without critical thinking supports concerns raised by previous researchers regarding overdependence on technology. Grammarly's occasional inability to

fully understand context and meaning also confirms that automated tools cannot replace human judgment, especially in academic writing.

Furthermore, students' views that Grammarly should complement rather than replace lecturers reinforce the importance of balanced technology integration. Lecturers remain essential in providing feedback on content, organization, and academic quality, while Grammarly mainly supports linguistic accuracy.

Overall, the discussion shows that Grammarly is most effective when used as a supporting tool combined with lecturer guidance. Proper instruction on how to use Grammarly critically is necessary to maximize its benefits and minimize its limitations in EFL writing instruction.

**Conclusions**

This study explored first-semester English Education students' perceptions of using Grammarly as a writing support tool at STAIN Madina and found that Grammarly is generally perceived positively and plays a supportive role in EFL writing instruction. The findings indicate that Grammarly helps students identify grammatical errors, improve language accuracy, reduce anxiety, and increase confidence in writing, particularly for first-semester students who are still adapting to academic writing in English through the provision of immediate feedback that enables efficient revision. In addition, Grammarly contributes to the development of learner autonomy by encouraging students to revise their writing independently, reflect on feedback, and become more aware of recurring errors, thereby supporting metalinguistic awareness and constructivist learning principles. However, the study also reveals challenges, including students' tendency to rely excessively on Grammarly without critical evaluation and occasional inaccuracies in feedback that do not fully match contextual meaning. Therefore, the findings suggest that Grammarly is most effective when used as a complementary tool rather than a replacement for lecturer feedback, as lecturers remain essential in guiding content development, organization, and academic quality; consequently, the integration of Grammarly in EFL writing instruction should be accompanied by explicit guidance on critical and responsible use of automated feedback to maximize its benefits in higher education contexts.

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