

Perspectives of Vietnamese Students and Teachers on the Effectiveness of Grammarly in English Writing Development

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Abstract

This study seeks to investigate the efficacy of Grammarly, an AI-powered tool, in enhancing English writing skills from both teachers' and students' viewpoints. To achieve this, the study employed a qualitative case study approach, conducting semi-structured interviews with five teachers and ten students at a private university in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The data were analyzed through thematic analysis to uncover patterns and insights. The findings indicate a consensus among students and teachers regarding Grammarly's value in augmenting writing skills, particularly in its capacity for error detection and the provision of immediate feedback. However, notable differences in opinion emerged between the two groups. While students tend to unquestioningly embrace the feedback from Grammarly, teachers approach the tool's suggestions with more critical evaluation. The distinction highlights differing attitudes towards the role of Grammarly in writing development and points to significant pedagogical implications for its integration into English language instruction.

Keywords: Grammarly; L2 writing; learners' perspectives; teachers' perspectives

INTRODUCTION

Effective writing skills serve as the basis of academic writing, playing a key role in conveying ideas, arguments, and research findings clearly and persuasively. In academic background, the ability to express thoughts coherently through writing is essential for producing well-structured essays, research papers, and dissertations, and ultimately contributing to the advancement of knowledge in various fields (Bailey & Lee, 2020). Strong writing skills not only demonstrate a student's comprehension of the subject matter but also reflect their critical thinking abilities and analytical skills. Moreover, proficient writing is often required for academic success.

Despite the importance of English writing skills in academic contexts, students often encounter numerous challenges in their writing such as linguistic problems, inter alia, relating to grammar, spelling, and punctuation (Bardianing et al., 2023). These language barriers often hinder them from expressing themselves accurately in English writing (Karyuatry, 2018). Moreover, limited access to English writing instructions and feedback due to time constraints further exacerbates these challenges, impeding students' progress in honing their English writing skills (van Rensburg & La, 2021).

Meanwhile, the emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools has revolutionized the landscape of writing instruction and feedback provision. Automated Writing Evaluation technologies have emerged as valuable resources for language students who

seek to improve their L2 writing proficiency. These AI-powered tools can offer real-time feedback on grammar, spelling, punctuation, style, and clarity (Tambunan, 2022). Specifically, they help language learners identify and rectify errors and refine the overall writing style in terms of cohesion and coherence. As a widely used tool, Grammarly has facilitated language learners in overcoming language barriers and improving their writing skills.

Grammarly is a widely acclaimed and user-friendly grammar-checking tool as it has gained immense popularity among writers, students, professionals, and individuals from various fields. According to Fitriana and Nurazni (2022), Grammarly offers both a software package that can be installed on the Microsoft Office Word platform and an accessible online version, providing users with flexibility and convenience in their writing process. Grammarly can scan written documents in realtime, flagging grammatical errors and offering valuable suggestions for improvement in the language (Astuti & Sumarni, 2023). Beyond its primary focus on grammar, Grammarly can provide suggestions for punctuation refinement; and vocabulary enhancements by suggesting more precise word choices to elevate the clarity of the text. By meticulously analyzing each sentence, Grammarly ensures that the written content adheres to grammatical rules, producing a polished and professional output (Puri & Setiamunadi, 2023).

Grammarly's effectiveness in error detection spans across various facets of writing, including grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Karyuatry (2018) conducted research involving 40 students, demonstrating that Grammarly effectively minimized errors in descriptive writing, leading to improved writing proficiency. Furthermore, Fitriana and Nurazni (2022) highlighted Grammarly's capability to detect grammar errors comprehensively, thereby aiding students in enhancing their writing quality. Additionally, studies by Fadhilah et al. (2019) and Daroina et al. (2022) showcased Grammarly's effectiveness in identifying errors across various writing contexts, including abstracts and academic articles. Furthermore, Barrot (2023) emphasized Grammarly's role in promoting correctness and conciseness in writing, thus serving as a valuable tool for error detection and correction. By addressing errors and providing suggestions for improvement, Grammarly acts as a valuable tool for individuals seeking to refine their writing skills, making it an essential asset in educational settings.

In terms of feedback provision, several studies have highlighted Grammarly's significance in offering corrective feedback to users. Tarsan et al. (2021) and Faisal and Carabella (2023) demonstrated that students perceived Grammarly positively for its feedback on grammar errors, indicating its utility in improving writing skills and boosting confidence. Moreover, Perdana et al. (2021) and Dewi (2022) emphasized the benefits of Grammarly in providing detailed feedback on grammar, punctuation, spelling, and style, which contributes to enhancing writing proficiency. Additionally, Qassemzadeh and Soleimani (2016), Armanda et al. (2022) and Ardhy et al. (2023) revealed that EFL students found Grammarly helpful in detecting and correcting grammatical and stylistic errors in their writing assignments. Overall, Grammarly's feedback provision stands out for its clarity, usefulness, and user-friendliness, making it an indispensable aid for learners seeking to refine their writing abilities across various contexts.

These previous studies (e.g., Fadhilah et al., 2019; Perdana et al., 2021; Tarsan et al., 2021; Zinkevich & Ledeneva, 2021; Dewi, 2022; Tambunan, 2022) have focused on Grammarly's role in improving writing skills among students, covering genres such as

descriptive, narrative, and academic writing. Grammarly has been recognized for its significant advantages including increasing motivation for learning (van Rensburg & La, 2021), providing personalized feedback (Nguyen & Hoang, 2023), and offering error corrections (Nguyen, 2024). However, Vietnamese students, despite recognizing these benefits, may not be fully equipped to optimize the platform's functionalities to improve their writing skills (van Rensburg & La, 2021). This gap highlights the need for further research specific to the Vietnamese context, which presents distinctive linguistic and cultural features. More studies are needed to explore how Vietnamese EFL learners can fully leverage Grammarly to enhance their writing abilities.

Thus, this study aims to explore the effectiveness of Grammarly in writing development from the perspectives of both learners and teachers. Hopefully, by adopting the qualitative approach, this study can provide more valuable insights into how Vietnamese students can better utilize Grammarly, addressing the specific challenges they face in improving their English writing competencies.

METHOD

This study adopted a qualitative research design to explore the effectiveness of Grammarly in enhancing writing skills at a private university, considering perspectives from both students and teachers. Qualitative methods, including interviews using open-ended questions, facilitate a nuanced examination of participants' experiences and perceptions regarding Grammarly's impact on writing abilities. A qualitative case study approach offers depth and complexity, allowing researchers to capture unique perspectives and behaviors effectively (Mackey & Gass, 2021). Through semi-structured interviews, researchers engage in rich conversations, eliciting detailed responses that may not be fully captured through quantitative methods. The flexible nature of open-ended questions enabled participants to express their thoughts freely while ensuring that emerging concerns were adequately addressed.

The participants were selected as a result of purposive and convenience sampling methods. The sample included ten students and five teachers, all with experience in using Grammarly in their writing. For the student group, the selection process ensured diversity by including students from different academic years and genders. All students were seniors with 50% male and 50% female students. They also had varied academic experiences, ranging from 10 to 13 years of study. In the teacher cohort, there were three male and two female participants. Four held master's degrees while one had a doctoral degree. The teachers possessed a wealth of experience in teaching tenures ranging from 7 to 13 years. The diversity in both groups allowed the study to capture a wide range of perspectives from learners and educators on the use of Grammarly as a writing enhancement tool.

This study primarily utilized interviews with open-ended questions as the main method for data collection. The interview format consisted of a set of predetermined questions specifically tailored to address the objectives of the current research study. Although these questions were asked systematically and consistently, the researcher had the flexibility to probe further and request additional explanations from the interviewees whenever clarification was needed. The interview guide consisted of seven open-ended questions, developed through a synthesis of relevant literature to align with the purposes of the study. These items revolved around the following issues: Grammarly usage for writing, frequency of use, the roles of Grammarly in writing, accuracy of suggestions, key beneficial features, personalization of feedback, and Grammarly versus

teacher feedback. All the interviews were conducted in the participant's native language to minimize potential language barriers and ensure that they could express their thoughts and ideas freely.

The research process began with getting permission from the authority of the research site. After that, the sample was identified. The researchers approached each participant, informing them of the research purpose, assuring confidentiality, and explaining their rights. The in-person interviews lasted about 20 minutes, with explicit consent for audio recordings to ensure accurate data collection and preserve the richness of participants' responses. After data collection, systematic analysis techniques were applied. The interview transcripts were reviewed. Keywords were highlighted and categorized into themes.

The researchers used thematic analysis to identify patterns, themes, and trends within the data. The following steps were taken (Neuendorf, 2002):

Step 1: Initial transcript review

Step 2: Highlight keywords.

Step 3: Organize data into categorical labels.

Step 4: Identifying patterns and trends.

Step 5: Reporting findings with key themes and illustrative quotes.

The analysis was cross-checked among members of the research team and an expert in the field to ensure the reliability of the process as well as the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings obtained from interviews with both students and teachers show that Grammarly offers many benefits to student writing. The overall opinion of the participants was that Grammarly had made notable contributions to improving the overall quality of students' writing. Students (S10) emphasized Grammarly's role in skills development by offering feedback, rectifying errors, and suggesting alternative vocabulary to enhance the precision of written content. Teachers noted its ability to support different writing styles, including academic writing. For example, T4 explained that Grammarly's academic tone aligns with the expectations of international publications.

Corroborating this view, Karyuatry (2018) identified positive student feedback for Grammarly in terms of having a constructive influence on writing development. Similarly, the instructor's views uncovered that Grammarly helps reduce students' common writing errors. In particular, they affirmed that Grammarly has emerged as a valuable pedagogical resource, providing students with the support and guidance needed to hone their writing skills and produce more polished essays. This aligns with insights from research conducted by Perdana et al. (2021). As elucidated by Perdana et al. (2021), the main goal of Grammarly is to establish a seamless connection between writers and comprehensive grammar software, providing a range of support services to enhance English academic writing, as well as supporting the achievement of other writing goals.

Specifically, teachers and learners highlight Grammarly's strengths in error detection, feedback provision, and its potential to substitute for teachers, revealing both shared and differing perspectives.

Error detection

Grammarly's error identification feature is highly valued by both teachers and students. However, they expressed slightly different perspectives. Teachers highlighted that Grammarly points out minor grammatical errors, such as verb conjugation and punctuation. For instance, T2 noted that "*Grammarly primarily focuses on checking spelling accuracy and minor grammatical issues like articles or verb forms*". This finding mirrors those by Astuti and Sumarni (2023), indicating its effectiveness in flagging grammatical issues. Conversely, students contended that Grammarly helps enhance the fluency and comprehensibility of their writing to a certain extent. As S7 shared, "*Grammarly's error detection is spot on. It points out mistakes that I did not even realize I made, and that has significantly improved the overall quality of my writing*". Additionally, students demonstrated significant interest in Grammarly's assistance in sentence construction and the clarification of writing structure. Besides identifying and rectifying spelling errors, S8 said that "*Grammarly aids in correcting sentence structure errors, thereby preventing redundancy and confusion*". These observations are consistent with Dewi (2022) and Nguyen (2024). They reported that Grammarly facilitates the identification of grammar, punctuation, spelling, and word choice errors in text, thereby minimizing errors in written products. Furthermore, Grammarly helps improve students' interpretation skills, correct errors in writing anytime, anywhere, and boost students' vocabulary levels.

Teachers and students agree on Grammarly's utility, but their emphasis differs. Teachers focused on grammatical precision, while students highlighted its broader contribution to writing clarity and coherence. As illustrated by quotes from teachers:

Grammarly's error detection feature played a crucial role in quickly identifying and fixing common writing mistakes in their students' work. (T1)

Currently, Grammarly's correction method is almost 100% accurate. It is just that it does not explain. If students are good at it, they can understand their grammatical errors when Grammarly points them out. (T4)

These insights were confirmed by Dewi (2022) who recognized Grammarly's practical benefits in detecting and correcting errors and its potential to improve students' language abilities. In brief, Grammarly's error detection function is widely appreciated by both teachers and students, albeit with differing emphases. Teachers value its precision in identifying minor grammatical issues, while students see it as a broader tool that enhances writing clarity, structure, and overall quality. These differing yet complementary views highlight Grammarly's effectiveness as a versatile tool for improving writing accuracy and supporting diverse academic writing needs.

Feedback provision

The superior usefulness and accuracy of the feedback provided by Grammarly is unanimously welcomed by both groups. While S7 described it as, "*accurate, and quite professional*"; T2 praised it as "*a perfect tool for correcting errors as it offers real-time feedback on various aspects of writing, including grammar, and punctuation*". These perspectives align with the findings by Tarsan et al. (2021) and Faisal and Carabella (2023). They demonstrated that students viewed feedback from Grammarly as timely, precise, and helpful for the improvement of writing fluency. Moreover, other researchers (e.g., Dewi, 2022; Qassemzadeh & Soleimani, 2016; Ardhy et al., 2023) also

identified the benefits of Grammarly in guiding learners through stylistic and structural improvements.

Grammarly's feedback on minor spelling and grammatical errors received high praise from both students and teachers for its accuracy. Given the vital role of feedback in writing development (Farida, 2022), this feature provides students with timely support that enhances their writing skills and confidence. Furthermore, the platform's capabilities extend beyond basic grammatical checks, highlighting its exceptional effectiveness in providing writers with clear structural suggestions and a set of comprehensive tools for refining written expression and mastering English conventions, as supported by Perdana et al. (2021) and Zinkevich and Ledeneva (2021). These features make it a reliable support system for improving language accuracy and stylistic refinement.

Despite these shared positive views, teachers and students also have differing views on Grammarly's feedback giving. On the one hand, teachers expressed concerns about the clarity and accuracy of Grammarly's feedback, noting instances where it may be confusing or contain outdated errors, which is in line with what was discovered by Fitriani and Nurazni (2022). As illustrated by T4: *"Sometimes Grammarly just doesn't get the meaning of a sentence; it suggests changes that completely miss the point. Especially with more complex or idiomatic phrases, it gives corrections that don't make sense at all."* On the other hand, students tend to have a more positive view, finding Grammarly's suggestions consistently accurate and highly valuable. Students who recognize Grammarly's recommendations can sometimes alter the intended meaning of the text and disrupt the flow between sentences. As exemplified by a remark of S9:

While Grammarly demonstrates precision in error correction, it often falls short in providing insights into the specific errors or the rationale behind suggesting alternative sentence structures that deviate from my original writing style.(S9)

The differing opinions between teachers and students highlight the complex dynamics of Grammarly's feedback system. While teachers point out areas for improvement, students acknowledge the value of Grammarly's feedback in enhancing their writing. These divergent perspectives emphasize the importance of ongoing refinement and optimization of Grammarly's feedback mechanism.

Teacher Replacement

When considering whether Grammarly could replace teachers, both groups voiced caution. This reflects a recurring theme in prior literature (e.g., Perdana et al., 2021; van Rensburg & La, 2021). These studies suggest that Grammarly undeniably holds value in improving students' writing skills, but it cannot fully supplant the crucial role of teachers in the educational setting. This is in agreement with Fitriani and Nurazni (2022) who suggested the limitations of Grammarly in simulating the unmatched pedagogical expertise, guidance, and real-life experiences that teachers bring to the classroom. As T2 noted: *"Grammarly can replace teachers provided users can independently review and compare their previous and revised work to identify mistakes. This requires self-study skills and a fundamental understanding of each student."* Yet, they stressed that the platform lacks the depth and personalization of teacher instruction. As T1 put it, *"Grammarly only focuses on correction and does not provide thorough explanations. The instructions are not as detailed and comprehensible as those provided by teachers, who offer explanations to help students grasp the underlying knowledge."*

Students echoed these concerns by stating that Grammarly falls short of human interaction and guidance, personalized feedback, individualized instruction, and individualized support provided by teachers. This is evidenced in S3's statement: *"Grammarly provided results without explaining the underlying reasons, while teachers had the experience to offer more detailed explanations."* Students also highlight the teacher's role in fostering critical thinking skills, promoting creativity, and offering mentorship beyond grammar and writing mechanics. This is reflected by Nguyen et al. (2024) who stressed the importance of teacher feedback in improving students' writing skills.

The difference in opinions between teachers and students can be attributed to factors such as teachers' professional experience and their belief in technology's potential to supplement teaching practices, as well as students' appreciation for the human connection and comprehensive support provided by teachers. Students may perceive Grammarly as mainly focused on surface-level errors and recognize the limitations of automated feedback in capturing language nuances and contextual intricacies, a view found in Fitriani and Nurazni (2022). These findings reinforce the argument that Grammarly works best when integrated into teacher-supported instruction. As noted by Nguyen and Hoang (2023), personalized human feedback remains crucial for developing critical thinking and rhetorical awareness. Yet, automated systems like Grammarly have not replicated these capabilities.

After all, Grammarly is a helpful writing tool, but it cannot replace teachers. Both groups value human guidance, explanation, and critical support that only instructors can provide, underscoring the tool's role as a supplement—not a substitute—for effective writing teaching.

CONCLUSION

This study seeks to explore the viewpoints of both students and teachers regarding the effectiveness of the use of Grammarly in enhancing English writing skills at the university level. The findings affirm that both students and teachers recognize Grammarly as a valuable tool for enhancing writing skills, though the natures of its perceived benefits vary between the two groups.

The findings suggest that Grammarly's error detection capabilities are highly valued by both students and teachers for their ability to enhance the overall quality of writing. Teachers often emphasize that Grammarly primarily addresses minor grammatical issues and may overlook more complex errors. In contrast, students believe that Grammarly also improves the fluency and comprehensibility of their writing, contributing to a more polished final product.

Additionally, Grammarly's provision of immediate feedback is also appreciated by both students and teachers. Students see it as a tool that supports the development of autonomy and critical thinking skills essential for academic success. Teachers, on the other hand, acknowledge the utility of Grammarly in aiding students to identify and correct grammatical errors, but also expressed concerns about students becoming overly dependent on Grammarly. They emphasized that while Grammarly can offer valuable assistance, it cannot provide the detailed explanations and contextual understanding that human feedback offers. Nonetheless, they see potential in combining Grammarly's automated feedback with teacher-personalized instruction to create a more robust learning experience.

Importantly, both teachers and students agreed that while Grammarly is a powerful tool for enhancing writing skills, it cannot replace the multifaceted contributions of human instructors, namely their pedagogical expertise and ability to nurture critical thinking, creativity, and comprehensive understanding. Yet, the integration of Grammarly as a supplementary resource, combined with the value of teacher-student interactions, creates a balanced approach to effective writing education. This approach ensures that students benefit from the immediate, practical feedback provided by Grammarly while still receiving the deep, contextual, and personalized instruction that only human teachers can provide.

While the study offers insights into how Grammarly improves writing abilities, certain limitations exist. The small sample size of 15 participants limits generalizability. The qualitative data collection method introduces subjectivity in responses. The context-specific setting restricts applicability to other populations. To address these limitations, future research should employ larger, diverse samples, conduct longitudinal studies, compare Grammarly with other tools or approaches, and adopt mixed methods to offer a more comprehensive understanding of its role in writing development.

Taken together, the study suggests that Grammarly serves as a helpful aid in writing development, while students appreciate its instant feedback and impact on overall writing quality, teachers emphasize its limitations in offering contextual explanations and deeper learning support. These perspectives highlight that Grammarly serves best as a supplementary tool alongside teacher instruction to foster both technical accuracy and meaningful learning.

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