



Using Grammarly as an Automated Writing Evaluation Tool for Academic Writing: Perceptions of English Linguistics Majors at a State University in Vietnam

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Abstract: Feedback plays a crucial role in helping EFL learners develop their academic writing. Traditionally, this task is done by instructors; however, with the advent of educational technologies, automated writing evaluation (AWE) tools have gained significant popularity. These tools, notably Grammarly, have been proven by several studies to be beneficial for students to evaluate their writing. However, little is clarified about how English Linguistics majors perceive these tools as an AI writing evaluation assistant in their academic writing. Using a questionnaire with 155 English-majored students at a state university in Vietnam, this study aims to shed light on Vietnamese EFL students' perceptions of the effectiveness and limitations of Grammarly as an AWE tool in writing academically, as well as their suggestions for a better version of Grammarly. Findings indicate that despite some perceived limitations, participants show a favourable attitude towards Grammarly as their evaluation assistant, and a better Grammarly should focus on increased personalization, transparency, and academic integration.

Key Words: Automated Writing Evaluation, Grammarly, English Linguistics Majors

1. INTRODUCTION

Academic writing, a writing form used in college courses (Oshima & Hogue, 2007), serves as the primary medium through which students can communicate complex ideas, research findings, and scholarly arguments in a structured and credible way. Due to linguistic barriers such as grammatical precision, lexical richness, and conformity to academic traditions (Karyuatry, Rizqan, & Darayani, 2018), academic writing is widely believed to be challenging for EFL students (Bui, Hoang, & Cu, 2022; Fitria, 2022). Feedback and evaluation are critical components in developing academic writing skills. Traditionally, instructors have provided feedback, offering insights into areas for improvement and guiding students towards clearer and more effective writing (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). As educational technologies advance, automated writing evaluation (AWE) tools have been developed and revolutionized this time-consuming process. AWE tools can offer instant, detailed feedback on various aspects of writing, enabling students to revise their work independently and efficiently (Karyuatry, Rizqan, & Darayani, 2018). Among the most well-known AWE tools is Grammarly, an AI-powered writing assistant that provides real-time recommendations for grammar, spelling, punctuation, style, and tone (Grammarly Inc., 2024).

An increasing number of studies have explored the effectiveness and perceptions of Grammarly in academic writing contexts. Previous studies have found that students generally hold favorable perceptions of Grammarly, valuing its immediate feedback and ability to facilitate error correction, encourage self-regulated learning, and improve writing proficiency (O'Neill & Russell, 2019; Dewi, 2022; Andi Anugrah Surya Ardhy, 2023; Ardhy, Waris, & Kryati, 2023). On the other hand, some studies highlight limitations, such as occasional inaccurate suggestions or the need for students to critically evaluate feedback to avoid inappropriate revisions (Nunes, Cordeiro, Limpo, & Castro, 2021; Ummah & Bisriyah, 2022). In the Vietnamese context, similar patterns emerge, with research indicating both the benefits and challenges of Grammarly's use (Vu, 2024). Despite the insights provided by existing research, there remains a scarcity of studies specifically focusing on English Linguistics students at higher education institutions in Vietnam. This research aims to fill this gap by investigating how these

students perceive the effectiveness and limitations of Grammarly as an AWE tool in their academic writing. Additionally, it seeks to gather their suggestions for enhancing the tool's utility, thereby contributing to the broader discourse on AWE tools in EFL education. By examining these perceptions and recommendations, this study aims to provide valuable insights for educators, students, and developers to optimize the use of Grammarly in academic settings.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Automated Writing Evaluation Tools

Automated Writing Evaluation (AWE) tools have emerged as transformative technologies in educational settings, offering efficient solutions for assessing and enhancing student writing skills (Stevenson, 2016; Tambunan, Andayani, Sari, & Lubis, 2022). These instruments utilize sophisticated computational methods like natural language processing (NLP) and machine learning to analyze written texts and provide feedback on various dimensions, such as grammar, syntax, style, and organization.

AWE tools serve multiple purposes in educational contexts, including formative assessment, error correction, and skill development. By providing instant feedback, these tools enable students to engage in iterative revision processes, fostering greater autonomy and self-directed learning (Nunes, Cordeiro, Limpo, & Castro, 2021). Moreover, AWE systems alleviate the burden on instructors, allowing them to focus on higher aspects of writing, such as argumentation and content development. However, the effectiveness of AWE tools depends on their ability to provide accurate, contextually relevant feedback, as well as students' capacity to provide critical evaluations, as well as to apply the provided suggestions (Stevenson, 2016).

2.2. Grammarly: Features and Applications

Grammarly stands out as one of the leading AWE tools, renowned for its user-friendly interface and extensive feedback features. Driven by AI and machine learning, Grammarly provides real-time recommendations for grammar, spelling, punctuation, style, and tone, therefore serving both novice and experienced writers (Grammarly Inc., 2024). Grammarly's accessibility and utility for students are improved by its compatibility with over 500,000 apps and websites, and various learning management systems (Grammarly Inc., 2024). In academic settings, Grammarly serves as a valuable tool for EFL students, who often face challenges with linguistic accuracy and stylistic conventions. By providing immediate feedback, Grammarly enables students to address errors promptly, develop self-editing skills, and enhance the overall writing quality (O'Neill & Russell, 2019; Huang, Li, & Taylor, 2020; Dewi, 2022). However, the effectiveness of Grammarly depends on students' ability to discern appropriate suggestions and the tool's ability to offer contextually relevant feedback.

2.3. Users' Perspectives on the impacts of Grammarly use on academic writing

Numerous studies have explored Grammarly's impact on academic writing globally, particularly among EFL students. Studies consistently report positive perceptions, with students appreciating the tool's convenience, accessibility, and ability to facilitate error correction, leading to a reduction in grammar, spelling, and punctuation errors in EFL learners' academic writing (Huang, Li, & Taylor, 2020; Dewi, 2022; Faisal & Carabella, 2023). Research also indicates that Grammarly can help EFL students to correct stylistic errors, enhance their vocabulary use, and boost their writing confidence (O'Neill & Russell, 2019; Dewi, 2022; Ardhy, Waris, & Kryati, 2023; Faisal & Carabella, 2023).

Despite these positive findings, some studies highlight limitations and mixed perceptions. Ummah and Bisriyah (2022) noted that while EFL students found Grammarly helpful, they also encountered inaccuracies in feedback, particularly with the premium version, which sometimes provided suggestions that altered the intended meaning of their writing. Other challenges include the tool's sensitivity to complex sentences and its reliance on stable internet access, which can pose barriers in certain educational contexts (Ardhy, Waris, & Kryati, 2023). These findings suggest that while Grammarly is a powerful tool, its effectiveness is maximized when used in conjunction with critical evaluation and instructor guidance. In Vietnam, where English proficiency is increasingly vital for academic and professional success, research on Grammarly in higher education is gaining traction. A case study by Vu (2024) at a private college in Hanoi examined 32 second-year college students' use of Grammarly to enhance English writing. Employing a mixed-method design with writing analysis, surveys, and focus-group interviews, the study found a significant reduction in grammatical errors and a positive

attitude toward Grammarly. Students appreciated its ease of use and immediate feedback. While direct research on English linguistics majors in Vietnam is scarce, Vu's findings suggest that Grammarly is a promising tool for Vietnamese students, particularly in EFL contexts. The study's recommendations for teachers to integrate Grammarly with traditional feedback align with global trends, emphasizing a balanced approach to maximize learning outcomes.

While existing research provides valuable insights into Grammarly's effectiveness and perceptions, there is a scarcity of studies specifically focusing on English-majored students in Vietnam. The unique linguistic and educational context of these students, who are training to become proficient English language professionals, warrants targeted investigation. Moreover, while studies in Vietnam and internationally have identified both the merits and limitations of Grammarly, few have explored students' suggestions for improving the tool's effectiveness, particularly in the context of academic writing. This study is conducted to bridge this gap. Specifically, it seeks the answers to the following two research questions:

- How do English Linguistics majors perceive the effectiveness and limitations of Grammarly as an AWE tool in their academic writing?
- What do these students suggest to make Grammarly more effective as an AWE tool in academic writing?

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

With a quantitative research design, this study employs a structured survey questionnaire as the primary instrument to collect data. The questionnaire was developed based on relevant literature with 21 closed-ended questions with multiple responses and the 5-point Likert scale. There are three main parts of the questionnaire. Part 1 consists of 13 statements to examine the participants' perception of Grammarly's effectiveness in evaluating their academic writing papers. Part 2 includes seven questions aiming to evaluate participants' perceptions of Grammarly's limitations as an AWE tool. Part 3 consists of one multiple-response question to figure out the participants' suggestions to improve Grammarly's performance. The participants are junior English Linguistics students at the Faculty of Foreign Languages of a state university in Vietnam. All the participants have already taken the English Academic Writing course and have experienced using Grammarly in their course. The convenience sampling method was utilized to select participants for this study, as it is the most appropriate method for the researcher to approach English Majors at that university. The demographic information of the participants is displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. *Participants' demographic information*

N = 155		
Gender	Male	30.3%
	Female	64.5%
	Prefer not to mention	5.2%
English writing proficiency	Intermediate	80.3%
	Advanced	19.7%

Google Forms was used to distribute the questionnaire to the participants. The collected data was then analyzed, employing the SPSS software version 25 to calculate the descriptive statistics. The Cronbach's Alpha of the questionnaire ($\alpha = 0.985$) justifies the questionnaire's reliability.

Table 2. *The questionnaire's reliability statistics*

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
0.985	0.988	20

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. English Linguistics majors' perceptions of Grammarly as an AWE tool in their academic writing

Table 3 presents an overview of participants' perceptions regarding the effectiveness and limitations of Grammarly as an AWE in their academic writing. The first item on the table sums up the participants'

responses in terms of Grammarly's benefits as an AWE tool. It states a mean of 4.168 with a standard deviation of 0.716 and scores falling between 3.735 and 4.452. The high mean indicates that the participants show a favourable perception of Grammarly's effectiveness in evaluating their academic writing. The low variation supports the fact that the respondents have somewhat similar experiences in using Grammarly as an AWE in their writing. The second item on Table 3 displays the participants' responses regarding the limitations of Grammarly in evaluating their academic writing. With a mean of 3.688, the result indicates a moderate awareness of Grammarly's shortcomings as an AWE tool in academic writing.

Table 3. Overview of participants' responses regarding their perceptions of Grammarly's effectiveness and limitations as an AWE tool in academic writing

	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Range	Maximum / Minimum	Variance	N of Items
Effectiveness	4.168	3.735	4.452	0.716	1.192	0.034	13
Limitation	3.688	3.510	3.852	0.342	1.097	0.018	7

Table 4 below presents the detailed results of the first part of the questionnaire. The data demonstrate that most participants agree that Grammarly is most effective at identifying and correcting spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors (with means of 4.45, 4.34, and 4.30, respectively). Grammarly is also believed to boost participants' confidence in their academic writing (Mean = 4.26), help develop their academic writing skills (Mean = 4.24), and improve sentence clarity (Mean = 4.13). Its impact on participants' writing style and vocabulary enhancement is perceived as less strong, though still positive (with means of 3.74 and 3.94, respectively).

Table 4. Participants' perceptions towards Grammarly's effectiveness

Statements	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Grammarly's feedback helps me develop my academic writing skills.	155	4.24	0.635
I rely on Grammarly to check my writing before submitting it.	155	4.25	0.742
I feel more confident in the accuracy of my writing after being evaluated by Grammarly.	155	4.26	0.643
Using Grammarly has enhanced my understanding of English grammar rules.	155	4.09	0.935
Grammarly's suggestions help me construct clearer and more concise sentences.	155	4.13	0.681
Grammarly helps me eliminate wordiness in my writing.	155	4.23	0.746
Grammarly's suggestions improve the overall structure of my writing.	155	4.09	0.638
Grammarly helps me detect and correct grammatical errors in my writing.	155	4.34	0.474
Grammarly helps me detect and correct spelling errors in my writing.	155	4.45	0.499
Grammarly helps me detect and correct punctuation mistakes in my writing.	155	4.30	0.574
Grammarly helps me detect and correct errors in my sentence structures.	155	4.14	0.571
Grammarly suggests better choices of words to enhance my writing.	155	3.94	0.858
Grammarly helps improve my writing style.	155	3.74	0.933
Valid N (list wise)	155		

Table 5 displays the participants' responses on specific limitations of Grammarly as an AWE tool in their academic writing. With means ranging from 3.51 to 3.85, the results indicate that participants tend to agree (but not strongly) with the limitations of Grammarly. Specifically, Grammarly is perceived to struggle most with handling technical or field-related vocabulary (mean = 3.85). The respondents moderately agree that Grammarly sometimes gives incorrect or unnecessary corrections (mean = 3.82). The relevance of vocabulary suggestion and the overlook of regional English differences are also perceived as notable limitations of Grammarly. Grammarly is also believed to be less effective with context and complex sentence structures, but responses are more varied for these issues, suggesting more varied experiences among Grammarly users.

Table 5. Participants' perceptions towards Grammarly's limitations

Statements	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Grammarly sometimes fails to detect certain grammatical errors in my writing.	155	3.66	0.825
Grammarly sometimes provides incorrect or unnecessary corrections.	155	3.82	1.119
Grammarly sometimes misinterprets the context of certain sentences in my writing.	155	3.53	1.240

Grammarly overlooks regional differences in English (e.g., British English vs. American English)	155	3.69	0.880
Grammarly's vocabulary enhancement suggestions are not always relevant.	155	3.76	0.926
Grammarly does not recognize specialized or technical language specific to my academic field.	155	3.85	0.844
Grammarly struggles with detecting errors in complex sentence structure.	155	3.51	1.028

In short, the survey results indicate that English Linguistics majors generally have positive perceptions of Grammarly as an AWE tool in academic writing. Specifically, Grammarly is perceived to be highly effective at technical corrections (like spelling, grammar, and punctuation), boosting writers' confidence, and helping with wordiness and clarity of sentences. However, the study's participants note moderate limitations, mainly with specialized vocabulary, sometimes unnecessary or incorrect corrections, context misinterpretation, and complex sentence handling. These results reinforce the findings of previous studies, both in international and Vietnamese contexts, like Andi Anugrah Surya Ardhy (2023), Ardhy, Waris, and Kryati (2023), and Vu (2024).

4.2. English Linguistics majors' suggestions to make Grammarly more effective as an AWE tool in their academic writing

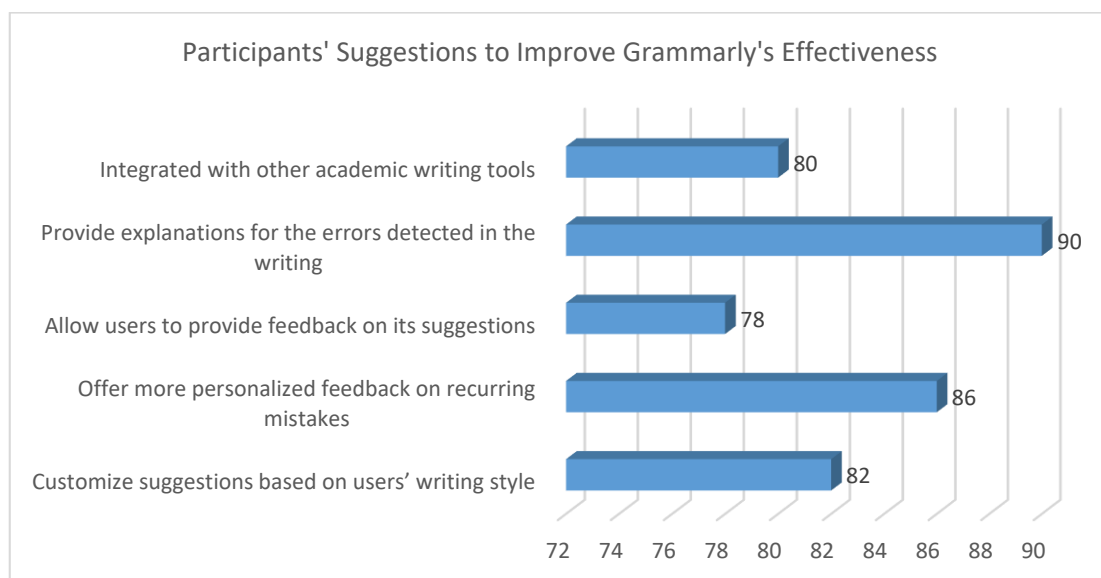


Chart 1. *Participants' suggestions to improve Grammarly's effectiveness*

Chart 1 illustrates participant suggestions for making Grammarly more effective as an AWE tool in academic writing. To be more specific, the highest-rate suggestion is for Grammarly to provide explanations for detected errors, helping them understand and learn from their mistakes, with 90% of the participants choosing this option. Many respondents believe that Grammarly should offer more personalized feedback on recurring mistakes (86%). Participants also want Grammarly to be able to customize its suggestions based on their writing style (82%). Particularly in an academic setting, participants suggest integration with other writing tools to make Grammarly more useful for academic writing tasks (80%). Allowing users to provide feedback on Grammarly's suggestions (78%) is also seen as important for a more interactive and adaptive system. In short, English Linguistics majors seek a more personalized, transparent, and integrated Grammarly. They would like explanations for suggestions, the ability to influence Grammarly's learning, and better support for academic-specific needs.

5. CONCLUSION

By surveying 155 English Linguistics majors at a state university in Vietnam, this study has provided valuable insights into their perceptions regarding the effectiveness and limitations of Grammarly as an AWE in academic writing. The findings indicate that current strengths of Grammarly lie in its error detection and basic writing support, as reflected by high mean scores for most effectiveness items in the questionnaire. However, concerns are raised among English-majored students relating to

Grammarly's lack of nuance, context-awareness, and adaptability to specialized or academic language. The study also emphasizes English Linguistics majors' suggestions to improve the effectiveness of Grammarly as an AWE in academic writing settings. These user-driven improvements focus on increased personalization, transparency, and academic integration, suggesting that as users' writing needs grow more sophisticated, they expect Grammarly to evolve beyond basic correction into a more intelligent and user-responsive writing assistant.

In short, the findings of this study reinforce that while Grammarly is highly valued for foundational writing support, there is clear demand for more advanced, adaptive, and transparent features to better serve academic writers. Addressing these user suggestions could further enhance Grammarly's role as an essential tool in academic writing.

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