

STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS TOWARD THE USE OF GRAMMARLY FEEDBACK IN ACADEMIC WRITING AT A PESANTREN-BASED UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

Writing remains a challenging skill for EFL students, particularly in maintaining grammatical accuracy and coherence. The emergence of AI-powered tools such as Grammarly offers alternative support; however, limited research has examined its use in religious-based higher education contexts. This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design. Quantitative data were collected through a questionnaire distributed to fifth-semester students and analyzed using descriptive statistics. This study investigates students' perceptions toward the use of Grammarly feedback in academic writing at a pesantren-based university. Qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis to explore students' experiences and challenges. The findings indicate that students generally hold positive perceptions of Grammarly, with most responses categorized at moderate to high levels. Grammarly is perceived as useful in improving grammatical accuracy, clarity, confidence, and learner autonomy. However, several challenges were identified, including unstable internet access, institutional regulations regarding gadget use, contextual inaccuracies, and the risk of over-reliance on automated feedback. Overall, Grammarly is considered a supportive and culturally adaptable tool when used responsibly and combined with lecturer guidance. This study contributes to the discussion of AI-assisted language learning within pesantren-based higher education contexts.

Keywords: Academic Writing, AI-Assisted Learning, Grammarly Feedback, Pesantren-Based University, Technology Acceptance.

INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the most challenging skills for EFL learners, as it requires not only grammatical accuracy but also coherence, critical thinking, and adherence to academic conventions (Rahman et al., 2023). In higher education, particularly in English language departments, students are expected to produce various types of academic texts such as essays, reports, and research papers. However, many students still encounter difficulties related to grammar, vocabulary, and organization, which often lower their confidence and hinder their academic success (Mulyanah et al., 2024).

The emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI)-based writing tools has provided alternative solutions to support students' writing development. Among these tools, Grammarly has become one of the most widely adopted applications, offering real-time feedback on grammar, spelling, punctuation, clarity, and even plagiarism detection (Wu, 2024). Previous studies indicate that Grammarly not only corrects errors but also facilitates autonomous learning, as students can reflect on the feedback to improve their writing quality (Dizon & Gayed, 2021; Prasetya & Raharjo, 2023). Nevertheless, some limitations remain, including inaccuracies in contextual suggestions and the potential risk of over-reliance on the tool (Susiana et al., 2024).

However, the effectiveness of a technological tool does not depend solely on its technical features, but also on how users perceive and accept it. To understand students' acceptance of Grammarly, this study is grounded in the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), originally proposed by Davis (1989). TAM explains that individuals' adoption of technology is primarily influenced by two key constructs: Perceived Usefulness (PU) and

Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU). Perceived Usefulness refers to the degree to which users believe that a system enhances their performance, while Perceived Ease of Use refers to the degree to which users believe that using the system requires minimal effort (Wicaksono & Maharani, 2020).

In educational contexts, students are more likely to adopt a digital tool when they perceive it as beneficial and easy to operate. Moreover, Perceived Ease of Use often influences Perceived Usefulness, meaning that technologies that are simpler to use are more likely to be considered helpful (Scherer et al., 2019). TAM also acknowledges that external variables—such as institutional support, technological infrastructure, digital literacy, and cultural background—may influence these perceptions. Therefore, examining students' perceptions of Grammarly through the TAM framework provides a structured way to understand how usefulness, ease of use, and contextual factors shape technology acceptance in academic writing.

Most existing research has explored Grammarly in conventional higher education settings, particularly focusing on its effectiveness in improving students' writing accuracy and overall writing performance. For example, Dizon and Gayed (2021) found that Grammarly's automated feedback helped improve the quality of students' L2 writing by allowing them to identify and revise grammatical errors more effectively. Similarly, Prasetya and Raharjo (2023) reported that the use of Grammarly contributed to improvements in grammatical accuracy and vocabulary usage in students' academic writing.

In addition, several studies have examined students' perceptions and usability of Grammarly in general EFL contexts. Nurhidayah and Irawati (2024) found that students generally viewed Grammarly as a helpful tool that assists them in correcting writing errors and improving their writing quality. Likewise, Melinia (2024) reported that Grammarly functions as a supportive writing assistant that helps students revise their work more efficiently through automated feedback.

However, little attention has been given to pesantren-based universities, where the integration of Islamic values with modern education creates a unique learning context. Students in such environments may have different attitudes toward technology adoption, shaped by cultural, religious, and pedagogical considerations. This raises important questions about how they perceive Grammarly whether as a helpful assistant, a threat to independent learning, or a tool that must be carefully balanced with traditional values.

Given this gap, the present study investigates students' perceptions of using Grammarly in the Academic Writing course at a pesantren-based university. Specifically, it explores (1) how students perceive Grammarly's usefulness and ease of use in supporting their academic writing, and (2) what challenges or limitations they encounter when using the tool. By focusing on this unique context, the study aims to provide deeper insights into technology acceptance in pesantren-based higher education and contribute to discussions on the integration of AI-powered tools in EFL writing instruction.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches in two consecutive phases (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The quantitative phase aimed to identify general trends in students' perceptions toward Grammarly, while the qualitative phase was conducted to explain and elaborate on the quantitative findings in greater depth. This design was selected because it enables researchers to obtain both breadth and depth of understanding by combining statistical patterns with participants' experiences and explanations.

Research Setting

The study was conducted at the English Language Education Department of Universitas KH. Mukhtar Syafaat (UIMSYA), a pesantren-based university in East Java, Indonesia. The institution integrates Islamic educational values with modern academic instruction, creating a distinctive academic environment. This context was considered relevant because students' perceptions of technology may be influenced not only by usability factors but also by cultural, institutional, and moral considerations.

Participants And Sampling

The participants consisted of fifth-semester students who had completed the Academic Writing course and had prior experience using Grammarly. They were selected through purposive sampling based on specific criteria to ensure that participants possessed sufficient familiarity with academic writing conventions and the tool being studied. This sampling technique was considered appropriate because it allowed the researcher to focus on information-rich participants whose experiences were directly relevant to the research objectives.

Instruments

Two instruments were used to collect data: a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire was adapted from Alghamdi and Abusa'aleek (2025) and focused on the constructs of the Technology Acceptance Model, particularly Perceived Usefulness and Perceived Ease of Use. The instrument had demonstrated high reliability in previous research, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient above 0.80, indicating strong internal consistency. The qualitative instrument consisted of an interview guide designed to explore students' experiences, perceptions, and challenges in using Grammarly.

Data Collection Procedures

Quantitative data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. After the responses were gathered, descriptive statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS version 27 to calculate frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. Following this phase, several participants who volunteered and represented varied response patterns were selected for interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain deeper insights into students' perspectives and experiences. The interviews were recorded with participants' consent and transcribed for analysis.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively to identify general trends in students' perceptions. The analysis included calculating frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations to summarize the responses. The results were presented using descriptive statistical measures to ensure clarity and systematic interpretation of the findings. To interpret the questionnaire data, mean scores were categorized into three levels: high (3.67–5.00), moderate (2.34–3.66), and low (1.00–2.33). These classifications were adopted from established cut-off score criteria used in previous studies (AbuSa'aleek & Alotaibi, 2022; AbuSa'aleek & Yaghi, 2024; Ishtaiwa & Aburezeq, 2015; Jamrus & Razali, 2021). The categorization was applied to determine the level of each questionnaire item and to identify the overall tendency of students' perceptions toward the use of Grammarly feedback. This categorization allows clearer interpretation of perception levels and facilitates comparison with previous studies.

These descriptive statistics enabled the researcher to identify patterns, tendencies, and variations in students' responses before the data were further interpreted in the discussion section. Although the calculations were generated automatically using SPSS, the formulas were presented to clarify the statistical procedures applied in this study. To support the descriptive statistical analysis, several statistical formulas were employed to calculate the mean, percentage, and standard deviation. These formulas were used to summarize the

questionnaire data and to interpret students' perceptions quantitatively.

Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis with an inductive approach, involving coding, categorizing, and developing themes directly from the data. This method allowed patterns and meanings to emerge naturally without being constrained by predetermined categories or theoretical assumptions.

Integration Of Data

The results from both phases were integrated during the interpretation stage. Quantitative findings provided general patterns, while qualitative findings explained the reasons behind those patterns. This integration ensured a comprehensive interpretation of students' perceptions of Grammarly within the pesantren-based university context.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Students' Perceptions Toward Grammarly Feedback

The quantitative findings indicate that students generally hold positive perceptions toward Grammarly as a feedback tool in academic writing. Descriptive statistical analysis revealed that most questionnaire items fall within moderate to high perception levels. Out of twelve items, nine were categorized as moderate, three as high, and none as low. These results suggest that Grammarly is perceived as beneficial and supportive in improving students' writing performance.

The results of the descriptive statistical analysis are presented in Table 1, which summarizes the mean scores, standard deviations, and perception levels for each questionnaire item.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Students' Perceptions toward Grammarly Feedback

No	Code	Item	Mean	Std. Deviaton	Level
1	x1	I am satisfied with the feedback Grammarly provides.	3.36	1.02	Moderate
2	x2	I feel that Grammarly's feedback is good for developing writing skills.	3.68	1.09	High
3	x3	"I prefer Grammarly feedback to other kinds of feedback, even if Grammarly seems to be complicated due to its in-depth feedback."	3.64	0.78	Moderate
4	x4	I want my supervisor to keep providing feedback on my research proposal through Grammarly.	3.75	1.00	High
5	x5	I think Grammarly helps students to become autonomous.	3.25	0.75	Moderate
6	x6	In my opinion, Grammarly boosts students' self-confidence in writing.	3.36	1.25	Moderate
7	x7	I like the way Grammarly provides in-depth feedback.	3.61	0.79	Moderate
8	x8	I will follow Grammarly's feedback to enhance my writing skills.	3.57	0.69	Moderate
9	x9	I prefer automated written corrective feedback (Grammarly) to direct or indirect feedback.	3.46	1.17	Moderate
10	x10	From my point of view, Grammarly is adequate for students with different levels.	3.71	1.15	High
11	x11	Grammarly is a good assistant for a writer.	3.43	0.96	Moderate
12	x12	Considering all aspects of Grammarly, I am very happy with Grammarly's utilization in writing research proposals	3.57	0.99	Moderate

the items are categorized as low. This suggests that students tend to accept Grammarly as a supportive tool in their writing process, although the level of agreement varies across different aspects.

As shown in Table 1, the highest mean score was observed in item x4 (M = 3.75), followed by x10 (M = 3.71) and x2 (M = 3.68), indicating strong agreement regarding Grammarly's usefulness. Conversely, the lowest mean score was found in item x5 (M =

3.25), suggesting comparatively weaker agreement. Overall, these results demonstrate that students tend to perceive Grammarly positively as a writing assistant.

To provide a more detailed understanding of students' responses, the distribution of responses for each questionnaire item was also analyzed in terms of percentages across the Likert scale categories. This analysis illustrates how respondents distributed their opinions from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

The percentage distribution of students' responses is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Percentage Distribution of Students' Responses.

No	Code	Item	SD	D	N	A	SA
1	x1	I am satisfied with the feedback Grammarly provides.	7.1	7.1	39.3	35.7	10.7
2	x2	I feel that Grammarly's feedback is good for developing writing skills.	3.6	10.7	25.0	35.7	25.0
3	x3	"I prefer Grammarly feedback to other kinds of feedback, even if Grammarly seems to be complicated due to its in-depth feedback."	0	7.1	32.1	50.0	10.7
4	x4	I want my supervisor to keep providing feedback on my research proposal through Grammarly.	3.6	7.1	21.4	46.4	21.4
5	x5	I think Grammarly helps students to become autonomous.	0	14.3	50.0	32.1	3.6
6	x6	In my opinion, Grammarly boosts students' self-confidence in writing.	14.3	3.6	32.1	32.1	17.9
7	x7	I like the way Grammarly provides in-depth feedback.	0	7.1	35.7	46.4	10.7
8	x8	I will follow Grammarly's feedback to enhance my writing skills.	0	7.1	32.1	57.1	3.6
9	x9	I prefer automated written corrective feedback (Grammarly) to direct or indirect feedback.	7.1	10.7	32.1	28.6	21.4
10	x10	From my point of view, Grammarly is adequate for students with different levels.	7.1	7.1	17.9	42.9	25.0
11	x11	Grammarly is a good assistant for a writer.	3.6	10.7	35.7	39.3	10.7
12	x12	Considering all aspects of Grammarly, I am very happy with Grammarly's utilization in writing research proposals	3.6	10.7	25.0	46.4	14.3

The percentage distribution shows that most responses were concentrated in the agree and neutral categories. For example, item x4 recorded 46.4% agreement and 21.4% strong agreement, while item x10 showed 42.9% agreement and 25.0% strong agreement. These results indicate strong acceptance of Grammarly among students. However, relatively high neutral responses across several items suggest that some students still hold mixed perceptions regarding certain aspects of Grammarly.

Standard deviation values ranged from 0.69 to 1.25. Lower values indicate stronger agreement among respondents, while higher values reflect greater variation in perceptions. For instance, item x8 showed the lowest variability, whereas item x6 demonstrated the highest variation, suggesting differing experiences among students.

Overall, these quantitative findings indicate that students generally perceive Grammarly as a useful and supportive learning tool in academic writing.

Students' Challenges In Using Grammarly

This section presents qualitative findings obtained from semi-structured interviews conducted with selected participants. The analysis focused specifically on the challenges students encountered when using Grammarly in academic writing.

Technical and Institutional Limitations

The most frequently reported challenge concerns technical limitations, particularly unstable internet access. Several participants emphasized that Grammarly's online dependency restricts consistent usage. As Respondent 1 stated:

"The challenges I face are unstable internet access and sometimes difficulty understanding certain technical terms." Similarly,

Respondent 2 noted:

"The main challenges are limited internet access and difficulty with certain technical aspects."

Respondent 3 also reported:

"The challenges are limited internet access and sometimes misunderstanding the context of suggestions."

In addition to connectivity issues, institutional regulations within the pesantren environment were identified as barriers. Respondent 4 explained:

"Pesantren students aren't allowed to bring laptops or phones. They can't use Grammarly easily."

Respondent 5 added that pesantren regulations regarding gadget use and internet time significantly influence accessibility:

"Pesantren regulations about gadget use and internet time sometimes limit when and how long I can use Grammarly."

These findings indicate that external and environmental factors significantly influence students' ability to utilize Grammarly effectively.

Advertisement And Platform Limitations

A unique challenge was mentioned by Respondent 4, who expressed frustration with advertisements in the free version:

"Advertisements. Ads everywhere. ChatGPT doesn't have ads. That's why I prefer ChatGPT."

This indicates that user experience and platform limitations can influence students' preference and satisfaction levels.

Risk of Over-Reliance and Critical Evaluation

Some participants highlighted the potential risk of over-reliance on automated corrections. Respondent 6 observed:

"Another challenge is the tendency for students to accept all suggestions without questioning their validity."

However, most students demonstrated critical engagement with Grammarly's feedback. For example, Respondent 1 explained:

"When a suggestion conflicts with my understanding, I usually re-check the grammar rule before deciding whether to accept or reject it."

Respondent 5 described his approach as comparative:

"I analyze Grammarly's suggestion and compare it with rules I learned from lecturers or classical texts."

Similarly, Respondent 7 stated:

"If I believe my version is more appropriate for the context, I keep my original

wording.”

These responses indicate that while challenges exist, students generally maintain analytical judgment rather than passively relying on the tool.

Discussion

Students' Perceptions Toward Grammarly Feedback

The quantitative findings indicate that students generally hold positive perceptions toward Grammarly as a feedback tool in academic writing. Most questionnaire items were categorized as moderate to high, suggesting favorable attitudes toward the tool's usefulness and adequacy across different proficiency levels. These findings align with the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which explains that users are more likely to adopt technology when they perceive it as useful and easy to use (Wicaksono & Maharani, 2020). In this study, students' agreement that Grammarly enhances writing development reflects a strong perception of usefulness, which is considered a key determinant of technology adoption (Scherer et al., 2019). This result confirms that perceived usefulness plays a central role in shaping students' acceptance of AI-based writing tools.

Furthermore, students' satisfaction with Grammarly's feedback suggests that automated writing evaluation tools can provide meaningful support in academic contexts. The ability to receive immediate corrections and suggestions appears to help students identify errors more efficiently than traditional delayed feedback. This finding is consistent with Dizon and Gayed (2021), who reported that Grammarly improved the quality of mobile L2 writing through real-time feedback. Similarly, Prasetya and Raharjo (2023) found that students using Grammarly demonstrated significant improvement in grammatical accuracy and vocabulary use. However, while previous studies primarily emphasized measurable writing improvement, the present study highlights students' perceptual acceptance within a pesantren-based context, thereby extending the discussion beyond performance outcomes to technology acceptance.

Despite these positive perceptions, students did not express unconditional preference for automated feedback over human feedback. The data reveal that while Grammarly is valued for speed and practicality, lecturer feedback remains essential for contextual understanding and deeper academic guidance. This finding supports Susiana et al. (2024), who noted that students appreciated Grammarly's assistance but still relied on lecturers for more accurate contextual evaluation. Similarly, Alghamdi and Abusa'aleek (2025) emphasized that AI-based writing tools are most effective when combined with pedagogical guidance. Thus, the current study does not position Grammarly as a replacement for teachers but rather as a complementary instructional support.

Additionally, students' perceptions indicate that Grammarly contributes to confidence and learner autonomy. Many respondents agreed that the tool helps them revise independently and feel more secure about their writing before submission. This supports Dewi (2023), who found that Grammarly encourages self-directed learning and reflective revision among EFL students. In line with self-regulated learning theory, the availability of immediate corrective feedback enables learners to monitor and adjust their writing strategies independently. In the present study, this autonomous engagement appears to coexist with critical awareness, as students reported not blindly accepting every suggestion.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that students perceive Grammarly as a supportive and practical academic writing assistant. However, its perceived effectiveness is closely connected to complementary human feedback and responsible usage within the educational environment. Compared to previous research conducted in conventional universities (Melinia, 2024; Nurhidayah & Irawati, 2024), this study contributes a contextual dimension by showing that students in a pesantren-based university also demonstrate positive

acceptance, though their perceptions are shaped by cultural and institutional considerations. Therefore, this research complements existing studies by situating technology acceptance within a religious-based higher education context.

Students' Challenges In Using Grammarly

While students generally perceive Grammarly positively, the qualitative findings reveal several challenges that influence its effectiveness. The most prominent issue concerns technical limitations, particularly unstable internet access. Since Grammarly operates primarily as an online platform, connectivity problems significantly affect accessibility. Similar challenges were also reported by Fitria et al. (2022), who noted that internet dependency limits consistent use of the application. In a pesantren-based university setting, where internet access may be regulated or limited, such technical constraints become even more significant. This finding supports Scherer et al. (2019), who argue that external variables such as technological infrastructure strongly influence technology acceptance beyond perceived usefulness.

Institutional regulations also play an important role in shaping students' experiences. Restrictions on gadget use and internet time within the pesantren environment limit students' opportunities to utilize Grammarly consistently. This finding highlights that technology acceptance is not determined solely by perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use, but also by environmental and institutional conditions, as explained in TAM theory (Wicaksono & Maharani, 2020). Unlike previous studies conducted in conventional universities where access to digital tools is relatively unrestricted (Melinia, 2024; Nurhidayah & Irawati, 2024), the present study reveals that cultural and institutional policies significantly shape students' engagement with AI tools. Thus, this research extends prior findings by emphasizing contextual constraints in religious-based higher education.

Another challenge relates to contextual and linguistic accuracy. Although Grammarly performs effectively in detecting surface-level errors such as grammar and punctuation, students reported limitations when dealing with academic nuances, discipline-specific terminology, or culturally embedded expressions. This finding is consistent with Susiana et al. (2024), who observed that Grammarly sometimes fails to accurately interpret tense consistency and contextual meaning. Similarly, Alghamdi and Abusa'aleek (2025) highlighted that automated writing evaluation tools may struggle with deeper semantic interpretation. Therefore, the present study confirms previous concerns while reinforcing the argument that AI tools cannot fully replace human feedback in complex academic writing contexts.

In addition, some participants noted the risk of over-reliance on automated feedback. Although most students reported critically evaluating suggestions before accepting them, there remains a concern that unreflective dependence on AI tools could weaken grammatical awareness. This concern echoes Dewi (2023), who warned that excessive reliance on automated feedback might reduce students' independent problem-solving skills. However, unlike studies that emphasize passive dependence, the present research found that students in a pesantren-based environment tend to apply critical judgment before accepting revisions. This suggests that cultural and moral values emphasizing discipline and responsibility may moderate the risk of over-reliance.

Overall, the challenges identified in this study indicate that Grammarly's effectiveness is mediated by infrastructural, institutional, and contextual factors. These findings complement previous research by demonstrating that technology acceptance is not only a matter of perceived usefulness but also deeply influenced by environmental conditions and educational culture (Scherer et al., 2019). In the pesantren-based university context, technology integration requires balance—leveraging the advantages of AI tools while

maintaining critical thinking, traditional pedagogical values, and human instructional support. Therefore, this study contributes a contextual dimension to the broader discussion of AI-assisted language learning in higher education.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to investigate students' perceptions toward the use of Grammarly feedback in academic writing at a pesantren-based university and to identify the challenges they encounter when using the tool. Based on the quantitative findings, students generally demonstrate positive perceptions of Grammarly. Most responses were categorized at moderate to high levels, indicating that students perceive Grammarly as useful and supportive in improving their academic writing performance. These findings suggest that Grammarly is positively received within the context of English language learning in higher education.

From the perspective of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), the results indicate that students' acceptance of Grammarly is strongly influenced by perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. Students believe that Grammarly helps enhance grammatical accuracy, clarity, and revision efficiency. At the same time, the tool's accessibility and real-time feedback contribute to its perceived practicality. These factors collectively encourage students to integrate Grammarly into their academic writing process.

However, the study also reveals several challenges that affect the tool's effectiveness. Technical limitations, particularly unstable internet access, and institutional regulations regarding gadget use within the pesantren environment restrict consistent utilization. In addition, contextual inaccuracies and the risk of over-reliance on automated feedback highlight the limitations of AI-based writing tools. These findings demonstrate that technology acceptance is not determined solely by functional benefits but is also shaped by infrastructural, institutional, and cultural factors.

Importantly, the findings show that students do not perceive Grammarly as a replacement for lecturer feedback. Instead, they consider it a complementary tool that supports technical correction while human instructors remain essential for contextual guidance and deeper academic development. This balanced perception reflects a critical and responsible approach to technology use within a religious-based educational setting.

Overall, this study contributes to the growing body of research on AI-assisted language learning by providing contextual insights from a pesantren-based university. It highlights the importance of integrating technological tools in a way that respects institutional values, promotes learner autonomy, and maintains pedagogical balance. Future research may explore larger samples, comparative institutional contexts, or longitudinal effects of AI-based feedback on.

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