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Using Grammarly Software to Check the Problems in Essay Writing: EFL Pre-service Teachers' Perceptions

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to investigate pre-service teachers' perceptions of using Grammarly software to help them check their essays' problems. The study considers the widespread use of AI in English language learning, particularly in writing. The research method used in this paper was a quantitative survey. The instrument used was a questionnaire. 36 English Pre-service teachers from two state universities and one private university in Jember were involved in this study. The findings show a positive response based on five aspects of perception: belief, knowledge, feeling, interest, and motivation. Based on the data, 18-24 participants agree, and 2-12 participants strongly agree with the statement. This data means that more than half of the respondents positively perceive using Grammarly software in essay writing. The belief aspect is the highest frequency (65.3% of respondents agree). This data means that students mostly believe that using Grammarly can help them improve their writing skills and can solve their writing problems. On the other hand, the motivation aspect received the lowest response, with less than half (48.6%) agreeing. Therefore, this study recommends that English language education programs emphasize the importance of AI in learning, particularly Grammarly.

Keywords: Grammarly, essay writing, EFL Pre-service Teachers' Perceptions

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, AI has made remarkable strides in language processing, leading to the development of sophisticated language models and tools. AI products that are dominantly utilized in academic writing are QuillBot, Grammarly, and ChatGPT (Raad et al., 2023; Arisandi et al., 2023). These AI-powered systems can now perform tasks like language translation, summary analysis, text summarization, and speech recognition with astonishing accuracy and efficiency. Moreover, AI-based language processing has enabled more accessible language learning platforms that adapt to individual learners' needs and proficiency levels. One of AI that can be used to check problems in writing such as grammar, tenses, vocabulary, conjunctions and others is Grammarly. Grammarly is a popular tool for detecting and correcting grammatical, punctuation, and writing style issues among students and writers (Calma et al., 2022). Furthermore, tools like Grammarly have become indispensable for students and writers as they offer real-time grammar and style suggestions to improve writing quality (Alharbi, 2023).

PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS

Perception is a person's view of something that is influenced by his social situation and environment (Kashive et al., 2021). Perception involves the way one sees the world several factors influence our perception of stimuli (Asmatahasin et al., 2021; (McDonald, 2012). Ummah (2022) stated that internal and external factors influence perception, stated that experience, abilities, environment, and how people react to them can influence perception. External factors come from outside a person, such as acquired information, their knowledge, culture, and social environment. On the other hand, internal factors come from within a person, such as their feelings, personality, attitudes, prejudices, expectations, desires, physical state, interests and motivations, and their values and needs. This process begins with the instrument's senses receiving a stimulus and sending it to the brain. Physiological processes then allow people to realize what they are receiving.

Pre-service teachers' perception is very important to assess learning. Dörnyei (2001) states that students' perceptions are crucial to determining educational success or failure. Therefore, teachers must pay attention to students' perceptions to ensure that students succeed. A pre-service teachers' perception can help determine the appropriateness of the technology, technique, or learning system used in teaching and learning. In short, it can be used as a benchmark to improve what you're already doing or continue what you're already doing to get the best learning outcomes. In this research, the perception involves believe, knowledge, feelings, interests, and motivations owned by students. From these perceptions will be known how students experience using Grammarly and their ability to write essays, whether positive perceptions or negative perceptions.

ESSAY WRITING

As most international journals and conferences require papers and articles to be written in English, students must be proficient in English, especially in writing (Nova, 2018). Writing is a complex form of written communication (Khalisa, 2018). Based on (Oshima & Hogue, 2007) writing is never a one-step action; it is an ongoing creative act. In academic writing, students concentrate on the writing style, content, vocabulary, grammar, and organizational structure. Strongman (2014) stated that academic writing is a type of writing in which opinions are justified and structural. Papers, general subject reports, essays, theses, and dissertations are all considered academic writing, but students have written the most essay writing. Therefore, this study focuses on researching students' essay writing

GRAMMARLY SOFTWARE

Grammarly is the most popular online grammar-checking application used by Indonesian students due to its ease of access (Ambarwati & Karlina, 2021). Max Lytvyn and Alex Shevchenko invented Grammarly in 2009, a computer-based technology for identifying grammatical accuracy in writing. It assists users in identifying and replacing tricky statements with more precise alternatives to correct spelling, punctuation, and grammar. In addition, Grammarly offers various functions for better writing, including checking spelling, punctuation, grammar issues, sentence structure, and verb phrases. The app also includes valuable suggestions to make writing more readable, clear, and error-free.

Several studies have analyzed the effectiveness of Grammarly software in learning to write. Karyuatry et al. (2018) analyzed whether using Grammarly could improve the quality of writing involved in writing essays. The results of this study showed that when Grammarly was used in essay writing, about 32 (82%) students out of 40 scored positively. The researcher then concluded that Grammarly is practical and can be used as a teaching tool. In addition, Ghufron and Rosyida (2018) conducted another study. They compared the effectiveness of Grammarly with corrective feedback from teachers in reducing students' errors in EFL writing. This study used a quantitative approach and a quasi-experimental design. The study concluded that the software proved more effective in reducing student errors such as vocabulary, grammar, and spelling or punctuation. However, it was less effective in improving students' EFL writing content.

In addition, Nova (2018) research concluded that Grammarly software provides helpful suggestions with examples and explanations, fast grading speed, ease of download and use, and complimentary services. However, some drawbacks were identified, such as misleading feedback, lack of context, and content evaluation, which require further investigation and research. Meanwhile, more research is needed on "pre-service teachers' perceptions of Grammarly's usability". For this reason, the question of this study is what are students' perceptions of using Grammarly Software in helping them to check the problems of their writing?

METHOD

To clarify this research, the appropriate type of research based on its approach was quantitative research, with a survey design. Survey design is an arrangement for quantitative or numerically describing, attitudes, trends, or opinions in a population by analyzing a sample of that group (Creswell, 2014). This research was conducted in Jember Regency, East Java, involving students from three universities in Jember: two state universities and one private university. The researcher distributed questionnaires through Google Forms to get respondents during the research. From 50 EFL pre-service teachers' participants who filled out the questionnaire, 36 met the criteria. Questionnaires were used as a data collection technique, and close-ended questions were used via Google Form. The researcher chose this platform to minimize the use of pencil and paper, and did not require costs. The questionnaire was adapted from Ummah and Bisriyah (2022) with certain modifications. The researchers reviewed and revised the questionnaire items multiple times. Two experts in writing and educational technology validated the modified questionnaires. The feedback from the two experts was used to enhance the quality of the items. These questionnaire items were nineteen questions which consist two items for *Believe*, four items for *Knowledge*, five items for *Feelings*, six for *Interest*, and two items for *Motivation*. The participants were asked to choose bases on 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree (5), agree (4), neutral (3), disagree (2), and strongly disagree (1). To ensure respondents fully comprehended the questionnaire's contents and avoid any potential misunderstanding, it was administered in Indonesian.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

It was discovered that students' perceptions of Grammarly software for checking problems in their essay writing varied after calculating the questionnaire scores. The distributed questionnaires covered various aspects of perception. The aspects of perception are divided into five parts, they are: belief, knowledge, feeling, interest, motivation.

The first is the students' perceptions of the belief aspect. The questionnaire contains two items that inform about the students' beliefs in the use of Grammarly software. The first is about how far the respondents believe that Grammarly feedback can improve their writing skills. Based on Table 1, 24 respondents (66.7%) believe that Grammarly feedback can help them improve their writing. However, 10 (27.8%) state that they are neutral, and only 2 respondents (5.6%) strongly believe.

Table 1. The Data of the Belief Aspects

| No | Item | SA | A | N | D | SD |
|----|---|---------------|---------------|---------------|----|----|
| 1. | Grammarly feedback improves my writing skill. | 5.6% (2) | 66.7% (24) | 27.8% (10) | 0% | 0% |
| 2. | Grammarly feedback overcomes my problem in grammar when writing essays. | 27.8% (10) | 63.9% (23) | 8.3% (3) | 0% | 0% |

The second item concerns how much the students believe that Grammarly feedback will help them solve their writing problems. Table 1 shows that 23 respondents (63.9%) say that Grammarly feedback helps them solve their problems when they write essay. Additionally, 10 respondents (27.8%) strongly believe, and only 3 (8.3%) state that they are neutral.

In the belief aspect, the data obtained from the questionnaire shows that the highest frequency, with a percentage of 66.7%, agreed with the statement. This indicates that most respondents believe using Grammarly can enhance their writing skills. Moreover, they also believe that the feedback provided by Grammarly can effectively address their writing challenges. This general agreement demonstrates that pre-service teachers believe Grammarly is a valuable tool for improving the quality and accuracy of their written work. This result is in line with (Nova, 2018), who found that using Grammarly to evaluate academic writing improved students' writing. As these students can learn from their mistakes, the use of this program could raise their awareness of their errors, give them a better understanding of revising their errors, and prevent them from making similar errors.

Next is the knowledge aspect of perceptions. There are four items in the questionnaire that inform about Grammarly features that can help students in their writing. Item number three is about how far respondents agree that the Formality feature in Grammarly can help them provide more precise words. Based on Table 2, 24 respondents (66.7%) agreed, which means that the formality feature can help them write words according to the desired context. On the other hand, 8 respondents (22.2%) stated neutral, and 3 (8.3%) strongly agreed. In addition, 1 respondent strongly disagreed. Questionnaire item number four is about students' perceptions of the Domain feature in helping them write essays according to their desired style. A total of 22 respondents (61.1%) agreed that they could write in the desired style with the help of Domain features in Grammarly. In addition, 11 respondents (30.6%) stated

neutral. Meanwhile, there were 2 respondents (5.6%) who strongly agreed and only 1 respondent who strongly disagreed.

Table 2. The Data of the Knowledge Aspects

| No | Item | SA | A | N | D | SD |
|----|--|--------------|---------------|---------------|-------------|-------------|
| 3. | The Formality feature in <i>Grammarly</i> helps me to provide more appropriate words in the context of the sentence. | 8.3% (3) | 66.7% (24) | 22.2% (8) | 0% | 2.8% (1) |
| 4. | The Domain feature in <i>Grammarly</i> makes my essays conform to the desired style. | 5.6% (2) | 61.1% (22) | 30.6% (11) | 0% | 2.8% (1) |
| 5. | The Intent feature in <i>Grammarly</i> makes my essays more understandable. | 8.3% (3) | 63.9% (23) | 25% (9) | 0% | 2.8% (1) |
| 6. | Set Goal feature in <i>Grammarly</i> makes my essays more coherent. | 16.7% (6) | 44.4% (16) | 33.3% (12) | 2.8% (1) | 2.8% (1) |

Next is item number five. This item is about how far students think the Grammarly Intent feature can help them make their essays more understandable. Table 4.2 shows that 23 respondents (63.9%) agree that the intent feature could make their essays more understandable. Additionally, 9 respondents (25%) said they were neutral, and 3 (8.3%) strongly agreed. On the other hand, only 1 respondent strongly disagreed, which means this respondent considered that the Intent feature could not make the essay more understandable because this respondent chose to use other methods or perhaps applications. Item number six is about how far students think Grammarly's set goal feature could make their essays more coherent. 16 respondents (44.4%) stated that they agree. In addition, 12 respondents (33.3%) were neutral, and 6 (16.7%) strongly agreed. Furthermore, 1 respondent disagreed, and 1 respondent strongly disagreed.

In the knowledge aspect, the data obtained from the questionnaire shows that the highest frequency, with a percentage of 66.7%, agreed with the statement, which means that more than half of the respondents thought that the Grammarly feature could help them when they write. This result aligned with Fitriana and Nurazni (2022) study claim that Grammarly can help the English department students to correct their writing. However, respondents strongly disagreed with the statement (2.8%). It can be interpreted that respondents think some features such as formality, domain, intent, and set goals in Grammarly have little impact on their essay writing. This result was contrast with the study result done by Ghaida & Rahma, (2021). The study reveals that 18 out of 44 students agreed that features in Grammarly give grammar accuracy in their writing. This can be caused by respondents paying less attention to the features in Grammarly or rarely setting the features provided by Grammarly.

The third is the students' perceptions of the feeling aspect. The questionnaire contains five items that inform about the students' feelings on the use of Grammarly software. Item number seven is about how far the respondents feel that Grammarly could help them understand English grammar rules. Based on Table 4.3, 20 respondents (55.6%) agree, meaning that using Grammarly makes respondents feel they can understand English grammar rules better. Additionally, 12 respondents (33.3%) strongly agree, and only 4 (11.1%) neutral. Questionnaire item eight concerns how much students feel that Grammarly helps them correct their language style. 23 respondents (63.9%) agree that Grammarly can correct their language style. In addition, 10 (27.8%) strongly agree, and only 3 (8.3%) said neutral. The

ninth item is about how far students feel that Grammarly helps them correct grammar in essay writing. 25 respondents (69.4%) agree that Grammarly can correct grammar. Meanwhile, 10 respondents (27.8%) strongly agreed, and only 1 was neutral.

Table 3. The Data of the Feeling Aspects

| No | Item | SA | A | N | D | SD |
|-----|--|---------------|---------------|--------------|----|----|
| 7. | Grammarly helps me understand English grammar rules. | 33.3% (12) | 55.6% (20) | 11.1% (4) | 0% | 0% |
| 8. | Grammarly helps me correct my language style in essay writing. | 27.8% (10) | 63.9% (23) | 8.3% (3) | 0% | 0% |
| 9. | Grammarly helps me correct grammar in essay writing | 27.8% (10) | 69.4% (25) | 2.8% (1) | 0% | 0% |
| 10. | Grammarly helps me correct spelling in essay writing | 27.8% (10) | 66.7% (24) | 5.6% (2) | 0% | 0% |
| 11. | Grammarly helps me correct punctuation in essay writing | 25% (9) | 66.7% (24) | 8.3% (3) | 0% | 0% |

Next is item number ten. This item discusses how students feel that Grammarly helps them correct spelling in their essays writing. Based on Table 4.3, 24 respondents (66.7%) agree that Grammarly can correct spelling in their essays writing. Additionally, 10 respondents (27.8%) strongly agree, and only 2 (5.6%) respondents are neutral.

Item number eleven is about how far students feel that Grammarly helps them correct punctuation in essay writing. 24 respondents (66.7%) agree that Grammarly can help them correct punctuation. Meanwhile, 9 respondents (25%) strongly agree, and 3 (8.3%) neutral.

In the feeling aspect, the data obtained from the questionnaire shows that the highest frequency, with a percentage of 69.4%, agreed with the statement. In addition, 66.7% of the respondents agree that Grammarly helps correct spelling and punctuation in essay writing. That means respondents feel that Grammarly can correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation. This finding is in line with (Aidil, 2019), who found that Grammarly's features are useful for learning academic writing, as it assists users in fixing grammatical errors, spelling, and punctuation. This positive emotional response highlights the perceived reliability and effectiveness of Grammarly in enhancing the overall writing experience (Calma et al., 2022).

The fourth is the students' perceptions of the interest aspect. The questionnaire contains six items about why students are interested in using Grammarly software. Item number twelve is about how far the students are interested in Grammarly's explanation of their essay writing errors. Based on Table 4.4, 20 respondents (55.6%) agree, meaning that the respondents are interested in using Grammarly because Grammarly explains the errors clearly. Additionally, 8 respondents (22.2%) strongly agree, and also 8 (22.2%) neutral. Questionnaire item thirteen concerns how much students are interested in the short time Grammarly takes to correct essay writing errors. 19 respondents (52.8%) agree, meaning that they are interested in using Grammarly because it saves them time. In addition, 11 (30.6%) strongly agree, and 6 (16.7%) said neutral. This finding was also in line with (Lailika, 2019), saying that Grammarly proofreads writing very quickly, students can immediately revise and do other assignments, and students feel they can manage their time well. Item fourteen concerns how interested students are in Grammarly's detailed feedback. 23 respondents (63.9%) agree that Grammarly gives detailed feedback for their essay writing. Meanwhile, 7 respondents (19.4%) strongly agreed, and 6 (16.7%) were neutral.

Table 4. The Data of the Interest Aspects

| No | Item | SA | A | N | D | SD |
|-----|--|---------------|---------------|---------------|-------------|----|
| 12. | Grammarly gives a clear explanation of the error in my essay writing | 22.2% (8) | 55.6% (20) | 22.2% (8) | 0% | 0% |
| 13. | Grammarly saves my time in correcting my essay writing errors. | 30.6% (11) | 52.8% (19) | 16.7% (6) | 0% | 0% |
| 14. | Grammarly gives detailed feedback. | 19.4% (7) | 63.9% (23) | 16.7% (6) | 0% | 0% |
| 15. | Grammarly gives an alternative word choice to make my essay more various. | 25% (9) | 52.8% (19) | 22.2% (8) | 0% | 0% |
| 16. | Grammarly gives suggestions on wordy sentences to make them clearer. | 16.7% (6) | 61.1% (22) | 16.7% (6) | 5.6% (2) | 0% |
| 17. | Grammarly gives suggestions on passive voice sentences to make them more direct. | 11.1% (4) | 58.3% (21) | 30.6% (11) | 0% | 0% |

Next is item fifteen. This item discusses how interested students are in alternative word choices provided by Grammarly. Based on Table 4.4, 19 respondents (52.8%) agree. This means the respondents are interested in using Grammarly because besides providing detailed feedback, it provides alternative word choices that can make their essay more varied. Additionally, 9 respondents (25%) strongly agree, and 8 (22.2%) are neutral. Item number sixteen is about how far students are interested in Grammarly's suggestions on wordy sentences. 22 respondents (61.1%) agree, meaning they are interested in using Grammarly because it gives suggestions on wordy sentences to make them clearer. Additionally, 6 respondents (16.7%) strongly agreed, and 6 (16.7%) were neutral. On the other hand, only 2 respondents disagreed. Questionnaire item seventeen concerns how much students are interested in Grammarly's suggestions on passive voice sentences. 21 respondents (58.3%) agree, meaning they are interested in using Grammarly because it suggests how to make passive voice sentences more direct. Additionally, 11 respondents (30.6%) were neutral, and 4 (11.1%) strongly agreed.

In the interest aspect, the data obtained from the questionnaire shows that the highest frequency, with a percentage of 63.9%, agreed with the statement. This means that respondents are interested in using Grammarly because Grammarly provides detailed feedback that makes correcting errors in their essays easier. The level of interest in this study indicates that integrating Grammarly into writing education could be beneficial, as it effectively aligns with students' preferences and supports their learning needs. These findings highlight the potential positive impact of Grammarly on student engagement and improving writing skills. These outcomes differed from Ambarwati (2021), she looked into two students' usage of Grammarly. The report states that they stopped using Grammarly because they believed the feedback to be prone to error. In contrast, Fahmi and Cahyono (2021) found that the majority of the participants in their study agreed that Grammarly's feedback could help them improve the quality of their writing.

The fifth is students' perceptions of the motivation aspect. This aspect consists of two items about how students are motivated after using Grammarly. Item number eighteen is about how far Grammarly has increased students' motivation to write better essays. Based on Table 4.5, 17 respondents (47.2%) agree that Grammarly motivated them to improve their

essays. Meanwhile, 11 respondents (30.6%) are neutral, 6 (16.7%) say they strongly agree, and 2 (5.6%) disagree.

Table 5. The Data of the Motivation Aspects

| No | Item | SA | A | N | D | SD |
|-----|---|---------------|---------------|---------------|-------------|----|
| 18. | Grammarly increased my motivation to make my essay better. | 16.7% (6) | 47.2% (17) | 30.6% (11) | 5.6% (2) | 0% |
| 19. | Grammarly feedback makes me feel more confident with my essays. | 27.8% (10) | 50% (18) | 22.2% (8) | 0% | 0% |

The last item concerns how far Grammarly's feedback can make students feel more confident about their essay writing. Table 4.5 shows that 18 respondents (50%) agree that they are motivated and feel more confident about writing their essays after receiving feedback from Grammarly. In addition, 10 respondents (27.8%) feel they strongly agree, and 8 (22.2%) are neutral. In the motivation aspect, the data obtained from the questionnaire shows that the highest frequency, with a percentage of 50%, agreed with the statement, which means that half of the respondents feel that Grammarly feedback motivated them and made them more confident in writing their essays. However, some respondents (5.6%) strongly disagreed with the statement. It can be interpreted as the fact that although Grammarly provides many features and feedback on their writing, it cannot motivate them.

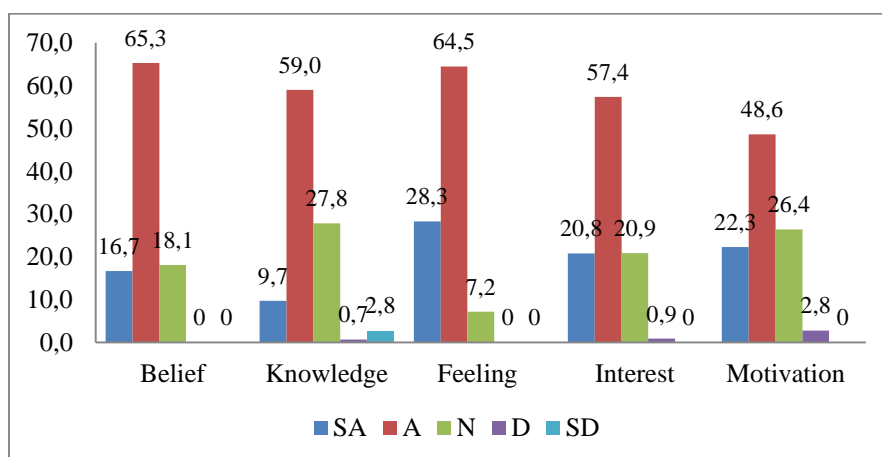


Figure 1. The Data of All Aspects

This study also analyzed each aspect of student perception through the average percentage of each item. Figure 4.1 shows that all aspects produce different percentages. Based on the data, the highest frequency, with a percentage of 65.3% of respondents agreeing, is in the belief aspect. This means students mostly believe that using Grammarly can help them improve their writing skills and solve problems. This result aligned with Karyuatry et al., (2018); Pratama (2020); and Guo et al., (2022) found that Grammarly's feedback increased students' writing ability. Besides, the average frequency motivation aspect was in the 48.6% agreeing. This means that respondents do not strongly agree that Grammarly significantly influences their motivation. However, this implies that the respondents still agree that Grammarly has effect on their motivation. This result aligned with the result study from Ummah and Bisriyah (2022), which found that students' perception of motivation to use Grammarly had a positive response. One of the reasons is that students feel

unconfident in their writing and feel that there are a lot of mistakes in their writing, so they want to improve the writing by using Grammarly. Further, Ananda et al. (2021) also show that the student in their study became more motivated after viewing the Readability function that displayed their written score.

CONCLUSION

In general, the findings in this study show a positive response based on five aspects of perception: belief, knowledge, feeling, interest, and motivation. Based on the data, 18-24 agree, and 2-12 strongly agree with the statement. This means that more than half of the respondents positively perceive the use of Grammarly software in essay writing. The finding about the aspect of perception that has the highest response is the belief aspect. This aspect shows that students believe that using Grammarly can resolve problems in writing their essays. This is because Grammarly provides features that can improve their essays. More than that, Grammarly also provides detailed feedback when correcting their writing. In addition, students believe that using Grammarly software will improve their writing skills. However, motivation should be particularly concerned in this study, as the survey data shows this aspect has a low response. This means that the use of Grammarly software is not significant enough to motivate students to write better essays. This can be caused by the way they utilize Grammarly inappropriately because they need specific interventions on how to use Grammarly correctly. This is also a limitation of this study, which is that researchers only investigate students' perceptions in general without providing treatment. In this context, the researcher recommends that English language education programs emphasize the significance of incorporating AI tools, particularly Grammarly, in the teaching and learning writing process. In addition, it is highly recommended for future researchers to study the motivational aspect more deeply.

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