



## EFL STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF GRAMMARLY IN ACADEMIC WRITING

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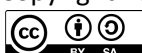
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### Abstract

This qualitative descriptive study investigated how seventh-semester English Education students at the *Institut Pendidikan Indonesia Garut* perceived Grammarly's capabilities and limitations in high-stakes academic writing. The research utilized perception theory, the Technology Acceptance Model, the process writing approach, automated feedback engagement, and the AI dependency dilemma. The study examined how students experienced, interpreted, and negotiated Grammarly's role in their Academic Writing and thesis practices through semi-structured interviews and reflexive thematic analysis. The findings indicated that students perceived Grammarly as an efficient assistant for surface-level correction, time-saving, and confidence-building. Students simultaneously recognized constraints related to disciplinary nuance, coherence, authorial voice, risks of over-reliance, oscillating between critical, learning-oriented engagement and uncritical "accept all" use, which created tensions between technological comfort and autonomous writing development. These complex negotiations supported the study's scientific novelty claim. The research moved beyond score-based evaluations and foregrounded students' meaning-making about both the affordances and constraints of Grammarly in authentic thesis-writing contexts. The results implied that EFL writing pedagogy needed AI-literacy and critical-engagement training. This training ensured that students used Grammarly as a complement rather than a replacement for human feedback and metalinguistic reflection. Future research could adopt mixed-methods and longitudinal



designs. Researchers could broaden samples across programs and institutions. Future studies could also test AI-literacy interventions to examine how different instructional framings shaped dependency, confidence, and independent academic writing competence.

**Keywords:** *Grammarly, Perceptions, Automated Writing Evaluation, AI Dependency, Technology Acceptance, Academic Writing Process.*

### Sari

Studi deskripsi kualitatif ini meneliti bagaimana mahasiswa Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris semester tujuh di *Institut Pendidikan Indonesia Garut* mempersepsikan kemampuan dan keterbatasan Grammarly dalam penulisan akademik berisiko tinggi. Penelitian ini menggunakan teori persepsi, Model Penerimaan Teknologi, pendekatan penulisan proses, keterlibatan umpan balik otomatis, dan dilema ketergantungan AI. Studi ini meneliti bagaimana mahasiswa mengalami, menafsirkan, dan menegosiasikan peran Grammarly dalam praktik penulisan akademik dan tesis mereka melalui wawancara semi struktur dan analisis tematik reflektif. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa mempersepsikan Grammarly sebagai asisten yang efisien untuk koreksi tingkat permukaan, penghematan waktu, dan peningkatan kepercayaan diri. Mahasiswa secara bersamaan menyadari kendala yang terkait dengan nuansa disiplin ilmu, koherensi, suara penulis, risiko ketergantungan berlebihan, berisolasi antara keterlibatan kritis yang berorientasi pada pembelajaran dan penggunaan “terima semua” yang tidak kritis, yang menciptakan ketegangan antara kenyamanan teknologi dan pengembangan penulisan otonom. Negosiasi kompleks ini mendukung klaim kebaruan ilmiah studi ini. Penelitian ini melampaui evaluasi berbasis skor dan menyoroti pemahaman siswa tentang kemampuan dan keterbatasan Grammarly dalam konteks penulisan tesis yang autentik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pedagogi penulisan EFL membutuhkan pelatihan literasi AI dan keterlibatan kritis. Pelatihan ini memastikan bahwa siswa menggunakan Grammarly sebagai pelengkap, bukan pengganti, umpan balik manusia dan refleksi metalinguistic. Penelitian selanjutnya dapat mengadopsi metode campuran dan desain longitudinal. Peneliti dapat memperluas sampel di berbagai program dan institusi. Studi selanjutnya juga dapat menguji intervensi literasi AI untuk meneliti bagaimana kerangka instruksional yang berbeda membentuk ketergantungan, kepercayaan diri, dan kompetensi penulisan akademik independent.

**kata kunci:** *Grammarly, Persepsi, Evaluasi Tulisan Otomatis, Ketergantungan AI, Penerimaan Teknologi, Proses Penulisan Akademik.*

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## **Introduction**

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers enforced a rigid approach to statistics, mainly in an academic setting. Research showed that students encountered difficulty in all areas of writing: grammatical accuracy, vocabulary richness, and logical organization (Isma et al., 2023; Selim, 2024). Educational technology sought to address these problems, and the AWE promised a solution for the end user. However, Grammarly dominated this terrain and became the best choice for students who sought writing help (Dewi, 2023). The application of AI in writing classes indicated a shift away from how instructors historically processed feedback (Alnemrat et al., 2025). Students no longer required exclusive feedback from instructors; digital algorithms prodded them to alter their writing in various ways. Nevertheless, this technical shift generated multiple interpretations among teachers. Some teachers praised the proficiency of the AWE tool, while others questioned its future potential in terms of actual language learning (Yousofi, 2022). These divergent perspectives highlighted broader concerns regarding how students engaged with AWE tools. Prior research revealed that learners appreciated the feedback about correcting immediate problems but overlooked underlying grammar rules (Fei et al., 2023; Sultan & Abidin, 2022). This trend raised questions regarding where technology dependence ended and independent study began. Nonetheless, limited empirical research specifically addressed how graduating students in higher education negotiated this potential conflict. Accordingly, the current study investigated final-year students' perceptions of such a writing tool in higher education.

This research looked at what certain words mean based on what experts say and how they're measured. Educators viewed perception as the way people organized their feelings into patterns to make sense of the immediate world (Baker, 2024). This study defined perception specifically as the attitude, views, and interpretations held by seventh-semester students regarding their interactions with Grammarly. Spelling posed a significant limitation regarding text production, alongside writing accuracy. Other research described Grammarly as a cloud-based grammar checker that identifies errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar, and sentence structure in English text (Fan, 2023). This research operationalized the concept as a specific AWE platform that students accessed to support their Academic Writing course requirements. Teachers characterized Academic Writing as the language of universities and scientific publications. This term

referred to the texts students wrote for their ACWR course, such as thesis papers and research reports.

This research update examined how final-year students experienced and made sense of Grammarly’s role in supporting their academic writing under considerable performance demands. It explored how students negotiated Grammarly’s prompt corrections in relation to their confidence and perceived learning, highlighting concerns about over-reliance, rather than merely reporting accuracy gains or user satisfaction scores found in previous studies. Survey results indicated that students valued the immediacy of automated corrections and associated with increased confidence, while some participants also felt that this convenience constrained their independent development as writers. The researcher applied the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and current AI reading-writing perspectives to interpret these nuanced student experiences and meaning-making processes (Driane et al., 2024; Dy et al., 2024).

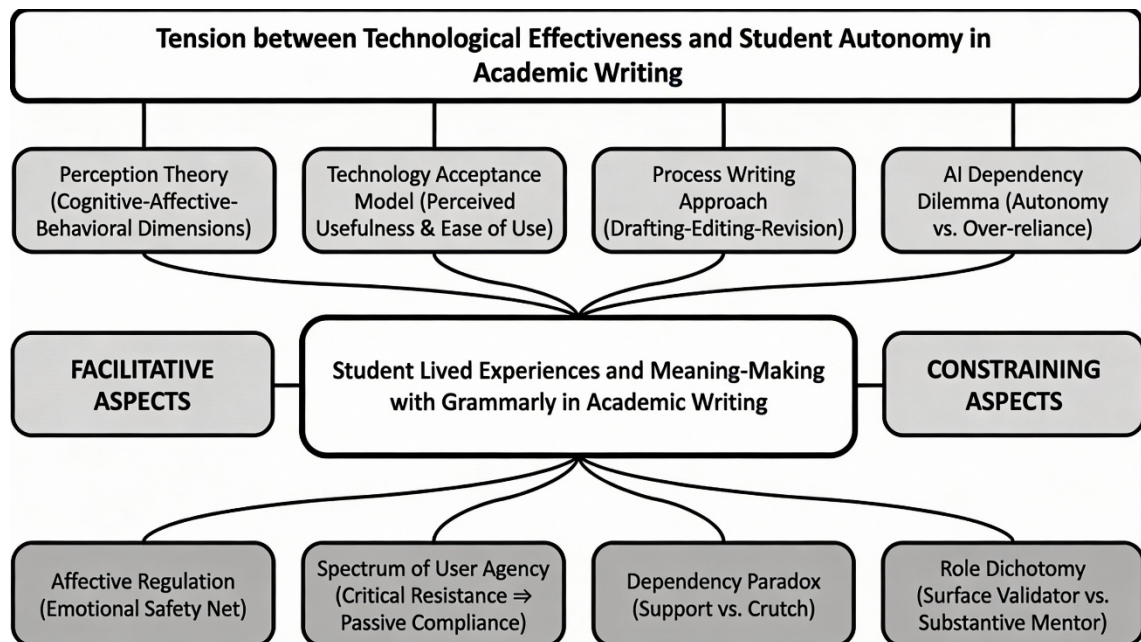
**Table 1: Theoretical Framework of the Study**

<b>Theory/Concept</b>	<b>Theorist/Source (Adapted)</b>	<b>Application in this study</b>
<b>Perception Theory</b>	(Stracke et al., 2023)	The frame work served as the overarching lens to understand and categorize students’ subjective beliefs, cognitive processing, and emotional responses towards using Grammarly for academic writing.
<b>Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)</b>	(Davis & Granic, 2024)	The framework guided the analysis of key adoption factors. This model structured the themes around Perceived Usefulness, Perceived Ease of Use, and Behavioral Intention to continue using the tool.
<b>Process Writing Approach</b>	(Conijn et al., 2022) integration by (Faisal & Carabella, 2023)	Analyzed how students incorporated Grammarly during the <i>drafting</i> and <i>editing</i> stages, rather than just the final proofreading.
<b>Automated Feedback Engagement</b>	(Koltovskaia, 2022)	Proofreading the lens to categorize student perceptions into “cognitive engagement” (learning) vs “behavioral engagement”.
<b>AI Dependency Dilemma</b>	(Chan & Hu, 2023) assessment by (Fan, 2023)	Framed the <i>Cons</i> regarding the loss of student voice and over-reliance on algorithms.

Previous studies looked closely at how effective Grammarly was for improving writing scores (Ngo et al., 2024). Research showed that Grammarly helped reduce surface-level errors in student writing (Abu Qub'a et al., 2024; Dewi, 2023; Tambunan, A.R.S., Andayani, W., Sari, 2022). The literature still contained some gaps. Most studies focused on quantitative outcomes, such as scores, rather than student views on tool limitations (Gholami & Vakili, 2022; Isma et al., 2023; Selim, 2024). Few researchers studied what Grammarly meant to seventh-semester students in Indonesia, especially when they used it for important tasks like writing a thesis. Many studies also overlooked the negative sides and described AWE tools as only helpful (Ummah & Bisriyah, 2022; Yousofi, 2022). Consequently, this qualitative descriptive study explored the complex perceptions of seventh-semester English Education students at a private university in Indonesia regarding the use of Grammarly in their thesis writing. The research examined how students subjectively experienced and negotiated both benefits and constraints instead of measuring writing scores. The study specifically prioritized their cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses regarding the tension between technological support and autonomous skill development.

Significant issues existed with integrating Grammarly's pedagogy into EFL academic writing, even amidst its widespread acceptance. Seventh-semester college students in Indonesia increasingly relied on Grammarly to complete theses and advanced academic assignments, but many accepted algorithmic suggestions without critical evaluation, a pattern that raised concerns about potential impacts on writers' agency and independent error-detection skills. A major concern about this uncritical reliance was that students developed a psychological dependence on automated feedback, lost metalinguistic awareness, prioritized surface corrections over significant language learning, and lost their authentic voice to algorithmically standardized prose. The central issue lay in the tension between effectiveness and autonomy. Grammarly reduced writing errors and anxiety, yet it also raised concerns that advanced EFL learners might become less oriented toward developing the skills necessary for long-term academic success. Little empirical research addressed how college students understood and navigated this paradox, especially in high-stakes writing contexts like thesis preparation, where critical thinking and accuracy were crucial.

This study focused on perceptions of the affordances and constraints of Grammarly use. The subjects were strictly limited to seventh-semester students of the English Education Department who took the Academic Writing course. The conceptual framework below illustrates the flow of the research:



**Figure 1 The Conceptual Framework**

This study pursued two main objectives. First, the researcher explored how seventh-semester English Education students experienced, interpreted, and constructed meanings regarding Grammarly as a support tool in their academic writing process. Second, the inquiry examined the tensions, complexities, and negotiations students encountered when integrating Grammarly into their thesis writing practices. Consequently, these objectives framed two research questions:

1. How do seventh-semester English Education students experience and make sense of Grammarly as a support tool in their academic writing process?
2. What tensions, negotiations, and complexities do students encounter when integrating Grammarly into their thesis writing practices?

This research carried significant urgency due to the rapid proliferation of AI tools in higher education post-2022. Teachers needed to understand how students perceived and interacted with these tools to facilitate changes in university policies on AI integrity

(Shephard, 2025). Educators utilized insights regarding students' fears. Stress, and threats to design writing instruction that encouraged AI literacy and reflective tool use. This study also aimed to raise students' awareness that Grammarly functioned best as a supportive learning resource rather than a complete substitute for their own linguistic decision-making.

## **Methods**

The researcher undertook a qualitative study to comprehend the essential perceptions of seventh-semester students at the *Institut Pendidikan Indonesia Garut* concerning the utilization of Grammarly in Academic Writing. This study employed this methodology to elucidate the participants' experiences and their interpretations of automated writing evaluation tools within their educational practices, without attempting to reveal profound essences or formulate formal theoretical frameworks (Elizabeth J. Tisdell, Sharan B. Merriam, 2025). Furthermore, the researcher prioritized the genuine voices of participants to elucidate their experiences, negotiations, and discussions regarding Grammarly's role on their English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing development (Barrot, 2023). The qualitative design of this study enabled the researcher to analyze the intricate phenomenon of technology integration in EFL classrooms through the students' perspectives.

### ***Research Design***

The researcher utilized a descriptive qualitative design to examine the experiences and engagement of seventh-semester students at the *Institut Pendidikan Indonesia Garut* (Armanda et al., 2022). The researcher aimed to deliver a comprehensive, contextualized account of students' reported actions, emotions, and thoughts while incorporating the tool into their thesis and course-related writing, rather than assessing effectiveness or categorizing Grammarly into positive and negative dimensions. This design enabled the researcher to present a comprehensive account of students' explicit experiences and narratives without formulating hypotheses or asserting causal relationships (Hall & Liebenberg, 2024). The author deliberately focused on the "what" and "how" aspects of students' lives experiences with Grammarly-specifically, the meanings they derived and the ways they managed their interaction with the tool, rather than forecasting relationships among variables. The present study offered a comprehensive account of how seventh-

semester students encountered and navigated Grammarly's integration into their academic writing, corresponding with the study's objective to elucidate EFL students' beliefs and interpretations concerning automated writing evaluation in authentic academic contexts.

### ***Settings***

The researcher conducted this study at *Institut Pendidikan Indonesia Garut*, a well-known teacher education institution in Garut, West Java, Indonesia, in academic year of 2024/2025. The researcher intentionally chose this campus because the institution maintained a solid English Education program and required students to take a series of academic writing courses while integrating technology-enhanced learning platforms like Grammarly (Fitriana, K., Nurazni, 2022). Data collection took place over two days in December 2025. The academic writing course in this university required students to write several scholarly texts, such as research proposals, literature reviews, and argumentative essays; thus, the student body utilized Grammarly as a suitable tool (Faisal & Carabella, 2023). The researcher only selected seventh-semester students, as this group represented advanced learners who understood academic writing conventions and used Grammarly for at least a full semester (Abbas et al., 2025).

### ***Participants***

The researcher utilized purposive sampling to select 15 participants from level 4, class C of the English Education program. The researcher established specific inclusion criteria to guarantee information-rich cases (Dahal et al., 2024; Elliot et al., 2024). Eligible participants met three requirements: active enrollment in the seventh semester, prior experience with Grammarly for at least one semester, and willingness to share real-life experiences (Dahal et al., 2024; McCombie et al., 2024). 2 male and 13 female students aged 21 to 22 comprised the final participant group. This balanced gender distribution provided diverse perspectives on Grammarly usage (Yang et al., 2022). The researcher recruited participants via classroom announcements and personal invitations to explain the study objectives. Data collection continued until the researcher achieved data saturation.

### ***Data Collection***

The researcher collected primary data through extensive, semi-structured interviews with all 15 participants. Semi-structured interviews provided a compromise between organised direction and flexibility. This style enabled participants to express their evolving worldviews through interaction (Junier, 2024). Some experts argued that semi-structured interviews employed a list of questions that had been made up before the session. The researcher retained the flexibility to alter the sequence of questions, incorporate supplementary inquiries, and introduce novel subjects during the session (Lubiano, 2025). Interactive interviews allowed for reflective engagement, clarification, and discussion between the researcher and participants (Denzin et al., 2023). This process increased the depth and credibility of qualitative data.

Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to ask further questions, clarify unclear responses, and explore issues more thoroughly (Saglam, 2024). Open-ended questions in written questionnaires often yielded shorter and less detailed responses (Lenzner et al., 2024). The theoretical frameworks in this study included perception theory, the technology acceptance model, the process writing approach, the engagement of automated feedback, and the dependency dilemma of artificial intelligence. The researcher utilized these theories directly to develop interview questions regarding students' perceptions, affective states, and behaviors.

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews at the *Institut Pendidikan Indonesia Garut* between December 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>, 2025. Most participants attended face-to-face sessions in a quiet classroom in the English Language Education Department to accommodate scheduling constraints. Two other participants completed their interviews online via Zoom. Each session lasted approximately twenty to thirty minutes and took place in a safe and private setting to encourage open and honest responses.

**Table 2. Interview Guideline**

<b>Construct</b>	<b>Sub-Components</b>
<b>Background Information</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Experience with Grammarly</li> <li>2. Frequency of use</li> <li>3. Types of writing tasks</li> </ol>
<b>Perception</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Cognitive aspect (understanding, beliefs, interpretation of Grammarly's functions)</li> <li>2. Affective aspect (emotional responses, confidence, anxiety, dependency feelings)</li> <li>3. Behavioral aspect (usage patterns, habits, acceptance/rejection of suggestions)</li> </ol>
<b>Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Perceived Usefulness</li> <li>2. Perceived Ease of Use</li> <li>3. Behavioral Intention to Use</li> </ol>

<b>Process Writing Approach</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Drafting stage.</li> <li>2. Editing/Revising stage</li> </ol>
<b>Automated Feedback Engagement</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Cognitive engagement (learning from feedback, metalinguistic awareness)</li> <li>2. Behavioral engagement (action toward feedback, explanation usage)</li> </ol>
<b>AI Dependency Dilemma</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Perceived benefits (error reduction, confidence boost, efficiency)</li> <li>2. Perceived risks/constraints (over-reliance, loss of autonomy, authentic voice)</li> </ol>
<b>Tensions Between Technology Support and Autonomy</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Negotiation of tool usage and independent writing skill development</li> <li>2. Critical evaluation vs uncritical acceptance of AI suggestions</li> </ol>

Perceptual theories such as TAM, the Process Writing Approach, Automated Feedback Engagement, and the AI Dependency Dilemma provided constructs and subcomponents for the interview questions. The researcher utilized these constructs to ensure that each question addressed a specific aspect of cognitive, affective, and behavioral perceptions, rather than haphazardly constructing questions. The interview guidelines served as a flexible guide because the semi-structured format ensured consistent coverage of all content areas while allowing participants space to express their own experiences and perspectives.

### ***Research Instrument***

This study used a semi-structured interview guide to operationalize the previously described theoretical framework. The guide consisted of 29 main questions and a series of supporting questions structured according to the constructs and subcomponents presented in the interview content blueprint (see **Table 2**). Each section of the guide addressed a specific topic. Examples of topics included cognitive perceptions, affective perceptions, behavioral perceptions, the academic writing process, technological issues, and general thoughts about using Grammarly.

The interview guide served as an adaptable protocol rather than a rigid script. The guide ensured that each participant addressed the basic topics while it allowed the researcher to adjust the wording, question order, and follow-up questions. This structure enhanced the credibility and comparability of the data and helped maintain consistency across interviews. The researcher used a digital audio recorder to accurately record participant responses. The researcher utilized a smartphone audio recording app for face-

to face interviews and placed the device discreetly on a table after obtaining consent. The researcher activated the built-in recording feature for online interviews via Zoom with participant permission. These recordings proved crucial to produce verbatim transcripts and prevent data loss.

### ***Data Procedures***

The researcher collected and processed data from seventh-semester English language students through a systematic process. Theroretical frameworks such as perception theory, technology acceptance models, process writing approaches, automated feedback engagement, and the AI dependency dilemma formed the basis for the semi-structured interview questions. The researcher utilized these questions to focus on student perceptions, affective responses, behavioral patterns, academic writing processes, and technological issues using Grammarly. Thirteen participants attended individual semi-structured interviews in a quiet classroom between December 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>, 2025. Two additional participants completed online interviews via ZOOM. Each session lasted between 20-30 minutes and began with rapport building and an explanation of confidentiality. The researcher recorded in-person sessions using a smartphone app and online sessions via Zoom upon receiving consent. The researcher transcribed the data verbatim, assigned pseudonyms to protect identities, and organized the transcripts for analysis. Inductive thematic analysis revealed patterns in students' perceptions through repeated reading, initial coding, and theme generation.

### ***Data Analysis***

The researcher analyzed the interview data systematically and interpretively using Braun and Clarke's reflective thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The researcher chose this approach because it allowed for the development of rich and nuanced themes that illustrated hoe seventh-semester English Language Education students at *Institut Pendidikan Indonesia Garut*, understood and experienced the capabilities and limitations of grammar in their academic writing practices, including complexity, conflict, and tension. Reflective thematic analysis prioritized depth of interpretation rather than counting frequencies. The researcher did not use this technique to count the number of students expressing positive or negative opinions. The study aimed to uncover deeper patterns of meaning in students' cognitive understanding, affective responses, and

behavioral practices related to Grammarly use. A hybrid method, largely inductive, formed the basis of this analysis. Perception theory (Stracke et al., 2023), which encompassed cognitive, affective, and behavioural aspects, along with the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis & Granic, 2024) and the automated feedback engagement framework served as a strict coding structure. This allowed themes to emerge organically from the data while maintaining theoretical coherence with the research’s conceptual foundation.

**Table 3. Reflexive Thematic Analysis**

Phase	Analytic Actions	Application in this study	Implication and Purpose
Familiarization with Data	Reading, re-reading noting initial reflections	The researcher reviewed interview transcripts multiple times, immersing in students’ descriptions of their Grammarly use, perceived benefits, and concerns	Built deep contextual understanding of seventh-semester students’ lived experiences with Grammarly in academic writing
Generating Initial Codes	Producing inductive and theory-informed codes	Codes captured students’ cognitive beliefs about Grammarly (e.g., “helpful for grammar” “reduces errors”), affective responses (e.g., “anxiety relief,” “over-dependency”), and behavioral patterns (e.g., “automatic acceptance.” “critical evaluation”)	Identified meaningful perceptions and behavioral engagement patterns grounded in students’ actual experiences.
Constructing Candidate Themes	Grouping related codes into broader meaning patterns	Codes were clustered into candidate themes aligned with the theoretical framework: perception dimensions (cognitive-affective-behavioral), Technology Acceptance Model components (perceived usefulness, ease of use), and AI dependency tensions.	Began forming analytical explanations of <b>how</b> and <b>why</b> students perceived Grammarly, rather than merely describing <b>what</b> they said.
Reviewing and Refining Themes	Checking coherence across data and themes	Candidate themes were compared against all interview excerpts and reviewed for internal consistency, ensuring that each theme was supported by multiple data points across different participants.	Strengthened analytical credibility and ensured themes authentically represented the data without forcing interpretation.
Defining and Naming Themes	Clarifying the essence and boundaries of each theme	Each theme was refined to explain the complexity of students’ negotiations between tool support and autonomy, their sense-making processes, and the tensions they navigated when integrating Grammarly into thesis writing.	Produced theoretically grounded and interpretable findings that address both research questions (experience and tensions/complexities).
Producing Thematic Narrative	Synthesizing themes into analytical accounts	Themes were integrated into coherent narrative accounts in the Findings and Discussion sections, illustrating how themes interconnected to represent the broader phenomenon of students’ Grammarly perceptions and writing practices.	Supported rich interpretation, meaning, and pedagogical implications regarding AI literacy and autonomous writing skill development.

## **Results and Discussion**

### ***Results***

This qualitative study examined how seventh-semester English Language Education students viewed Grammarly in their Academic Writing course. Researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with fifteen students ranging from heavy users to critical skeptics. The researcher utilized Braun and Clarke's framework to identify six key themes that captured the essence of students' experiences. These themes discussed the benefits and drawbacks of using Grammarly in academic writing.

#### **Theme 1: Students Experienced Grammarly as a Time-Saving Technical Assistant**

Students consistently experienced Grammarly as a participatory time-saving assistant that reduced their manual proofreading load. Heavy users described how they used Grammarly almost every time they opened a laptop and they let the tool handle typos and subject-verb agreement so they could focus on content. One participant stated that Grammarly's premium features helped restructure sentences and saved them from checking grammar line by line: *"I don't need to waste time checking typos or subject-verb agreement manually one by one, the premium feature also helps improve sentence structure."* Another participant emphasized that Grammarly worked as a fast detector of human error when they felt tired after long writing sessions. This pattern showed that students positioned Grammarly as a technical assistant that participated in routine language correction rather than as a deep learning tutor.

#### **Theme 2: Cognitive Perceptions Mixed Trust in Basic Accuracy with Doubts about Higher-Level Writing**

Cognitively, students experienced Grammarly as accurate for surface level grammar but limited for higher-order academic writing. Some students trusted Grammarly up to *"90% accurate"* for basic grammar but clearly stated that the tool could not manage paragraph coherence or argument logic. Other participants noticed that Grammarly often misread passive voice or discipline-specific terms and tried to force its own style on academic sentences. Several participants explained that Grammarly sometimes treated legitimate Indonesian educational terminology or ELT jargon as errors,

which made them feel that the tool did not fully understand their disciplinary context. These experiences indicated that students constructed nuanced beliefs that separated Grammarly's technical strengths from its conceptual limitations.

### **Theme 3: Affective Responses Ranged from Anxiety Relief to Annoyance and Dependence**

Affective perceptions of Grammarly varied widely across participants and formed a continuum from anxiety relief to irritation and dependence. Some students reported initial stress when they saw many red underlines but gradually felt safe once Grammarly cleaned their drafts before submission. One heavy user stated, *"At first, I was stressed and felt my English was terrible. But now I see it as normal, and I actually feel safe when I'm corrected."* Other students described Grammarly as a source of confidence and admitted that they only submitted assignments or thesis chapters when the performance score looked good, as reflected in the comment, *"it's a huge confidence booster. I'm only willing to submit assignments to my supervisor if my writing has a good score on Grammarly"*. In contrast, critical or skeptical users felt annoyed when Grammarly mis-flagged quotations, names, or passive constructions and perceived the markings as intrusive rather than supportive. A group of low-proficiency and anxious writers also revealed strong psychological dependence and stated that they did not dare to write without Grammarly active on the screen.

### **Theme 4: Behavioral Practices Showed Diverse Patterns from "Accept All" to Critical Filtering**

Behaviorally, students demonstrated diverse participatory patterns in how they responded to Grammarly's suggestions and integrated them into their writing process. Some participants, especially perfectionists and busy students, admitted that they frequently used "accept all" when they worked under time pressure, particularly during final editing of thesis documents; one participant stated: *"To be honest, when I'm in a hurry, I often accept all. But for crucial parts of my thesis, I try to read the suggestions first before clicking accept"*. Other participants adopted a more critical stance and always read the pop-up explanations before accepting or rejecting a suggestion because they wanted to keep their preferred academic style, as reflected in the comment, *"I analyze it*

*first. I read the pop-up explanation. If I understand the reason, then I change it. I don't want to just click.*" Several learners described a hybrid strategy in which they let Grammarly handle surface corrections first and then brought the cleaned draft to lecturers for feedback on content and argumentation; one student explained, *"I used Grammarly first until it was clean of red lines, then I submitted it to my lecturer so that the lecturer could focus on the content of my thesis."* Many students also restricted Grammarly to late revising and editing stages because they felt the tool disturbed their concentration during planning and early drafting, which appeared in statements such as, *"As I said, it only supports me in editing. During the planning and drafting stages, it actually disrupts my concentration."*

### **Theme 5: Grammarly Supported Academic Writing Processes but Did Not Replace Human Feedback**

Regarding the academic writing process, students experienced Grammarly as most useful during revising and editing but less helpful for planning and idea development. Many participants described Grammarly as a 24-hour personal reviewer that assisted them in final drafting, polishing cohesion, and avoiding embarrassing typos in thesis chapters and research reports; one participant stated, *"it was incredibly supportive during the final drafting and especially the editing. It was like having a personal assistant reviewing your writing 27/7."* However, they still prioritized lecturers' comments for content, methodology, and argument flow, and treated Grammarly as a preliminary filter before supervision, as indicated by a student who said, *"Lecturer feedback is paramount for content. I only use Grammarly to polish the surface to make it neat."* Several students stated that they used Grammarly to remove "noise" from grammar errors so that supervisors could focus on conceptual issues, which appeared in remarks like, *"I used Grammarly first so that the lecturer wouldn't be distracted by trivial grammar mistakes and could focus on the content of my thesis."* Others felt that heavy use of Grammarly risked making their writing style too standardized and robotic, which encouraged them to maintain a balance between human feedback and AI-based correction; one skeptical participant commended, *"Tends to make all student writing 'uniform' in style, boring and stiff"*.

## **Theme 6: Students Negotiated Affordances and Constraints in the AI Dependency Dilemma**

Across interviews, students actively negotiated the affordances and constraints of Grammarly and recognized the potential AI dependency dilemma. Many participants appreciated Grammarly's ability to reduce anxiety, increase efficiency, and improve perceived professionalism of their academic prose; a perfectionist user noted, *"it made me very confident. I was sure my writing would be error-free when my lecturer read it."* At the same time, several students worried that constant reliance on automated suggestions weakened their metalinguistic awareness and reduced their motivation to consult grammar books or style manuals, as illustrated by the remark, *"I feel like my manual grammar skills have declined a bit because I've been spoiled too much by this app."* Some critical users explicitly resisted letting Grammarly "drive" their text and emphasized the importance of preserving authorial voice and disciplinary nuance, which appeared in statements such as, *"Use it wisely, don't let your writing lose its authorial identity just because you want to appear grammatically perfect."* Others openly acknowledged that they might struggle to write under exam conditions without Grammarly and therefore felt tension between technological comfort and the need for autonomous writing competence, as one participant admitted when they said that they felt anxious about writing "on-the-spot" without the tool and feared they would not remember basic grammar forms.

### ***Discussion***

#### **Addressing Research Question 1: Experiencing and Making Sense of Grammarly**

The first research question asked how seventh-semester English Education students experienced and made sense of Grammarly as a support tool in their academic writing process. The results showed that students perceived Grammarly as a participatory assistant that operated primarily at the level of surface correctness, time-saving, and confidence management. This pattern aligned with previous AWE studies that reported significant reductions in mechanical errors and improved writing scores when students used Grammarly and similar tools as grammar checkers rather than as comprehensive learning environments. Prior research found that students valued the immediacy of automated feedback and frequently overlooked underlying grammar rules, which

supported the current study's observation that many participants prioritized error removal over deeper language learning (Fei et al., 2023; Sultan & Abidin, 2022). Perception theory elucidated these experiences by emphasizing cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. Students exhibited trust in Grammarly for fundamental grammar while acknowledged its limitations regarding disciplinary terminology, coherence, and intricate style. They expressed diminished anxiety and an increased willingness to submit high-stakes work. These participants demonstrated behaviors ranging from "accept all" to reflective filtering. This pattern aligned with the differentiation between superficial behavioral engagement and profound cognitive engagement with automated feedback (Dewi, 2023; Fan, 2023; Koltovskaia, 2022; Ngo et al., 2024; Stracke et al., 2023; Yousofi, 2022). The Technology Acceptance Model explained Grammarly's sustained usage through high perceived usefulness, robust perceived ease of use, and consistent behavioral intention. This finding extended TAM by demonstrating that favorable adoption could coexist with nuanced critiques of limitations and disciplinary relevance (Davis & Granic, 2024; Driane et al., 2024; Dy et al., 2024). The process writing approach demonstrated that students infrequently utilized Grammarly for planning and initial drafting. Students focused instead on revising and editing as a late-stage scaffolding for language form. This offered a contextualized account of how Indonesian teacher-education students organized human and AI feedback in manners that quantitative AWE studies insufficiently examined (Conijn et al., 2022; Faisal & Carabella, 2023).

### **Addressing Research Question 2: Perceived Limitations (Cons) of Grammarly**

The second research question examined the tensions, negotiations, and complexities that students faced while incorporating Grammarly into their thesis writing practices. The results showed an ongoing negotiation between technological support and self-directed skill development that directly related to the AI dependency problem. Students acknowledged the benefits of using technology, such as reducing errors and increasingly efficiency, while they feared losing their authentic voice and relying too much on algorithmic judgment (Abu Qub'a et al., 2024; Chan & Hu, 2023; Fan, 2023; Gholami & Vakili, 2022; Isma et al., 2023). Automated feedback engagement theory elucidated these tensions by differentiating cognitive responses from behavioral responses. The present study refined previous findings by demonstrating that Grammarly

could function either as a catalyst for reflective learning or as a shortcut to superficial correctness. The study illustrated that discerning and critical users acted as proactive agents who strategically filtered AI suggestions. The AI dependency dilemma framework further illuminated students' explicit fears that standardized style recommendations might narrow rhetorical diversity. The results supported the need for AI literacy and critical thinking in EFL writing instruction. Participants stressed the importance of using Grammarly along with feedback from teachers, grammar books, and journal reading. This perspective aligned with constructivist views of digital tools as useful resources in a larger system of human mediation (Alnemrat et al., 2025; Barrot, 2023; Fitriana, K., Nurazni, 2022). The study focused on the cognitive, affective, and behavioral perceptions of seventh-semester students. The research demonstrated its purported scientific novelty by illustrating how final-year EFL students articulated the tension between technological assistance and autonomous academic writing development.

## **Conclusion**

This study explored how seventh-semester English Education students experienced and interpreted Grammarly as a participatory support tool in their academic writing. The research concluded that students viewed the tools as highly capable for surface-level correction, time-saving, and confidence-building. They simultaneously recognized limitations in disciplinary nuance, argument coherence, and preservation of personal voice. Students actively constructed meanings around Grammarly's affordances and constraints. They negotiated how far they allowed the tool to shape their drafts. This finding answered the first research problem on experiencing and making sense of Grammarly. Their simultaneous reliance on the tool for security and worry about over-reliance answered the second research problem on tensions and negotiations. The conclusions remained consistent with the scientific novelty claim. The study moved beyond score-based evaluations and produced a theoretically grounded account of how final-year EFL students interpreted capabilities and constraints in high-stakes writing. The results showed strong alignment between the theoretical framework and the empirical patterns. Perception theory categorized cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses. The Technology Acceptance Model explained continued adoption through perceived usefulness, ease of use, and behavioral intention. The process writing approach clarified

Grammarly's role at late stages of writing. The AI dependency dilemma framework illuminated concerns about losing voice and long-term competence. This confirmation proved that the study genuinely focused on tensions, conflicts, and negotiations rather than simple satisfaction.

### **Recommendations**

Future researchers could extend this study by adopting mixed-methods designs. These designs combined in-depth qualitative interviews with quantitative measures of writing performance, self-regulation, and technology acceptance. Researchers replicated the current semi-structured interviews while they also administered standardized writing tasks with and without Grammarly. They distributed TAM-based and automated feedback engagement questionnaires to link perceptions with accuracy, complexity, organization, and engagement patterns. Future studies could also broaden the sampling frame and comparative scope. They included students from different semesters, programs, and universities. The comparison involved classes with explicit AI-literacy instruction and classes that used Grammarly without critical guidance. The inclusion of lecturers or supervisors as additional participants contrasted teacher and student views on Grammarly's role in supervision and academic integrity. This approach constructed a richer picture of the tool within the wider academic writing ecosystem. Future studies could refine the methodological focus on learning processes. Researchers followed selected students longitudinally across at least one semester. They collected iterative drafts, Grammarly reports, reflection journals, classroom observations, and screen-capture data. The application of reflexive thematic analysis alongside document analysis connected evolving textual features with shifts in reported beliefs and emotions about Grammarly. Researcher could design, implement, and evaluate pedagogical interventions on AI literacy and critical Grammarly use. These modules asked students to compare Grammarly's suggestions with style guides, grammar references, and journal articles. Students discussed when to accept, adapt, or reject AI suggestions. The interventions examined changes in perceptions, dependency levels, and confidence when writing without Grammarly. The results offered practical guidance for EFL writing teachers who aimed to balance technological support with the cultivation of independent, critically aware academic writers.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

There are no potential errors during data collection.

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