

Can Grammarly be Implemented as an English Writing Tool?



Mohammed Mahib ur Rahman, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor, Department of English Language and Translation, Qassim University, Qassim, K.S.A.

ABSTRACT: The need for application-based writing is all-time high due to the inevitable implementation of technology in education. Several proofreaders are available in the market and used by EFL learners to develop error-free content; one such popular tool is Grammarly, which has gained popularity in the last few years. Significantly, before implementing any such tool for teaching-learning activities, we must determine users' perceptions of using it. However, such applications are more common in developed nations than in the Arab world. Therefore, this study determines EFL learners' perceptions of using Grammarly in their writing skills improvements. A web-based questionnaire was randomly distributed among 50 Arab EFL learners. The valid responses received against each item were quantitatively analyzed using SPSS. The results clearly show that EFL learners are positive and agree that Grammarly positively impacts writing skills.

KEYWORDS: Grammarly, Online writing tool, EFL writing, Learner's perceptions.

1. INTRODUCTION

The growing demand for technology has stimulated developers to design numerous applications for teaching-learning activities. As a result, several apps have been designed that significantly improve writing skills; one among them is Grammarly, which has gained overwhelming popularity among EFL learners globally. However, using technology for academic purposes is not new, but in a country like Saudi still, it is in the infancy stage (Rahman, 2020). Therefore, it is imperative to understand its users' perception of using such tools in achieving their writing goals. Grammarly is a tool that supports features like spelling checking, grammar checking, punctuation checking, etc., and enables users to write error-free writing. As a result, one can write reliable content in English with Grammarly's help and enable learner's co-dependence.

Notably, Meyers (2005) notes that writing is a complex language learning action; hence, writing a complex grammatical construction requires more attention. In this study, the author mentions that second language teaching is the most crucial and challenging task, mainly writing skills, as several learners rated writing as the most tedious task to accomplish. This gives rise to the feeling that teachers need to make class creative and exciting to push EFL learners towards the writing activity. Here comes the scope of an online tool that can easily benefit our goal both as a teacher and students, on which most scholars agreed that this might spark new energy to fulfil our writing goal. Further, the potential of the online tool has primarily been recognized and said to be a game-changer and motivates learners towards writing. A large number of learners report that their writing was poor but using an online tool, they have significantly improved their English writing. The primary observations reveal that EFL students had problems placing the right choice of proverbs, vocabulary, spelling, and collocation based on the context. However, they significantly improved their writing skills after using the online tool.

Further, on the one hand, the learners also claim that developing good writing skills requires practice and demands a handsome amount of time. On the other hand, they say that teachers hardly realize to focus on the student's creativity rather than consistently teaching complicated methods and traditional methods to improve writing. If the teacher focuses on the student's creativity, the results would be more satisfying and surprising (Sokoholic, 2003). Recent research has even claimed that EFL learners can improve their writing by monitoring their mistakes using online tools (Hui and Yinjuan, 2011). Based on the above discussion, it can be surmised that online tools have such potential which can be implemented as a new writing tool to improve English writing skills.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Numerous studies have been conducted to determine the efficacy of web-based learning (WBL) and application-based learning (ABL), including language writing. This shift from the traditional method to the technology-aided language learning approach is

Can Grammarly be Implemented as an English Writing Tool?

seen in relation to the growing demand for technology, which has significantly impacted human life (Rahman, 2020). Therefore, a rapid influx in the area of ICT has been noticed in the last several decades. The literature provides complete coverage of the journey of technological penetration in teaching methods like WBL to Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), Mobile Aided Language Learning (MALL) to online tool-supported writing and even shifting more towards the WBL, which several researchers have noted that the use of technology in teaching has a significant impact on learners' attitude and learning ability, especially in improving learners' writing skills. In this regard, Setiyadi (2000, p.22) note that the outcome of language learning greatly depends on the appropriateness of the employed method, which is derived based on the characteristics, needs, and context of both learning and learners. Therefore, this becomes pertinent to choose the appropriate method. In this line, teachers also require in-depth training, such as designing learning materials, resources, and tools, as they are integral to teaching activities. Further, language teaching is not merely seen as a process of class activity which requires formal training for this purpose, but this translates into language learning; as a result, language teaching or instructors is always in a combination of language learning.

McNamara et al. (2010) claimed that writing a quality requires superior linguistic competence belonging to syntactic complexity, textual complexity, and other linguistic devices. In addition, they stressed that focusing on these aspects could significantly improve writing skills. Also, students need to be taught about different writing strategies, their steps, process, and organizations which will help them develop sophisticated writing skills. In this line, Fowler et al. (2007) proposed several theories concerning writing steps which focus on how different writers discovered, explored, and defined themselves through quality and creative writing.

Moreover, VanderPyl (2018) explained different crucial stages for writing, such as organizing, drafting, reviewing, and editing. Where organizing and planning chiefly involve brainstorming (critical thinking skills, exchanging thoughts with others, highlighting, browsing materials and sources) as well as goal setting. According to Bello (2008), there are two ways to do brainstorming, i.e., either oral (through discussion) or written, both individually or group-wise (in class). Planning helps students visualize and craft what they have in their minds amidst the planning process, leading to their learning goal fulfilment (First and MacMilan, 1995). Here, the visuals may appear in different forms ranging from websites, figures, charts, animation, and note-taking on paper using a pen (Saddler and Andrade, 2004). Therefore, an effective writing strategy gives thoughtful consideration to all such problems that might hinder students' writing during the writing process, which requires timely review and planning to make the writing task interesting and creative (Karyuatry, Rizqan, and Darayani, 2018).

Karyuatry et al. (2018) note that besides MALL's overwhelming acceptance among EFL learners, CALL is more reliable and essential for writing activities. Also known as WBL, illustrated in the following words, "a hypermedia-based educational program which utilizes the attributes and resources of the World Wide Web to create a meaningful learning environment where learning is fostered and supported" (Karyuatry et al., 2018); "individualized instruction delivered over a public or private computer network and displayed by a Web browser" (Clark and Healy, 1996) (cited in Henke, 1997: 1). Previous studies revealed that WBL has significantly improved students' writing skills in contrast with the traditional approach (pen-paper) used for writing skills. Taking this observation, Lin (2008) further argues for the inclusion of WBL for writing skill improvement over the use of the traditional approach. The WBL provides tremendous opportunities for the learner to collaborate with classmates, share feedback about each other work, publish their work, and so on. Overall, these advantages cultivate the development of strong writing skills. The WBL offers a significantly fair chance for learners to learn and improve second language writing skills. A similar thought has been expressed by Grejda and Hannafin (1992), where they say that online writing tool significantly minimizes writing errors as compared to the pen-paper approach. As a result, this enables learners to write sophisticated content in English. With added points, McCarthy and Grabowski (1999) say that language tools could be the future of teaching-learning activities, as this provides enormous opportunities for students to learn more than required. They also claimed that by using such language tools, a teacher could also make the session more interesting and exciting for the students, ultimately developing the motivation among the learners towards writing skills. In this context, one such tool is Grammarly, which has gained immense acknowledgement from EFL learners nowadays. Grammarly supports the features like grammar checking, spell checking, clarity of the content, writing styles, etc. (Krasnikov et al., 2018). Notably, Grammarly supports both the CALL and MALL platforms; hence, separate versions are available for each platform.

3. METHODS

The current paper offers a descriptive statical analysis of EFL learners' perceptions about the use of Grammarly as a writing tool for English writing skills. The results obtained from the valid responses against each item helped the author figure out the learners' actual perception, and the results' findings can facilitate the teachers and developers to design a framework that can fulfil the learners' requirements. To conduct this study, both male and female respondents have been chosen to determine the specific challenges and issues that can be used to prepare customized teaching-learning materials based on individual strengths,

Can Grammarly be Implemented as an English Writing Tool?

weaknesses, and personalized preferences. Further, questions focus on the frequency of use, prior experience, and the purpose of using Grammarly to understand the level of readiness among learners for such tools for their writing skills. The data was collected from undergraduate EFL learners at Qassim University in Saudi Arabia.

3.1. Audience

This study's sample size is 50 EFL learners, which are further subdivided into two groups based on gender: male (25), and female (25) students. All the respondents are currently enrolled at Qassim University, Saudi Arabia.

Instrument

The nature of the questionnaire was close-ended; it includes a total number of 10 items of close-ended nature to determine EFL learners' perception towards the use of Grammarly as a new writing tool for English content. Only one set of questionnaires is prepared as this study only aims to understand students' perception of being the ultimate user. The questionnaire is divided into two parts; the first section deals with general questions like the student's demography, use of Grammarly, frequency of use, etc. On the contrary, the second deals with the real questions asked to understand the perception related to Grammarly and its use in EFL learning, especially in the improvement of writing skills. A five (5) point Likert-scaling system has been used, starting from strongly agree (SA), agree (A), neutral (N), disagree (D), and strongly disagree (SD).

3.2. Procedure

The current study is quantitative, and the analysis has been made against the valid responses received from the students for each item asked in the questionnaire. The total number of fifty (50) students have randomly been selected from Qassim university undergraduate level learners and include both male and female respondents. The questionnaire was circulated using electronic media like email, Facebook, and other social media platforms. After receiving the total valid responses, a quantitative analysis was performed using SPSS, and the results have been enumerated in table 1.2 below.

4. RESULTS

In this sub-section, the results have been presented based on the EFL learner's perception that is analyzed through their valid responses. This section includes two tables; table 1 offers the respondents' demographic details, and table 2 presents the total number of responses and their percentage for each Likert scale. Further, two figures have also been presented; figure 1 displays the frequency of using Grammarly, while figure 2 shows the purpose of using Grammarly, respectively.

Table 1. Demographic details of the learners

Groups	Number		Frequency		Education/Undergraduate	
	N		F		N	M
Male	25		50		25	50
Female	25		50		25	50
Total	50	100	50	100		

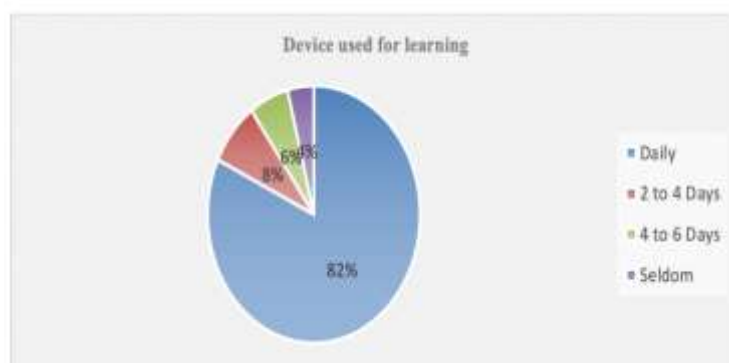


Figure 1. Frequency of using Grammarly

Can Grammarly be Implemented as an English Writing Tool?

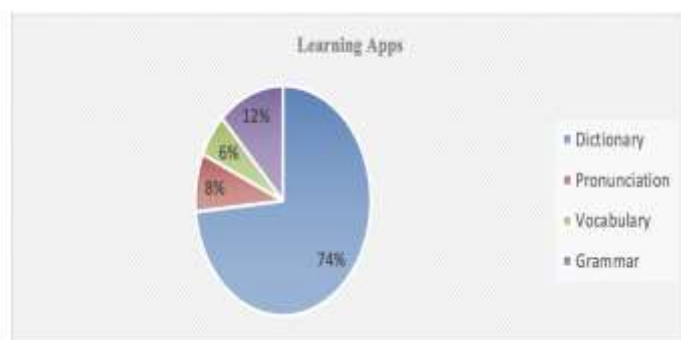


Figure 2. Purpose of using Grammarly

Table 2. Perceptions of EFL learners' towards Grammarly for writing skills

Items/Questions	Str. Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Str. Disagree	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1. Do you agree that Grammarly enables the learner to write error free English?	16	32.0	24	48.0	6	12.0	3	6.0	1	2.0
2. Do you agree that Grammarly enables the learner to achieve desired writing skills?	13	26.0	22	44.0	10	20.0	3	6.0	2	4.0
3. After continuous use of Grammarly one day I will write polished English.	9	18.0	32	64.0	8	16.0	1	2.0	-	-
4. Do you agree that Grammarly provides immediate solutions to EFL learners during writing?	10	20.0	23	46.0	14	28.0	-	-	3	6.0
5. Do you agree that Grammarly has a positive impact on your English writing?	7	14.0	21	42.0	13	26.0	4	8.0	5	10.0
6. Do you agree that English writing with Grammarly is a great idea?	14	28.0	25	50.0	9	18.0	1	2.0	1	2.0
7. I welcome Grammarly as a new writing tool if implemented.	9	18.0	27	54.0	9	18.0	2	4.0	3	6.0
8. Do you agree that Grammarly is a good online proofreader?	16	32.0	19	38.0	11	22.0	-	-	4	8.0
9. Write up scanned using Grammarly gets lesser grammatical error comments by instructors?	11	22.0	21	42.0	5	10.0	7	14.0	6	12.0
10. Do you agree that Grammarly will increase dependency on English writing?	9	18.0	12	24.0	21	42.0	5	10.0	3	6.0

Can Grammarly be Implemented as an English Writing Tool?

5. DISCUSSION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Using digital tools is not a new practice for writing purposes in developed nations. On the other hand, literature shows a dearth in developing nations' perspectives. Previous studies have reported its crucial role in improving learners' English writing skills. The literature concerning the use of technology for academic purposes strongly recommends that technology has significantly improved the results and enables learners to write sophisticated content in English over the traditional method (Grejda and Hannafin, 1992). In a recent study, Haque (2022) reports that the continuous use of Grammarly significantly reduced Arab EFL learners' writing errors. Further, he notes that Grammarly did not only help students minimize errors but also enabled them to choose contextually appropriate grammatical items such as correct placement of article, the right choice of verb, and plurals. The existing study's findings also align with Haque's (2022) findings, revealing that 82% of the EFL learners use Grammarly daily for English writing (see figure 1 above). These tools are gaining popularity based on the fact that learners can use them anywhere-anytime. This infers that such tools are not limited to classrooms only but also provide learner with fair opportunities to use and practice as much as they can, based on their writing needs. The findings of Q3 further indicate that 82% of learners believed that "After continuous use of Grammarly, one day I will write polished English?" students were satisfied because Grammarly has highlighted the inaccuracy they resolved and fixed quickly, leading to the improvement in their writing. This entails that Grammarly helped them choose appropriate syntactic elements that fit well in the context that learners would not have known independently. This can be supported by the findings recorded by previous researchers that such tools like Grammarly facilitates students in several ways: collaborate with classmates and other peers and exchange feedback on each other's writing, ultimately leading to meaningful and interactive writing sessions (Krasnikov et al., 2018).

Notably, the vast majority of respondents have voiced that writeup produced by learners using Grammarly was more reliable and consistent and received lesser instructors' comments and rectification (see Q9). In addition, they also agreed that using such tools provides confidence and plays a key role in learners' writing improvements. As a result, they also indicated that they welcomed the institution's idea of implementing such tools for their academic writing.

Therefore, based on the overwhelming popularity of using the online tool for writing skills improvement, it may best be used to implement in the primary course teaching-learning curriculum. The results also reveal that the students show a strong desire to use Grammarly as it enables them to gain confidence, which results in developing good writing skills.

Moreover, most learners believe that using Grammarly can get immediate assistance with the content and immediate amelioration of errors based on the suggestions highlighted by Grammarly. The learners also opine that Grammarly is an intelligent language tool that is also used to place the right choice of lexicons, prepositions, articles, and subject-verb agreement. Furthermore, in response to Q.1, 'Do you agree that Grammarly enables the learner to write error-free English?', it is evident that Grammarly helps learners to write error-free content. Lastly, based on this study's overall results, it can be said firmly that Grammarly can be implemented in the EFL learning curriculum.

This work makes a significant contribution to the literature that it indicates the utility of Grammarly as a grammar proofreader in developing English writing skills in the Saudi Arabia context. Specifically, the results of items 1, 2, 3, and 6 (see table 2) revealed that students bear a positive bend of mind towards the use of Grammarly as a new writing tool due to its numerous feedback features like highlighting wrong spelling, punctuation, grammar and so on. This infers that students were satisfied with the features and services provided by Grammarly. The implications concluded from the findings of this work in the Saudi Arab context are listed below:

It is advised that university administrators and teachers pay careful attention to the items asked from students concerning Grammarly for better implementation in the main curriculum. Writing tool like Grammarly promotes collaborative learning between the students and teachers that significantly contribute to developing English writing skills.

Several students argued the vitality of Grammarly, specifically towards its 'ease of use' feature. Ease of use mainly refers to the 'anywhere-anytime' support feature, which especially enables students to practice more and more in English and complete the assignment even outside the formal classroom. The 'anywhere-anytime' feature will provide students with more opportunities to write and enhance their writing skills than in formal classroom situations. In this context, more practice will contribute to higher and enhanced learning. In order to avail of seamless and uninterrupted services of Grammarly, it is recommended that both instructors and learners must ensure compatible devices and high-speed internet connection to enjoy the services of Grammarly to the fullest. Notably, the topic we explored in this research is mainly considered from the perspectives of its utility, fitability, accessibility, and easy-to-use factors. Therefore, teachers and educational administrations in Saudi Arabia must pay careful attention to the items highlighted in this study for the optimal effectiveness of Grammarly in EFL classrooms. More specifically, encouraging students to use Grammarly will overall enhance students' writing skills.

Can Grammarly be Implemented as an English Writing Tool?

6. CONCLUSION

Before proposing or implementing technology for learning purposes, it is of high importance to determine the ultimate user (i.e., learner) perception towards it. Therefore, in this study, we have investigated EFL learners' perceptions of the role of Grammarly in writing English content. The results revealed that the learners are overall fully ready to use Grammarly for their writing tasks. The responses received against Q1 show significant results that learners are more excited due to its function of an anytime-anywhere writing facility helping students gain confidence. Consequently, EFL learners' English writing skills have noticeably improved, and the errors have also decreased. Further, learners also claimed that someday they would be able to write sophisticated English. In conclusion, based on the findings of the results, it can be noted that Grammarly plays a vital role in the development of writing skills.

REFERENCES

- 1) Andersen, I. (2013). Mobile Apps for Learning English. A Review of 7 Complete English Course Apps: Characteristics, Similarities and Differences (Doctoral dissertation).
- 2) Breese, C., Jackson, A., & Prince, T. (1996). Promise in Impermanence: Children Writing with Unlimited Access to Word Processors. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 6(2), 129-160.
- 3) Clark, I. L., & Healy, D. (1996). Are Writing Centers Ethical? *WPA-LOGAN*, 20(1/2), 32-48.
- 4) Darayani, N. A., Karyuatry, L. L., & Rizqan, M. D. A. (2018). Grammarly as a Tool to Improve Students' Writing Quality: Free Online Proofreader across the Boundaries. *Jurnal Sains Sosial dan Humaniora*, 2(1), 83-89.
- 5) Grabowski, B., McCarthy, M., & Koszalka, T. (1998). Web-based Instruction and Learning: Analysis and Needs Assessment. NASA Technical Publication 1998-206547. NASA Center for Aerospace Information, Hanover, MD.
- 6) Graham, S., & Harris, K. R. (2009). Almost 30 Years of Writing Research: Making Sense of It All with the Wrath of Khan. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice*, 24(2), 58-68.
- 7) Henke, R. (1997). *Pastoral Transformations: Italian Tragicomedy and Shakespeare's Late Plays*. University of Delaware Press.
- 8) Hui, D., & Yinjuan, S. (2011). Self-directed English Vocabulary Learning with a Mobile Application in Everyday Context.
- 9) Isaac, S., & Michael, W. B. (1997). *Handbook in Research and Evaluation: A Collection of Principles, Methods, and Strategies Useful in the Planning, Design, and Evaluation of Studies in Education and the Behavioral Sciences* (3rd Ed.). San Diego: Educational and Industrial Testing Services.
- 10) Karyuatry, L., Rizqan, M. D. A., & Darayani, N. A. (2018). Grammarly As A Tool To Improve Students' Writing Quality: Free Online-Proofreader Across The Boundaries. *Jurnal Sains Sosial dan Humaniora*, 2(1), 83-89. 10.30595/jsosh.v2i1.2297
- 11) Krasnikov, D., "Grammarly Opens New Kyiv Office as Demand Rises for Help with English," July 6, 2018 <<https://www.kyivpost.com/technology/grammarly-opens-new-kyiv-office-as-demand-rises-for-english-help.html?cn-reloaded=1>> retrieved on 20 September 2020.
- 12) Lam, F. S., & Pennington, M. C. (1995). The Computer vs. the Pen: A Comparative Study of Word Processing in a Hong Kong Secondary Classroom. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 8(1), 75-92.
- 13) McCarthy, M., & Grabowski, B. (1998). Web-based Instruction and Learning: Analysis and Needs Assessment Summary. Retrieved September 20, 2020 from the World Wide Web: http://www.isoc.org/inet98/proceedings/4c/4c_1.html
- 14) Rahman, M. M. (2020). Undergraduate students' attitudes towards learning English: A case study at the college of Arabic language and social studies, Qassim University. *Asian EFL Journal*, 27(4.4). <https://repository.psau.edu.sa/jspui/retrieve/6c32b699-5c06-4e2f-8286-b2466f868127/EFL%204.pdf>. Retrieved on 21 February 2021.
- 15) Meyer, A. (2005). *Gateways to Academic Writing: Effective Sentences, Paragraphs, and Essays*.
- 16) Sokoholic, M. (2003). Writing. In D. Nunan (Ed.), *Practical English Language Teaching*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- 17) Haque, S. I. (2022). Comparing Arab 'EFL Learners And Instructors' Perceptions Of Using Online Writing Tools During COVID-19. *Journal of Positive School Psychology*, 3228-3245.



There is an Open Access article, distributed under the term of the Creative Commons Attribution – Non Commercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits remixing, adapting and building upon the work for non-commercial use, provided the original work is properly cited.