

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The first chapter discusses the research background, research questions, research purposes, research significance, research scope, conceptual framework, and previous studies.

A. Research Background

Writing is one of the four language skills considered the most complex and challenging, especially for learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). In an academic context, essay writing is a primary requirement that college students must master, as it requires students to organize ideas logically, develop coherent arguments, and use proper grammar. However, several studies indicate that EFL students, particularly in Indonesia, still face various difficulties in writing academic essays. EFL students in Indonesia often face linguistic, psychological, and sociocultural barriers in the academic writing process, ranging from difficulties in selecting the right vocabulary and establishing coherence between paragraphs to anxiety regarding high standards of scholarly writing (Alkhasanah & Kholis, 2024).

In language education programs, students are required not only to master English receptively but also productively, particularly in writing skills. Essay writing is one of the core courses that demands both critical thinking skills and linguistic proficiency simultaneously. EFL students in Indonesia face various challenges in academic writing, including difficulties with grammar, spelling, punctuation, and the development of logical and structured ideas. This situation indicates that students need support and tools that can facilitate their writing process more effectively and efficiently, particularly in identifying and correcting language errors independently (Batubara & Fithriani, 2023).

In today's era, advances in artificial intelligence (AI) technology have revolutionized this process through tools such as Grammarly, an application that can improve writing skills. Not only can it instantly detect grammar, spelling, and punctuation errors, but it also provides suggestions on writing style, clarity, engagement, and plagiarism checks, thereby supporting the writing process from

drafting to editing with high efficiency, especially for EFL learners who need personalized assistance to overcome linguistic barriers. The role of generative AI in facilitating the research writing process emphasizes its ability to help students generate ideas and improve their writing fluency (Campbell & Cox, 2024). Similarly, research by Nolan and Vang (2024) has explored automated essay grading systems, suggesting that AI-driven feedback can accelerate students' learning curve in writing.

These difficulties include grammatical aspects, grammar, cohesion, coherence, and organization of ideas that meet academic standards (Fitriani & Widiaastuti, 2021). Various automated writing evaluation (AWE) intelligence-based tools, such as Grammarly, are increasingly being used in academic contexts to help students improve the linguistic aspects of their writing (Ranalli, 2018).

Grammarly positively impacts students' writing confidence by enabling them to immediately identify and correct language mistakes (Fitriana & Nurazni, 2022). Grammarly also serves as a linguistic scaffolding tool that facilitates the revision of academic writing (Utami, 2023; Hamdan & Widiastuty, 2024). However, Grammarly also has limitations. Some students find that the corrections are not always consistent with the academic context and tend to rely on technology, especially when they do not understand the linguistic rationale behind the suggested improvements (Fitriana & Nurazni, 2022). Grammarly is one of the most frequently used and learned Automated Corrective Feedback (ACF) tools (Shadiev & Feng, 2023).

AI writing tools are becoming increasingly popular as the use of artificial intelligence in writing education continues to grow. Recent qualitative research suggests that while AI tools can enhance writing efficiency, their use may inhibit students' critical thinking and originality if not approached with sound pedagogical strategies (Munawaroh, 2024). Although research on Grammarly and other AI-based writing tools has increased, many previous studies have focused on the effectiveness of the tools or students' general perceptions of them. Less attention has been given to how students actually experience and use Grammarly throughout the essay-writing process. In particular, there is still limited research examining how

EFL students use Grammarly during different stages of writing, such as planning, drafting, and revising, and how they respond to the feedback provided at each stage. This is especially relevant in the context of Islamic universities in Indonesia, including UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, where research on students' experiences of using Grammarly in essay writing remains limited.

In the context of EED students at UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, the use of Grammarly raises an important question about how students experience and respond to automated feedback during the writing process. Grammarly may help students identify language problems and feel more confident, but students may also accept its suggestions without fully understanding them or encounter suggestions that do not fit the context of their writing. Therefore, it is important to examine not only whether Grammarly is effective, but also how students experience and respond to the tool while writing their essays. For this reason, the present study uses a qualitative approach to explore EFL students' experiences of using Grammarly during the essay-writing process. By focusing on EED students at UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, this study aims to provide a more detailed understanding of the role Grammarly plays during planning, drafting, and revising, as well as the benefits and challenges students experience when using it.

B. Research Questions

The research questions in this study include:

1. How do English education students at UIN Sunan Gunung Djati experience the use of Grammarly in their essay writing process?
2. What benefits and challenges do students encounter when using Grammarly for their essay-writing process?

C. Research Purposes

According to the research questions above, the research purposes of this research include:

1. To figure out the EED Students' experience when using Grammarly in their essay-writing process.
2. To find out the benefits and challenges students face when using Grammarly for their essay-writing process.

D. Research Significance

This study is significant because it addresses a persistent gap between the widespread use of AI-based writing tools in Indonesian EFL classrooms and the limited empirical understanding of how students actually experience these tools throughout the writing process, rather than merely whether such tools are effective. By focusing on the lived experience of EED students at an Islamic university, this study contributes context-specific insight that can inform how Grammarly and similar tools are positioned within EFL writing pedagogy. In this section, the theoretical and practical significance will be discussed as follows:

1. Theoretical Significance

Theoretically, this study contributes to the field of EFL writing instruction by providing insights into students' experiences of using Grammarly during the essay-writing process. This study may contribute to Harmer's (2004) process-writing theory, which emphasizes that writing develops through recursive cycles of drafting and revising rather than as a single final product. In this context, the findings are expected to provide a deeper understanding of how AI-based feedback such as Grammarly is experienced within this recursive writing process.

2. Practical Significance

a. To Lecturer

It is hoped that this research can provide a better understanding of how to use Grammarly to support lecturers in teaching writing, specifically in writing terms, so that lecturers can use the application as a medium for feedback on students' essay writing process.

b. To students

This research is expected to help students understand how to use Grammarly appropriately in the essay-writing process, so they can improve grammatical accuracy, clarity, and independence in revising without relying entirely on their lecturers.

E. Research Scope

This study focuses on students in the English Education (EED) program at UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, class of 2024, who are taking a task-based

essay writing course in 2025 during their third semester. The research focuses on students' experiences using Grammarly as a writing-assistance tool during the drafting, revision, and revising stages of essay writing. The scope will be restricted to the perceived impacts of Grammarly on word selection, sentence-level composition, and spelling correctness in student essays. Other aspects of writing, such as content development, coherence, organization, and critical thinking, are beyond the scope of this study. This research does not compare Grammarly with other digital or AI-based writing tools. Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative approach.

F. Conceptual Framework

This study was grounded in the Cognitive Process Theory of Writing proposed by Flower and Hayes (1981) as the grand theory. This theory viewed writing as a recursive cognitive process rather than a linear process. It consisted of three main processes: planning, translating, and reviewing. Planning involved setting goals and developing ideas, translating involved turning ideas into written text, and reviewing involved evaluating and revising the writing. These processes were also influenced by the writing task and the writer's previous knowledge. This theory was relevant to this study because it viewed revision and editing as important parts of the writing process. This was also the stage where most of the EFL students in this study used Grammarly.

In this study, Flower and Hayes' (1981) writing process was used to explain EFL Writing Skill as the foundation for examining the use of AI tools. As AI became more common in language learning, Automated Writing Evaluation (AWE) tools such as Grammarly were increasingly used to support students in revising their writing (Ranalli, 2018). Grammarly functioned as an Automated Corrective Feedback (ACF) tool that provided immediate feedback on grammar, mechanics, and writing style (Shadiev & Feng, 2023). The students then responded to the feedback in different ways. They could understand the feedback, question the suggestions, or accept them without further consideration. These responses were important because they influenced the students' learning experiences with Grammarly. In this study, these experiences included the benefits they perceived,

such as increased confidence and writing efficiency, as well as the challenges they experienced, such as dependence on Grammarly and limited understanding of the reasons behind some of its corrections.

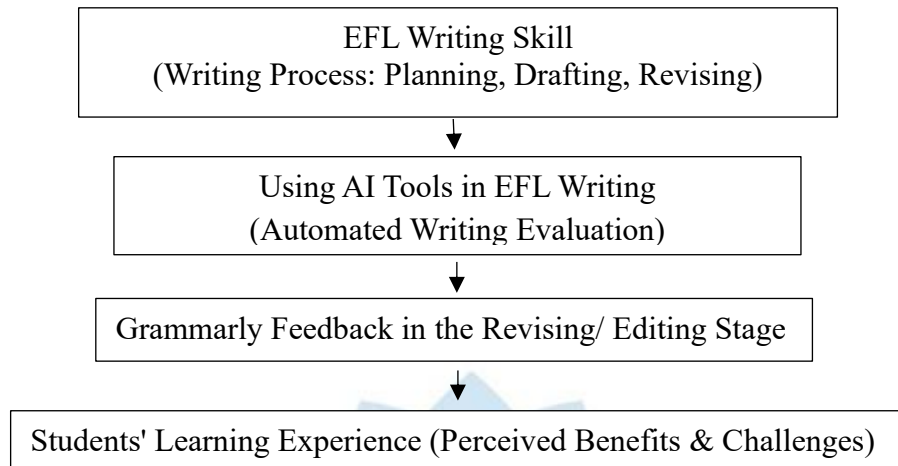


Figure 1.1 Conceptual Framework

As shown in Figure 1.1, the framework started with EFL Writing Skill, which was understood through Flower and Hayes' (1981) writing process of planning, drafting, and revising. During this process, students used AI tools, particularly Grammarly, to support their writing, especially during revision and editing. Grammarly provided feedback on students' writing, and students then decided whether to accept, question, or ignore the suggestions.

These interactions with Grammarly's feedback influenced students' learning experiences. The benefits they experienced included increased confidence and efficiency in writing, while the challenges included becoming too dependent on Grammarly and having limited understanding of the reasons behind some grammatical corrections. Therefore, the framework connected the four main constructs of this study: EFL Writing Skill, the use of AI tools in EFL writing, Grammarly feedback, and students' learning experience. The framework showed how these elements were related to the students' experiences of using Grammarly during the essay writing process.

G. Previous Study

In a review of 27 empirical investigations, Ng, Yunus, and Ismail (2025) found that Grammarly has a beneficial impact on several aspects of writing ability,

including grammar accuracy, vocabulary richness, coherence, and overall composition quality. Grammarly was implemented into ELT classrooms using a variety of pedagogical approaches, serving as a supplement to traditional writing teaching, an independent learning asset, and a component of blended learning strategies, according to the researchers. This study employs a systematic literature review (SLR) methodology with a qualitative approach, aiming to systematically analyze and synthesize existing research on the use of Grammarly in ELT contexts.

Another previous study, Suryanto et al. (2024), observed that although Grammarly improved writing correctness, there was a worry that students would become unduly dependent on automated feedback instead of honing their own proofreading skills. The study used both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, collecting data through interviews and survey questionnaires. The findings showed that Grammarly was a useful tool for students, greatly assisting with thesis writing and cutting down on the amount of time spent correcting grammatical errors. According to the questionnaires, all students agreed that Grammarly had improved their writing process. Interviews with lecturers supported this, with students who used Grammarly writing higher-quality theses.

Additionally, Martínez-Carrasco and Chabert (2023) noted that Grammarly's feedback quality varied, particularly regarding writing style, and that the tool was initially designed for native English speakers, making some feedback less suitable for English as a foreign language, using a mixed method approach. Technical issues such as limited functionality in the free version and inconsistent feedback quality were also reported. Fitriana and Nurazni (2022) investigated students' attitudes toward using Grammarly in Indonesia's English department at Universitas Tidar, Magelang, Central Java, by using a descriptive qualitative method. The majority of respondents (46.7%) strongly agreed that Grammarly helped them spot grammar errors, and 60% felt greatly aided by the tool. Students expressed special appreciation for Grammarly's ability to detect minor issues, such as article usage, and its automatic repairs with explanations, which enhanced their knowledge of grammatical principles.

Previous studies have shown that Grammarly can support EFL students'

writing in several ways, particularly by improving grammar accuracy, vocabulary, writing structure, efficiency, and confidence. However, these studies have also reported some limitations, such as students' potential overreliance on automated feedback, technical problems, and suggestions that may not always be appropriate for EFL learners. Although these studies provide useful information about the benefits and limitations of Grammarly, most of them focus on its general effectiveness or students' attitudes toward the tool. Less attention has been given to how students actually experience and use Grammarly during the different stages of the writing process. Therefore, this study uses a qualitative approach to explore EFL students' experiences of using Grammarly when writing essays. This approach allows the researcher to examine in more detail how students use Grammarly and how they respond to its feedback during the writing process.

The present study differs from previous studies in three main ways. First, it focuses on students' use of Grammarly during the planning, drafting, and revising stages of essay writing rather than treating writing as one general activity. Second, it focuses on the experiences of EED students at an Islamic university in Indonesia, a context that was not represented in the previous studies reviewed. Third, this study does not focus on measuring Grammarly's effectiveness or students' general attitudes toward the tool. Instead, it explores how students experience and respond to Grammarly's feedback while writing their essays. Through this qualitative approach, the study provides a more detailed understanding of how Grammarly is used at different stages of the writing process and how students respond to its benefits and limitations.