STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS TOWARD THE USE OF GRAMMARLY AS A GRAMMAR CHECKER IN THE PROCESS OF WRITING

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to find out how students perceive the use of Grammarly Premium in the process of writing. This research applied the qualitative method to achieve the research objectives. The subjects of this research were 6 students from the English Education Department, Faculty of Languages and Literature, Universitas Negeri Makassar, who are currently in their seventh semester of the academic year 2022/2023, The subjects were chosen by using purposive sampling. This research used the interview as the instrument of the study. The findings of this research found that students perceive positive and negative perceptions toward the use of Grammarly Premium. Positive perceptions include being easy to access and use having more complete features, can be integrated into the laptop software, motivating, and having a lot of useful features. Negative perceptions include less accurate and detailed feedback, sometimes feedback out of context, limited plagiarism feature, and requires a stable internet connection. The result showed that students' perceptions were dominated by positive perceptions.

Keywords — *Students' Perception, writing, Grammarly, Grammarly premium.*

INTRODUCTION

Writing is a tool for people to communicate with one another and explore ideas and the emotional expression of the writer. In the context of EFL, there are four English skills that learners should master, and one of them is writing. Writing is an activity that takes multiple steps, such as finding the right ideas and words to produce statements and paragraphs that the reader can understand (Nunan, 2003). In the context of EFL students, they cannot be separated from writing assignments such as papers, articles, essays, etc. All students try their best to write as well as possible when given a writing assignment. However, according to Richards & Renandya (2002), writing is a skill that is quite difficult for second language learners to master.

It will be even more complicated if writing in a foreign language such as English because it has a complex grammatical language that must be understood and followed.

EFL students' difficulties in writing are because it is difficult for students to understand the stage of writing, lack of motivation, and do not know to arrange ideas effectively (Aidil, 2019). Moreover, Karyuwatry (2018) revealed that it is difficult for students to produce good writing in English because they found numerous differences between writing English and Indonesian sentences. In addition, students usually do not know whether their grammar is correct or not and do not know the location of grammatical errors. They often require multiple repetitions of work to avoid mistakes. Even so, they still make mistakes in grammar. Fortunately, along with the development of technology, students can utilize several websites or applications to assist them in correcting their writing. For instance, by using grammar checkers, also known Automatic Writing Evaluation. According to Hao & Hao, (2020) grammar checker is a tool that can be a web or an application to help users correct grammatical errors. Many grammar checkers can be accessed online, such as Grammarly, Ginger, Pro Writing Aid, Language Tool, After the Deadline, etc. Each grammar checker has features to assist users in checking their grammatical errors. In this study, the researcher used Grammarly software.

Grammarly is one of grammar checkers was founded in 2009 by Maz Lytvyn and Alex Shevchenko. This software can check for some errors like grammar, words, punctuation, spelling, style, and even plagiarism. This application provides free, premium (paid), and business versions (Ummah, 2022). Grammarly free version provides basic writing suggestions, tone detection, and spellcheck. Meanwhile Grammarly's premium (paid version) is offering 400 types of checks for grammatical error, including tone improvement, detection of plagiarism, enhancement of vocabulary and citation suggestion (Perdana, Al Banjari, & Farida, 2019). It is available starting at $12 per month and is intended for individual users. For business version, it is available for teams from 3 to 149 users. Its cost $12.50 USD member per month (Grammarly inc., 2022).

A number of studies have attempted to investigate about students' perceptions on the use of Grammarly and Grammarly premium. The first research is from Fitria (2021). The findings of this research showed that students had positive perception toward the use Grammarly in undergraduate thesis writing because Grammarly was useful for them. They stated the strengths of Grammarly are easy to understand and saves time. Meanwhile, the weakness is Grammarly unable to recognize the tenses use in students' writing.

The second is from O'Neill & Russell (2019). This study compared two groups of students; the first group consisted of 54 students who gave their perception to the Grammarly's feedback. The second group consisted of 42 students who gave their perceptions to the non-automatic grammar feedback. The findings showed that students who received Grammarly's feedback responded more positively and considerably more satisfied with the feedback rather than students who did not receive Grammarly's feedback.

The third one is from Ummah (2022) who want to find out about the students' perception of the Grammarly premium's feedback and how the students deal with the inaccuracy of the feedback. The findings showed that Grammarly premium's feedback really assist students in correcting their writing. However, they still require additional editing because some feedback is still inaccurate. Furthermore, for using Grammarly premium well, we need a stable internet connection. From students' perspective, they continued to use Grammarly premium despite some inaccurate feedback because it assisted them in proofreading.

Following the explanation above, the researcher was interested in conducting further research related to Grammarly, especially Grammarly premium seen from students' perspective. The gap between this study and previous studies is in its focus. This study focused on students' perception towards Grammarly in premium version. Furthermore, this research does not refer to certain conditions or types of writing but explored the experiences felt by students as a whole. After experiencing using Grammarly premium, students certainly have different perceptions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Perception

Qiong (2017) defined perception as the way we think, notice and understand things quickly with our senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. Perception, according to Eggen, Kauchak, & Garry (2001) is the process by which someone gives a certain meaning to their experiences. It means that perception occurs after a person pays attention to specific stimuli in their sensory memories. Perception occurs after individuals organize and interpret the stimulus received so that the stimulus has meaning for the individual concerned. Through the process of perception, each individual will arrange and interpret the stimuli they get through the perceptual process, such that the stimulus has a different meaning for each individual.

Irwanto (2002) divides perception into 2 types. Which are positive and negative perceptions. Positive perception is a positive interpretation or response to anything that involves activating, accepting, and supporting the object experienced. Meanwhile, negative perception is the tendency to evaluate an item negatively and to reject or avoid the perceived information or objects. According to Toha (2003) in Dahlan (2015), someone's perception can be affected by 2 factors, internal and external factors. Internal factors are factors that come within a person or from the individual himself namely feelings, desires, attention, attitudes, mental disorder, traits, individual personalities and motivation. Meanwhile, external factors are factors that do not occur from within the individual himself, but from elsewhere like their environment. External factors affecting perception refer more to the needs around, family and friends' background, knowledge, relationship intensity, opposition, etc.

2. Writing

There are many definitions of writing referring to the experts. Olive and Levy (2002) define writing as an activity carried out by someone to express his ideas, feelings, and opinions on paper. Ramelan (1994) claims that writing is an essential part of human culture because it is able to preserve thoughts, ideas, and speech sounds. In another opinion, Ur (1996) said that writing is a tool for expressing ideas and conveying messages to readers. Writing is very useful for helping language acquisition because students can use the target language actively and effectively (Bello, 1997). Students can apply the sentences, ideas, vocabulary, and grammar that they have learned in class. Similarly, D'Angelo (1980) assumed writing is a form of thinking. Writing can help students to think effectively.

3. Grammarly as a Grammar checker

Grammarly was launched in 2009 by Maz Lytvyn and Alex Shevchenko and has grown to become one of the most popular online grammar checkers. Grammarly is an online proofreading website that allows users to scan their documents for spelling, grammar, and mechanic errors (Ghufron & Rosyida, 2018). The features of Grammarly automatically identify the errors in writing. Daniels & Leslie (2013) stated that Grammarly not only identifies punctuation and erroneous words, but also recognize the fragments and provides verb form suggestions. By using Grammarly, students can enhance their confidence, motivation, and engagement in their studies. As a result, students be more confidence to write because

Grammarly allows them to identify and correct their writing errors (Jayavalan & Razali, 2018). This grammar checker is available at www.Grammarly.com and we can access it through some web browser such as Firefox, Safari, and Chrome (Grammarly, 2020).

According to Ummah (2022), Grammarly is available in three versions, which are free, premium, and business. The free and premium types are for individual usage, while the business type is for groups of 3 to 149 users. Grammarly free offering misspelled words, imperfect grammar and punctuation mistakes. Meanwhile, the premium available as a paid upgrade has more comprehensive features includes over 400 types of grammatical error checks and features, as well as vocabulary enhancement, citation suggestions, and plagiarism detection. Business version includes everything in the premium version, as well as priority email support, analytics dashboard, brand tones, account roles and permissions and SAML SSO.

METHODS

1. Research Design

This research utilized qualitative research as the research design to collect data about students' perceptions toward the use of Grammarly premium in the process of writing. According to Sukmadinata (2016), qualitative research is the description and analysis of individuals' events, beliefs, perceptions, phenomena, social activities and thoughts of either individually or in groups. To present the result of the research, the researcher used a descriptive qualitative method. Based on Muhammad (2019), the descriptive qualitative method described people's daily lives and social phenomena.

2. Place and time of the research

This research was conducted in Faculty of Languages and Literature, Universitas Negeri Makassar, located in Jl. Malengkeri Raya, Parang Tambung, South Sulawesi province. This study was conducted from December 2022 until January 2023.

3. Data Sources

The participant of this study were seventh-semester students of the English Language Education program at Universitas Negeri Makassar. In choosing the participants, the researcher used purposive sampling. The participants involved in this study were selected purposively and do not have to be large in number just following the necessity of the investigation. There are 6

subjects of this research who are currently in their seventh semester of the academic year 2022/2023 and have experience in using Grammarly premium versions for many purposes in the process of their writing.

4.   Instruments of the Research

This study used the in-depth interview as the main instrument. The following are some benefits of an in-depth interview. 1) the participants can provide a detailed response as they can speak openly about their thoughts, feelings, or beliefs regarding to the subject of interest. 2) In depth-interview offers the chance to develop a relationship and trust between the interviewer and interviewee, which will lead to more accurate data. To facilitate in compiling the data, the researcher used a voice recorder during the interview with the respondent's permission so that no statements are missed.

5.   Procedure of Collecting Data

First, the researcher collected a list of 6 students who met the criteria to be the respondents and asked for their agreement. Then, the researcher interviewed the participants by asking some questions which had been designed. The interview was conducted twice at different times by following the students' free time. After getting the results of the interview, the researcher organized the data based on the data technique analysis and then draw the conclusion of the research.

6.   Technique of Data Analysis

The data from interview was analysed using Miles, Huberman & Saldana (2014) which are data condensation, data display, and data conclusion. 1) Data condensation is related to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, and changing the data that derived from the results of transcripts, interviews, field notes, documents and other empirical materials. 2) Data display is the process of presenting data in the form of graphs, metrics, tables, narratives, words and sentences. The purpose of this display is to make it easier for the researcher to draw the appropriate conclusions. 3) Conclusions are drawn after the analysis process has been re-checked with the evidence found in the field.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section covers the answer to the research question. There are six students as the subjects in this research. The data was collected by interview to get clear and detailed information. The students were interviewed from December 25th, 2022 until January 30th, 2023 via video conferences (zoom and google meet), face-to-face interview and WhatsApp voice note.

This section reveals the data from the research question. Based on the results of the interview, students perceived positive and negative perceptions.

1. Positive perception

a. Grammarly premium is easy to access and use

The findings of this study showed that it is easy for students to access Grammarly as long as they have a stable internet connection. To access Grammarly, they simply type the word Grammarly in their browser, and then the Grammarly website will appear in the first section. This is evidenced by one of the student statements:

"I think it is quite easy, the important thing is we need to have internet access. Just by writing Grammarly on Google or the website, the website will appear right away at the very first section. So, I think it is very easy to access Grammarly" (Student 2, 26/12/2022).

This application is also easy to access on laptops and smartphones and can be connected to their Google account. Additionally, all students also agreed that Grammarly premium is easy to use. Students felt that it is easy for them to use Grammarly because it looks simple, compelling, easy to understand, and they can directly write sentences on the website or upload their documents. This can be seen from one of the students who stated *"Grammarly is easy to use because it is simple. Those who want to check one sentence, two or three paragraphs can simply copy the paragraphs from words and paste them into Grammarly. We also can verify the grammar. Therefore, it is very simple and easy for all students"* (Student 5, 28/12/2022). Those statements are supported by study from Cavaleri & Dianati (2016), in which students claimed that Grammarly is easy to use, it may be accessed on the website or downloaded on students' devices.

b. Has more complete features

After experiencing using Grammarly premium, students felt that Grammarly premium extensive features than Grammarly free. The feedback of Grammarly premium is more detailed,

the suggestions are more precise, they also can choose the tone of their writing. This can be seen from one of the student statements:

"There are many advantages of Grammarly premium. It can detect more errors in our writing than non-premium ones. And the explanations are more detailed" (Student 1, 25/12/2022).

Those additional features in Grammarly premium are very useful, especially for checking the grammar that they have written. One of the advantages of Grammarly premium is offering 400 types of checks and features for grammatical errors, including tone improvement, detection of plagiarism, enhancement of vocabulary and citation suggestion (Perdana, Al Banjari, & Farida, 2019). The finding of research by Ummah & Bisriyah (2022) also discovered that Grammarly premium more complete features than the free version to support students in producing good writing.

c. Can be integrated into the laptop software

The interview result found that one of the advantages of Grammarly is it can be integrated into our laptop software. This advantage makes it is easier for students to check their writing directly on the application without having to move the text or the file back and forth into the Grammarly website. This is evidenced by student statement:

"The advantage of Grammarly premium is that is automatically attached to our laptop software. So, when we open the essay or scientific work in Microsoft word, it will automatically corrected grammar and vocabulary errors" (Student 6, 30/1/2023).

Ummah & Bisriyah (2022) stated that Grammarly can be used in two ways, first by uploading documents directly into the Grammarly website or using it directly on our laptop software such as Microsoft word, browser and other applications. This integration is for the ease of editing.

d. The features are useful

According to students, the features of Grammarly premium are useful in helping them in checking their writing. This application also provided an options or suggestion as a substitute of those errors. This finding is supported by Ummah (2022), who revealed that Grammarly premium features can help them to solve linguistic problems, encourage them to be independent proofreading and could enhance their writing ability. In addition, Moon (2021)

stated that Grammarly has a strong potential to be a useful education tool to complementent the shortcomings of the teacher feedback and assist learners in improving grammatical accuracy in their written work. This is evidenced by student statement:

"it is worth recommending to students, especially students majoring in English education, because the feature is helpful for correcting errors in writing. and it is not only detecting errors but also provides options or several choices as a substitute for those errors" (Student 1, 25/12/2022).

e.   Motivating

The student also perceived that Grammarly premium could motivate them. Readability score, one of the premium features of Grammarly, can motivate student. The student felt more motivated after seeing the feature showing her written score, student feel satisfied and enthusiastic every time she saw this feature appears on the screen. It can be seen from student statement:

"besides that, the feature of recognizing writing tone and readability scores motivates me to improve my writing because when I see this feature appear on the screen, I become satisfied and excited to write. (Student 3, 26/12/2022).

This is in line with Potter & Fuller (2008), who stated that using English Grammar checkers can increase students' engagement, motivation, and confidence in grammar rules.

2.   Negative perception

a.   Less accurate and detail feedback

The students stated that they are still experiencing less accurate and less detailed feedback even though they have used Grammarly premium. As participant 4 stated:

"I think the feedback in terms of correcting is still lacking in detail. Even though some of the feedback given are clear enough, however some of them especially the longer ones are still not that clear, so it is hard to understand it" (Student 4, 27/12/2022).

This drawback is especially for long and complex sentences in which Grammarly is unable to give a clear and detailed explanation, which make it is difficult for students to understand the feedback given. The findings from Ummah & Bisriyah (2022) and Nova (2018) also showed that some of the feedback provided by Grammarly was still inaccurate the suggestions were still not quite right and can produce another meaning.

b.   Sometimes feedback is out of context

Students stated that the feedback from Grammarly premium sometimes are out of line with the user's writing purpose. Additionally, Grammarly sometimes gives incorrect feedback regarding the use of people's names. For example, when student writes the name of someone, Grammarly will give feedback to change that person's name. This is evidenced by student statement:

"based on my experience, there are words that I think are correct, but Grammarly claims it incorrect. For instance, the use of name sometimes gets detected incorrectly in Grammarly even though it should be correct because it is a person's name" (Student 1, 25/12/2022).

This finding is supported by Pratama (2020) stated that he had some experience in which Grammarly over-checking for names, places and an acronym, another example is the students wanted the sentence to be active, but Grammarly gave feedback to change it into a passive sentence. It is in accordance with Nova (2018) and Ghufron & Rosyida (2018) who claimed that students felt that the feedback of Grammarly is inaccurate. The feedback was out of context with the students' writing purpose and sometimes changed the sentence's intended meaning. Grammarly works well in detecting the use of diction, language use and mechanics, however this software has less effect on detecting the content and organization of the writing. The Grammarly system cannot detect whether the feedback is suitable to the topic or not.

c.   Limited plagiarism feature

The next drawback of Grammarly premium is the limited of plagiarism feature. Students stated that when using the plagiarism feature, they felt that the scope of this feature is limited compared to other legitimate plagiarism websites. In contrast, Barrot (2020) stated that Grammarly's plagiarism features can identify duplicate content more than 16 billion web pages and academic articles. However, when students check plagiarism in Grammarly, the percentage was low. Nonetheless, when checking it on other plagiarism websites, the results were quite high. It is indicated that the scope of plagiarism detection in Grammarly is still limited. This is evidenced by student statement:

"One of Grammarly's shortcomings is related to the plagiarism feature. I think the scope of the plagiarism feature still needs to be improved because even though we have used Grammarly to check the plagiarism and the percentage is already low, but if we check it on another website, the result is still different". (Student 4, 5/1/2023).

d. Requiring a stable internet connection

Another drawback of Grammarly premium is it requires a stable internet connection. When using this application, it would be better if we have a good internet connection because the strength of internet would affect the performance of this application. If the internet is slow or loading it will affect the correction process. The text will disappear instantly and be cut off right away as if it has not been corrected before. This is evidenced by student statement:

 "The problem might be related to the internet network. Because sometimes if the internet connection is not good, the text will disappear instantly, or it will be cut off immediately. It just like has not been corrected" (Student 4, 27/12/2022).

One of the technical problems of Grammarly software is related to the network connection (O'Neill and Russell, 2019), Grammarly will work slowly to detect writing errors if the connection is bad. Similarly, Pratama (2020) also found that for using Grammarly comfortably we need a stable internet connection especially if the students access it from the website.

CONCLUSIONS

From the findings and the discussion chapter, it can be concluded that premium received many positive perceptions from the students. In using Grammarly Premium, students considered that Grammarly Premium was easy to access and use, has more complete features, can be integrated into the laptop software, motivating, and has a lot of useful features. On the contrary, students complained that to work properly Grammarly Premium requires a stable internet connection. In addition, as technology, sometimes Grammarly fails to provide proper feedback which causes students to get confused and end up not using the feedback. Students also stated that Grammarly has a limited plagiarism feature compared to other plagiarism checkers.

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