

Investigating Undergraduate Students' Experiences Using Grammarly in Writing a Thesis

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Abstract

This reserach was aimed to explore undergraduate students' experiences of using Grammarly in thesis writing. The research was conducted in English Education Department at one of the universities in East Java province. Narrative inquiry research design was used to explore stories about people's lives and/or experiences. To collect the data, narrative interview was conducted to this research. To analyze the data, I used Thematic Analysis which is guided by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis revealed three emergent themes: How Grammarly Facilitates Undergraduate Students to evaluate their undergraduate thesis; How Grammarly Supports Undergraduate Students in Evaluating Thesis; and Undergraduate Students' challenges when using Grammarly to Write Thesis. The research results are Grammarly simplifies undergraduate thesis evaluation by offering easy access, justifications for corrections, and suggestions for word corrections. It offers both free and premium versions, with free offering misspelt correction, correctness, and clarity, while premium features have drawbacks like unclear clarity, lack of explanations, and imperfect correction. Both versions require double-checking for optimal results.

Keywords: *Grammarly, Undergraduate Thesis Writing, and Thematic Analysis*

1. Introduction

Academic writing involves creating, codifying, conveying, evaluating, updating, teaching, and learning knowledge and ideology, expressing ideas in response to others, and ensuring thorough development and organization. (Fang, 2021). Therefore, academic writing is a special form of writing that is used in educational contexts to convey information, present arguments, and engage with existing knowledge.

One type of academic writing is an undergraduate thesis. An undergraduate thesis is a scientific report which is essential for undergraduate students. It has become the main requirement for university students to graduate. It challenges the students to develop their scientific knowledge and prepares them to face any challenges that may arise (Lestari, 2020).

However, students experienced some obstacles in academic writing, especially in writing down an undergraduate thesis. Common academic writing obstacles are phrases, unfamiliar words, adverbs, and passive words (Karyuatry & Rizqan, 2018). Hence, to overcome those problems, writing evaluation is necessary to prevent ambiguous meanings and misunderstanding of information and make writing more straightforward (Nova, 2018).

On the other side, technology that can be used in education fields is growing rapidly. Many applications, websites, and platforms can help undergraduate students write their thesis. One of the platforms that can help them is Grammarly, a simple tool for automatic writing evaluation that can help educators such as students, lecturers, or teachers check their writing. Grammarly has several correction features: checking for spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors (Huang et al., 2020).

The preliminary study I conducted with a questionnaire found that Grammarly was often utilized by undergraduate students, especially in writing a thesis. At one of the universities in East Java Province, for example, the Undergraduate Students from the English Education Department, 108 out of 120 students have used Grammarly. It can be clarified that 90% of the undergraduate students in the English Education Department use Grammarly to help their writing skill, and 65% of the students utilize Grammarly to check their grammar on their assignments. From these preliminary data, it can be concluded that Grammarly is a popular application to help undergraduate students to construct an undergraduate thesis.

In addition, I was interested in exploring individual experiences. According to Cresswell (2012), analyzing the individual's experience is important to help the researcher understand the phenomenon occurring because it provides insight into how people view, interpret, and react to various stimuli. Furthermore, the experience can offer perceptions of the historical, social, and cultural influences that might affect the phenomenon of interest.

Some previous studies investigated EFL students' experiences of using Grammarly in writing. The result showed some strengths and weaknesses of Grammarly in helping students' English writing skills. The strengths are evaluations of grammar, spelling, and punctuation; automatic feedback; and correction and suggestion. On the other hand, Grammarly has weaknesses such as the inability to detect correct tenses, the inability to download feedback, and incompleteness features in the free access account. The studies also show that the use of Grammarly does not influence the English proficiency level of the students (Fahmi & Cahyono, 2021; Fitria, 2021; Fitriana, 2022; Hakiki, 2021; Huang et al., 2020; Karyuatry & Rizqan, 2018; Nova, 2018; O'neill & Russell, 2019; Perdana et al., 2021; Tarsan et al., 2021).

Although writing a thesis had become the primary goal for undergraduate students to finish their studies, no study had looked at how they utilized Grammarly in this process, despite the fact that there had been many studies about students' experiences with using Grammarly. For this reason, this study explored undergraduate students' experiences using Grammarly in thesis writing. This present research used a narrative inquiry research design to explore undergraduate students' experiences deeply.

2. Methodology

This present research investigated the students' experiences of using Grammarly in academic writing to help undergraduate students write a thesis. Therefore, a narrative inquiry

research design is the most appropriate research design to explore the undergraduate students' experience of Grammarly in assisting them in constructing a thesis. According to Mills and Gay (2016), narrative research is the study of how different humans experience the world around them. It is based on a methodology that allows people to tell their "storied lives" stories. Individual lives are described, stories about people's lives are collected and informed, and personal narratives are written in a narrative study (Creswell, 2012).

The study was conducted in the English Education Department at one of the universities in East Java province. It was purposefully selected because the students must write down a thesis at the end of their studies as one of the requirements to graduate from university.

The participants of this research were undergraduate students who have experience of using Grammarly in evaluate their thesis. The participants were the two Indonesian EFL Undergraduate Students; both were female. These students were given pseudonyms, namely Amel and Nesi. They were purposefully selected since they have experience using Grammarly in evaluating thesis proposals. Furthermore, both of them were selected because they were the longest users of the Grammarly application among other English Education student's class of 2019 based on the questionnaire which had been conducted as preliminary study.

This research used semi-structured interviews to collect data on students' experiences using Grammarly in evaluating undergraduate thesis. The interview session was held in two sessions. The first session was held to collect the complete stories of the participants by using open-ended questions. In the second session, the participants were asked questions about their stories using a semi-structured interview.

In analyzing qualitative data in narrative inquiry, a thematic analysis applied to this study. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a technique for locating, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) in data. At the very least, it organizes and describes the data set in detail. I used an inductive or 'data-driven' approach to analyze the data. When using an inductive or 'data-driven' methodology, a researcher created codes that reflect the data's content, free of preconceived theories or conceptual frameworks (Byrne, 2022).

3. Results and Discussion

Results of Thematic Analysis

The data from the interview session were analyzed using Thematic Analysis guided by Braun and Clarke (2006). The thematic analysis is used to analyze the experiences of participants. The results of the study produce three emergent themes as follows:

Table 1. Results of Thematic Analysis

Themes		Sub-themes
How Grammarly Facilitates Undergraduate Students to Evaluate Their Undergraduate Thesis		-
How Grammarly Supports Undergraduate Students in Evaluating Thesis		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Strength of Grammarly's Free Version to Help Undergraduate Students in Evaluating Thesis 2. The Use of Grammarly's Premium Version to Help Undergraduate Students in Evaluating Thesis
Undergraduate Students' Challenges When Using Grammarly in Evaluating a Thesis		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Limitation of Grammarly's Free Version 2. The Drawbacks of Grammarly's Premium Version

How Grammarly Facilitates Undergraduate Students to Evaluate Their Undergraduate Thesis

The ease of accessing Grammarly has become one of the reasons why Grammarly is a popular application that undergraduate students use in evaluating a thesis. The simple use in evaluating writing in a thesis is the main focus of its ease of access. Amel felt the ease in having corrections to evaluate her writing. Grammarly gives easiness in evaluating writing by having a feature that justifies if there are misspelt words. It helped her to evaluate her misspelling by giving a correction. In addition, Nesi also faced easiness in using Grammarly to evaluate her writing. Her statement shows that she just needed to click at the words that needed corrections to make her work simpler and more efficient.

Statements from Amel and Nesi provide evidence that the ease of using Grammarly helped undergraduate students to evaluate their writing. This finding is in line with Nova's (2018) who also found that students can get benefits from using Grammarly due to its accessibility, and it can help them monitor the feedback and the correction given easily.

How Grammarly Supports Undergraduate Students in Evaluating Thesis

The Strength of Grammarly's Free Version to Help Undergraduate Students in Evaluating Thesis

While the paid English grammar check (premium) provides full advantages and benefits, many features, and comprehensive coverage, the free online English grammar check service undoubtedly has limitations and lacks service features (Fitria, 2021). Although it has some limitations on its free version, Grammarly still can help them evaluate their thesis, especially in correcting their grammar and punctuation errors.

Amel's story shows that Grammarly can still evaluate misspelt words, although it is in the free version. It is in line with Fitria's (2021) found that the free version of Grammarly is proficient at spotting minor mistakes like misused articles and comma usage.

Nesi's story shows that Grammarly's free feature helped her to make her thesis became not wordy. Furthermore, With the 'correctness' feature of Grammarly, Nesi stated that this feature helped her because she got corrections of pronouns, articles, spelling, punctuation, and grammar. It helped her to correct her thesis writing.

It related to the finding of Fitria (2021), all the features in Grammarly's free version related to basic writing skills that need spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Furthermore, we conclude that, despite its limitations, Undergraduate students are helped with the feature, especially in correcting their spelling errors, the correctness and clarity of their writing.

The Use of Grammarly's Premium Version to Help Undergraduate Students in Evaluating Thesis

It was different from Grammarly's free version, which was available for some features only, with its premium version having additional features to help its users evaluate their writing. In constructing a thesis, Grammarly had advanced evaluation features that help undergraduate students improved their writing quality and ensure their writings were on target.

From Nesi's story, Grammarly can help undergraduate students give suitable correction words, so that the writing didn't sound wordy and make reading was more effective. She gave an example of how Grammarly corrected her words by changing "very tired" into "terrified" to make it more formal and effective. It aligned with Fitria et al. (2022) finding, which stated that Grammarly Premium offers vocabulary enrichment suggestions in constructing a thesis.

Not only giving suitable correction words, but Grammarly also shortens the time for the users to correct their writing. It happened to Nesi when correcting her writing. In Nesi's story, in the context of using the "Adjust Goal" feature, Nesi stated that this feature helped her not only give suggestions to change the words but also shortened her time correcting her thesis, especially correcting grammar. It is aligned with Nova's (2018) finding that the satisfaction expressed by the students in having a high evaluation speed also demonstrated the feature of this program in saving time in evaluating their academic writing and helping them revise their academic writing

in a shorter time. In addition, Pratama (2020) also stated that Students claimed that Grammarly could save them time when correcting their text.

Moreover, from her statement, some of Grammarly's features helped Nesi to evaluate her thesis. First, Grammar Correction helped Nesi to check her grammar because she realized that grammar is included in Thesis Assessment. Second, the level of formality feature helped her to choose appropriate words in her thesis because she constructed a thesis which it will read in academic scope, she needed to select the formal words, and because of this, it helped her to construct formal writing in her thesis writing. Third, the punctuation checker helped her evaluate her punctuation in a thesis. Fourth, the infographic feature helped her to avoid overwriting in the process of writing a thesis. It helped her to make sure that her writing was easier to understand by the readers. Fifth, the fluency feature helped her make her writing more fluent. This feature is needed to make the readers of her writing, either the experts or the general public could understand her thesis. Lastly, to make her thesis more professional, she used the 'word choice' feature to get suggestions to change the words into professional ones. These findings described the finding of Fitria (2021), which stated that in a 'premium' feature related to style, clarity improvements, and further advanced repairs.

Undergraduate Students' Challenges When Using Grammarly in Evaluating Thesis

The Limitation of Grammarly's Free Version

Grammarly's free version has several features which is free and easy to be used by undergraduate students. However, it has some limitations in the use of application. However, from Amel's story, Amel felt disappointed because she thought that Grammarly's free version did not give her a significant impact. Amel stated that Grammarly's free version has fewer features than the premium one. It came to the example that Amel has told; she gave an example related how the corrections of Grammarly were not completely perfect. It is in line with the finding of Perdana et al. (2021), They stated that since the application simply displays error areas and does not do automatic correction, the free version appears to be very limited.

Not only about the limitation of free version feature, But Amel also showed her another disappointment. She felt disappointed because Grammarly cannot give appropriate suggestions to her. From Amel's story, it can be concluded that Grammarly's Free version cannot read the context and content of writer in the writing process. Amel showed about how Grammarly gave her suggestion, she said A, but Grammarly give a B suggestion. It is in line with the finding of Nova (2018) which stated that Grammarly's free service hasn't met the needs of its users, and as a result, it didn't live up to their expectations for utilizing it as a tool for proofreading. Conversely, it was the opposite of the findings of Fitria (2021) which stated that Grammarly can also check for context, word choice, and plagiarism along with its easy editing.

The Drawbacks of Grammarly's Premium Version

Grammarly's premium version has provided complete features of Grammarly to give convenience to the users in evaluating their writing. However, Grammarly's Premium Version still have some drawbacks as an online automatic writing evaluation. As a premium user, Nesi revealed some obstacles in using Grammarly's premium version.

From her story, Nesi tried to show that the suggestions of Grammarly are not totally perfect. The clarity feature in Grammarly suggested the user to change passive sentences into active sentences. However, sometimes this suggestion made the writing out of context. This finding was opposite with the finding of Perdana et al. (2021) which stated that the author chooses to adhere to the Grammarly application directions by employing tools to assist the author in a variety of circumstances and problematic content. Yet, Nesi stated that there was an over-checking in giving suggestion to change passive voice into active voice.

Nesi's experiences also implied that Grammarly cannot improvement undergraduate students' writing skill. It caused there is no obvious explanation about how the words must be change. Grammarly just gave a justification if there's a correction of writing. Grammarly cannot give perfect correction to the students. Therefore, it necessary to do double-check to ensure the writing is good, appropriate, and readable.

Furthermore, although it's premium version, Plagiarism checker feature in Grammarly's premium version cannot correct the writing maximally. It just can check based on the similarities with website. Therefore, it was doubtful if it can check based on the similarities with journal or not. It aligned with the finding of Fitria (2021), which stated that Grammarly's plagiarism detection engine functions and uses a sort of analysis such as locating similarities between one's writing and sources that are widely accessible or have been uploaded on the internet

4. Conclusion

Based on the findings and discussion, The analysis revealed three emergent themes: How Grammarly Facilitates Undergraduate Students to evaluate their undergraduate thesis; How Grammarly Supports Undergraduate Students in Evaluating Thesis; and Undergraduate Students' challenges when using Grammarly to Write Thesis.

Grammarly simplifies undergraduate thesis evaluation by providing easy access, justifications for corrections, and suggestions for word corrections and changes. It assists undergraduate students to write their thesis with free and premium versions. In free version, Grammarly provides misspelling correction, correctness, and clarity. Moreover, the premium version provides suitable correction words, reducing time and enhancing evaluation.

Grammarly, an Automatic Writing Evaluation tool, challenges undergraduate students in free and premium versions. The free version has limited thesis evaluation features, while premium features have drawbacks like unclear clarity, lack of explanations, and imperfect correction and double-checking is necessary.

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