

Exploring Arab EFL Learners' Attitudes: Is Grammarly a Game-Changer in Academic Writing Classes?

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ABSTRACT

Unquestionably, writing is a crucial productive skill in language learning, for which students require ongoing advice to improve. In this study, the researchers analyze Arab students' attitudes toward Grammarly deployment in the EFL academic writing skills classes. This study used a descriptive approach, surveying (50) and interviewing (10) EFL academic writing students from the English Department at a university. A survey questionnaire and semi-structured interviews were utilized in this study. The study findings reveal that students perceive Grammarly as a valuable tool for improving various aspects of their academic writing. In addition, the content analysis of the semi-structured interviews identified challenges encountered by students during deployment, such as issues with device compatibility and overreliance on Grammarly suggestions regarding vocabulary, grammar, and syntax, among others. This study also makes pedagogical recommendations for further investigations into Grammarly's efficiency and students' attitudes toward this AI tool.

Key Words: Academic writing, EFL students' attitudes, challenges in Grammarly deployment.

Introduction

An attitude is a person's overall evaluation of behavior, which is developed from earlier educational endeavors and impacts our thinking and conduct concerning the object (Rheu, 2020). The researchers evaluated students' attitudes in this study using a tripartite model—the ABC model of attitudes—to determine the attitudes. The ABC model (Affective, Behavioural, and Cognitive) was defined by Verešová and Malá (2016) in the following manner: The three components of attitude are affective, behavioral, and cognitive. Affective refers to how one feels and behaves toward an attitude object(s), behavioral refers to how one acts or behaves toward an attitude object(s), and cognitive refers to the belief or knowledge one has regarding an attitude object(s).

In recent years, information technology (IT) has undergone significant transformation, and an increasing number of apps have been developed to help successfully support language teaching in general and the teaching of English writing skills in particular. According to Van Leeuwen and Gabriel (2007), who hold a similar perspective, IT impacted students' writing in terms of what they wrote and how they wrote. IT also made it simpler for students to plan, compose, and revise independently. Many tools have been developed to enhance the process of teaching and learning writing due to the challenges students face when learning how to write and the advantages of using IT in language teaching. One of them is Grammarly. Grammarly is one of the writing tools that is considered to be useful and is adopted by many educational institutions and universities across the globe because of the needs of the learners and its usefulness. In keeping with the concept above, Yulianti and Reni's (2018) study centered on using Grammarly to teach narrative writing through a genre-based approach. They found that students' attitudes toward using Grammarly were overwhelmingly positive and that the inclusion of Grammarly in a genre-based approach considerably enhanced students' ability to write narratives.

The cloud-based typing assistant Grammarly is an American AI tool. It examines flaws in English writings' clarity, engagement, and delivery, as well as their spelling, grammar, and punctuation, finds instances of plagiarism, and offers corrections for the mistakes. Users can also personalize their words for the situation, tone, and style. Alex Shevchenko, Max Lytvyn, and Dmytro Lider founded Grammarly in 2009. A browser plugin designed for Google Docs, a smartphone keyboard, and a separate tool for use with desktop programs are all offered by Grammarly (Rejeki, 2023). There are two versions of the Grammarly app: a free version and a premium version. The free version of Grammarly focuses only on style, grammar, spelling, and punctuation features. On the other hand, the premium version offers more features than the free one. It can look into word choice, formality level, and fluency, among other features. (Lailika, 2019). Furthermore, the Grammarly app's free edition works well at spotting small problems like improper article construction and comma mistakes. Users must pay for the premium version, even though it offers more features than the free version. The researchers in this study only looked at the Grammarly Apps free version. Grammarly provides non-plagiarized writing assistance to correct grammatical and spelling errors. This technology can also detect unethical academic behavior, like plagiarism, by looking through and comparing other textual materials that are accessible online. Correctness, fluency, clarity, engagement, delivery, and plagiarism are among the attributes of Grammarly. Cross-referencing the work with 16 billion web pages guarantees that it is unique and current (Javier, 2022). Daroina et al. (2022) explored that, based on the concepts of practicality, reliability, validity, authenticity, and washback, students felt that Grammarly could assist them in a variety of ways, not just with grammar. It also helps them effectively and efficiently with writing assessments on punctuation and spelling features. Grammarly is renowned for offering a wide range of beneficial services to users. It can instinctively detect and correct various potential grammatical errors (Nova, 2018; Lailika, 2019), which is beneficial for students who struggle with complex English grammar rules and spelling.

One notable research gap in the existing studies on students' perceptions of Grammarly software is the limited discussion on its disadvantages or limitations. While the studies generally highlight the benefits and positive attitudes towards Grammarly, there is a lack of in-depth exploration into the potential drawbacks or challenges associated with its use. Understanding the limitations of Grammarly is crucial for educators and learners to make informed decisions about its integration into the writing process (Aidil, 2019; Cauring et al., 2023; Ghufon & Rosyida, 2018; Gufron, 2019; Nova, 2018; O'Neil & Russell, 2019; Ramayanti, 2021; Russell, 2019). Addressing the shortcomings of past studies, the current study aims to (1) identify students' attitudes toward the deployment of Grammarly in academic writing courses and (2) analyze challenges do learners face when deploying Grammarly in an academic writing class. Therefore, the current study examines the following research questions:

1. What are students' attitudes toward Grammarly deployment in academic writing courses?
2. What challenges do learners face when deploying Grammarly in an academic writing class?

Literature Review

Investigators have studied student perceptions of Grammarly Software as a tool for checking grammar in written work. Aidil's (2019) study aimed to ascertain how students felt about Grammarly assistance with their writing skills. In this study, the interview served as the methodology. A descriptive analysis was conducted on the data collection results. According to the findings, Grammarly assisted the participants in editing their academic writing, yet Grammarly software has disadvantages in addition to its benefits. Ramayanti (2021) conducted a research observation to determine student perceptions of the value of using Grammarly during the writing process and ways to make future usage of the tool more effective. A survey of the English class was conducted to gather the data. The findings revealed that students had a positive attitude and felt that using Grammarly as a grammar checker was beneficial for improving their academic writing. In a study published in 2023, Cauring et al. employed a descriptive survey research design to gather information from students in grades 9-12 at ARMM Regional Science High School. Although most students had enough experience writing research papers, the findings showed that they believed there was a need for digital help, especially for proofreading with the Grammarly app. They also had a positive attitude about Grammarly, complementing its usefulness, simplicity of use, and absence of drawbacks. In light of this, it was found that students can improve as writers by utilizing the Grammarly app, which is very helpful, easy to use, and provides constructive criticism. According to O'Neil and Russell (2019), the outcome showed that students who received Grammarly were more content than those who received grammar guidance from traditional teaching methods. According to Nova's (2018) research, using Grammarly when learning a language helps students become more conscious of their faults and avoid making the same grammatical mistakes again. Also, learners said Grammarly may save them time while checking their writing grammar. He further stated that there are advantages and disadvantages to using Grammarly in the learning process. Students, however, should not rely solely on technology because it could not check their writing for grammar errors. Grammarly could make writing more difficult because it does not check context, which could lead to work that lacks clarity and cohesiveness. (Nova, 2018). Gufron (2019) discovered that while using Grammarly software to write in EFL reduces errors, it does not help determine the context in which students write in English. He also evaluated academic writing and identified its advantages and shortcomings. Strengths include making study input easier to acquire, making the service free, and evaluating research quickly. Drawbacks encompass deceptive evaluations, an inordinate

amount of reference list inspections, and the incapacity to verify textual materials and settings. O'Neil and Russell (2019) examined students' perspectives regarding grammar when combined with guidance from an academic learning advisor. The study compared the responses of two groups of students—one group to the Grammarly feedback and the other group to the traditional, non-automated grammatical feedback provided by the Academic Learning Center at CQ University. The findings indicate that students who received feedback from Grammarly were considerably more satisfied with the grammar assistance they received and answered more favorably to nine out of the fifteen survey items than students who did not receive feedback from Grammarly. In addition, Ghufon and Rosyida (2018) investigated how well 40 Indonesian university students' writing errors were reduced by Grammarly feedback as opposed to teacher-corrected feedback. The analysis included punctuation, grammar, spelling, and diction errors. The results showed that students using Grammarly made significantly fewer mistakes while writing than students getting assessments from teachers.

Research Methodology

This study utilizes an attitudinal questionnaire and performs semi-structured interviews to gather data, applying a survey-descriptive research methodology. The study reflects an effort to accomplish the following research objectives: (1) to examine students' attitudes toward the deployment of Grammarly in academic writing courses and (2) to analyze the challenges faced by learners when deploying Grammarly in an academic writing class.

Participants

Fifty EFL academic writing students were chosen from the English Department at Najran University in Saudi Arabia to participate in a survey-descriptive study methodology. A convenience sampling technique was used in the present study. All individuals were selected from the English Department, who took the same course and had the same educational background. The age range of the students, which is between 17 and 25, helps to maintain the sample units' consistency within the population. A key component of sample quality is homogeneity, defined as the resemblance or shared characteristics among sample items. Sample adequacy in qualitative research refers to the suitability of sample size and composition, which is essential for determining the reliability and validity of qualitative investigations (Spencer et al., 2003). It is implicated in assessments of validity and generalizability, especially for research situated within a post-positivist tradition, and maintains some commitment to realist ontological premises (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Small sample sizes are typical in qualitative research to enable the in-depth, case-oriented analysis central to such investigation (Sandelowski, 1996). Furthermore, ten students were purposively recruited for the semi-structured interviews to determine the challenges encountered by students while deploying Grammarly in an academic writing class. The students were chosen based on their ability to yield intricate details pertinent to the topic of study.

Instruments

The research instruments used in this study were: (i) a survey was given to participants to determine how they felt about Grammarly's deployment in their academic writing class. The questionnaire was modified following the ABC model of Verešová and Malá (2016) concerning their affect and behavior domains. The researchers used a Google Form survey with 15 questions that could be evaluated numerically to motivate students to respond to collect the data. The questions aimed to find out how much Grammarly assisted the participants in writing academically. The participants were asked to respond to inquiries about Grammarly's usefulness—or lack thereof—concerning their ability to write academically. (ii) Semi-structured interviews of students were held to find out the challenges that EFL learners face while deploying Grammarly in the writing class. Semi-structured interviews with students were carried out in the researchers' room at the College of Languages and Translation. According to Merriam (2009), semi-structured interviews are the most effective data collection method since they are directed by a planned list of questions and issues to be addressed. But neither the precise phrasing nor the order of the questions is preset. Fifteen to twenty-five minutes were allotted for each interview.

Validity and Reliability

To determine the validity and substance of the interview and assessment questionnaire, a group of specialists ($n = 4$) with more than ten years of teaching experience assessed the materials. The researchers gave specialists access to the instruments and study objectives to guarantee adequate handling of the objectives. The experts looked at Grammarly's performance in college writing programs. The experts' concerns were considered when making various tool modifications based on their input. Rosaroso (2015) claims that a tool is deemed dependable if it assesses experimental variables consistently and produces consistent results after multiple administrations. This consistency over testing sessions is important because it shows how consistently a specific set of test takers performs when given the same test at different times.

In addition, the research instrument was exploratorily analyzed, which consisted of 15 questions to determine the Pearson correlation coefficient between the items. The following table displays the findings:

Table 1. Pearson Correlation Coefficient

Item No.	Pearson Correlation	Item No.	Pearson Correlation
1	.479**	8	.463**
2	.339*	9	.717**
3	.518**	10	.485**
4	.318*	11	.700**
5	.242	12	.459**
6	.665**	13	.489**
7	.415**	14	.575**

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). * . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Two techniques were used to verify the results: The air count and the Pearson correlation score. If the Pearson correlation score or the air count exceeds $>.312$, the test is considered reliable. We can determine the validity of the test if the air count or Pearson correlation score is more than the minimal criterion and falls between $.318^*$ and $.717^{**}$. Second, as a secondary technique, the significance value was evaluated. If the significance value is less than <0.05 , the test is deemed valid. The test's validity and consistency have been verified, with the significance value calculated in Table 1 ranging from 0.000 to 0.05, suggesting significance.

Table 2. Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	No. of Participants
0.727	0.727	20

Table 2 illustrates the questionnaire's level of internal consistency. The alpha of 0.772 that was attained with 15 items is regarded as good. Alpha levels should ideally be close to 1.00, with values over 0.7 considered good and those around 0.6 considered acceptable.

Data Analysis

The quantitative responses from the participants were examined using the SPSS program 26 to understand more about their attitudes and how Arab EFL learners felt about the effectiveness (or lack thereof) of Grammarly use in academic writing classes. A content analysis of the semi-structured interviews assessed the use of Grammarly and the student's academic achievement in EFL academic writing classes to answer the study's research objectives adequately. In addition, the following grading was adopted for the items of the study questionnaire to determine the degree of agreement of student attitudes based on the range given:

Degree of agreement: Very low, low Medium High Very high
Mean: 1-1.80 >1.80-2.60 >2.60-3.40 >3.40-4.20 >4.20-5

Results

Students' attitudes towards the deployment of Grammarly in academic writing courses

Students' attitudes regarding Grammarly's effectiveness in EFL writing classroom. The mean, standard deviations, and level of the study sample's responses to using Grammarly in EFL writing classroom originality are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3. Means, Standard Deviation, and Level of Students' Responses

Domain Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Degree
Grammarly helps students to check grammar mistakes in their write-ups.	50	4.22	0.764	Very High
Grammarly helps students to check proper punctuation in their write-ups.	50	4.30	0.647	Very High
Grammarly helps students check correct spelling in their write-ups	50	3.82	0.825	High
Grammarly assists in choosing the appropriate vocabulary to develop academic writing	50	3.90	0.839	High
Grammarly provides proper sentence structure prompts.	50	4.08	0.829	High
Grammarly offers proper capitalization prompts for academic writing.	50	3.72	0.784	High
Grammarly offers word choice in academic writing.	50	4.06	0.620	High
Grammarly assists in using linking words to make academic writing effective	50	4.20	0.700	High
Grammarly helps in selecting a variety of synonyms/antonyms in academic writing	50	4.14	0.729	High
Grammarly assists in identifying the wrong use of articles in academic writing.	50	4.18	0.941	High
Grammarly assists students to organize their ideas in their academic writing	50	4.02	0.714	High
Grammarly provides explanations & suggestions to improve academic writing.	50	4.16	0.817	High
Grammarly assists in developing unity to make academic writing effective	50	4.38	0.602	Very High
Grammarly helps in editing academic writing's language issues.	50	4.16	0.681	High
Grammarly addresses active vs. passive voice problems in academic writing.	50	4.62	0.567	Very High
Total	50	4.13	0.737	High

Table 3 presents that students generally hold high attitudes towards the deployment of Grammarly in academic writing classes. The mean score for students' responses regarding the effectiveness of Grammarly in EFL writing classrooms is high (Mean = 4.13), indicating that students perceive Grammarly as a valuable tool for improving various aspects of their academic writing. The mean scores for most items related to Grammarly's assistance in various aspects of writing, such as checking grammar, punctuation, spelling, vocabulary selection, sentence structure, capitalization, word choice, and organizing ideas, are high, indicating that students perceive Grammarly to be helpful in these areas. Additionally, the mean scores for items related to more advanced writing concepts, such as developing unity, addressing language issues, and identifying active vs. passive voice problems, are even very high, suggesting that students find Grammarly particularly effective in assisting with these aspects of academic writing. The overall mean score for all items is 4.13 with a standard deviation of 0.737, indicating a generally high level of agreement among students regarding the usefulness of Grammarly in academic writing. The responses fall within the "High" or "Very High" categories, indicating a strong attitude toward Grammarly's deployment in improving the quality of academic writing among students.

Challenges learners face when deploying Grammarly in an academic writing class.

Students' interviews reveal that students face challenges with Grammarly's compatibility with devices and user-friendly functions. S2 said, "Grammarly, in my opinion, is not developed with specific devices in mind, and the functions that are provided are not user-friendly." In addition, excessive dependence on Grammarly can also hinder students' writing abilities. S4 told, "In my view, an excessive dependence on Grammarly can prevent students from developing their own editing and proofreading abilities. Students run the risk of being too dependent on Grammarly to edit their work." Students are also of the view that EFL learners struggle to understand Grammarly's recommendations in vocabulary, grammar, and syntax, limiting their language development. S5 added, "As a student, I think that students frequently struggle with Grammarly's recommendations, which can lead to uncertainty and possibly inaccurate writing. Students also might not have the contextual knowledge required to determine whether a change recommendation is useful or not. This situation reduces rather than increases the quality of students' writing, undermining the usefulness of Grammarly's feedback." Also, S7 hinted, "In my view, Grammarly provides difficulty for EFL learners due to their poor academic level. It may be challenging for these students to understand Grammarly's recommendations in vocabulary, grammar, and syntax. This disparity can make it difficult for students to use Grammarly's writing advice successfully, which will limit their language development." Finally, the analysis demonstrated that Grammarly updates can cause issues with different web browsers and operating systems, causing performance delays, and data loss. S9 narrated, "To my mind, updates in Grammarly can cause challenges for students using it on different web browsers and operating systems. Sometimes, these security and performance-enhancing updates unintentionally change how Grammarly interacts with the operating system or browser." In addition, S10 added, "As a student, I understand that slow internet speeds can hinder Grammarly usage, causing performance delays and data loss. It can also cause sluggish response and performance delays. Furthermore, internet speed may cause frustration and hinder productivity."

Discussion

The results of the current study offer new perspectives on the difficulties and attitudes related to the use of Grammarly in academic writing instruction. The results indicate that Arab EFL students have high attitudes about Grammarly deployment, as evident in the mean scores representing perceived efficiency in writing support areas. This result means that students perceive Grammarly as a valuable tool for improving various aspects of their academic writing. These results might be attributed to the fact that Grammarly, a tool for Arab EFL students, enhances writing skills through grammar checking, punctuation correction, and vocabulary enhancement. The user-friendly interface and positive feedback align with academic excellence aspirations in the Arab EFL context. The results of this study are consistent with those of Abdallah et al. (2023), who found that Grammarly helps low-level pupils improve their writing abilities. In addition, the current study's findings concur with those of Hakiki (2021), who showed that Grammarly can help students with their English essay writing. The study also showed that Grammarly offers helpful advice on how to write better essays. Moreover, according to Faisal and Carabella (2023), most students believed it was a good idea to use Grammarly for their academic writing projects. The study's participants also indicated confidence in Grammarly's capacity to help them correct errors they make when writing academically, saying that it can help them become better writers and feel more comfortable with writing academically in general. Furthermore, the results of this study are partially consistent with those of Halim et al. (2022), who showed how Grammarly significantly supports students' self-directed learning to raise the standard of their writing. However, the current study's results conflict with those of Miranty et al. (2021), who found that Grammarly's effectiveness was not very apparent and that students expressed skepticism about the app's usefulness despite their perceptions that it was a helpful learning tool. In addition, the findings of the current study contrast with John and Wool (2020) pointed out a flaw in Grammarly, pointing out that part of the feedback was discovered to be unreliable. Moreover, they noted that Grammarly's restricted functionalities hinder it from providing exhaustive commentary on student writings.

In addition, the content analysis results identify many difficulties that students run into while employing Grammarly for academic writing. One significant problem is Grammarly device compatibility, which can limit students' access to its capabilities and detract from the user experience. The qualitative analysis also demonstrates that students run the risk of becoming overly reliant on Grammarly, which could hinder their academic writing ability. Students' observations also highlight how challenging it is for EFL learners to comprehend Grammarly recommendations, especially when it comes to vocabulary, grammar, and syntax. This may limit Grammarly's usefulness for this student population by indicating a discrepancy between the language difficulty of its feedback and the competency levels of EFL learners. The study also highlights problems with Grammarly updates, which may result in operating system and web browser incompatibilities, slowing down performance and erasing data. Slow internet speeds also seem to be a major barrier to students using Grammarly, which negatively affects their productivity and Grammarly experience as a whole.

The reason for the students' semi-structured interview content analysis findings may be due to Grammarly incompatibility which can lead to over-reliance, slow internet speeds infrastructure limitations, network congestion, and connectivity issues. The findings of the qualitative analysis of this study align with those of Fitria et al. (2022), who identified Grammarly shortcomings as students are unable to download feedback in the form of a file, Grammarly cannot identify the tenses that students use in a given context, and access to all of Grammarly premium features requires payment. However, the results of the current study are in contrast to those of Nova (2018), who discovered that Grammarly provides some false feedback, has trouble identifying the type of English and reference list, and lacks experience with context and content evaluation.

Conclusion

The study contributes to the existing literature by providing insights into students' attitudes toward Grammarly and highlighting the practical challenges they face during its deployment. It underscores the importance of considering both the benefits and challenges of using Grammarly in academic writing courses to maximize its effectiveness. The results of the quantitative analysis revealed that students perceive Grammarly as a valuable tool for improving various aspects of their academic writing. In addition, the content analysis highlighted the challenges that EFL learners face while deploying Grammarly in an academic writing classroom. These challenges include but are not limited to Grammarly's compatibility with devices and user-friendly functions and excessive dependence on Grammarly's decontextualized recommendations of vocabulary, grammar, and syntax. These results mean that when deploying Grammarly into academic writing training, teachers must consider the complex needs and difficulties faced by Arab EFL students. In light of the quantitative and qualitative findings, the researchers offer pedagogical recommendations, emphasizing the importance of considering the intricate needs and challenges experienced by Arab EFL students when deploying Grammarly into academic writing instruction. Offering targeted language support to close the gap between learners' proficiency levels and Grammarly's recommendations, encouraging a balanced approach to Grammarly usage to foster independent writing skills, and offering technical support for device compatibility issues are some strategies to address these challenges. The study's primary limitation stems from its exclusive focus on two bachelor's degrees in English and Translation conducted using Grammarly. Other programs and digital writing tools that are available were overlooked. The researchers chose Grammarly over other software options despite they were limited in auto-correcting solutions. Subsequent research projects ought to broaden their focus to include a wider range of programs, promoting student participation in the teaching and learning process. Incorporating the viewpoints and experiences of the instructors would also lead to a more thorough comprehension of the subject. To enhance the scope of future research, expanding the study to include a broader range of academic programs and digital writing tools should be considered. Additionally, exploring the impact of auto-correcting solutions and promoting student engagement in the teaching and learning process could also be fruitful areas for future investigation.

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