

THE ASSESSMENT OF EFL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' WRITING THROUGH GRAMMARLY BUSINESS

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Abstract

This study examined the assessment of the writing of 23 EFL university students using Grammarly. The descriptive qualitative research method employed in this study is the collection of student texts. The results demonstrated that students' writing contains errors in four Grammarly categories: correctness, clarity, engagement, and delivery. Punctuation, S-V agreement, pronoun usage, conjunction usage, determiner usage, sentence fragments, improper formatting, incorrect or absent prepositions, and misspelled words are examples of correctness errors. The clarity errors include the use of passive voice, ambiguous sentences, wordy sentences, complex text, and difficult-to-read text. The engagement errors then involve poor word selection and repetitive sentences. The remaining errors consist of incomplete sentences, tone suggestions, and improper colloquialisms. Even though this program has several flaws, such as its inability to detect the type of English and its absence of context and content evaluation, it can be used to assist EFL instructors in evaluating their students' writing more effectively and efficiently.

Key terms: Assessment, Grammarly Business, University Students, Writing

I. BACKGROUND

In Indonesia, EFL writing courses are required in higher education, specifically in the English Education Study Program. The topic is classified as one of the language skills that EFL students must acquire. This skill differs from other language skills (listening, reading, and speaking) that can be performed once. Learners of English as a Second Language are able to express and communicate their ideas, thoughts, opinions, intentions, and anything else they have in mind through this skill. To become a proficient EFL writer, one must understand the grammar (sentence structure), clarity, and coherence of each sentence. The EFL writing topic occupies a significant portion of the instruction and learning process. This is due to the fact that writing becomes a requirement before students can graduate from their institutions (Ghuffron et al., 2016). During their studies, they are encouraged to take a writing class to assist them meet the requirements.

Although EFL students have been taught a writing subject or multiple writing subjects and have been exposed to a variety of writing techniques, this does

not mean that they do not encounter difficulties when writing their assignments. The majority of students typically struggle with grammatical aspects, vocabulary usages, misspelled words, and improper punctuation. Moreover, according to Xie (2019), linguistic accuracy is one of the most difficult duties in writing.

In order to assess the students' linguistic accuracy in writing, university lecturers frequently provide written corrective feedback to both the disciplinary knowledge and the linguistic, rhetorical, and conventional aspects of writing (Jabulani, 2015). According to Zhang and Hyland (2018), feedback has long been acknowledged as a potent instrument for promoting and consolidating learning. In the context of writing, feedback is essential for improving students' knowledge, skills, strategies, and motivation (Graham et al., 2015). Alternative: the use of automated writing assessment. In this digital age, teachers can use a variety of automatic feedback programs to assist them in teaching and learning and to provide students with useful feedback. According to Yunus et al. (2012), the programs include, among others, Facebook, MS Word, Wiki, Grammar software, and Feedback fruits.

In addition, Ambarwati (2021) notes that Grammarly is one of the most popular automated feedback tools in Indonesia that can be used to assist students and teachers in feedback assessments used in an EFL writing course to identify grammatical errors in documents, correct spelling, punctuation, conventions, clarity, and word choice, and detect plagiarism (Schraudner, 2014). In addition to detecting spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors, it also suggests corrections for nouns, offers alternative spellings for misspelled words, identifies fragments, and offers verb forms. Grammarly, according to Qassemzadeh and Soleimani (2016), can help teachers and students become better writers and discover new research sites. In addition, Grammarly can assist English teachers in reducing errors in vocabulary usage, language usage, and writing mechanics (Ghufron, 2019). In Indonesia, he adds, instructors have already used Grammarly as an automated writing assessment and feedback system.

Several studies (Ghufron and Rosyida, 2018; Nova, 2018; Tambunan, et al., 2022) have been conducted regarding the use of Grammarly to evaluate students' writing. A study conducted by Gufon and Rosyida (2018) revealed that the texts of students evaluated by Grammarly contain significantly fewer errors than those evaluated by the instructor (indirect corrective feedback). It has been demonstrated that the software is more effective at reducing errors in vocabulary usage (diction), language usage (grammar), and writing mechanics (spelling and punctuation). However, it is less effective at improving the students' writing's content and organization.

Then, according to the findings of Nova's (2018) study, free-Grammarly offers color-coded feedback with explanation and example, convenience of account

access, a high rate of evaluation speed, and a free service for evaluating academic writing. Several misleading feedbacks, inadequacies in detecting the type of English and reference list, and a lack of context and content evaluation were identified as limitations of this software's application.

In addition, a study by Tambunan et al. (2022) revealed that students' primary difficulty is with grammar. This finding is consistent with the difficulties encountered by university students in learning to write at a private university in Lubuklinggau. Some first-semester students interviewed by the researcher identified writing as the most challenging skill. They also mentioned that their limited knowledge of grammar and vocabulary hindered their proficiency in this area.

To ensure that the students' statements were acceptable in this study, the researcher employed Grammarly Business as a Premium tool to examine the students' writing profiles in depth.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The assessment of writing in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context has long been recognized as a complex and demanding task, particularly at the university level where students are expected to produce academically rigorous texts. Writing assessment traditionally focuses on multiple components, including grammar, vocabulary, coherence, organization, and content development (Hyland, 2019). Among these components, grammatical accuracy remains a persistent challenge for EFL learners, often affecting the overall quality and clarity of their writing (Ferris, 2017). Consequently, educators have sought innovative assessment tools that can provide consistent, timely, and detailed feedback to support both teaching and learning processes.

With the rapid development of educational technology, automated writing evaluation (AWE) tools have emerged as an alternative or complementary approach to traditional teacher-based assessment. AWE systems are designed to analyze written texts and provide feedback on linguistic features such as grammar, mechanics, style, and sometimes content (Shermis & Burstein, 2013). Previous studies suggest that AWE tools can enhance students' writing performance by offering immediate feedback and opportunities for revision, which are often limited in large EFL classrooms (Li, Link, Ma, Yang, & Hegelheimer, 2015). However, the effectiveness of such tools largely depends on how they are integrated into instructional and assessment practices.

Grammarly is one of the most widely used AWE tools in higher education, offering feedback on grammar, punctuation, vocabulary use, clarity, and tone. Grammarly Business, an advanced version of the platform, provides institution-level features such as centralized feedback, consistency checks, and analytics,

making it particularly relevant for university writing assessment. According to Ranalli, Link, and Chukharev-Hudilainen (2017), Grammarly functions as a form-focused feedback tool that can support learners' grammatical accuracy and language awareness. In EFL contexts, Grammarly has been found to help students notice recurring grammatical errors and improve surface-level accuracy through repeated revisions.

Several empirical studies have explored the impact of Grammarly on EFL students' writing quality. Research by O'Neill and Russell (2019) indicates that students who used Grammarly demonstrated improvements in grammatical accuracy and mechanics, although gains in higher-order writing skills such as argumentation and organization were less evident. Similarly, Koltovskaia (2020) found that Grammarly-assisted feedback encouraged learner autonomy by enabling students to self-edit and reflect on their errors. These findings suggest that Grammarly is particularly effective for assessing and improving lower-level writing skills, which are foundational for academic writing development.

Despite its advantages, the use of Grammarly as an assessment tool has also raised pedagogical concerns. Critics argue that overreliance on automated feedback may reduce students' critical engagement with their own writing and limit the development of deeper writing skills (Stevenson & Phakiti, 2019). Additionally, AWE tools may not fully capture contextual appropriateness, discourse-level coherence, or discipline-specific writing conventions, which are crucial in university-level writing assessment (Hyland & Hyland, 2019). Therefore, Grammarly Business should be viewed as a supplementary assessment tool rather than a replacement for teacher judgment.

In summary, the literature indicates that Grammarly Business has considerable potential for assessing EFL university students' writing, particularly in terms of grammatical accuracy and language mechanics. Its immediate and detailed feedback can support formative assessment practices and promote learner autonomy. However, effective implementation requires careful pedagogical integration, with instructors balancing automated feedback and human evaluation to ensure comprehensive writing assessment. This balance is essential to maximize the benefits of Grammarly Business while addressing its limitations in assessing higher-order writing skills.

III. RESEARCH METHOD

This investigation aimed to examine the texts written by first-semester students using the online software Grammarly Business. To achieve the goal, the researcher employed a qualitative descriptive study to investigate the writing profiles of students by identifying language problems in the target language. The

Grammarly Business application identified the identified language issues, which included overall scores, correctness, clarity, engagement, and delivery.

This investigation gathered data via a writing test. This test requires 30 students to compose two texts, such as a descriptive and a narrative text, that they had previously studied over the course of eight meetings. After collecting the paragraphs, they were uploaded to an electronic writing enhancement platform known as Grammarly Business. Errors were then identified automatically based on the application's features, which included overall scores, correctness, clarity, engagement, and delivery. The total grade indicates the text's overall performance. Consequently, correctness includes grammar and punctuation. The grammar aspect includes a missing preposition, improper use of a determiner, improper subject-verb agreement, modal verbs, improper use of modifiers, an incorrect number noun, improper use of quantifiers, misplaced words, an incorrect tense sequence, and a conjunction. The punctuation aspect includes comma misuse within clauses, incorrect concluding punctuation, incorrect punctuation in compound sentences, and semicolon misuse. Next is clarity, which serves to make one's writing simpler to comprehend by incorporating conciseness and clarity. The third component is involvement, which requires vocabulary and fluency. The final step is delivery, which serves to verify the formality of a text.

Using Grammarly Business, the researcher analyzed the student texts during the analysis phase. She utilized multiple stages. First, the texts of the students were collated and analyzed based on four categories. In the subsequent phase, their sentences were classified according to their linguistic issues based on the Grammarly Business features, and errors were identified in PDF format. The final one was that each instance of an error was marked with an asterisk and coded to denote its location. The error rate was computed using descriptive statistics. The average number of words per paragraph type was 20. The language problems within each assignment were extracted, categorized, and then the linguistic problem pattern was differentiated based on Grammarly Business's capabilities.

IV. FINDING

The most severe and least severe linguistic issues among students.

The percentage description of each aspect of Grammarly Business was utilized to determine which paragraphs contained the most and fewest linguistic errors. Table I presents the percentage of linguistic errors discovered in student writing, while Table 2 provides an example of linguistic errors found on the writing test.

Table 1. The results of the linguistic problems

No.	Linguistic Problems	Descriptive	Narrative
1	Correctness	229	390
	Punctuation	57 (25%)	172 (44%)
	S-V agreement	38 (17%)	81 (21%)
	Pronoun use	12 (5%)	12 (3%)
	Conjunction use	-	7 (2%)
	Determiner use	17 (7%)	24 (6%)
	Sentence Fragments	3 (1%)	8 (2%)
	Improper formatting	37 (16%)	22 (6%)
	Wrong or missing Prepositions	12 (5%)	32 (8%)
	Misspelled words	53 (23%)	32 (8%)
2	Clarity	39	57
	Passive voice misuse	4 (10%)	10 (18%)
	Unclear sentences	9 (23%)	20 (35%)
	Wordy sentences	20 (51%)	25 (44%)
	Intricate text	6 (15%)	1 (2%)
	Hard-to-read text	-	1 (2%)
3	Engagement	45	35
	Word choice	31 (69%)	34 (97%)
	Monotonous sentences	14 (31%)	1 (3%)
4	Delivery	5	13
	Incomplete sentences	-	8 (62%)
	Tone suggestions	3 (60%)	5 (38%)
	Inappropriate colloquialisms	2 (40%)	-

The table reveals that correctness was the greatest linguistics issue in student writing. It contained 318 errors in descriptive paragraph writing and 495 errors in narrative paragraph writing. According to the data, the most common error was making narrative paragraphs (495), followed by errors in correctness (390), clarity (57), engagement (35), and delivery portions (13). Punctuation 172, S-V agreement 81, missing prepositions 32, misspelled words 32, determiner use 24, improper formatting 22, pronoun use 12, sentence fragments 8, and conjunction use 7 were all correct. On the other hand, the descriptive paragraphs of students contained 318 errors. The errors included 229 correctness errors, 39 clarity errors, 45 engagement errors, and 5 delivery errors. In addition, as seen in the second section, the clarity errors of creating narrative paragraphs were also the most problematic, with 57 errors of passive voice misuse, unclear sentences, wordy sentences, complex text, and difficult-to-read text. The errors of delivery accounted for the majority of narrative paragraph problems, including 13 instances of incomplete sentences, tone suggestions, and potentially sensitive language.

In constructing descriptive paragraphs, students committed the most errors in terms of correctness. There were a total of 229 errors, including 57 punctuation errors, 53 misspelled word errors, 38 S-V agreement errors, 37 formatting errors, 17 determiner use errors, 12 pronoun use errors, 12 incorrect or absent preposition errors, and 3 sentence fragments. The second section contained 20 wordy sentences, nine ambiguous sentences, six intricate texts, and four passive voice errors. The

following section contained 31 word choices and 14 monotonous sentences. Last was delivery, which included three tone suggestions and two inappropriate colloquialisms.

Correctness, lucidity, engagement, and delivery were the specific linguistic issues that students encountered when writing narrative and descriptive paragraphs, according to the results. Punctuation, misspelled words, S-V agreement, improper formatting, determiner use, pronoun use, incorrect or absent preposition, and sentence fragments accounted for the majority of errors. In the accompanying table, descriptive paragraph writing linguistic issues will be listed.

Table 2. Students' Linguistic Problems Example in Descriptive Paragraphs

No.	Linguistic Problems	Descriptive
1	Correctness	
	Punctuation	The thing that makes me laugh is he can climb but he can not go down anymore
	S-V agreement	His height is 178, brown skin, and hair is black.
	Pronoun use	I gave him name is Hiro
	Conjunction use	My t-shirt is put at the first and parts of my cupboard .
	Determiner use	He is tall with short curly black hair, big nose and big brown eyes
	Sentence Fragments	Sometimes he comes to my boarding house and bring me some food and give me a lot of money.
	Improper formatting	My dad also advise me when i left home to continue my college education.
	Wrong or missing Prepositions	And acted like professional actor.
	Misspelled words	It is really playfull, he-cat loved to play with me and the new things it found.
2	Clarity	
	Passive voice misuse	He has released many books that was sold out
	Unclear sentences	He is debuted as a vocalist and also a rapper in group called ENHYPEN.
	Wordy sentences	My father always gives advance to school properly in order to become a successful person.
	Intricate text	I have a cat. It is a male cat. His name is Bocil.
Hard-to-read text	At my house, I have a mother cat who gave a birth of very adorable kitten.	
3	Engagement	
	Word choice	He has been awarded as a creative man by Trans TV.
	Monotonous sentences	He was born in Jakarta on December 28, 1984. He works as a comedian, writer, director and an actor. Dika is short. His body is little bit fat. His hair is short. He has a funny face.
4	Delivery	
	Incomplete sentences	-
	Tone suggestions	I think I am lucky because dwita are my best fried.
	Inappropriate colloquialisms	I also promise to always try to protect her.

The table displays the linguistic issues students encountered when writing descriptive paragraphs, broken down into four categories: correctness, clarity,

engagement, and delivery. The aspect of correctness was the most important for students to review initially. When composing their paragraphs, the students made nine errors. Punctuation, s-v agreement, pronoun use, conjunction use, determiner use, sentence fragments, improper formatting, incorrect or absent prepositions, and misspelled words are examples of common writing errors.

In addition, the table below explains the student's linguistic example in narrative paragraphs. The sample consists of 23 students from one of Lubuklinggau's private institutions.

Table 3. Students' Linguistic Problems Example in Narrative Paragraphs

No.	Linguistic Problems	Narrative
1	Correctness	
	Punctuation	First I got fruit juice in a real watermelon cup.
	S-V agreement	We have finished ate and we came home.
	Pronoun use	There is a teacher who came out of the teacher's room and has said that there one student whose grades were slightly higher than mine.
	Conjunction use	It was seven years our friendship ran.
	Determiner use	This is special birthday I will never forget.
	Sentence Fragments	When I was still in middle school. <i>I</i> was invited by my friend to watch a horror movie in class.
	Improper formatting	My family and I visited my grandma house in Muara Megang village, Musirawas <i>regency</i> , South Sumatra.
	Wrong or missing Prepositions	I also don't dare to tell the teacher about this because I'm afraid they will do something even worse <i>to</i> me.
	Misspelled words	We were in a summit, i was so excited after arrived.
2	Clarity	
	Passive voice misuse	Then I was told to go home and don't play mussels taken using a doctor's tool.
	Unclear sentences	But because of the words that he said earlier, his son could really died.
	Wordy sentences	At that time I was told by my mother to go to pick pandan leaves what a coincidence to be at a neighbor's house and the neighbor's house had a dog.
	Intricate text	This is because in ancient times there were four figures who had led this are.
Hard-to-read text	At that time I was at my aunt's house to take care of college files but after three days there my aunt was tested for covid and the results he was positive for covid 19	
3	Engagement	
	Word choice	I was bullied at that time and it was really scary.
	Monotonous sentences	The fruit becomes a beehive. I want to throw a stone at the fruit. But my friend forbid me.
4	Delivery	
	Incomplete sentences	Don't know why when on the road there are some geese that don't know where they are coming from
	Tone suggestions	I don't know what song it is.
	Inappropriate colloquialisms	-

The table categorizes the linguistic errors students made when writing narrative paragraphs into four categories: correctness, clarity, engagement, and delivery. The aspect of correctness was the most important for students to review initially. When composing their paragraphs, the students made nine errors. Punctuation, s-v agreement, pronoun use, conjunction use, determiner use, sentence fragments, improper formatting, incorrect or absent prepositions, and misspelled words are examples of common writing errors. The students then commit five clarity errors, namely the use of passive voice, ambiguous sentences, wordy sentences, intricate text, and difficult-to-read text. In addition, they commit two engagement errors, namely word choice and monotonous sentences. Lastly, the students' delivery errors consisted of incomplete sentences and tone suggestions.

This was consistent with the findings of Abushihab's (2014) study, which examined 179 grammatical errors in 20 second-year Turkish compositions. The research uncovered five kinds of errors: usage of articles (29%), prepositions (28%), morphological (18.4%), tenses (15%), and active and passive voice (9%). Furthermore, quantitative data analysis revealed the negative impact of the native language. One could argue that such a system of articles does not exist in Turkish, including in Indonesia. The absence of the definite article in two sentences could therefore be attributed to L1 interference. Because their L1 lacks an article system, Turkish Cypriot students struggle to use the article/determiner.

The similar research had been conducted by Bostanci (2019) in the same context (North Cyprus) revealed that EFL college students had issues with the incorrect use of tenses. She also discovered that the subcategories Past Perfect as opposed to Simple Past and Past Perfect Continuous as opposed to Simple Past had the fewest instances of improper tenses, with each having a single instance. Similarly, the subcategory Omission of Copula generated the fewest committed issues. This is possible given that the study described and classified errors made by Turkish Cypriot EFL learners whose past tense of the language structure is used for all past actions regardless of the structure or sequence involved.

V. DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that correctness was the most severe linguistic issue in both descriptive and narrative paragraphs, as identified through Grammarly Business analysis. Errors related to punctuation, subject-verb agreement, misspelled words, prepositions, determiners, and formatting dominated students' writing. Narrative paragraphs contained a higher number of errors than descriptive paragraphs, suggesting that writing tasks requiring chronological development and more complex language structures posed greater challenges for EFL university students. This result aligns with Ferris (2017), who argues that grammatical

accuracy remains one of the most persistent difficulties for EFL learners, particularly when they attempt longer and more cognitively demanding texts.

In addition to correctness, clarity-related problems were prominent, especially in narrative writing. Errors such as wordy sentences, unclear sentence construction, misuse of passive voice, and hard-to-read text suggest that students struggled to express ideas efficiently and coherently. This finding supports Hyland's (2019) assertion that EFL learners often prioritize meaning over form, which can lead to overly complex or ambiguous sentence structures. Grammarly Business effectively highlighted these issues, demonstrating its usefulness in identifying surface-level clarity problems that may otherwise be overlooked in traditional assessment.

Although engagement and delivery errors were less frequent, they still revealed important weaknesses in students' writing. Problems related to inappropriate word choice, monotonous sentence patterns, incomplete sentences, and tone inconsistencies indicate limited rhetorical awareness and audience consideration. According to O'Neill and Russell (2019), automated writing evaluation tools such as Grammarly are particularly effective in detecting mechanical and stylistic issues but less effective in fostering higher-level discourse awareness. Therefore, while Grammarly Business can support formative assessment by drawing attention to engagement and delivery issues, teacher mediation remains necessary to develop students' rhetorical competence.

Overall, the findings are consistent with previous studies on EFL writing errors. Abushihab (2014) found that article use, prepositions, verb forms, and voice were the most frequent grammatical errors among EFL learners, many of which were attributed to L1 interference. Similarly, Bostanci (2019) reported that tense misuse and copula omission were common among Turkish Cypriot EFL students due to differences between the learners' first language and English grammatical systems. These parallels suggest that the linguistic problems identified through Grammarly Business are not isolated but reflect broader, well-documented challenges in EFL writing. Consequently, Grammarly Business can be considered a valuable diagnostic and formative assessment tool, particularly when combined with explicit grammar instruction and teacher feedback.

VI. CONCLUSION

On the basis of the research findings, this study can conclude that the majority of students make errors in four aspects of effective writing, namely correctness, clarity, engagement, and delivery. Although this program has several flaws, such as its inability to detect the type of English and its absence of context and content evaluation, it can be used to assist EFL instructors in evaluating their students' writing more effectively and efficiently.

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