EFL postgraduate students' perceptions on the use of Grammarly and peer feedback to improve their academic writing skills

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ABSTRACT

Grammarly and peer feedback have recently become two evaluative approaches that are commonly used in writing classes to provide effective comments on students' writing (Fahmi & Cahyono, 2021). However, recent studies have only examined their effectiveness on students' writing skills, neglecting their thoughts and perceptions. To address this gap, the paper explores EFL postgraduate students' perceptions of using Grammarly and peer feedback activities to enhance their academic writing skills. The interview approach was incorporated to collect data, using the participation of 10 EFL postgraduate students who were learning at Van Lang University. The qualitative study indicates that students feel satisfied with both approaches; however, they all claimed that although their peers take more time to complete revision, those comments are more in-depth and constructive. Grammarly is fast but sometimes inappropriate and limited. Moreover, more learners prefer peer feedback. It is highly recommended that this study serve as a database for further quantitative research on other groups of participants.

Introduction

In this day and age, the teaching of writing has dramatically changed its focus from writing outcomes to the writing process. Hence, providing feedback has become a crucial aspect for EFL learners. In the past, educators were responsible for offering comments on their students' writing tasks. However, the introduction of peer feedback has emerged as a new approach to further develop students' writing skills (Asper et al., 2024; Zeevy-Solovey, 2024). Generally, peer feedback is an evaluative process where students receive assessments and grades from their peers (Falchikov, 2001; Pham et al., 2020) with this type of activity, students are required to make comments on their friends' works in written or oral form with the purpose of improving them (Liu & Hansen, 2002). Moreover, several researchers have proven that this type of evaluation can bring a whole host of advantages to L2 classes, especially the writing ones. First of all, one of the major benefits of applying peer response activities in writing classes is that

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students can effectively fix their writing thanks to comments made by their peers (Robinson, 2005; Wakabayashi, 2013; Pham et al., 2020; Latifi et al., 2023). Along the same line with that, Pratama and Arriyani (2021) found that even students with low motivation in studying are still able to enhance their writing abilities through the implementation of peer response activities. Besides that, Liu and Carless (2006) argue that this kind of assessment can be beneficial in developing students' detection and revising their work.

Since the emergence of technological advancements, the Automated writing evaluation (AWE) program, a computer-based platform, has been the center of attention. In general, this type of program has the ability to utilize sophisticated language analysis methods to offer writers immediate, detailed, and comprehensive feedback on their lexicon, grammar, and spelling, facilitating improvements in their writing (Warschauer & Ware, 2006; Cotos, 2011; Grimes & Warschauer, 2010). Moreover, by using a technique called "natural language processing", some programs recently are even able to process and diagnose an overall score for people's writing works (Shermis & Burstein, 2003, p37; Grimes & Warschauer, 2010; Hockly, 2019). Thanks to those feedback and scoring mechanisms, students can save time in previewing their works and then have suitable corrections, leading to enhanced versions of their writing (Stevenson & Phakiti, 2014; Parra & Calero, 2019; Fahmi & Cahyono, 2021). Overall, the AWE program is a perfect assistant for EFL learners in terms of analyzing, evaluating, and scoring.

Among the different Automated Writing Evaluation (AWE) programs available, Grammarly stands out as a highly commendable choice due to its valuable features and user-friendly interface, making it a recommended tool for integrating into writing classes (Fahmi & Cahyono, 2021). The founders of Grammarly (2020) emphasize its reputation as a user-friendly and effective learning aid that assists learners in addressing their writing needs. For better clarity and readability, Grammarly can provide insightful feedback that generates corrections and suggestions for better clarity and readability by proficiently detecting all kinds of errors (spelling, grammar, and punctuation). The platform is renowned for its exceptional accuracy in evaluating written content, ensuring error-free and impactful writing.

Statement of the problem

In general, peer feedback or Grammarly feedback offers notable advantages in different sectors, and both methods significantly contribute to the improvement of writing skills and outcomes among EFL learners. However, the study conducted by Fahmi and Cahyono (2021) reveals that students express partial satisfaction with the use of Grammarly feedback alone; instead, they prefer a combination of feedback from their teachers and Grammarly. Furthermore, Ghufon (2019) states the application of the Grammarly platform in EFL writing has been shown to have a positive impact on error reduction, but the website is not as effective in detecting the content of students' writing, a task that peers are capable of finishing (Pham & Usaha, 2016).

On the other hand, cultural factors pose a significant challenge to the effectiveness of peer feedback (Chareonsuk, 2011). In Asian countries, where relationships are built on mutual respect, individuals tend to avoid actions that may cause others to lose face (Chareonsuk, 2011); hence, students often feel hesitant to provide comments when being asked to evaluate their peers' writing; resulting in comments that lack quality and sincerity (Kunwongse, 2013). Moreover, the lack of guidelines can lead students to focus on surface errors rather than content, potentially hindering meaningful revisions and improvements. Another issue is that since providing feedback on students' work has traditionally been a teacher's responsibility, students often lack the necessary assessment skills and feel reluctant to evaluate their peers' work when asked to do so (Le, 2023). Last but not least, younger and less experienced students may struggle to provide constructive feedback, leading to ineffective learning experiences (Hutt et al., 2024).

The purpose of the study

With all of the problems mentioned above, the authors may examine how EFL postgraduate students feel and think about peer response activities and Grammarly feedback and in which aspects they are satisfied or dissatisfied with the two methods. Ultimately, the authors aim to identify which approach provides more constructive feedback for students' writing based on their opinions. Therefore, the paper's primary objective is to analyze EFL postgraduate students' perceptions of the implementation of Grammarly and peer feedback to enhance their writing skills.

The significance of the study

This paper serves as a scientific record that represents the perspectives of EFL postgraduate students on utilizing Grammarly feedback and peer feedback to enhance their writing abilities. In addition, this research aims to explore the incorporation of blended feedback in an academic writing class. Hence, this study hopes to make a great contribution to the current body of knowledge regarding the use of Grammarly feedback and peer response activities in various settings and subjects. Moreover, it suggests the potential for future researchers to integrate this study into their own investigations to attain a more comprehensive understanding within the same field.

Literature review

Definition of "academic writing skills"

According to Jones (1994, as cited in Iftanti, 2016), writing skills are defined as (1) the ability to choose appropriate words and grammatical structures for different purposes and topics; (2) the ability to state clear ideas and organize them in order while still maintain the coherence between sentences, paragraphs and parts of articles; (3) the ability to correct writing errors.

In a broad context, writing can be classified into two distinct branches: academic writing and creative writing. Academic writing is distinguished from creative writing to some extent. Specifically, while the latter focuses mostly on creativity and the use of informal language (slang or abbreviations), the former is mainly about the structured organization of sentences and formal language (Oshima & Hogue, 2007, p3). As stated by Irvin (2010), good academic writing is one that can necessitate the demonstration of comprehensive knowledge and the display of adeptness in specific cognitive abilities such as critical thinking, interpretation, and proficient presentation within the context of disciplinary domains.

Definition of "perception"

Previous papers have claimed that there is no definition of "perception" and that it may vary from researcher to researcher. Efron (1969) found that perception serves as the fundamental way for individuals to mentally connect with the world surrounding them, and all our conceptual understanding is built upon and originates from this initial mode of consciousness. In the same line, Nurzakiah (2021) finds that perception roots in "precipice" - a Latin word that involves receiving input and interpreting signals to have experiences or make connections.

Crane (2005) argues that perception is the thoughts of people about the world around them formed by the five senses (hearing, listening, touching, tasting, and watching). Similarly, in the paper of Epstein et al. (2023), perception in humans refers to the transformation of sensory input into structured and meaningful experiences that result from the cooperation of sensory stimulation and the underlying cognitive processes. In addition, according to the Oxford

Learner's Dictionaries, perception is defined in different ways: (1) an image or a belief that is formed as a result of an individual's understanding of something; (2) a way people think or feel about something, especially through five senses.

According to Ghadirian et al. (2018), perception is characterized as a series of actions with the purpose of acquiring knowledge or information within the field of education. This process can occur through exposure to different environments experienced by learners. Freiberg (1999) even emphasizes that learners' perception is a primary element of education improvement.

Despite the various definitions surrounding perception, this study emphasizes perception as a subjective thought of EFL postgraduate learners influenced by a long period of experience with two evaluative methods.

Local and global revision

It is a fact that there are two distinct areas in writing, global and local, and several differences are pointed out between them. About the definitions, on the one hand, people engage in local revision when they just change one to two words in a sentence, which can just have an impact only on a few sentences, while global revision involves making changes to one part of a passage that subsequently requires modifications in other parts of it (Ramage et al., 2011). In the same line, local revision refers to the connections between neighboring clauses within a text, but global cohesion refers to the cohesive elements and structures that connect and unify larger discourse units such as paragraphs and sections (Van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983).

In terms of areas of focus, the main focus of global revision includes ideas, purpose, cohesion, content, reader, coherence, and organization (Ramage et al., 2011). Similarly, Bridwell (1980) supported that global revisions encompass substantial alterations carried out at different levels, including individual sentences, paragraphs, and the text's overall structure. These revisions primarily focus on the meaning and semantics of the text and require actions such as removing, relocating, adding, changing, or fixing ideas across the text. On the other hand, local revision focuses on addressing errors related to spelling, grammar, and mechanics (Ramage et al., 2011). From the view of Hayes (2000), the researcher considers the process of local revision as the problem-solving activity in which reviewers skim through a writing outcome to detect and fix mistakes and may ignore the comprehension factor of the writing.

Regarding the importance of local and global revision, it is argued by Bransford and Johnson (1972, as cited in McNamara et al., 2002) that texts that are just locally revised can hinder understanding, texts that maintain a clear overall structure but lack coherence due to grammatical or spelling errors can pose challenges for reading and comprehension. As opposed to the previous finding, Crossley and McNamara (2011) argue that just global revision can benefit the quality of writing. In the same way, Butler and Britt (2011) also claimed that the effectiveness of local revision in enhancing the writing quality of students' works is not comparable to that of global revision.

Based on those previous definitions and arguments about local and global revision, the research will analyze EFL postgraduate students' perceptions of local and global revision comments provided by Grammarly feedback and peer feedback to determine which element is more effective and preferable.

Previous studies

Numerous studies conducted around the world have explored how EFL learners perceive the utilization of Grammar feedback and peer response activities to develop the quality of their writing achievements.

The perception of learners toward peer feedback

Regarding peer feedback, through semi-structured interviews, Ebadi and Rahimi (2017) found that their participants feel positive about the implication of traditional and online peer editing activities in their writing classes. It has been demonstrated that both approaches contribute positively to enhancing students' academic writing capabilities. In the same vein, Huisman and co-authors (2018) claim that regardless of whether they are receiving or giving feedback, participants consistently reported that such comments positively develop the quality of their writing. In addition, participants expressed a preference for explanatory feedback over analytical one.

Although it is a big concern that students who lack prior exposure to peer feedback can encounter several problems and think negatively about the method, Kasch et al. (2021) prove the opposite view. According to their study, even students who have never encountered peer feedback before are willing to use peer feedback and acknowledge the method's usefulness. In the context of online learning, peer feedback still expresses its potential. The findings of Noroozi and Mulder (2017) and Taghizadeh Kerman et al. (2022) have demonstrated a noteworthy correlation between student's perception of the value and credibility of peer feedback and their overall satisfaction with their learning experience. Similarly, in the study about integrating blog-based peer comments to improve learners' writing skills conducted in Vietnam, Pham and Usaha (2016) found that EFL students treasure feedback from their classmates. As explained by Misiejuk et al. (2021), students who find peer feedback to be valuable are more inclined to accept it, and this acceptance is evident through their acknowledgment of mistakes, expressing a wish to make revisions, recognizing the effectiveness of the feedback provided by their peers. More than developing learners' writing competence, students themselves can even trigger their review and critique abilities, which is a foundation for critical thinking (Lee, 2017). Overall, it is determined that students at different levels perceive the activity positively and recognize the potential of the method to enhance their writing abilities.

However, it is unavoidable that some students may doubt the accuracy and validity of feedback from their colleagues. As found by Taghizadeh Kerman et al. (2022) and Burgess et al. (2013), several participants claimed that they lacked belief and confidence in their peers' knowledge and ability, which made them express their hesitancy to engage in peer feedback practices. Hence, students gravitate toward expert feedback (Tai et al., 2015). Another reason leading to negative perceptions is that due to the lack of experience in rhetoric, learners tend to prioritize sentence-level aspects over ideas and organization of the writing, resulting in feedback that may be less helpful in improving overall writing quality (Hyland, 2003). Lastly, although constructive criticism is beneficial for students' writing, they have the tendency to ignore this type of feedback, as they do not want to feel negative (Ryan & Henderson, 2017).

Ho and his colleagues (2020) have researched the viewpoints of Vietnamese lecturers and their learners regarding written peer feedback in Vietnam. From the findings, the researchers point out that even EFL students who have never experienced peer feedback activities before still perceive it positively, as they acknowledge its value in providing opportunities for learning from peers and improving their writing competence. It has also been found that apart from improving students' writing abilities, peer feedback is useful for both receivers and givers (Dang, 2024). Moreover, Dang (2024) believes that through collaboration in peer feedback, users can develop their critical thinking skills, improve their social interactions, and strengthen their intellectual reasoning, which is necessary for their future careers.

On the contrary, Pham (2020) argues that even though peer editing activities have obtained

encouragement from EFL learners, some students still prefer feedback from instructors because they feel hesitant and uncertain about giving feedback on their peers' work. In the same vein, Vo (2022) claims that the preference for teacher correction also comes from the belief in teachers' academic abilities and the ability to deliver precise and detailed corrective feedback to students. Another issue Pham (2020) highlighted regarding the lack of enthusiasm for peer feedback activities is students' concern about embarrassing their peers. As a result, they are unwilling to join peer response activities.

The perception of learners towards Grammarly feedback

In terms of Grammarly feedback, most recent studies reveal that Grammarly has received a whole host of positive responses from users, particularly in writing classes. According to Fahmi and Cahyono's (2021) study, the participants shared their views on utilizing Grammarly to develop their writing proficiency; the results reveal that real-time feedback provided by Grammarly greatly influences students' writing development and helps save their time. In the same way, participants in the study conducted by Huang and co-researchers (2020, May) claim to like using Grammarly to revise their writing during writing classes; furthermore, their knowledge about grammatical points and writing structure also develops. In the same vein, Ghufron and Rosyida (2018) and Ghufon (2019) prove that with the incorporation of Grammarly, the number of spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors has decreased significantly.

Grammarly has proven its role as a useful evaluating assistant for EFL learners and a great assistant for English teachers. According to Wilson and Andrada (2016) and Lailika (2019), because Grammarly helps to revise students' writing works, teachers are able to noticeably reduce their workload and allocate more time towards supporting learners with their writing structure and organization.

However, it is pointed out that there are several concerns with Grammarly feedback in terms of validity and correctness. Some EFL students in the research of O'Neill and Russell (2019) expressed their negative feelings towards using Grammarly in writing tasks; the matter is that when the students used passive voice, some complex structures, or several word choices, Grammarly recommended them to modify for stylistic reasons rather than for accuracy, and the platform even failed to detect some errors. For example, sometimes students use passive voice structures, but Grammarly still suggests they convert to active ones, which may overshadow their unique voice and style. Besides that, students occasionally could not understand Grammarly's suggestions. Furthermore, Lailika (2019) and Fahmi and Cahyono (2021) reveal that learners who were not good at English expressed dissatisfaction with Grammarly, as those comments are misleading, which may cause difficulties for them. Another concern about this app is its limitations in accessing content and organization. According to Ghufron and Rosyida (2018), the website is not very effective when it comes to organizing content. This is because the system cannot tell if the student's writing stays on a topic or if their ideas are arranged in a logical way. Finally, many authors agree that the original version of Grammarly is not as effective as the premium one due to some limitations, but purchasing this version seems to be a financial burden for some students (Fitria, 2021; Fitriana & Laeli, 2022; Dewi, 2023).

Research gaps

Overall, it is clear that several gaps can be observed from previous studies. First, existing papers predominantly focus on examining students' perceptions of peer feedback (Gaynor, 2020; Misiejuk et al., 2021) or Grammarly feedback separately (O'Neill & Russell, 2019; Fitriana & Nurazni, 2022). In the end, there is a lack of materials investigating the perceptions of learners

on the combination of these two techniques. Next, most of the existing research has chosen undergraduate students and students at lower proficiency levels as their primary participants (Pham et al., 2020; Aidil, 2021; Fitriana & Nurazni, 2022), but there are nearly no research records about the utilization of Grammarly feedback and peer feedback, particularly at the postgraduate level.

Although there are numerous papers related to this field worldwide, not many of them are conducted in Vietnam, especially those about students' perceptions of Grammarly feedback. Additionally, Vietnamese researchers predominantly concentrate on investigating the usefulness or the pros and cons of such approaches, but not the perception. Consequently, it is urgent to conduct this study.

Research questions

1. What are the perceptions of EFL postgraduate learners about feedback from peers to enhance their writing quality?
2. What are the perceptions of EFL postgraduate learners about feedback from Grammarly to enhance their writing quality?
3. Which method is more effective for EFL postgraduate students, between Grammarly and peer feedback?

Methods

Participants

The study took place during the third semester of the academic year 2022-2023, within the Research Writing class at the Faculty of Foreign Languages of a prestigious university in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam—Van Lang University.

The sampling technique that was applied was the convenience sampling technique. According to Andrade (2021), convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where samples are drawn from a population that is easily accessible to the researcher. In other words, convenience sampling involves selecting readily available participants, such as students in a classroom or individuals in a specific location. The researchers selected this sampling method because their classmates were readily accessible, facilitating observation and data collection. Additionally, conducting the study with Master's students from other classes was not feasible due to scheduling conflicts.

The class consisted of 10 students, all of whom held a Bachelor's degree in language-related fields and are currently pursuing a Master's degree program. The age range of the participants ranged from 23 to 32 years old. Furthermore, these EFL postgraduate students have accumulated over 10 years of experience in English language learning. In terms of the participants' English proficiency, it is worth noting that each learner had to meet a minimum requirement of B2 CEFR level or higher in English to be accepted into the Master's program, as followed by the entrance requirements. It is worth noting that their primary motivations for learning English included job promotion and further academic pursuits.

Design of the study

A qualitative study was conducted with 10 EFL postgraduate students' participation in a Research Writing class. During the Research Writing class, the learners were taught how to write various types of paragraphs and essays in an academic and professional way. Following each lecture, the EFL postgraduate students were assigned a writing task that they would

collaboratively complete in groups, as required by the lecturer. When completed, the assignments would be reviewed by both Grammarly and the other colleagues in the class. With the feedback received, the students then revised their work before submitting it to the lecturer.

On the final day of the course, the students participated in structured interviews with the researchers so as to deepen their perceptions of these two methods. The reason why we chose to utilize this interview method was due to its advantages. According to Lune and Berg (2017), this type of interview allows researchers to effectively gather information in terms of students' thoughts and attitudes on study-related issues. Additionally, Peus et al. (2013) argued that the structured approach provides a specific context for interviewees, which facilitates a more customized evaluation. Last but not least, as compared to unstructured interviews, structured ones offer a higher level of validity and reduce the potential for additional risks (Levashina et al., 2014).

Procedure

The study was conducted at the beginning of the third semester of the academic year 2022-2023. Prior to conducting the research, the author obtained permission from Prof. Vu Phi Ho Pham, the lecturer responsible for teaching the Research Writing course. At the first session of the course, the lecturer provided an overview of the course syllabus, introduced the notion of peer feedback, as well as guided the students on effectively integrating peer feedback into their writing process. After that, the researchers provided the students with comprehensive instructions on the utilization of Grammarly as a tool for assessing and reviewing their assignments.

After the course introduction, 10 EFL postgraduate students participating in the study were put into four groups to facilitate peer feedback activities. Two groups consisted of three members each, while the remaining two groups comprised two members each. The purpose of grouping them is for peer feedback activities afterwards, and it is crucial to note that the groups were carefully formed to ensure that the members possessed similar language proficiency levels. All participants achieved a good to excellent Bachelor's degree from different universities across Vietnam.

Students would be assigned a group writing task after each lesson to collect data for the research. For the first two weeks, they would write opinion paragraphs to discuss the following topics: "Collaborative learning" and "No one is perfect". In the 3rd week, an argument essay about "The implementation of ChatGPT in learning" was given to EFL postgraduate students. In the following week, the participants were required to write a cause-effect paragraph about the topic "The effects of technology or mobile devices on L2 learning". During the 5th and 6th sessions, the EFL postgraduate learners were tasked with completing summary and critique paragraphs based on a paper provided by the lecturer. The students were expected to write their final paper's introduction and literature review in the next two weeks. The final three weeks were for knowledge revision and teacher feedback.

Throughout the course, students completed eight writing assignments. Before submitting their work to the lecturer, each group was encouraged to seek feedback from two other groups. The EFL postgraduate students used a checklist when reviewing their peers' work to ensure that the feedback was constructive and helpful. When giving feedback on their peers' writing, the students were asked to focus on four elements: task achievement, coherence and cohesion, grammatical structures, and lexical resources. For the task achievement criterion, students should evaluate how effectively the writer responds to the prompt, develops ideas, and includes relevant examples or arguments. Secondly, in terms of coherence and cohesion, students need

to analyze the logical arrangement of ideas, the flow between sentences and paragraphs, and the appropriate use of linking words to create cohesive and well-structured writing. Furthermore, the grammatical structures criterion emphasizes the diversity and accuracy of sentence forms, ranging from simple to complex, ensuring that any errors do not hinder understanding. Lastly, students assess the writer's ability to employ a wide range of vocabulary accurately, including less common vocabulary, while maintaining clarity and avoiding repetition or misuse of words.

At the same time, students uploaded their assignments to Grammarly for further editing. This feedback and revision process took place outside of class and before the submission of the final homework assignments. Once feedback from both peer evaluations and Grammarly was incorporated, students revised their work and submitted the edited versions. Additionally, they were asked to record their feelings and opinions about the process to support later interviews.

After experiencing peer feedback and Grammarly feedback for the whole course, the researchers conducted structured interviews with each participant on the final day of the course. The aim was to explore their opinions and feelings about using these two methods to assess their writing. The interviews were conducted in a face-to-face setting within the classroom and lasted approximately 20 to 30 minutes. The researcher needed to obtain permission from the 10 EFL postgraduate students to conduct interviews.

Data collection and analysis

The figures were gathered through structured interviews. At the first stage of each interview session, the author spent a few minutes breaking the ice and collecting some of their personal information, including their age, current job, and duration of English language learning. When ensuring that the interviewees were completely comfortable, the author provided an overview of the study, including the title, purpose, and other relevant details. The author also encouraged the interviewees to provide honest responses from what they had experienced so far so as to avoid bias. The author also used a phone to record each interview section to facilitate the data collection process, which was also informed to the participants.

Overall, the authors interviewed the participants with a total of 16 questions divided into three main sections. Before coming to the final questions list, the researchers piloted it many times with support and feedback from Dr. Vu Phi Ho Pham. The first section, comprising seven questions, aimed to gather the participants' perceptions of Grammarly feedback. The second part also consisted of 7 questions about students' perception of peer feedback. In the first two sections, there are five open-ended questions, one yes-no question, and one question in the form of the five-point Likert scale, including Very satisfied, Satisfied, Neutral, Dissatisfied, and Very Dissatisfied to collect data about the level of satisfaction of the participants towards the implementation of Grammarly and peer feedback in enhancing their writing competence. In the final section, the interviewees needed to choose the preferred method and explain why. These interviews wished to comprehensively explore students' perceptions, so each interview lasted about 20 to 30 minutes.

After having all of the data, the author started to listen to the recorded audio and noted down the answers in a Word document for analysis.

Results/ Findings

This section will show readers data resulting from interviews. The data analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for Social and Science (SPSS) version 22, and the findings were visualized through tables and pie charts. The analysis includes numerical measurements such as mean, percentage, and St.derivation (SD). Five headings, like demographic information, focused areas of Grammarly and peer feedback, peer feedback, Grammarly feedback, and peer feedback vs. Grammarly feedback, clarify the findings.

Demographic information

Table 1

The personal information of participants

Student	Gender	Group
Student 1	Female	Group 1
Student 2	Female	
Student 3	Female	
Student 4	Female	Group 2
Student 5	Male	
Student 6	Female	Group 3
Student 7	Female	
Student 8	Female	
Student 9	Female	Group 4
Student 10	Male	

As stated above, 10 EFL postgraduate students participated in the interviews. Most of them were female, while there were only two male students.

Focused areas of Grammarly feedback and peer feedback

Charts 1 and 2

Focused areas of feedback
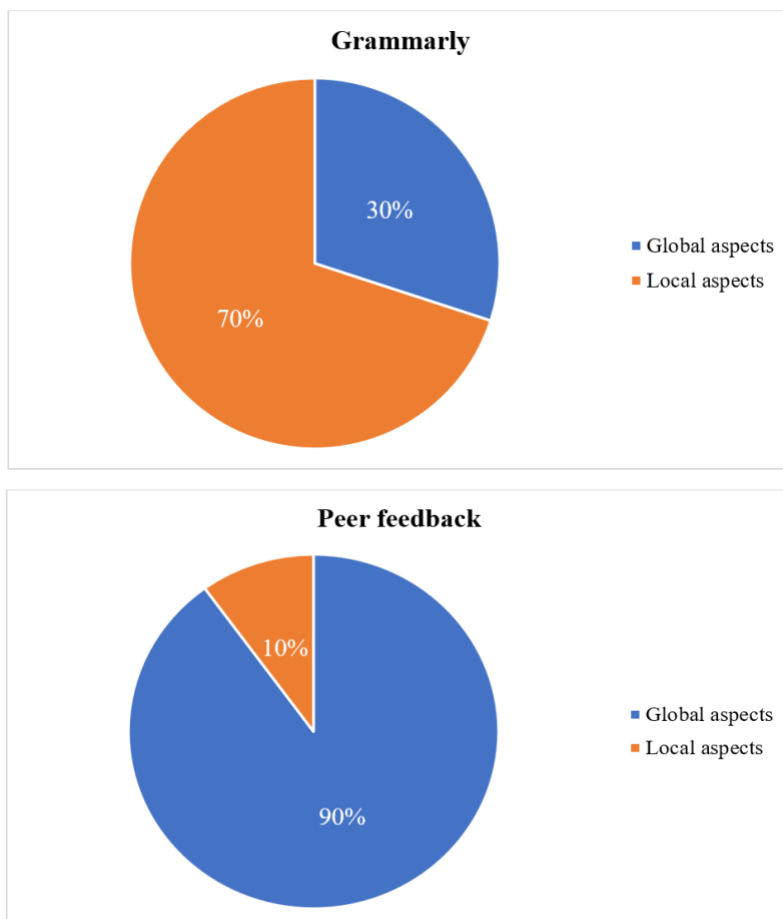
The first two pie charts illustrate the focused areas of feedback that EFL postgraduate students obtained from both Grammarly and peer feedback. Based on the course curriculum, there are 13 factors of writing assessment, including Grammar, Vocabulary, Word order, Punctuation, Capitalization, Spelling, Collocation, Ideas, Content, Cohesion, Organization, and Citation. These factors are categorized into two main groups: Global aspects and Local aspects. The global aspects include Ideas, Content, Organization, Cohesion, and Citation. The remaining factors belong to local aspects.

According to the interviews, EFL postgraduate students reported that the majority of feedback they received from Grammarly was related to local revision (70%), and only 30% of those comments were global revision. On the other hand, whereas their classmates concentrated more on global revision, accounting for 90%, the remaining 10% of the feedback addressed local aspects. Overall, it can be seen that while Grammarly predominantly focused on local assessment, peer feedback primarily addressed global factors.

Peer feedback

Table 2.

Levels of satisfaction

Questions	VD%	D%	N%	S%	VS%	Mean	SD	Decision
How satisfied are you with peer feedback?	0	0	10	50	40	2	2.35	F

Table 2 illustrates data about the interviewees' satisfaction levels with peer editing activities. The mean score is 2, with most of the students expressing satisfaction with the method. Four students reported high levels of satisfaction, five students felt satisfied with peer feedback, and only one student had a neutral perspective. Fortunately, no students expressed negative feelings toward the peer response activities.

Why are you satisfied with peer feedback?

EFL postgraduate students expressed satisfaction with the feedback from their peers due to several beneficial aspects. First of all, thanks to high quality and constructive comments in terms of global factors from their classmates, their writing skills have improved in leaps and bounds. Students 8 and 9 specifically mentioned that the comments from their peers proved more practical and effective than the feedback from Grammarly. This was attributed to the peers' ability to consider the work's purpose, audience, and style, leading to suggestions that aligned better with the writers' intentions.

Secondly, the logic of the content is also very important. According to the responses of Student 6 and Student 9, their friends' global feedback guided them in choosing the best ideas for their writing works and organizing those ideas in a logical order.

The next factor is that the activities allowed them to broaden their knowledge and identify areas of weakness in their writing. Students 3, 4, 6, and 7 reported that they all expressed their interest in peer response activities, as they provided valuable opportunities for improvement and learning.

Next, Student 6 also emphasized that discussing the feedback obtained with peers enhanced their critical thinking abilities.

Last but not least, Student 1 emphasized the convenience of immediately meeting with classmates in class to discuss and gain further understanding when faced with comments that were initially unclear to them.

Have you ever encountered any difficulties with peer feedback? If yes, what are they?

The majority of EFL postgraduate students encountered several challenges with peer response activities. One of the primary problems was the feedback quality. The interviewees shared that certain peers did not approach the activities with seriousness, resulting in ambiguous or unhelpful comments, which did not improve the writing but made it worse. In addition, some of my classmates only gave normal and general praise, such as "good" or "excellent", without showing any errors in the writing. This led to dissatisfaction among the research participants, who expected more constructive feedback.

The second challenge identified was the limitation of time. Specifically, students were typically given approximately four days to leave comments on their peers' writing assignments, and this limited time often forced them to rush, leading to incomplete or low-quality evaluations. The students themselves also felt that the insufficient time did not allow them to provide thorough

and helpful comments.

Thirdly, although EFL postgraduate students in this Master's course were already good at English, varying levels of expertise and knowledge among peers could lead to confusing or unsuitable feedback. As a result, EFL postgraduate students needed to carefully select the ones that were most appropriate for their writing.

Lastly, peer feedback can also be influenced by biases, personal perspectives, subjective opinions, and cultural differences, which can result in feedback that does not align with the intended goals and objectives or the targeted audience.

Grammarly feedback

Table 3

Levels of satisfaction

Questions	VD%	D%	N%	S%	VS%	Mean	SD	Decision
How satisfied are you with Grammarly feedback?	0	10	30	60	0	2	2.55	F

Table 3 illustrates information about the participants' levels of satisfaction with Grammarly feedback. Overall, the mean score is 2, with the majority of EFL postgraduate students feeling satisfied with the implementation of Grammarly feedback. Three students felt neutral about the method, and only one student expressed the opposite idea.

Why are you satisfied with Grammarly's feedback?

In response to this question, Student 6 highlighted the convenience of Grammarly, emphasizing the simplicity of pasting their text and instantly receiving feedback within a minute, which is so fast. Students 3, 4, and 7 also recognized Grammarly's ability to identify grammar and spelling mistakes that their peers tended to overlook during self-editing. In the same vein, Student 10 even claimed that "because Grammarly follows predefined grammar rules and algorithms, offering a standardized evaluation, users can rely on its consistency and trust in its suggestions for error correction and language improvement ."Furthermore, due to real-time feedback, students can now save time and effort in editing and evaluating their writing works, as stated by Students 7 and 9.

Additionally, some students expressed the usefulness of Grammarly feedback in correcting punctuation errors, as the platform helped improve the clarity of their writing. Another aspect that pleased EFL postgraduate students was the app's ability to transform sentence structures to make the writing clearer, more powerful, engaging, and less wordy; for example, it would change passive voice structures into active voice. The overall predicted score was also a plus for the platform.

One of the last things the interviewees mentioned was Grammarly's accessibility and availability. The students explained that Grammarly is accessible online and through various platforms such as web browsers, desktop applications, and mobile apps, which enables users to receive assistance with their writing whenever they want.

Why are you dissatisfied with Grammarly's feedback?

Student 8 expressed her dissatisfaction with how Grammarly feedback was used in the Research Writing class for several reasons. First, the app seemed to focus more on correcting local aspects such as grammar, vocabulary, or spelling mistakes while ignoring global aspects like content, organization, cohesion, etc. This she personally did not appreciate since she believed that she

and her friends could handle them on their own.

Secondly, sometimes some of her sentences were grammatically wrong, but the website still claimed them as correct, causing confusion and frustration. This inconsistency undermined her trust in the accuracy of Grammarly's feedback.

The last reason was that some of the feedback from Grammarly resulted in changes that completely altered the meaning and intention of her original sentences.

Have you ever encountered any difficulties with Grammarly feedback? If yes, what are they?

9 out of 10 EFL postgraduate students claimed that they had encountered several challenges when using the Grammarly platform, and the most common one is about contextual understanding. Student 9 reported that Grammarly might sometimes struggle to understand the context or specific nuances of a particular sentence, leading to incorrect suggestions. Besides that, it primarily relies on patterns and rules, which may not accurately capture the intended meaning.

In the same vein as her, Student 10 claimed that Grammarly's primary focus is on grammar, spelling, and clarity, often overlooking the broader aspects of content, structure, and logical flow in a piece of writing. For example, Grammarly may not address issues related to the logical progression of ideas or provide suggestions for restructuring paragraphs to improve the flow of the text. As a result, Grammarly might suggest corrections that were not always appropriate for the particular context or writing style, as stated by Student 7.

In addition, when it comes to longer text pieces, the website was unable to detect structural and organizational issues, leading to frustration for Student 7.

Finally, citations are significant in academic writing, and the website's weakness is its inability to identify citation errors. As Student 6 reported, the website failed to highlight any citation mistakes that her peers easily pointed out.

Peer feedback vs Grammarly feedback

This part will provide information about which method is preferred by more EFL learners and the reasons for their choice.

Chart 3

A popular method among EFL postgraduate learners
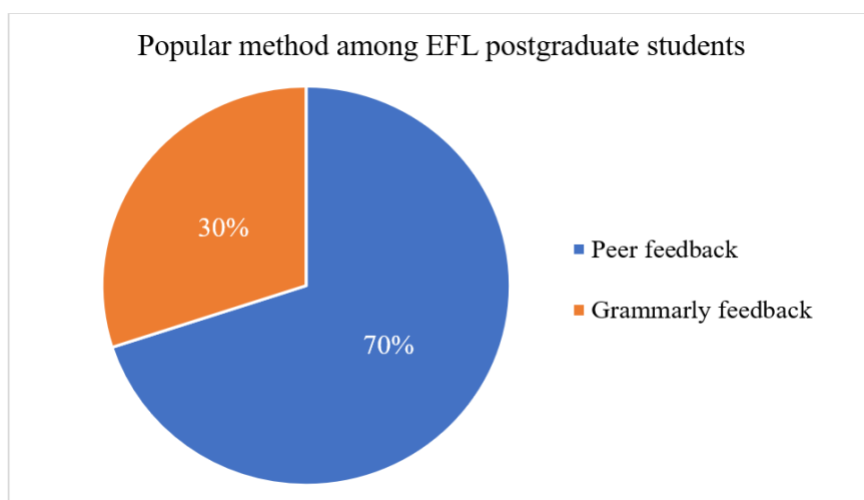
The pie chart above provides an insightful comparison of the preferences of EFL postgraduate learners regarding two different feedback methods, peer feedback and Grammarly feedback. The data highlights a clear trend in favor of peer response activities, with a substantial majority of the interviewees (70%) strongly prefer this method to develop their academic writing skills. On the other hand, a smaller proportion, comprising only 30% of the entire class, leaned towards using Grammarly feedback. Overall, it is clearly stated that peer feedback activities were more favorable towards postgraduate EFL learners than Grammarly.

Why did you choose peer feedback?

First and foremost, the reason why EFL postgraduate students prefer peer response activities was that they had a strong belief in their peers, as they clearly understood the ideas the writers were aiming for, rather than a machine program like Grammarly, as stated by Students 1, 3, and 8. As a result, most of the feedback from their peers related to coherence, clarity, cohesion, and organization were more helpful for academic writing works. Even if there were misunderstandings, the writers could easily clarify and double-check with their friends, making the feedback more detailed, reliable, and constructive.

Furthermore, according to Student 2, 4, and 7, thanks to the method, they could find their weaknesses and areas for improvement in global and local fields while Grammarly was more likely to provide them with feedback in local fields. They also found the feedback to be a valuable learning resource in terms of grammar, ideas, content, organization, and vocabulary.

Lastly, the uniqueness of peer comments was a noteworthy factor. Student 8 highlighted that these comments were based on their peers' personal observations and understanding, leading to different viewpoints about her writing. This diversity of perspectives allowed writers to gain fresh insights into their own works.

Why did you choose Grammarly feedback?

One of the primary reasons that Grammarly outperformed peer feedback was immediate and automated suggestions. Students 6 and 9 highlighted the convenience of receiving instant corrections by simply pasting their text into Grammarly. This eliminated the waiting time of 3 to 4 days that peer feedback required, which was time-saving and suitable for those who prefer efficiency and a seamless writing experience.

The next factor was unbiased evaluation, as stated by Student 9. As Grammarly suggestions are based on predefined grammar rules, it was able to offer a standardized evaluation unlike peer feedback, which was influenced by personal biases or subjective opinions. Therefore, Grammarly could provide a more impartial assessment of the work.

Last but not least, in addition to grammatical corrections, Grammarly could offer suggestions on improving clarity, conciseness, and tone to improve the overall quality of the writing.

Discussion

Question 1: What are the perceptions of EFL postgraduate learners about feedback from peers to enhance their writing quality?

Regarding this question, Table 2 shows that 90% of the interviewees shared positive or very positive responses towards the method in many aspects, which has been investigated in the study of Ebadi and Rahimi (2017). Most of the EFL postgraduate students agreed that by implementing peer feedback into writing, the students got effective and constructive feedback rather than surface-level feedback from Grammarly; sometimes, their friends helped them

eliminate irrelevant ideas. Hence, the learners could improve their writing competence and the quality of their writing in terms of context organization and cohesion. The findings align with those of Huisman et al. (2018), Pham et al. (2020), and Latifi et al. (2023). By discussing with their classmates vague comments, the EFL postgraduate students could develop their critical thinking and foster a more analytical and reflective approach to their own writing, as in correspondence with the studies of Yang et al. (2006), Ekahitanond (2013), Novakovich (2016), and Vo (2022). In Vo's study (2022), the author explained that discussing those comments with friends motivates them to communicate effectively and helps students understand the problems clearly.

Furthermore, the students highlighted that peer feedback offered them a chance to expand their knowledge horizons. Through their peers' feedback, they were able to discover new vocabulary or writing styles and identify areas of weakness in their writing abilities. This observation aligned with the findings of Yang (2016), Kuyyogsuy (2019), and Bui et al. (2021), which also emphasized the positive influence of peer feedback on vocabulary acquisition and self-awareness of writing deficiencies. Consequently, peer feedback was regarded as a valuable and beneficial editing activity in writing classes.

On the other hand, the EFL postgraduate students viewed aspects of peer evaluation negatively. One significant concern was the quality of feedback received from unenthusiastic peers, who often provided vague, unconstructive, and unhelpful comments. This issue undermined the overall effectiveness of the feedback process, and this problem is aligned with the study of Vo (2022). Additionally, the EFL students expressed dissatisfaction with the limited time required to provide feedback. The time constraint restricted their ability to offer thoughtful and detailed comments, as supported by the research conducted by Rollinson (2005) and Kuyyogsuy (2019). Furthermore, the presence of varying levels of expertise and knowledge among peers could lead to differences in perspectives. Consequently, an idea that may seem suitable to one individual could be perceived as irrelevant by others, potentially resulting in conflicts and disagreements, as highlighted by Kuyyogsuy (2019). Finally, in cases where the students had close relationships with their peers or wished to maintain harmony within the class, they tended to provide biased comments to avoid making the writers, correlating with the research of Kunwongse (2013), Kuyyogsuy (2019), and Vo (2022).

Question 2: What are the perceptions of EFL postgraduate learners about feedback from Grammarly to enhance their writing quality?

In reference to the figures collected from the interview, the EFL postgraduate learners expressed favorable views regarding the integration of Grammarly in their academic writing class. Most learners praised Grammarly for its ability to provide instant and automated feedback, making the feedback process faster and more convenient. This result was also aligned with the result of previous papers by Wilson and Czik (2016), Fahmi and Cahyono (2021), and Dewi (2022), which found that Grammarly supported users to save their time in the revision stage; therefore, the writers themselves had more time to edit carefully before submitting their works. Meanwhile, the platform was able to provide detailed and helpful corrections, particularly on grammar and linguistics aspects, focusing mainly on local revisions, it also offered suggestions about clarity, conciseness, and tone improvement, which reduced the number of errors in their writing (Wilson & Czik, 2016; Ghufron & Rosyida, 2018; Fitriana & Nurazni, 2022; Dewi, 2022; Astuti et al., 2023). Besides that, the scoring system was a standout feature of the program that received high satisfaction from users. It allowed the EFL postgraduate students to access the quality of their work and edit it for better grades, which correlates with the findings of Astuti et al. (2023). The EFL postgraduate students also regarded the website well in terms of

accessibility and availability. This finding shares the same view with O'Neill and Russell (2019), Dewi (2022), Fitriana and Nurazni (2022), and Astuti et al. (2023), all of whom indicate that the app can be accessed anywhere and on any electronic device such as phones, computers, or laptops as well as its integration with Microsoft Word. The last feature, but also the most important one, was the unbiased evaluation, which significantly elevated the quality of the students' writing works, which corresponds to the statement of Astuti et al. (2023).

Nevertheless, misleading feedback contributed to reducing the level of trust of the users towards the program; those comments changed the intended meaning and intention completely, causing frustration among the EFL postgraduate students. The finding is in line with previous papers of Nova and Lukmana (2018), O'Neill and Russell (2019), and Fahmi and Cahyono (2021). Furthermore, when dealing with longer texts, Grammarly showed limitations in detecting errors, especially in citation, which subsequently affected the overall writing quality and this result is also highlighted in the studies of Nova and Lukmana (2018), O'Neill and Russell (2019), and Astuti et al. (2023). Grammarly is also proved to be less efficient in providing suggestions in terms of context improvement, restructuring ideas, and understanding some specialized terms, as also highlighted in the studies of Ghufron & Rosyida (2018), Ghufon (2019), Javier (2022), and Astuti et al. (2023). Lastly, it is noticeable that Grammarly predominantly gave feedback on local aspects rather than global ones, which the students at the high proficiency level did not highly appreciate.

Question 3: Between Grammarly and peer feedback, which method is more effective according to EFL postgraduate students?

In terms of the third question about the preferred method, the figures indicated that over two-thirds of the EFL postgraduate students gravitated towards peer feedback activities. The findings show that the EFL postgraduate students valued global revisions of peer feedback more than those local comments offered by Grammarly. The current finding corresponds with that of Huisman and co-authors (2018), who discovered that students enrolling in academic writing classes tend to prefer explanatory feedback more than analytical feedback. The top reason for this is that the students themselves could handle grammatical, lexicon, or spelling errors while Grammarly was found to be less efficient in adjusting organization and content (Ghufron & Rosyida, 2018). In other words, the higher English proficiency levels are the lower expectations for local revisions.

Conclusion

The primary objectives of the research are to investigate the perceptions of the EFL postgraduate learners on the integration of peer feedback and Grammarly feedback in improving their academic writing skills, as well as to determine which approach is more effective. Through employing the interview method, the study has successfully unveiled that the implementation of peer feedback and Grammarly feedback in the Research Writing course obtained good responses from the EFL postgraduate students. The findings demonstrate that the postgraduate students particularly valued peer feedback for its ability to facilitate global revision, foster critical thinking development, enhance their overall knowledge, etc. On the other hand, Grammarly feedback was commended for its real-time feedback, error reduction, easy accessibility and availability, etc.

It is also pointed out that for the EFL postgraduate students, peer feedback totally outperformed Grammarly feedback, primarily due to their strong appreciation for global revision as opposed to the focus on local revision. Another reason was that with peer feedback, the students could

discuss comments with their friends, while they could not do that with Grammarly.

Recommendations

We believe that English teachers should consider integrating peer feedback into their writing class so as to save time in accessing students' works and foster critical thinking skills among students. However, it is essential to consider students' English levels, especially when it comes to undergraduate students, due to the fact that different proficiency levels may need their own approach. For example, with students at A1 to B1 CEFR levels, instead of giving a whole text and asking them to give feedback to their friends, it is more commendable for teachers to break down the text into small sections so that the students can easily point out their friends' mistakes and then provided feedback. While with high-proficiency students (B2 to C2 CEFR levels), teachers can totally provide learners with a whole text and then ask them for review. Regardless of the students' proficiency levels, it is important to provide a checklist that outlines the assessment and evaluation criteria for various aspects such as task achievement, coherence and cohesion, vocabulary, and grammar. This checklist serves as a helpful tool for students to provide feedback to their peers in a more detailed and precise manner. Students can focus on specific criteria by referring to the checklist, ensuring that their feedback covers the necessary elements.

Besides that, with students at lower English proficiency levels - from A1 to B1 CEFR levels, English teachers can consider implementing Grammarly into their class due to the fact that the program can support them in terms of local revision so that the teachers can allocate more time to instruct students about how to organize ideas in a paragraph or essay and other global aspects. By tailoring the feedback approach to the student's language proficiency levels, educators can effectively enhance their students' writing skills and overall learning experience.

Nevertheless, it is also essential to consider the amount of time allocated for peer response activities. As the findings show, limited time can negatively impact the quality of peer feedback. Indeed, by taking into account the complexity of each writing task and their students' proficiency levels, English teachers can make informed decisions about setting appropriate time limits.

To future researchers, it might be beneficial for future studies to explore other contextual factors that could influence student's perceptions of peer feedback and Grammarly feedback. Factors such as cultural background, prior writing experiences, and individual learning preferences could potentially shape student preferences for specific feedback methods. Moreover, other researchers can conduct a study on the combination of both peer evaluation and Grammarly feedback on students' writing abilities. Investigating the impact of this combined approach on students' writing outcomes and perceptions would provide valuable insights for educators seeking effective feedback strategies. Additionally, investigating which method is more effective than the other in terms of developing students' writing competence and overall academic performance could be another good idea for future studies. Finally, it is also highly recommended for future researchers to diversify their study samples by including students with lower English proficiency levels.

Limitations

Despite the promising findings obtained in this study, it is crucial to acknowledge certain limitations in order to lay the groundwork for more rigorous and comprehensive research in the future. One primary limitation is the relatively small sample size in this investigation, which comprised only 10 participants from a Master's class. Therefore, it is imperative for future studies to expand the sample size. Another aspect worth considering is the reliance solely on

interviews as the data collection method in this research. While interviews are valuable for obtaining in-depth responses from participants, it might be advantageous for future research to employ other methods such as questionnaires, observations, and experimental and control groups.

Acknowledgments

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