

Integrating Grammarly Into Process Based Writing Approach: A Case Study of Vocational High School Students in Karawang

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Abstract

The integration of Grammarly in language education has gained momentum, especially in enhancing students' writing. Grammarly provides automated feedback on grammar, clarity, and style. However, little is known about how vocational students perceive and engage with this feedback. This study explores how vocational high school students in Karawang interact with Grammarly during the revising and editing stages of the Process-Based Writing Approach (PBWA), and how they perceive its role in their writing development. Using a qualitative method, data were collected from five students through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. PBWA was used as the framework to examine students' engagement and reflections. The findings reveal diverse behavioral, cognitive, and emotional responses to Grammarly feedback. Students found the tool helpful and confidence-boosting but were sometimes confused by its formality suggestions. Engagement patterns varied, including reflective revisions, active editing, and overreliance on suggestions. These findings highlight the need for instructional support to improve feedback literacy. Effective integration of Grammarly into writing instruction should include guidance to help students critically evaluate AI feedback and develop greater writing independence.

Keywords: Grammarly Feedback; Process-Based Writing Approach; Vocational High School

INTRODUCTION

Writing is widely recognized as a foundational skill in education, essential not only for academic success but also for effective communication, self-expression, and professional development. In today's interconnected and digital world, writing proficiency enables learners to produce structured and coherent texts across various disciplines and purposes. In the Indonesian EFL (English as a Foreign Language) context, writing remains a critical component of the curriculum, especially for vocational high school students who are expected to demonstrate both language accuracy and communicative effectiveness in academic and professional environments (Agustiana, 2016; Din et al., 2021). Despite this importance, many students continue to struggle with organizing ideas, applying appropriate grammar, and revising their texts effectively. To address these persistent challenges, the integration of digital tools into writing instruction has gained momentum. Automated Writing Evaluation (AWE) systems, in particular, have emerged as powerful supports by providing instant, data-driven feedback on various writing components such as grammar, vocabulary, clarity, and tone. Grammarly, one of the most popular AWE tools, uses artificial intelligence to assist learners throughout the writing process. Unlike traditional grammar checkers, Grammarly offers real-time suggestions not only to correct surface errors but also to enhance clarity and style, thus encouraging self-directed revision (Fitria, 2021; Halim et al., 2022; Zinkevich & Ledeneva, 2021). Prior studies have highlighted Grammarly's positive influence on writing accuracy and learner autonomy.

For EFL learners, it helps identify common grammatical issues and supports reflective revision practices (Huang et al., 2020; Suryanto et al., 2024). However, much of the existing literature focuses on technical improvements or score outcomes, offering limited insight into the actual ways students interact with Grammarly during the writing process. Moreover, few studies have examined Grammarly's use within structured pedagogical models such as the Process-Based Writing Approach (PBWA), which promotes writing as a recursive and reflective process. The PBWA encourages learners to approach writing in stages planning, drafting, revising, and editing, emphasizing the importance of revisiting and reshaping one's work to enhance meaning and clarity (Koh, 2017). Rather than viewing revision as simple correction, this approach positions it as an integral part of developing ideas and improving overall quality. Integrating Grammarly into this model could offer pedagogical value by supporting revision stages and helping learners reflect on language use. However, it also raises concerns about possible overreliance on automated suggestions, misunderstandings of feedback, or reduced critical engagement. In vocational high schools, writing instruction often receives less emphasis than in academic-track schools, despite the need for practical and context-based communication skills. Vocational students must be equipped to write reports, business correspondence, and workplace documentation, all of which require clarity and correctness (Maulidina & Wibowo, 2022). Yet, research exploring how vocational students engage with tools like Grammarly remains scarce. Most existing studies are quantitative, focusing on performance outcomes rather than the qualitative dimensions of students' experiences, challenges, and reflections during revision (Llausas et al., 2024; Miranty & Widiati, 2021). This study addresses that gap by investigating how vocational high school students engage with Grammarly during the revising and editing stages of process-based writing. It aims to understand how students interact with Grammarly feedback, whether they critically evaluate and apply suggestions, or accept them passively, and how this engagement influences their writing development. The study also explores students' perceptions of Grammarly's role in their writing process, including their views on its helpfulness, limitations, and its influence on their confidence and decision-making during revision. By examining both behavioral engagement and personal interpretation, this research provides a nuanced understanding of how Grammarly shapes students' writing behaviors, thoughts, and emotions. It considers how feedback is interpreted, implemented, or ignored, and what this reveals about students' writing strategies and their readiness to manage digital tools in an educational setting. Focusing on vocational students, this research contributes meaningful insights to the intersections of EFL pedagogy, writing instruction, and educational technology. It emphasizes the need to align digital feedback tools with instructional approaches that promote critical engagement and learner agency. The findings are expected to inform more effective integration of AWE tools into EFL classrooms, particularly in underrepresented contexts such as vocational education. Additionally, the study offers implications for teachers, curriculum developers, and educational technology designers seeking to foster feedback literacy and scaffold technology-enhanced learning experiences. More broadly, this study supports current educational trends that promote AI-integrated pedagogy, positioning digital tools not as external aids, but as embedded supports within the learning process. It highlights the importance of designing writing instruction that is both process-oriented and technologically adaptive, empowering students to become independent writers prepared for both academic challenges and workplace demands.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design (Creswell, 2014, as cited in Ishtiaq, 2019) with a case study approach to explore the engagement of vocational high school students in Karawang with Grammarly during the revising and editing stages of the Process-Based Writing

Approach (PBWA). A qualitative approach was chosen to gain in-depth insights into students' behaviors and experiences with AI-powered writing tools in authentic classroom settings. The case study method allowed for a focused examination of a specific group of students, emphasizing their interaction with Grammarly as a tool for revision and language improvement. The research was conducted at a vocational high school in Karawang, Indonesia, where the integration of digital writing tools like Grammarly was still emerging within the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. Five purposively selected tenth-grade students participated in the study, chosen based on criteria such as their completion of a descriptive writing task, high performance in English writing assessments, and proficiency in using digital technology to access Grammarly. Data collection involved two primary instruments: semi-structured interviews and an observation checklist. The semi-structured interviews served as the main instrument to explore students' perceptions and experiences with Grammarly. The interview protocol was adapted from previous studies (Inayah & Apoko, 2024; Suryanto et al., 2024; Huang et al., 2020) and included open-ended questions that addressed students' feelings toward Grammarly feedback, its influence on their motivation, and specific examples of how it aided or hindered their revision processes. The interviews were audio-recorded for accurate transcription and thematic analysis. The observation checklist, adapted from Setyawan, Suwastini, and Ratminingsih (2020), documented students' observable behaviors during the revising and editing stages, focusing on their interaction with Grammarly feedback. Indicators included students' ability to identify and apply Grammarly's suggestions and their critical thinking in accepting or rejecting feedback. This checklist provided real-time engagement data, complementing the insights gained from the interviews. Data analysis utilized Thematic Analysis, following the framework by Braun and Clarke (2022). The analysis began with familiarization with the data, followed by coding meaningful segments that reflected students' experiences. Related codes were grouped into broader themes, which were then refined and articulated to capture their essence. The findings were presented through a cohesive narrative, supported by direct quotations from participants, and discussed in relation to existing literature on AI integration in writing instruction. This methodology provided a comprehensive understanding of how students engaged with Grammarly during the writing process, offering valuable insights into the pedagogical implications of AI-assisted tools in EFL classrooms.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This section presents the study's findings in response to the two main themes. The first theme focuses on how vocational high school students engage with Grammarly feedback during the revising and editing stages of the Process-Based Writing Approach (PBWA). It reveals their interaction strategies, levels of engagement, and revision behaviors in response to automated feedback. The second theme outlines students' perceptions of Grammarly integration, highlighting their views on its usefulness, role in supporting low-proficiency learners, and limitations they encountered during its use. These findings offer a deeper understanding of how AI-powered tools like Grammarly influence students' writing development, feedback literacy, and self-regulation in academic English contexts.

Students' Engagement with Grammarly Feedback During the Revision and Editing Stages in PBWA

This section explores the multifaceted engagement of students with Grammarly, particularly in the revision and editing stages of PBWA. Data collected through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations identified four central themes of student engagement: 1) strategic

feedback filtering for meaning preservation, 2) reactive engagement and surface-level corrections, 3) reflective revision and metacognitive awareness, and 4) struggles with feedback interpretation and literacy gaps. These themes highlight the depth of interaction students maintained with Grammarly and reflect their evolving writing competencies.

1. Strategic engagement and feedback filtering

The first key theme that emerged from the findings is students’ strategic engagement with Grammarly feedback. Rather than accepting all the suggestions automatically, several students were found to filter, consider, and selectively apply the feedback based on their personal judgment. This behavior indicates that students were not fully dependent on the tool but used it as a supplementary aid to support their writing process. One student stated,

“I am a typical selective person, I think it first and consider it before I click and choose the corrections. Because I learn from mistakes.”
(P2)

This demonstrates that some students viewed Grammarly as a support system, not a replacement for their own thinking. During classroom observations, these tendencies were clearly visible.

Table 1. Observation 1

Participant	Indicator 3	Notes
	Critically evaluated suggestions	
P1	✓	Read feedback, paused before applying, rejected conclusion changes that left impersonal
P2	×	Clicked suggestions without review
P3	✓	Compared suggestions to original meaning, reworded for voice retention
P4	×	Accepted all corrections automatically
P5	✓	Filtered corrections to preserve casual tone

Participant 1 paused and read suggestions carefully before choosing which changes to apply, especially in the conclusion section, where the feedback was rejected due to a mismatch in tone. Participant 3 also engaged in comparing the suggestions with the original meaning, showing critical judgment in maintaining the intended message.

2. Engagement with surface-level feedback

The second theme highlights students’ tendency to focus on surface-level issues such as grammar, punctuation, and spelling, often relying heavily on Grammarly to correct these errors. Many students admitted that they primarily interacted with red underlines and obvious alerts. One student stated,

“I didn’t choose clarity or other suggestions, because I’m afraid it would be too formal,” (P1)

This pattern of usage was evident during classroom observation sessions, where most students quickly accepted suggestions related to technical issues but ignored more complex feedback regarding clarity or tone.

Table 2. Observation 2

Participant	Indicator 5	Indicator 6	Notes
	Identified technical suggestions	Applied corrections independently	
P1	✓	✓	Corrected grammar errors manually after Grammarly’s input
P2	✓	✓	Revised after grammar flags, made minor edits
P3	✓	×	Noticed punctuation but didn’t revise
P4	✓	×	Clicked “accept all” without evaluation
P5	✓	×	Ignore stylistic feedback and red suggestions

Although this behavior helped eliminate basic errors, it limited students’ opportunities to engage in deeper revision or content restructuring. Participants 1 and 2 were the only ones who revised their texts independently beyond what Grammarly suggested, while others, like Participant 4, simply used the "accept all" function. The observational data showed that this reliance on surface correction resulted in mechanical revisions. For example, Participant 3 noticed a punctuation issue but did not take action. Meanwhile, Participant 5 ignored suggestions related to tone or structure, demonstrating a narrow engagement with the editing process. This limited interaction indicates a need for further instructional guidance in moving students from basic correction to meaningful revision.

3. Reflective revision and metacognitive awareness

A more advanced engagement was observed among students who demonstrated reflective revision. These students re-read their texts, evaluated coherence, and revised based on an understanding of their writing goals, beyond what Grammarly suggested. For example, one student said,

“Let me train this grammar, I’m still confused whether the grammar is correct or not,”(P2)

The statement indicating a conscious effort to internalize grammar knowledge rather than just accept corrections.

Table 3. Observation 3

Participant	Indicator 9	Notes
	Reflected on revision	
P1	✓	Corrected grammar errors manually after Grammarly’s input
P2	✓	Revised after grammar flags, made minor edits
P3	✓	Noticed punctuation but didn’t revise

P4	✓	Clicked “accept all” without evaluation
P5	✓	Ignore stylistic feedback and red suggestions

Such behavior shows a higher level of metacognitive awareness, a critical aspect of the revising phase in PBWA. In the classroom, Participants 1 to 3 restructured sentences, improved transitions, and even modified paragraph structures for clarity. These actions signify a deliberate attempt to enhance writing beyond surface-level adjustments. For instance, Participant 1 was observed rereading and adding linking phrases to improve logical flow, while Participant 2 made multiple revisions to rephrase unclear ideas.

4. Feedback interpretation challenges and support gaps

The final theme that emerged reveals the challenges students faced in interpreting Grammarly feedback. Although the tool provides visual and color-coded feedback, several students struggled to understand the meaning behind the suggestions. One student said,

“All of the colors on Grammarly, I don’t really understand them.” (P4)

While another admitted,

“Yes, I know, but I can’t understand it. I just know.” (P2)

These comments reflect a gap between recognition and comprehension of feedback.

Table 4. Observation 4

Participant	Indicator 10	Notes
	Demonstrated reasoning	
P1	✓	Explain purpose of changes during peer discussion
P2	✓	Justified article and verb tense corrections
P3	✓	Understood and adapted suggestions with color codes
P4	×	Accepted changes without knowing reasons
P5	×	Confused by category terms; clicked to eliminate alerts

In the classroom, Participants 4 and 5 were observed clicking suggestions without reading or explaining their choices. When asked to justify their revisions during peer discussions, they were unable to articulate the reasoning behind the edits. This indicates a passive engagement with the tool, where the feedback is applied for compliance rather than for improvement.

Students’ Perceptions of Grammarly Feedback in the Revising and Editing Stages

As students engaged with the writing process, they reflected on the role of Grammarly not only as an error-correction tool but also as a writing aid, a source of confusion, and a confidence booster. Their experiences clustered around four key thematic perceptions: (1) grammarly as a helpful learning tool, (2) perceived limitations and confusion, (3) mixed feelings about accuracy and formality, and (4) grammarly as a confidence booster. These

themes provide insight into how students make meaning of AI-generated feedback, how they apply it, and what emotional or strategic effects it has on their writing behavior throughout the revision and editing phases.

1. Grammarly as helpful learning tool

In the classroom, students who viewed Grammarly as a beneficial learning tool were often observed actively revising their drafts with visible engagement. During the revising stage of PBWA, these students interacted with feedback not only to correct errors but also to understand the underlying rules. As students explained,

“It helps me learn grammar I never knew before,” (P3)

“I know which part I usually get wrong because Grammarly always underlines it,” (P1)

which aligns with the moments when learners paused to read Grammarly’s suggestions rather than simply accepting them. This behavior was typically accompanied by verbal reflection or brief notetaking, indicating a conscious learning moment. These students demonstrated curiosity in the feedback process. For instance, a student restructured a sentence after considering a clarity suggestion and then rechecked the meaning to ensure that their original intent remained intact. This indicated a form of self-monitoring, a core component of the revising phase in PBWA. The tool appeared to serve not only as a corrector but as a personalized grammar guide that exposed common mistakes and promoted reflective editing.

2. Perceived limitations and confusion

Although Grammarly provided consistent support, some students struggled to interpret the feedback it generated. This confusion became particularly evident when the tool used linguistic terminology or color-coded categories without clear explanations. As participants noted,

“I don’t know why it tells me to change this. I’m confused,” (P4)

“I don’t know, it just fixed it” (P5)

These sentiment was echoed by others during both the revising and editing phases of PBWA. Students who lacked confidence in grammar found it challenging to trust or understand certain suggestions, resulting in either hesitation or automatic acceptance. In observed classroom sessions, students occasionally hovered their cursors over the Grammarly suggestions but failed to act upon them. Their body language, such as frowning, shrugging, or quickly moving on, indicated uncertainty or disengagement

3. Mixed feelings about accuracy and formality

A third theme that emerged from students’ perceptions relates to the tension between Grammarly’s focus on formal correctness and students’ personal voice or stylistic preferences. Some students expressed concern that blindly accepting Grammarly’s suggestions made their writing feel unnatural or overly formal. One shared,

“If I follow it all, my writing becomes too formal. I want to make it sound more like me.” (P2)

This resistance often surfaced during the editing stage, where tone and sentence style were more prominent. During revision, these students selectively applied feedback, demonstrating awareness of genre, audience, and communicative purpose. Such selective engagement is valuable in PBWA, as it reflects ownership of the text and a move away from blind compliance.

4. Grammarly as a confidence booster

Despite its limitations, many students expressed that Grammarly gave them greater confidence in their writing. This was particularly evident among those who had previously felt anxious about grammar and spelling. One student reflected,

“It helps me fix many things before submitting, I feel better with my writing.” (P2)

Such sentiments highlight Grammarly’s emotional impact, particularly in reducing revision-related stress in the final editing phase of PBWA. Some participants reported rereading their drafts more carefully because they felt empowered to do so.

“Before Grammarly, I always nervous. Now, I feel more sure,” (P1)

The statement echoing a shift in mindset. As PBWA emphasizes the importance of student agency in the revising process, this growing confidence supports greater engagement and deeper reflection. However, this confidence occasionally led to overreliance. In some cases, students assumed that Grammarly’s suggestions were final and stopped revising once the feedback was applied. This behavior shows that while Grammarly can serve as a motivational tool, it also needs to be framed as a complement, not a replacement, to critical thinking in revision.

Discussion

The integration of Grammarly into the revising and editing phases of the Process-Based Writing Approach (PBWA) has garnered significant attention in educational research. Studies by Fitria (2021), Halim et al. (2022), and Suryanto et al. (2024) highlight the benefits of AI-based writing assistants, including promoting learner autonomy and providing immediate feedback. However, concerns raised by Dahlstrom (2018) and Fitria (2021) regarding superficial engagement and overreliance on technology remain pertinent. This study reveals that students primarily utilize Grammarly during the editing phase, focusing on micro-level text features such as grammar and punctuation. This behavior aligns with Huang et al. (2020), who noted that repeated tool use enhances accuracy. However, students exhibited limited engagement with higher-order revision tasks, such as content organization and argument development, indicating a gap in macro-level writing skills. This pattern supports Dahlstrom’s (2018) concerns about surface learning when digital tools are used without adequate pedagogical support. Cognitive engagement varied among students, closely tied to individual proficiency and motivation. High-performing students critically evaluated Grammarly’s suggestions, while many others accepted feedback passively, echoing Fitria’s (2021) caution against overreliance. The affective dimension revealed that while some students gained confidence from immediate feedback, this confidence sometimes led to complacency, particularly among those lacking metacognitive skills. The tension between Grammarly’s potential to foster autonomy and its limitations in promoting deep revision is evident. Although Halim et al. (2022) and Hakiki (2021) emphasize the tool’s benefits for independent learning, many students approached it merely as a correction

device, undermining reflective decision-making. This discrepancy highlights a pedagogical gap; the availability of advanced digital tools does not guarantee effective use without targeted instruction. Moreover, students struggled with macro-level revision skills, diverging from Inayah and Apoko's (2024) findings on Grammarly's effectiveness in supporting genre-based coherence. This suggests that AI tools excel in micro-level editing but fall short in facilitating complex revisions requiring nuanced judgment. The limited capacity of AI feedback reinforces the need for teacher guidance and collaborative practices. A significant factor in these engagement patterns is students' low metacognitive awareness and insufficient training in interpreting AI-generated feedback. The focus on product-oriented outcomes may constrain learners' willingness to engage deeply with revision tasks, as noted by Huang et al. (2020) and Armanda et al. (2022). Pedagogically, educators should not position Grammarly as a standalone tool but rather integrate it within a scaffolded writing process. This includes explicit instruction on interpreting AI feedback and opportunities for collaborative reflection. Marzuki et al. (2023) emphasize the importance of human judgment to complement AI support. By embedding digital tool literacy into writing curricula, teachers can enhance cognitive engagement and empower students to make evaluative decisions. While Grammarly offers valuable support for improving writing mechanics and boosting confidence, its effectiveness hinges on strategic pedagogical integration. Without such integration, there is a risk of fostering surface-level engagement and undermining critical revision skills. Future instructional designs must balance the benefits of AI writing tools with structured teaching approaches that cultivate metacognitive skills and deeper engagement in the writing process.

CONCLUSION

This study confirmed that the integration of Grammarly within the revising and editing stages of the Process-Based Writing Approach (PBWA) influenced how vocational high school students engaged cognitively, behaviorally, and emotionally with AI-generated feedback. The problem addressed, how students utilize and respond to Grammarly feedback in a real classroom context, was examined through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. The findings demonstrated that while Grammarly effectively supported surface-level language corrections, particularly grammar, punctuation, and structure, students' engagement varied significantly. Most students exhibited behavioral engagement by quickly accepting corrections, with limited critical thinking. Cognitive engagement depended largely on their prior knowledge and confidence, while emotional responses ranged from increased motivation to confusion and reliance on the tool. These patterns confirmed concerns raised in the research questions regarding the depth and quality of student interaction with AI tools during revision. Four key themes emerged: Grammarly as a helpful learning tool, perceived limitations, emotional responses, and its role as a confidence booster, all of which illustrated both the pedagogical potential and the limitations of Grammarly. The study concluded that while Grammarly can enhance revision and promote language awareness, its effectiveness depends on students' digital literacy and instructional guidance. Without this support, students risk becoming overly dependent on AI feedback without developing critical revision skills. In summary, this research affirms the complexity of integrating AI tools like Grammarly into writing pedagogy. It highlights the need for structured, guided engagement to maximize educational benefits and reduce potential drawbacks in the PBWA learning cycle.

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