

Teachers' Perceptions of Grammarly in Secondary-School EFL Writing Instruction: Evidence from Bac Ninh Province, Vietnam

Tran Thi Mai Anh

Nhan Thang secondary school, Bac Ninh province, Vietnam

ABSTRACT: This study investigated secondary-school English teachers' perceptions of Grammarly as an AI-assisted writing tool in Bac Ninh Province, Vietnam. Guided by the Technology Acceptance Model, the study focused on perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, and challenges arising from classroom implementation. An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was employed. Questionnaire data were collected from 24 English teachers working across 11 lower-secondary schools, followed by semi-structured interviews with 10 teachers. Descriptive statistics showed that teachers generally regarded Grammarly as easy to operate and useful for improving surface-level accuracy, particularly grammar, sentence structure, spelling, and punctuation. The perceived usefulness scale achieved good internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .869$), while the perceived ease-of-use scale also showed satisfactory reliability ($\alpha = .838$). Qualitative findings, however, revealed substantial pedagogical tensions. Teachers reported that students sometimes equated error-free text with good writing, accepted suggestions without reflection, lost confidence when the tool was unavailable, and encountered feedback that did not align with curriculum targets or handwritten examinations. The findings indicate that functional acceptance does not automatically produce pedagogically sound integration. Grammarly is most valuable when positioned as a late-stage diagnostic scaffold within a teacher-mediated writing process rather than as an autonomous corrector. The study contributes context-sensitive evidence from Vietnamese secondary education and proposes practical principles for teacher-AI complementarity, reflective revision, and assessment alignment.

KEYWORDS: Grammarly; automated writing evaluation; teacher perceptions; EFL writing; Technology Acceptance Model; Vietnam

1. INTRODUCTION

Writing remains one of the most demanding skills for learners of English as a foreign language because it requires simultaneous control of linguistic accuracy, idea development, organization, cohesion, and audience awareness. In Vietnamese secondary schools, these demands are intensified by large classes, restricted instructional time, and an examination-oriented curriculum. Teachers must often address frequent errors in grammar, spelling, and sentence structure while also attempting to develop students' ability to produce coherent and meaningful texts. Under such conditions, automated writing evaluation tools have gained attention as possible sources of immediate feedback and as mechanisms for reducing teachers' corrective workload.

Grammarly is among the most widely recognized AI-assisted writing tools. It identifies problems related to grammar, spelling, punctuation, clarity, and style and provides users with real-time suggestions. Previous studies have reported that automated feedback can improve linguistic accuracy, support revision, enhance confidence, and enable learners to work at their own pace. Nevertheless, concerns remain regarding the accuracy and contextual suitability of automated suggestions, the possibility of learner over-reliance, and the limited capacity of such tools to address higher-order writing concerns such as argumentation, coherence, rhetorical purpose, and originality.

Teachers occupy a decisive position in the adoption of educational technology. Their judgments determine whether an application is treated as a supplementary scaffold, a proofreading device, an assessment aid, or an inappropriate substitute for human feedback. Teachers' perceptions are therefore important not only because they influence acceptance, but also because they shape the pedagogical conditions under which learners engage with automated feedback. This issue is particularly significant in lower-secondary education, where students are still developing foundational language knowledge, self-monitoring strategies, and attitudes toward technology-assisted learning.

Research on Grammarly has concentrated largely on university students, academic writing, and learner perceptions. Comparatively less is known about how secondary-school teachers interpret the tool's affordances and limitations in real classroom settings. Evidence is especially limited in Vietnam, where digital innovation coexists with high-stakes handwritten assessment and uneven institutional guidance on the use of AI-assisted tools. Bac Ninh Province provides a useful setting for examining this tension

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because schools increasingly possess digital infrastructure, while classroom writing remains closely tied to prescribed textbooks, curriculum outcomes, and entrance examinations.

This study therefore examines secondary-school English teachers' perceptions of Grammarly in Bac Ninh Province. Rather than claiming that Grammarly directly enhances students' writing performance, the study investigates teachers' judgments of its ease of use and usefulness, together with the pedagogical and institutional challenges encountered during implementation. The study is guided by the following research questions: (1) How do teachers perceive the ease of use of Grammarly in supporting students' writing? (2) How do teachers perceive the usefulness of Grammarly in enhancing students' writing? and (3) What challenges do teachers encounter when using Grammarly in writing instruction?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Automated writing evaluation in EFL writing

Automated writing evaluation (AWE) systems provide computer-generated feedback on written texts. Their most consistent strength lies in the rapid identification of lower-order concerns, including spelling, punctuation, grammatical form, and some aspects of sentence-level clarity. In EFL contexts, this immediacy can increase the frequency of revision and reduce the delay associated with teacher feedback. It can also create a low-risk environment in which learners experiment with language before submitting a final text.

However, the availability of immediate correction does not guarantee learning. A distinction must be made between producing a cleaner text and developing transferable writing competence. When learners accept suggestions mechanically, automated correction may improve the product without strengthening the writer's underlying knowledge. Research on engagement with automated written corrective feedback has therefore emphasized the importance of noticing, interpretation, evaluation, and revision justification. These processes transform feedback from a simple correction mechanism into a learning resource.

Grammarly's feedback is strongest at the surface level. Although the platform also comments on clarity, concision, and tone, such suggestions may not correspond to a specific curriculum, genre requirement, age group, or teacher objective. A recommendation to shorten a sentence, for example, may conflict with a lesson in which students are practising relative clauses or complex sentence patterns. Likewise, a grammatically accurate text may still lack organization, relevance, coherence, or meaningful idea development. These limitations make teacher mediation central to pedagogically responsible use.

2.2. Teachers' perceptions and technology acceptance

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) provides a useful lens for understanding teachers' responses to educational technologies. The model proposes that perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use are central determinants of acceptance. Perceived usefulness concerns the extent to which a user believes that a technology improves performance, whereas perceived ease of use concerns the effort required to operate it. In classroom contexts, however, acceptance is not purely technical. Teachers also evaluate whether a tool aligns with instructional objectives, assessment practices, learner characteristics, professional roles, and institutional expectations.

Accordingly, a tool can be easy to use and still be pedagogically difficult to integrate. Teachers may appreciate rapid feedback while remaining concerned about inaccurate suggestions, reduced student reflection, unequal access to premium functions, or inconsistency between technology-supported homework and tool-free examinations. These contextual concerns extend TAM beyond functional acceptance and reveal the difference between adoption and meaningful pedagogical integration.

In the present study, perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness form the quantitative core of the analysis, while interviews explore contextual constraints that are not fully represented by the two TAM constructs. This combination enables the study to identify both the practical appeal of Grammarly and the conditions under which its use may weaken rather than strengthen writing development.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research design and context

An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was used. The quantitative phase established general patterns in teachers' perceptions, and the qualitative phase subsequently examined the reasons, tensions, and classroom experiences underlying those patterns. The design was appropriate because numerical ratings alone could not explain how teachers negotiated automated feedback, learner dependence, curriculum expectations, and assessment constraints.

The study was conducted in 11 lower-secondary schools in Bac Ninh Province during the 2025–2026 academic year. English was taught to students in Grades 6–9, and writing formed part of an integrated four-skills curriculum. Participating schools had access to common classroom technologies, including televisions, projectors, and internet connectivity. Nevertheless, teachers worked within 45-minute lessons and a curriculum strongly influenced by textbook completion and examination preparation.

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3.2. Participants

The quantitative sample consisted of 24 full-time EFL teachers. Sixteen were female and eight were male. Fourteen teachers were aged 30 or younger, eight were between 30 and 40, and two were above 40. Eleven participants had fewer than five years of teaching experience, ten had between five and ten years, and three had more than ten years. Most participants had relatively limited experience with Grammarly, generally between one and six months. Ten teachers participated in follow-up semi-structured interviews.

3.3. Instruments and data analysis

The questionnaire included demographic items and two perception scales: perceived ease of use (five items) and perceived usefulness (seven items). Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The instrument was adapted from previous research and piloted with ten teachers who were not included in the main sample. Internal consistency was satisfactory for both perceived ease of use (Cronbach's $\alpha = .838$) and perceived usefulness ($\alpha = .869$). Quantitative data were analyzed using means and standard deviations.

The ease-of-use scale contained four negatively worded items. For interpretive consistency, these items must be reverse-scored before an overall scale mean is reported. Based on the item means presented in the thesis, reverse scoring produces an estimated composite mean of approximately 3.78 rather than the unreversed value of 2.53. The article therefore reports the corrected interpretation and retains the original item-level means for transparency.

Semi-structured interviews examined three broad areas: pedagogical challenges, over-reliance and learner autonomy, and curriculum alignment. Interviews were conducted in Vietnamese to allow participants to express their experiences precisely. Recordings were transcribed and analyzed thematically through familiarization, initial coding, theme development, review, definition, and reporting. Quotations used in the article were translated into English while preserving the original meaning.

Participation was voluntary. Respondents were informed about the aims of the study, confidentiality was protected, and no personally identifiable information was included in the questionnaire dataset.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Perceived ease of use and usefulness

Teachers generally regarded Grammarly as accessible and technically manageable. The positive item concerning user-friendliness received a mean of 3.79 (SD = .41). The low raw means for negatively worded statements—such as difficulty navigating the taskbar, operating features, receiving prompt feedback, and accessing functions—also indicate favorable perceptions once reverse scoring is applied. The estimated corrected composite mean for perceived ease of use was 3.78, suggesting high rather than low acceptance.

Table 1. Teachers' Perceptions of Grammarly: Descriptive Statistics

Construct / item	M	SD	Interpretation	Key implication
Perceived ease of use (corrected composite)	3.78	$\approx .45$	High	Teachers generally found Grammarly easy to operate.
Accurate feedback on sentences and grammar	3.87	.53	High	Strongest perceived benefit.
Identifying spelling mistakes	3.75	.44	High	Useful for routine surface-level correction.
Correcting punctuation mistakes	3.79	.41	High	Supports mechanical accuracy.
Motivation and engagement	3.70	.80	High	Positive but responses were more varied.
Confidence in writing	3.79	.41	High	Immediate feedback may reduce anxiety.
Writing sentences correctly	3.66	.48	High	Supports sentence-level accuracy.
Overall writing improvement	3.58	.50	High	Lowest-rated usefulness item; teachers were more cautious about holistic improvement.
Perceived usefulness composite	3.73	.51	High	Teachers valued Grammarly, especially for lower-order concerns.

Table 1 shows that perceived usefulness was consistently positive. The highest mean was recorded for accurate feedback on sentences and grammatical structure (M = 3.87, SD = .53). Punctuation correction and confidence in writing both received means

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of 3.79. The lowest-rated item was the broad claim that Grammarly improves students' overall writing skills ($M = 3.58$, $SD = .50$). This pattern is important: teachers expressed stronger confidence in Grammarly's capacity to correct specific surface-level features than in its ability to develop writing holistically.

The motivation item had the largest standard deviation ($SD = .80$), indicating greater variation in teachers' judgments of affective benefits. Some teachers viewed immediate feedback as encouraging and confidence-building, whereas others observed that the same immediacy could produce anxiety about visible error markings or dependence on the application.

4.2. Pedagogical challenges

The interviews complicated the favorable quantitative pattern. Teachers did not reject Grammarly; instead, they described a conditional form of acceptance. The tool was useful when it functioned as a final-stage assistant, but problematic when it shaped students' composing decisions, replaced self-checking, or conflicted with curriculum and assessment requirements.

Table 2. Major Themes Emerging from Teachers' Interviews on the Use of Grammarly in EFL Writing Instruction

Theme	Illustrative issue	Representative teacher statement	Interpretation
Pedagogical disruption	Sentence-level correction interrupted idea development	"Students corrected each small sentence before completing the whole idea, which interrupted content development." (P5)	Attention shifted from meaning to visible error signals.
Narrow definition of quality	Error-free text was equated with high-quality writing	"If there were no red or blue lines, students assumed the text would receive a high score." (P7)	Grammatical correctness overshadowed coherence and task response.
Style homogenization	Suggestions encouraged safe and similar expression	"After using Grammarly, many texts became quite similar in wording." (P7)	Automated optimization may reduce experimentation and voice.
Reduced self-monitoring	Students stopped checking their own work	"Self-detection of errors almost disappeared from their writing process." (P3)	Product improvement did not necessarily become transferable knowledge.
Tool-dependent confidence	Confidence decreased in handwritten tasks	"Students' confidence shifted from themselves to the tool." (P9)	Supportive technology became a psychological safety net.
Assessment misalignment	Homework quality differed from handwritten performance	"There was a mismatch between the learning environment and the examination environment." (P9)	AI-assisted products could obscure unaided competence.
Curriculum mismatch	Suggestions exceeded taught structures or lesson aims	"It may suggest structures that students have not yet learned." (P3)	Generic feedback was not level- or syllabus-sensitive.
Institutional and equity issues	No guidance; free-premium divide	"There was no training or clear regulation." (P1)	Effective use depended on policy, support, and equitable access.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. Functional acceptance versus pedagogical integration

The quantitative results are consistent with the basic assumptions of TAM. Grammarly was viewed as easy to operate and useful for writing support. Its interface, rapid feedback, and low technical demands lowered the effort required for adoption. Teachers also perceived clear benefits in grammar, sentence structure, spelling, and punctuation. These characteristics explain why the tool was readily accepted even by participants with relatively short experience of use.

Yet the interview data show that functional acceptance should not be treated as evidence of successful pedagogical integration. Ease of use can encourage frequent engagement, but it can also make uncritical acceptance more likely. Several teachers observed

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that students clicked on suggestions without reading explanations, abandoned pre-submission checking, and interpreted the absence of highlighted errors as proof of quality. In this sense, the same usability that supports adoption may weaken reflection when it is not accompanied by instructional scaffolding.

The findings therefore extend TAM by demonstrating that perceived usefulness is context-dependent. Teachers valued Grammarly when usefulness meant rapid identification of lower-order errors. They were less certain when usefulness was defined as holistic writing development. This distinction explains why the overall writing-improvement item received the lowest mean within the usefulness scale. Teachers recognized that writing quality involves content, organization, coherence, audience awareness, and task fulfillment—dimensions that cannot be reliably reduced to automated sentence-level correction.

5.2. Grammarly as a double-edged scaffold

The findings portray Grammarly as a double-edged scaffold. On one side, it can increase confidence, reduce fear of making mistakes, and allow students to revise independently. On the other, it may transfer responsibility from the learner to the application. Teachers repeatedly contrasted students who used feedback analytically with those who simply selected “accept.” The more proficient learners were more likely to compare alternatives and ask questions; weaker learners were more likely to defer to the tool. Thus, identical access did not produce identical learning.

This difference is best understood through feedback literacy. Learners need to understand the purpose of feedback, judge its relevance, and make reasoned decisions about revision. Grammarly can support autonomy only when students remain responsible for evaluating suggestions. Without this evaluative stage, apparent independence is actually dependence on algorithmic authority. The finding that students repeated corrected errors in handwritten tasks is especially significant because it suggests that successful digital revision did not always lead to durable learning.

Teachers' accounts also reveal a distinction between confidence in a polished product and confidence in one's own writing competence. When students felt secure only after all colored lines disappeared, confidence was located in the application rather than in internalized knowledge. This explains why some became more anxious during paper-based examinations. The tool reduced immediate anxiety but potentially increased vulnerability when unavailable.

5.3. Curriculum, assessment, and teacher authority

Curriculum alignment emerged as a major condition of effective use. Grammarly is designed for broad language support rather than a specific Vietnamese lower-secondary syllabus. Suggestions may therefore exceed students' current proficiency, conflict with a target structure, or privilege concision over descriptive development. Teachers had to decide whether to accept, reject, postpone, or explain such recommendations. This role positioned them as interpreters between algorithmic feedback and curriculum expectations.

The mismatch between AI-supported homework and handwritten assessment raises questions of validity. A highly accurate homework text may reflect the combined performance of student and tool rather than the student's unaided competence. Teachers consequently reported uncertainty when assigning marks and a need to compare first drafts, revised drafts, and in-class writing. This suggests that assessment practices must distinguish between process-oriented AI-supported learning and summative demonstrations of independent performance.

The study also highlights the continuing importance of teacher authority. Automated feedback can appear objective because it is immediate, consistent, and visually salient. Students may therefore assign it greater credibility than teacher judgment. Teachers must explicitly communicate that algorithmic suggestions are provisional and context-sensitive. Their role is not diminished by Grammarly; instead, it becomes more complex, requiring technological, pedagogical, linguistic, and ethical judgment.

6. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Adopt a delayed-use protocol: Students should brainstorm, draft, and complete at least one round of self-editing before opening Grammarly. This protects idea generation and preserves self-monitoring.

Require revision justification: Students should record selected changes and explain why each suggestion was accepted or rejected. A brief revision log can turn automated correction into metalinguistic learning.

Separate lower- and higher-order feedback: Grammarly may be used for grammar, spelling, and punctuation, while teachers prioritize content, organization, coherence, genre, and audience.

Assess both process and unaided performance: Teachers should consider original drafts, revised versions, and handwritten or tool-free writing to avoid overestimating competence.

Teach feedback literacy explicitly: Students need instruction in evaluating confidence levels, recognizing false positives, and understanding that no highlighted error does not mean the text is effective.

Develop school-level guidance: Schools should clarify appropriate stages of use, acceptable use in assignments, restrictions during examinations, data privacy, and responses to free–premium inequality.

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Provide pedagogical—not only technical—training: Professional development should include lesson design, reflective revision tasks, assessment rubrics, curriculum alignment, and strategies for maintaining learner autonomy.

7. CONCLUSION

This study examined teachers' perceptions of Grammarly in lower-secondary EFL writing instruction in Bac Ninh Province. Teachers generally perceived the tool as easy to use and useful, particularly for grammar, sentence structure, spelling, punctuation, confidence, and rapid feedback. These findings support the relevance of perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness in explaining initial acceptance.

However, the qualitative evidence demonstrates that acceptance is only the beginning of effective integration. Teachers identified disrupted idea development, narrow definitions of good writing, reduced self-monitoring, tool-dependent confidence, curriculum mismatch, assessment inconsistency, and unequal access. Grammarly therefore cannot be understood simply as a neutral proofreading application. It reshapes the writing process, learner responsibility, teacher authority, and the relationship between classroom practice and assessment.

The most defensible pedagogical position is neither unrestricted adoption nor rejection. Grammarly should be used as a teacher-mediated, late-stage diagnostic scaffold. Students should first generate ideas and attempt self-correction, then evaluate automated suggestions and justify revisions. Teachers should retain responsibility for higher-order writing development and for determining whether feedback serves curricular and learner needs. Under these conditions, Grammarly can complement human feedback without replacing the cognitive and relational processes through which writing competence develops.

The study is limited by its small, localized sample and by participants' relatively short experience with Grammarly. Future research should employ larger multi-site samples, longitudinal designs, classroom observation, writing-performance measures, and comparisons between guided and unguided use. Such work would clarify when automated feedback supports durable learning and when it merely produces a more polished final text.

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