EFL Undergraduate Students' Perceptions of Slick Write as Web-Based Writing Support Tools: A Qualitative Case Study

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Abstract

The integration of web-based writing support tools in EFL writing instruction has gained attention due to their potential to address students' writing challenges. This study investigates EFL undergraduate students' perceptions of Slick Write as a web-based writing support tool in academic contexts, representing the first systematic examination of this freely accessible platform in Indonesian EFL contexts. The study employed a qualitative case study approach, with data collected from ten eighth-semester undergraduate students (eight females, two male) aged 20-21 years at the State Islamic University of North Sumatra through closed-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews conducted over two months in early 2025. All participants had prior experience using Slick Write for at least one semester in their academic writing tasks. Data from questionnaires and interviews were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's six-step thematic analysis framework. The findings revealed five main themes: effectiveness in detecting grammar errors, clarity and quality of feedback, increased writing autonomy and confidence, enhanced structured revision practices, and suitability with academic writing conventions. A significant concern identified was potential over-reliance on automated tools. While findings highlight Slick Write's benefits in supporting academic writing development, they also suggest the need for balanced implementation to prevent dependency. This study contributes to computer-assisted language learning literature by examining a less-explored tool through sociocultural and automated writing evaluation theoretical lenses, providing practical insights for educators seeking cost-effective technological solutions and informing university policies regarding digital writing tool adoption in Indonesian Islamic higher education contexts. Future research should explore the long-term impact of web-based writing tools on writing development and investigate their effectiveness across different academic disciplines.

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Introduction

The landscape of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing instruction has evolved significantly in recent decades, particularly as educators seek innovative solutions to address persistent challenges in academic writing development. EFL learners consistently struggle with multiple dimensions of writing competency, including grammatical accuracy, lexical sophistication, coherence, and organizational structure challenges magnified in academic contexts where precision and clarity are paramount (Hyland, 2019).

Recent research indicates that approximately 67% of Indonesian EFL students experience significant difficulties in essay composition, particularly in maintaining coherence and selecting appropriate academic vocabulary (Astuti, 2021). These challenges are compounded by limited opportunities for immediate feedback and authentic writing practice, creating substantial barriers to developing writing proficiency (Fan, 2023).

The complexity of EFL academic writing demands both linguistic accuracy at the micro-level and global coherence at the macro-level, requirements that often exceed the capacity of traditional classroom instruction to address comprehensively (Wang et al., 2022). Contemporary EFL writing pedagogy faces the dual challenge of providing individualized feedback to large student populations while maintaining pedagogical quality. This challenge has intensified with increasing enrolment in higher education institutions across developing nations. As Fan (2023) Observed, "Writing in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) remains a major challenge for learners, especially due to the lack of immediate feedback and real-world writing contexts, which are essential for improvement".

In response to these pervasive challenges, integrating technology-enhanced writing instruction has gained considerable momentum, with Automated Writing Evaluation (AWE) systems emerging as promising pedagogical tools. AWE systems represent a significant advancement in computer-assisted language learning, offering the potential to provide immediate, individualized feedback that can bridge the gap between limited classroom time and students' extensive feedback needs (Dewi, 2023). These digital platforms leverage natural language processing and machine learning algorithms to analyze various aspects of writing quality, from surface-level grammatical accuracy to more complex stylistic and structural features. By providing instant feedback, such tools allow students to improve their writing without relying solely on teacher corrections, addressing what Wang et al. (2022) identified as the critical need for "both linguistic accuracy and global coherence" in EFL writing instruction.

Recent investigations into AWE effectiveness have demonstrated promising outcomes across diverse EFL contexts. Li et al. (2015) found that AWE feedback significantly enhanced revision quality and writing accuracy among Chinese EFL learners, establishing a foundation for subsequent research across different linguistic and cultural contexts. Contemporary research by (Rahimi et al., 2024) further established that AWE systems can enhance learners' metalinguistic awareness through color-coded feedback mechanisms that guide attention to specific error patterns, noting that "feedback is often presented in color-coded formats to guide learners' attention to specific error types, enhancing their metalinguistic awareness" (p. 15). Additionally, emerging research suggests that AWE tools can facilitate the development of autonomous learning behaviors and metacognitive awareness when appropriately integrated into writing curricula (Shi & Aryadoust, 2024).

Despite these documented benefits, the AWE research landscape reveals significant gaps in tool coverage and contextual diversity. While extensively researched platforms like Grammarly have received substantial scholarly attention, alternative AWE systems remain under-investigated, creating an incomplete understanding of the broader AWE ecosystem. As Shi & Aryadoust (2024) noted, "Although a wide range of AWE tools has been explored, much of the research focuses on popular platforms like Grammarly, while tools such as Slick Write remain under-researched" (p. 8). This research gap is particularly pronounced for freely accessible tools that may offer sustainable solutions for global resource-constrained educational institutions.

Slick Write, accessible at https://www.slickwrite.com, represents an exciting case for investigation due to its unique positioning within the AWE landscape. The platform is a free web-based writing analysis tool that provides comprehensive feedback on various aspects of writing quality, offering real-time analysis of text for grammar errors, stylistic issues, sentence structure problems, and readability concerns (Rahimi et al., 2024). Unlike Grammarly's AI-driven rewording suggestions, Slick Write focuses primarily on detecting stylistic and structural issues more analytically. The platform's accessibility, requiring no software installation or account registration, makes it particularly relevant for educational contexts with limited technological infrastructure, a common characteristic of many developing nations' educational systems.

The investigation of Slick Write becomes even more critical when considered within specific cultural and institutional contexts that remain underrepresented in AWE research. Indonesian Islamic higher education represents a distinctive educational environment that combines Islamic pedagogical principles with contemporary academic standards, creating unique challenges and opportunities for technology integration (Anshari et al., 2017). These institutions serve large student populations who often enter university with varying levels of English

proficiency while facing high expectations for academic writing performance in English-medium instruction contexts.

The cultural dimensions of technology adoption in Islamic educational contexts complicate AWE implementation. Islamic educational philosophy emphasizes collaborative learning, respect for traditional knowledge sources, and careful evaluation of technological innovations for alignment with educational values (Anshari et al., 2017). Understanding how students within these contexts perceive and interact with AWE tools provides crucial insights for effective technology integration that respects cultural values while achieving pedagogical objectives.

Furthermore, the Indonesian EFL context presents specific challenges that make AWE tool investigation particularly urgent. Indonesian students often struggle with transitioning from academic writing conventions to English academic discourse patterns, which requires targeted technological support (Astuti, 2021). The limited availability of qualified English writing instructors in many Indonesian institutions creates additional pressure for technological solutions that can supplement human instruction effectively. As Astuti (2021) documented, many Indonesian EFL students "experienced difficulties organising their ideas, selecting appropriate vocabulary, and maintaining grammatical accuracy, which could hinder their academic progress" (p. 125).

Despite growing interest in AWE applications, several critical gaps persist in current research. First, most existing studies employ quantitative methodologies focused on writing score improvements, providing limited insight into students' experiential and perceptual dimensions of AWE engagement (Lin et al., 2022). Second, AWE research's geographical and cultural diversity remains limited, with Western educational contexts receiving disproportionate attention while developing nations' experiences remain under-explored. Third, tool-specific investigations have concentrated heavily on commercial platforms while overlooking freely available alternatives that may be more accessible to resource-constrained educational institutions.

This study is theoretically grounded in Sociocultural Theory (SCT) and Automated Writing Evaluation Theory, providing a comprehensive framework for understanding technology-mediated writing development. Sociocultural Theory, as articulated by Vygotsky (1978), posits that learning occurs through mediated interactions within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where technological tools can serve as scaffolds supporting learners' progression toward independent competence. Within this framework, AWE systems like Slick Write function as mediating artefacts, bridging the gap between students' writing abilities and potential development through structured feedback provision. As Lantolf & Thorne (2006) explained, digital tools like Slick Write can function "as scaffolding mechanisms, supporting students as they refined their writing skills before achieving full autonomy" (p. 201).

Complementing this sociocultural perspective, AWE Theory emphasizes the capacity of automated systems to foster learner autonomy through immediate, data-driven feedback on multiple writing dimensions. Warschauer & Grimes (2008) emphasized that "AWE tools fostered learner autonomy by enabling students to independently revise and reflect" (p. 28), arguing that such tools enhance writing proficiency by providing consistent, objective feedback that supplements human instruction while developing students' self-regulation capabilities. However, some scholars have cautioned that over-reliance on these tools might limit critical thinking and self-editing abilities, as students might become dependent on automated suggestions rather than developing their revision strategies (Hyland, 2019).

Building on these identified gaps and theoretical foundations, this study addresses the following research question: How do EFL undergraduate students in Indonesian Islamic higher education contexts perceive Slick Write as a web-based writing support tool for academic writing development?

This investigation offers a novel contribution by examining Slick Write specifically through the lens of Indonesian Islamic higher education students' experiences, an underrepresented population in AWE research. Unlike previous studies that focused primarily on error correction metrics, this research provides insights into the qualitative dimensions of students' engagement with web-based writing tools. Considering the specific cultural and institutional factors in Islamic higher education, this focus adds a unique perspective to the growing research on AWE tools, addressing the need for more diverse representation in educational technology studies (Anshari et al., 2017).

Through a qualitative research approach, this study seeks to determine whether students find Slick Write useful, practical, or limited in their writing process. The findings are expected to provide valuable insights into integrating web-based writing tools in EFL contexts and offer practical recommendations for educators seeking to enhance writing instruction through technology. Moreover, the results might inform university policies regarding adopting digital writing tools in academic curricula, particularly in contexts where freely accessible alternatives may be more sustainable than expensive commercial platforms.

Method

This study employs a qualitative case study approach to explore Indonesian EFL undergraduate students' perceptions regarding using Slick Write as a web-based writing support tool. A qualitative research design was selected as it allows for an in-depth exploration of students' experiences, providing rich descriptive data that reflect their engagement with the tool (Creswell, 2013). The case study methodology enables intensive examination of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, which is essential for understanding the complex

interactions between students and digital writing tools (Maxwell, 2013).

The study involved 10 undergraduate students (eight females, two male) from the eighth semester of their English language education program at a prominent Islamic university in North Sumatra, Indonesia. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, ensuring that all had prior experience using Slick Write for academic writing tasks. According to Patton (Patton, 2015), purposive sampling is appropriate when seeking information-rich cases to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. The selection criteria included: (1) completion of at least 75% of coursework in the English Education program, (2) demonstrated experience with Slick Write for academic writing tasks spanning at least two semesters, (3) willingness to participate in both questionnaire and interview phases, and (4) availability for follow-up procedures.

This study employed two data collection techniques: a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The closed-ended questionnaire was developed based on frameworks from previous studies on automated writing evaluation tools (Zhang, 2021) and consisted of 10 items using a five-point Likert scale, assessing students' perceptions across three dimensions: usability of Slick Write, perceived effectiveness for writing improvement, and limitations encountered. The semi-structured interview protocol consisted of 6 open-ended questions to elicit detailed responses about participants' experiences with Slick Write.

The questionnaire was distributed electronically through Google Forms, followed by fifteen- to twenty-minute interviews each. All interviews were audio-recorded with prior consent and conducted in English and Bahasa Indonesia to ensure participants could express their thoughts comfortably.

Data from questionnaires and interviews were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (Braun & Clarke, 2006) six-step thematic analysis framework: familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and producing the report. Interview data were transcribed verbatim, and relevant quotations were translated into English for analysis. To ensure coding reliability, two researchers independently coded 40% of the interview transcripts using the initial coding framework. Inter-rater reliability was calculated using Cohen's kappa (J. Cohen, 1960), yielding a coefficient of $\kappa = 0.87$, indicating substantial agreement between coders (Miles, 2020)

Data saturation was achieved when no new themes or significant variations emerged from the interviews (Guest et al., 2006). This occurred after the eighth interview, with the final two interviews serving as confirmatory cases. Comprehensive member checking was conducted to ensure data integrity and accuracy (Lincoln, 1985). An audit trail was maintained throughout the analysis process, documenting analytical decisions and interpretations to enhance the transparency and credibility of the findings (Shenton, 2004).

Before data collection, each participant received a clear explanation of the study's objectives and procedures and provided informed consent through a signed consent form (L. Cohen et al., 2017). Participation was voluntary, and students were informed of their freedom to withdraw at any stage without facing any negative consequences. To safeguard anonymity, pseudonyms (P1-P10) were assigned to each participant, and all identifiable information was removed from transcripts and reports.

Results

This qualitative case study explores Indonesian undergraduate students' perceptions of English as a foreign language (EFL) towards Slick Write as a web-based writing tool, answering the main research question: How do EFL undergraduate students view Slick Write as a web-based writing tool? This study utilized a closed-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interviews with ten eighth-semester students (eight females, two males) aged 20–21 years, all of whom had at least one semester of experience using Slick Write for academic writing assignments.

Closed-ended questionnaire responses indicated generally positive perceptions across five key dimensions, while interviews provided rich contextual understanding of these perceptions. Data showed that participants viewed Slick Write as a valuable tool for identifying strengths and weaknesses in their writing, with responses ranging from strongly agree to neutral, and occasional disagreement. These important variations and neutral responses require in-depth examination by integrating questionnaire patterns with interview insights.

The following analysis presents six themes that emerged from the thematic analysis of the interview data, providing a comprehensive understanding of students' experiences with the tool:

Effectiveness in Detecting Grammar Errors

One of the main advantages of using Slick Write is its ability to identify grammar errors that students commonly miss in their writing. The tool provides immediate feedback about grammatical mistakes, including verb tenses, missing articles, and sentence structure issues, helping students recognize recurring patterns in their errors. Most students found this feature particularly valuable, enabling them to improve their grammatical accuracy without relying solely on instructor feedback.
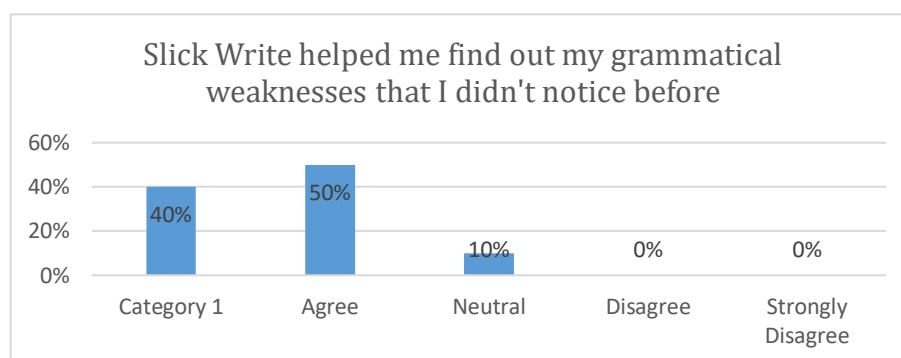
Figure 1. Questionnaire 1 Responses

The questionnaire responses showed strong positive perceptions regarding Slick Write's grammar detection capabilities, with four participants (40%) strongly agreeing and five (50%) agreeing that the tool helped them identify grammatical errors. Only one participant (10%) remained neutral, while no participants (0%) disagreed with this statement. This overwhelming positive response pattern (90% agreement) suggests that grammar error detection represents the tool's most recognized benefit among participants.

> *"Before I use Slick Write, I think my grammar is okay. But after using it, I see many mistakes I didn't notice. It shows me small errors like missing articles or wrong tenses. That really help me understand my weak points." (P2, interview, 2025)*
>
> *"I always forget about past tense and verbs. When I see the red underline, I feel like 'Oh, I make this mistake again.' It makes me more careful now." (P5, interview, 2025)*
>
> *"Slick Write is like my grammar checker friend. It checks my writing and tell me what's wrong. I use it every time I finish my assignment." (P8, interview, 2025)*

P2, P5, and P8 highlighted how Slick Write was a revealing tool that uncovered errors they had previously overlooked in their writing. P2's statement about discovering many errors she was unaware of reflects the tool's ability to raise metacognitive awareness of weaknesses in one's writing. P5 mentions tenses and verb issues, suggesting that the tool helps identify pattern-based errors that EFL students commonly experience. Meanwhile, P8's personification of the tool as a grammar checker friend suggests an emotional connection that makes the error correction process less intimidating. This personalization of technology aligns with research showing that a positive relationship with digital tools can increase student engagement in the writing improvement process.
Other participants shared similar reflections:

"Sometimes I just write quickly and don't read again. But with Slick Write,
it finds the errors I didn't see. I think it's really helpful." (P1, interview)
"I use this tool many times and always find grammar mistakes that I miss.
I feel like it makes my writing cleaner." (P4, interview)

P1 and P4 emphasized how Slick Write compensates for hasty writing habits by providing a safety net to detect missed errors. P1's confession about writing quickly and not reading anymore represents a common challenge among EFL students who may not have developed a thorough self-editing habit. P4's description of the tool making writing cleaner shows that grammar correction is perceived not only as technical accuracy but also as an aesthetic enhancement that improves the overall quality of writing. These responses suggest that automatic writing aids may be particularly valuable for students who struggle with the revision stage of the writing process, offering systematic support where self-regulation skills are still developing.

Clarity and Quality of Feedback

Slick Write offers clear and accessible feedback that effectively guides students through revision. Visual cues like underlines, highlights, and straightforward explanations make it easier for students to identify and fix issues independently. Most participants appreciated that even without deep grammatical knowledge, they could understand and apply the suggestions to improve their writing. However, some noted that explanations for complex grammar issues could be more comprehensive.
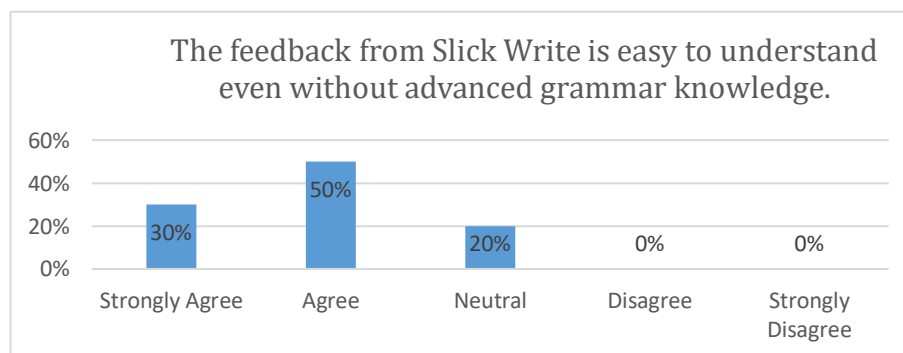

Figure 2. Questionnaire 2 Responses

The feedback clarity responses showed three participants (30%) strongly agreeing, five participants (50%) agreeing, and two participants (20%) remaining neutral. The overall positive response rate (80% agreement) indicates general satisfaction with feedback quality, but the neutral responses merit examination. Both neutral respondents (P9 and P6) were female students who expressed concerns about explanatory depth during interviews. These generally positive

responses suggest that the tool successfully strikes a balance between simplicity and effectiveness, providing guidance that can be applied by students without extensive grammar knowledge. Further interview responses explored how students interpreted and used this feedback in their writing process.

"The feedback is not too hard to understand. It tells me clearly where the problem is. Sometimes I don't get all the grammar terms, but I understand enough to fix my sentence." (P1, interview)

"When it says 'sentence is too long', I know I have to make it shorter. It doesn't give long explanation, but it's simple and helpful for me." (P6, interview)

"I think most of the feedback is okay. Not perfect, but I can follow the suggestions. It gives me warning and then I fix it." (P9, interview)

P1, P6, and P9 appreciated the accessibility of Slick Write's feedback system despite their varying levels of grammar knowledge. P1's admission that he did not understand all the grammatical terms, but he understood enough, highlights how the tool bridges the gap between technical linguistic concepts and practical application. This feature is significant for EFL students who may understand grammar intuitively but lack formal terminology. P6's example of responding to feedback on her sentences being too long demonstrates how a simple style guide can encourage meaningful revision. P9's characterization of the feedback as imperfect, but helpful and straightforward, shows that students value practicality over completeness, prioritizing actionable suggestions over exhaustive grammar explanations.

"The colours and underlines help me know which part to check. Even if I don't fully understand the grammar explanation, I still know what to change." (P3, interview)

"Sometimes it's a bit confusing, but I just read it twice and try to fix the sentence slowly. It's easier than checking everything by myself." (P2, interview)

P3 and P2 emphasize the value of Slick Write's visual feedback system in overcoming comprehension barriers. P3's comment about colours and underlines indicates that multimodal cues enhance the tool's usability by making abstract grammatical concepts more concrete and visually accessible. This aligns with research suggesting that visual scaffolding benefits EFL learners by reducing cognitive load during editing. P2's description of reading feedback twice and fixing slowly reveals the deliberate, reflective learning process that automated feedback can foster, encouraging students to engage deeply with editing rather than making superficial corrections.

Increasing Autonomy and Confidence in Writing

Using Slick Write helped students develop greater confidence and independence in their writing process. Many participants reported heavily relying on peers or instructors to review their work before using the tool. However, Slick Write enabled them to take initiative in identifying and correcting errors themselves. This shift toward self-reliance represents an important development in students' growth as writers, as they begin to trust their judgment and develop critical editing skills.
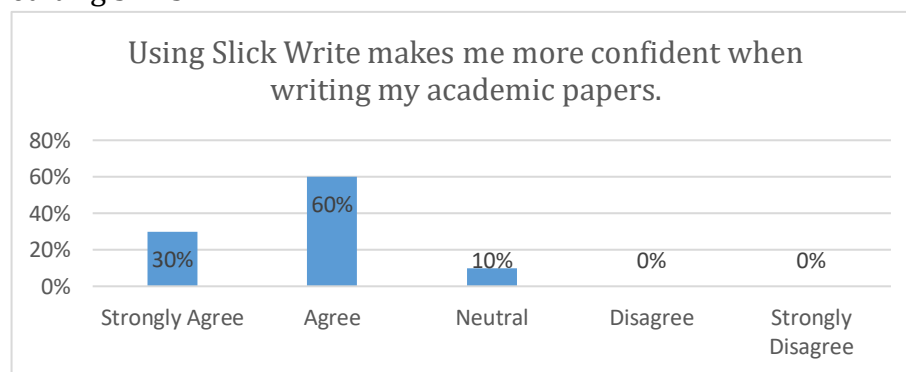

Figure 3. Questionnaire 3 Responses

Autonomy development showed strong support with three participants (30%) strongly agreeing, six participants (60%) agreeing, and one participant (10%) remaining neutral. The positive response rate (90% agreement) indicates widespread appreciation for the tool's confidence-building effects. During the interviews, the students shared personal experiences regarding their increased confidence.

"After I use this tool, I feel more confident to revise by myself. Before, I always ask my friend to check everything. Now I can try to fix it first alone." *(P3, interview)*

"I know I still make mistakes, but I feel better when I see that I can fix some things by myself. The tool helps me believe that I can improve." *(P7, interview)*

"Now I don't always depend on others. I try to check using Slick Write first, then ask feedback if needed. It helps me grow in writing." *(P10, interview)*

P3, P7, and P10 reveal a significant shift from dependency on peer review to greater self-reliance in their writing process. P3's transition from always asking my friend to attempt revisions alone represents a crucial developmental step toward writing autonomy. P7's acknowledgment that she still makes mistakes but feels better when self-correcting shows how automated tools can create a psychological

safety net that encourages risk-taking in writing. P10's description of a new workflow checking with Slick Write before seeking human feedback demonstrates how technology can serve as an intermediary step that builds confidence gradually. This progression toward independent editing aligns with Vygotsky's concept of scaffolding, where external support is gradually reduced as learners develop greater competence.

> *"I learn more when I fix my own writing. Using this tool make me think more about what I write, so I'm not too scared to revise anymore." (P5, interview)*
>
> *"It's like I become more responsible for my own writing. I don't wait for my lecturer or classmate; I try to do it first." (P8, interview)*

P5 and P8 highlight automated writing tools' cognitive and personal growth dimensions. P5's observation that she learns more when she fixes her writing and becomes not too scared to revise suggests that the tool transforms revision from an intimidating process into a learning opportunity, fostering what composition theorists call positive error attitudes. P8's comment about becoming more responsible for her writing indicates a shift in ownership and agency, key factors in developing intrinsic motivation for writing improvement. These responses demonstrate how automated tools can facilitate technical skill development and attitudinal changes that support long-term writing growth.

Enhancing Structured Revision Practices

Students also expressed that Slick Write helped them revise their writing to be more organized and strategic. Instead of revising arbitrarily, the tool guided them to focus on specific issues first, making the revision process more systematic.
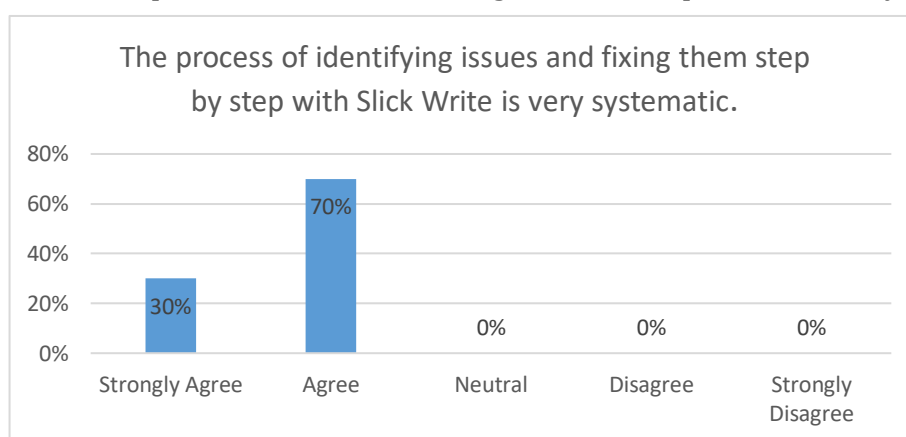

Figure 4. Questionnaire 4 Responses

This dimension received the most consistent positive responses, with three participants (30%) strongly agreeing and seven participants (70%) agreeing, resulting in a unanimous positive perception (100% agreement). The absence of neutral or negative responses suggests universal appreciation for the tool's organizational benefits. Several participants expressed their opinions regarding this perception during the interviews.

> *"I used to revise without thinking. Just change something if it looks wrong. But now, I follow the feedback from the tool step by step." (P2, interview)*
> *"It makes the revision easier because it shows which part has problem. I don't feel lost anymore. I fix the grammar first, then other things." (P4, interview)*
> *"I now revise in order. Before I jump everywhere, but now I see the list and follow it. It makes my process better." (P6, interview)*

P2, P4, and P6 describe how Slick Write has transformed their previously random revision approaches into systematic editing processes. P2's contrast between revising without thinking and following feedback step by step illustrates a transition from intuitive to strategic editing, a crucial metacognitive development for novice writers. P4's statement about no longer feeling lost during revision suggests that the tool alleviates the cognitive overload many EFL students experience when facing multiple writing issues simultaneously. P6's description of revising in order reflects the development of prioritization skills that are essential for efficient editing. These experiences align with research showing that structured feedback sequences help writers develop more effective revision strategies than open-ended correction tasks.

> *"Sometimes I just want to submit quickly, but with this tool, I take time to fix based on the suggestions. That's more structured for me." (P1, interview)*
> *"It helps me stay focused. I don't fix everything at once. I go one by one and think carefully." (P3, interview)*

P1 and P3 highlight how Slick Write counteracts hasty submission tendencies and promotes more careful writing consideration. Based on the suggestions, P1's acknowledgment of taking more time to fix reveals how automated tools can encourage students to invest additional effort in revision processes they might otherwise rush through. P3's description of going one by one and thinking carefully indicates the development of a more deliberate, analytical approach to editing rather than making superficial corrections. These testimonies suggest that automated writing tools can in still valuable editing habits that extend beyond immediate error correction to foster deeper engagement with the writing process,

potentially transferring to contexts where such tools are unavailable.

Suitability with Academic Writing Conventions

Students found that Slick Write generally supported their efforts to meet academic writing standards despite not being specifically designed. The tool encouraged a more formal tone, suggested appropriate vocabulary, and improved overall structure, helping students produce writing that aligns with scholarly expectations. Participants demonstrated critical thinking by selectively implementing suggestions that enhanced academic quality while disregarding those that did not fit the formal context of their assignments.
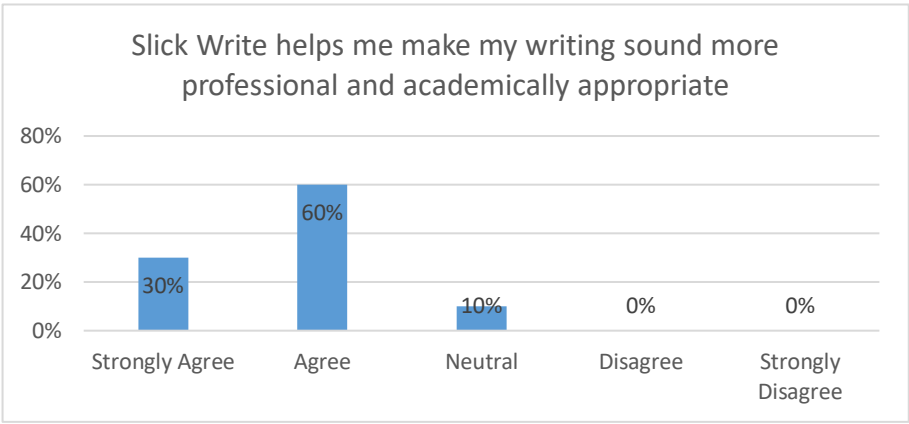

Figure 5. Questionnaire 5 Responses

Academic writing suitability responses showed three participants (30%) strongly agreeing, six participants (60%) agreeing, and one participant (10%) remaining neutral. The positive response rate (90% agreement) indicates general appreciation for the tool's academic writing support. The interviews provided a more nuanced insight into how students applied the suggestions from the tool to their academic tasks.

> *"The suggestions from Slick Write make my writing sound more formal. Like, it tells me to remove simple words and use better ones." (P7, interview)*
> *"I think it's good for assignments. My writing becomes clearer and more professional. Not perfect, but better than before." (P3, interview)*
> *"Some feedback looks general, but it's still useful. I just ignore the one that's not academic. Most of it still helps." (P9, interview)*

P7, P3, and P9 demonstrate how Slick Write supports the transition to formal academic writing styles despite its general-purpose design. P7's observation that the tool suggests removing simple words and using better ones indicates its value in promoting lexical sophistication, a key feature of academic discourse that EFL

students often struggle to develop naturally. P3's perception that their writing becomes more precise and professional suggests that the tool helps bridge the gap between conversational and academic communication styles. P9's statement about ignoring unacademic feedback reveals an important critical filtering process. Students are not passively accepting all suggestions but evaluating them against academic standards, demonstrating the development of genre awareness and rhetorical sensitivity that characterizes advanced writers.

> *"It reminds me to write in formal style. I use it for essays, and I feel more confident that it follows academic standard." (P6, interview)*
> *"Even though it's not made only for students, it still gives advice that fits with university writing. That's why I like to use it." (P2, interview)*

P6 and P2 emphasize Slick Write's role in building confidence specific to academic writing expectations. P6's comment about being reminded to write formally suggests that the tool is a consistent prompt for maintaining appropriate register, a challenging aspect of academic writing for EFL students who may unconsciously slip into informal patterns. P2's assessment that although "not made only for students, the tool still gives advice that fits with university writing" highlights its adaptability to educational contexts. This transfer of general writing advice to specific academic needs demonstrates the tool's flexibility and students' ability to contextualize feedback within their disciplinary requirements. This sophisticated cognitive skill indicates growing rhetorical awareness.

Over-Reliance on Automated Writing Tools

Some students expressed concerns about becoming too dependent on Slick Write for their writing process. They admitted feeling uncomfortable submitting work without checking it through the platform, suggesting a psychological reliance that might hinder their development as independent editors. This concern highlights the importance of balancing technological assistance with self-editing skills to ensure students continue developing critical thinking abilities alongside using digital writing tools.

Using Slick Write sometimes makes me dependent on technology for checking my writing

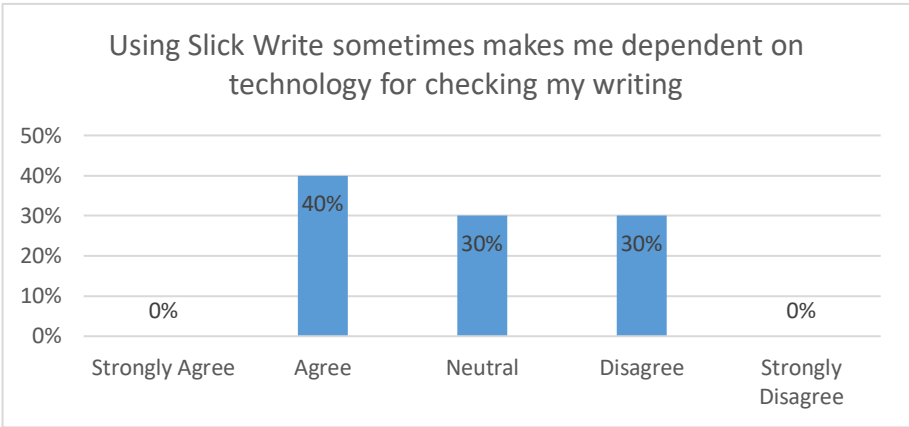|				
0%	40%	30%	30%	0%
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Figure 6. Questionnaire 6 Responses

The dependency concern showed varied responses: four participants (40%) agreed, three participants (30%) remained neutral, and three participants (30%) disagreed. This distribution reveals significant variation in perceived dependency risks among participants. During the interviews, students shared their personal experiences with this potential drawback.

> *"I always use it before I submit. I feel like if I don't check with the tool, I miss something. Maybe that's not good." (P1, interview)*
> *"I depend on it sometimes. Like, even for short writing, I still open it. But it's also my way to make sure." (P8, interview)*
> *"I try to fix things first, but in the end, I still use Slick Write. I feel safer if I double-check with the tool." (P10, interview)*

P1, P8, and P10 reveal underlying anxieties about submission quality that drive dependency on automated tools. P1's feeling that if she does not check with the tool, he misses something indicates a lack of confidence in their editing abilities that could potentially hinder long-term growth as an independent writer. P8's admission of using the tool even for short writing suggests that reliance has become habitual rather than strategic, potentially short-circuiting the development of internal editing processes. P10's statement about feeling safer with the tool reveals how technological support can create a psychological security that, while comforting, may inadvertently reinforce dependency. These responses highlight the paradoxical risk that tools intended to scaffold writing development may prevent students from internalizing editing skills if they remain permanently dependent on external validation.

> *"Yes, maybe I rely on it too much. But it helps me and saves time. I know I should try to balance it more." (P7, interview)*
> *"Sometimes I ask myself, can I revise without this tool? But I feel nervous, so I still use it. Maybe I'm too used to it." (P4, interview)*

P7 and P4 demonstrate awareness of their dependency while struggling to overcome it, revealing the complex psychological dynamics involved in tool usage. P7's acknowledgment that maybe she relies on it too much, but justification that it helps her and saves time, reveals the tension between efficiency and skill development many students face in digital learning environments. P4's rhetorical question: Can she revise without this tool? Followed by admission of nervousness, illustrates how technological dependency can create anxiety about unaided performance, a potential barrier to developing writing confidence. These reflections highlight a critical pedagogical challenge: helping students balance the immediate benefits of technological support with the long-term goals of developing independent writing competence and self-efficacy.

The questionnaire responses clearly indicated overall positive perceptions, while interview data revealed the complexity behind these response patterns. Neutral responses consistently reflected nuanced thinking rather than indifference, with participants articulating both benefits and limitations. The predominantly positive responses across most dimensions were supported by detailed interview descriptions of transformative experiences, while the varied responses on dependency aligned with different interview perspectives on appropriate tool usage. These findings collectively suggest that while Slick Write significantly supports EFL writing development, successful implementation requires attention to potential over-reliance and explicit instruction about the tool's limitations and appropriate usage contexts.

Discussion

This study's findings reveal how EFL undergraduate students in Indonesian Islamic higher education perceive Slick Write as a web-based writing support tool, demonstrating significant benefits and critical limitations aligned with the six major themes identified in the results. The results strongly support Vygotsky (1978) Sociocultural Theory, where Slick Write is a mediating artifact within the Zone of Proximal Development. Students' progression from peer dependency to writing autonomy exemplifies Lantolf & Thorne (2006) scaffolding process. The 90% positive response for grammar error detection and autonomy development confirms Warschauer & Grimes (2008) assertion that automated tools foster learner independence. This finding aligns with Dewi (2023) research showing that AWE tools significantly enhanced students' writing confidence and self-editing capabilities, enabling greater ownership of revision processes.

However, the study uncovered a critical paradox: while 90% reported increased autonomy, 40% simultaneously acknowledged concerning dependency levels. This reflects Chen (2019) autonomy paradox, where tools designed to promote independence create new forms of dependency. Participants like P1 expressed anxiety about submitting work without tool validation, suggesting what could be termed "technological learned helplessness," a phenomenon where students become psychologically dependent on automated feedback rather than developing internal editing confidence.

The Indonesian Islamic higher education context provides unique insights that are often overlooked in AWE research. The limited availability of qualified English writing instructors, as documented by Fithriani (2021), makes technological solutions particularly valuable for addressing critical educational gaps where intensive individual feedback is unavailable. Students successfully adapted Slick Write's formality suggestions to address cross-linguistic academic writing challenges that Astuti (2021) documented as persistent struggles for Indonesian EFL learners. The 100% positive response for structured revision practices and 90% agreement on academic writing suitability demonstrate the tool's effectiveness in supporting systematic editing approaches within cultural contexts, emphasizing collaborative learning (Anshari et al., 2017).

Compared to other AWE studies, this research found similar grammar detection benefits to those of Grammarly research (Rahimi et al., 2024) but revealed more pronounced dependency concerns than Li et al. (2015) Chinese EFL study. Slick Write's simplicity appeared advantageous for novice writers, supporting Cotos's (2011) argument that the complexity of the AWE tool should match learner proficiency levels. However, consistent with Wang et al. (2022) findings, limitations in addressing higher-order rhetorical concerns suggest standalone AWE tools are most effective when integrated with human feedback.

The dependency issue emerges as the most critical finding, with students expressing nervousness about tool-free revision despite reporting increased confidence. This anxiety-driven reliance extends Grimes' (2010) observation that assessment pressures intensify technological dependence, potentially impeding authentic skill development. The varied responses on dependency (40% agreeing, 30% neutral, 30% disagreeing) indicate individual differences in metacognitive awareness and learning preferences.

Several pedagogical solutions emerge from these findings. Implementing graduated withdrawal protocols could help students develop confidence through structured phases, aligning with Wood et al. (1976) scaffolding framework. Developing metacognitive awareness through explicit instruction about AWE limitations could promote strategic usage, echoing Wenden's (1998) advocacy for explicit metacognitive training. Most importantly, integrating AWE tools with peer review and instructor feedback addresses both dependency concerns and higher-order writing needs, supporting Fithriani (2021) argument for hybrid approaches

leveraging technological efficiency and human expertise in Indonesian EFL contexts.

For educational practice, Dewi (2023) research emphasizes that successful AWE implementation requires explicit pedagogical frameworks rather than simple tool access. Educators should introduce AWE tools with strategic usage instruction, implement combined technological and human feedback approaches, and monitor dependency development through regular tool-free activities.

This study makes several significant contributions to AWE literature. First, it provides the first systematic investigation of Slick Write in EFL contexts. It demonstrates that free platforms can achieve meaningful writing support outcomes, challenging assumptions about the necessity of expensive commercial systems. Second, identifying "technological learned helplessness" provides a new theoretical framework for understanding over-reliance phenomena in educational technology, extending beyond simple habit formation to psychological dependency patterns. Third, insights into Indonesian Islamic higher education contexts expand AWE research diversity, demonstrating how cultural values and resource constraints influence technology adoption and effectiveness.

The integration of Sociocultural Theory and AWE frameworks advances theoretical understanding of automated tools as mediating artifacts, particularly highlighting the autonomy paradox in technology-enhanced learning. These contributions suggest that successful AWE implementation requires careful balance between technological support and independent skill development, with particular attention to cultural contexts and institutional constraints. The findings indicate that while Slick Write provides valuable scaffolding for EFL writing development, optimal implementation requires dependency prevention strategies and integration with human feedback to address higher-order writing concerns. Future research should investigate long-term dependency patterns and explore hybrid approaches that optimize technological efficiency and human pedagogical expertise in culturally responsive educational frameworks.

Conclusion

This study examined Indonesian EFL undergraduate students' perceptions of Slick Write as a web-based writing support tool, revealing significant benefits demonstrating its potential value in EFL writing instruction. Students viewed the tool positively, particularly appreciating its ability to detect grammatical errors, provide clear feedback, and support more systematic revision practices. The research identified five key themes in students' experiences: effectiveness in grammar error detection, clarity of feedback, increased writing autonomy and confidence, enhanced structured revision practices, and general suitability for academic writing contexts. These findings suggest that Slick Write functions effectively as a scaffolding mechanism, helping students develop greater

confidence and autonomy in their writing processes, particularly for those who need support in developing foundational editing skills.

However, the research also uncovered important limitations and concerns that must be addressed for effective implementation. A significant finding was the potential over-reliance on automated tools, with several students expressing discomfort about submitting work without first checking it through Slick Write, indicating a psychological dependency that could hinder the development of independent editing capabilities. This underscores the importance of implementing these tools thoughtfully, with explicit instruction about their appropriate use and limitations. While this study provides valuable insights into how digital tools can support EFL writing development, it has several limitations, including the small sample size from a single institution that limits the generalizability of findings to other contexts.

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