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TABLE OF CONTENT

APPLICATION OF TECHNOLOGY AND BIG DATA IN THE FIELDS OF FINANCE, ACCOUNTING AND AUDITING IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBALIZATION

BANK RUN AND SILICON VALLEY BANK	1
Lam Dang Xuan Hoa, Ho Minh Khoa, Huynh Vo Nhat Linh	1
BIG DATA AND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS.....	14
Le Thi Minh, Vo Trung Hau	14
THE EFFICIENCY OF THE INTERNAL CONTROL SYSTEM IN RISK MANAGEMENT AT THE NAM A COMMERCIAL JOINT STOCK BANK	23
Truong Thanh Loc, Tran Ngoc Thanh.....	23
VIETNAM - AUSTRALIA ECONOMIC AND TRADE COOPERATION IN THE NEW NORMAL: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR VIETNAMESE INVESTORS.....	30
Nhu Nguyen Phuc Quynh*, Anh Nguyen Thi Nguyet, Duy Nguyen Anh	30
IMPACTS OF CREDIT GROWTH AND CREDIT RISK ON THE PROFIT OF VIETNAM JOINT STOCK COMMERCIAL BANKS	43
Dao Le Kieu Oanh*, Tran Thi Huong Ngan	43
FACTORS AFFECTING CUSTOMERS' DECISIONS TO USE E-BANKING AT JOINT STOCK COMMERCIAL BANKS IN HO CHI MINH CITY	57
Nguyen Duy Khanh ¹ , Pham Quoc Tham ²	57
HOW CHINA_USA POLITICAL TENSIONS AFFECT STOCK MARKET RETURN OF CHINA AND THE USA? A QUANTILE VAR CONNECTEDNESS APPROACH	70
Hao Wen Chang ¹ , Tsangyao Chang ² and Mei-Chih Wang ³	70
BANKING HUMAN RESOURCES BEFORE THE DEVELOPMENT OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AI	92
Nguyen Huynh Chi.....	92
IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF TRAINING THROUGH IMPROVEMENT OF STUDENT TESTING AND ASSESSMENT – CASE IN ACCOUNTING BRANCH, UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS AND FINANCE	102
Thuy Thi Ha	102
ACTIVITIES OF DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION IN VIETNAMESE COMMERCIAL BANKS: AN OVERVIEW DURING THE COVID-19 RECOVERY PERIOD.....	109
Nguyễn Thị Quỳnh Châu, Đào Lê Kiều Oanh	109
OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR VIETNAM IN ATTRACTIVE FDI IN GLOBAL MINIMUM CORPORATE TAX IMPLEMENTATION	117
Ngo Hoang Thong	117

DIGITAL ECONOMY IN VIETNAM, TRENDS AND POTENTIABILITY

DEVELOPING SMART HOME MODEL FOR APARTMENTS IN HO CHI MINH CITY BASED ON INTERNET OF THINGS (IoT) TECHNOLOGY	182
Dang Thanh Thuy ¹ , Nguyen Thanh Dien ²	182
TRANSPARENCY OF ACCOUNTING INFORMATION OF CONSTRUCTION ENTERPRISES IN HO CHI MINH CITY – CASE STUDY OF APPLICATION OF ACCRUAL ACCOUNTING	193
Truong Thanh Loc ^{1*} , Pham Thi Yen Nhi ²	193
FACTORS AFFECTING THE QUALITY OF FINANCIAL STATEMENTS OF MANUFACTURING ENTERPRISES IN HO CHI MINH CITY	207
Truong Thanh Loc [*] , Dang Nguyen Tuong Han, Nguyen Ngoc Mai Phuong, Nguyen Thi Quynh Huong	207
THE CRITICAL FACTORS OF COLLEGE STUDENTS' INTENTION TO USE METAVERSE TECHNOLOGY FOR SUBJECTS RELATED TO IMPORT-EXPORT LEARNING	221
Van Thuy Nguyen Ho, Chau The Huu, Luan Thanh Nguyen [*]	221
CONSUMER PERCEPTION ABOUT THE SUSTAINABILITY COMMITMENT OF LUXURY BRANDS IN VIETNAM AND CHINA MARKETS.....	233
Tran Minh Tu ¹	233
INFLUENCE OF WOM AND EWOM IN MAKING DECISION BUYING GOODS	247
Doan Anh Tu ¹ , Kim Phi Rum ² , Nguyen Pham Hai Ha ³	247
DIGITAL ECONOMY AND DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL IN VIETNAM.....	257
Hoang Thi Chinh, Nguyen Hoang Phan	257
BLOCKCHAIN APPLICATION IN MODERN LOGISTICS: INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE AND SOME RECOMMENDATIONS FOR VIETNAM	266
Nguyen Nu Tuong Vi.....	266
FACTORS AFFECTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE DIGITAL ECONOMY IN VIETNAM	272
Vo Tien Si	272
LEGAL FRAME FOR THE OPERATION OF THE REAL ESTATE BUSINESS UTILIZING THE BLOCKCHAIN PLATFORM IN VIETNAM.....	284
Le Thi Khanh Linh.....	284

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION – COOPERATION – GLOBAL INTEGRATION IN BUSINESS

FACTORS INFLUENCING BUSINESS ACCEPTANCE OF INDUSTRY 4.0 TECHNOLOGY APPLICATIONS IN DONG NAI PROVINCE.....	291
Thanh-Thu Vo*, Minh-Huong Tang.....	291
DIGITAL ORIENTATION, INNOVATION CAPABILITY AND FIRM PERFORMANCE: A PROPOSAL RESEARCH MODEL	298
Nguyen Van Hau	298
PREDICTION OF STUDENT'S BEHAVIORAL INTENTION TO USE SMART LEARNING ENVIRONMENT: A COMBINED MODEL OF SELF-DETERMINATION THEORY AND TECHNOLOGY ACCEPTANCE	309
Nguyen Thi Hai Binh ¹ , Dao Y Nhi ² , Nguyen Thanh Luan ³ , Dang Quan Tri ⁴	309
THE PEDAGOGICAL IMPACT OF GRAMMARLY ON EFL WRITING COMPETENCY: AN EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION CONTEXT.	323
Nguyen Thi Hong Lien ¹ , Nguyen Truong Gia Minh ² , Nguyen Ngoc Vu ^{3*}	323
FACTORS AFFECTING PURCHASING DECISION OF THE YOUTH ON TIKTOK	336
Ngoc Pham ¹ , Thanh Cong Tran*.....	336
FACTORS AFFECTING OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY BEHAVIORS OF WORKERS DIRECT PRODUCTION AT CU CHI POWER COMPANY.....	345
Minh Luan Le, Thi Trang Tran.....	345
CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND EMPLOYEES' ORGANIZATIONAL CITIZENSHIP BEHAVIOUR.....	355
Nguyen Xuan Hung ¹ , Ha Le Thu Hoai ¹ , Nguyen Huu My Truc ^{2&3} , Pham Tan Nhat ^{2&3}	355
THE INNOVATION CAPACITY - THE ROLE OF LEADERS OF SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES IN HO CHI MINH CITY, VIETNAM.....	365
Huynh Nhut Nghia	365
PEOPLE'S THOUGHTS ON THE IMPACT OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE ON BUSINESS	376
Ton Nguyen Trong Hien, Bui Tuyet Anh	376
FACTORS AFFECTING BRAND SWITCHING INTENTION IN THE CONTEXT OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN VIETNAM	382
Ly Dan Thanh, Nguyen Phu Quoi, Tran Hoang Nam, Vo Hong Son, Nguyen Ngoc Thuy Tien	382
ENHANCE THE DIGITAL COMPETITIVENESS	398
Tran Quang Canh, Hoang Thi Chinh.....	398

ASSESSING PATIENT SATISFACTION (BRAND) AFTER THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AT THU DUC CITY HOSPITAL.....	408
Nguyen Hoang Dung ^{1*} , Nguyen Huynh Bao An ² , Van Phuong Trang ²	408
INDUSTRIAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES FORM THE FOUNDATION FOR BINH DUONG'S SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	408
Hoang-An Nguyen	417
IMPACT OF ORGANIZATIONAL FAIRNESS ON THE EMPLOYEES' KNOWLEDGE SHARING IN TRAVEL AND TOURISM ENTERPRISES IN HO CHI MINH CITY	426
Le Thi Nhu Quynh ^{1,2} , Le Thi Giang ² , Truong Quang Dung ¹	426
THE EFFECT OF PERSONAL MOTIVATION ON THE TACIT KNOWLEDGE SHARING BEHAVIOR OF 5-STAR HOTELS' EMPLOYEES IN HO CHI MINH CITY	440
Le Thi Giang, Nguyen Bach Hoang Phung.....	440
DIGITAL COMPETITIVENESS AND OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY OF ENTERPRISES IN THE DIGITAL ERA: THE CASE OF VIETNAMESE ENTERPRISES	453
Diep Nguyen Thi Ngoc ^{1*} , Canh Quang Tran ² , Anh Bach Hoang Ngoc ¹	453
FACTORS INFLUENCING PARENTS' SELECTION OF PRIVATE PRESCHOOLS IN THU DUC CITY	466
Thi-Trang Tran ¹ , Thi-My-Dung Pham ² , Thi-Bich-Diep Le ^{1*}	466

RECOVERY COMMUNICATIONS IN THE TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY AFTER THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

DEVELOPING A SPIRITUAL TOURISM DESTINATION IMAGE MEASUREMENT SCALE OF AN GIANG	474
Nguyen Vuong Hoai Thao ¹ , Nguyen Quyet Thang ²	474
PROSPECTS OF VIRTUAL REALITY TOURISM APPLICATION IN VIETNAM TOURISM PROMOTION	487
Nguyen Thi Hong Ha, Pham Thi Huong Giang.....	487
PERSONALIZATION TRAVEL TRENDING IN HO CHI MINH CITY IN THE CONTEXT OF POST COVID-19	497
Duong Bao Trung.....	497
IMPACTS OF MEDIA ON CUSTOMERS' DECISION TO CHOOSE FOOD AND BEVERAGE SERVICES POST THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC	511
Nguyen Thi Bich Van	511
DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION APPLICATION TO PROMOTE THE RECOVERY AND DEVELOPMENT OF INBOUND TOURISM IN HO CHI MINH CITY	521
Tran Trong Thanh	521
VIETNAM TOURISM AFTER COVID-19 PANDEMIC	527
Nguyen Hoang Phan ¹ , Hoang Thi Chinh ²	527
NAVIGATING THE EVOLVING LANDSCAPE OF SOCIAL MEDIA DATA MINING AND PRIVACY	537
Pham Thai Hien	537
THE CORRELATION BETWEEN STUDENT SELF-REPORTED GENERAL WELL-BEING AND PERCEIVED SUPPORT FROM FRIENDS, TEACHERS, AND UNIVERSITY	545
Virginia Kelsey ¹ , Đặng Thị Mai Ly ^{2*} , Nguyễn Anh Khoa ² , Nguyễn Văn Tường ²	545

DIGITAL VERSUS NON- DIGITAL

PROVIDING CONVENIENCE TO CUSTOMERS IN THE DIGITAL MARKETING ERA: OBSERVATIONS FROM COMMERCIAL BANKS IN HO CHI MINH CITY	556
Nguyen Quang Trung	556
VIRTUAL REALITY: AN INNOVATIVE TOOL IN TOURISM EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING	564
Thanh Nguyen Ngoc Le ¹ , Khuong Thanh Nguyen ²	564
THEORETICAL CONCEPTS OF STRATEGIC POSITIONING FOR PLACE BRANDING: A CASE STUDY OF DONG THAP PROVINCE	580
Phan Bao Giang.....	580
LITERATURE REVIEW ON THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL MARKETING ON VIETNAM'S SMALL AND THE MEDIUM BUSINESS ENTERPRISES (SMEs)	587
Lê Kim Nguyên *	587

CHALLENGES FACED BY TEACHERS IN NON-TRADITIONAL EDUCATION

PROPOSE AN ONLINE TEACHING COMPETENCE SCALE FOR UNIVERSITY LECTURERS	596
Duong Thi Kim Oanh*, Dang Thi Dieu Hien	596
EXAMINE USAGE OF LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS (LMSS) BY FACULTY STAFF AT UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS (UEF) AND FINANCE WITH EXPANDED TECHNOLOGY ACCEPTANCE MODEL (TAM).....	608
Ha Truong Minh Hieu, Ngo Minh Hai*, Mach Tran Huy.....	608

**DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION
AN INDISPENSABLE EVOLUTION FOR SUSTAINABLE CORPORATES**

FACTORS AFFECTING THE APPLICATION OF STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTING AT MANUFACTURING ENTERPRISES IN BINH DUONG PROVINCE	618
Truong Thanh Loc ^{1*} , Nguyen Thi Thanh Truc ²	618
HRM DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION: TAKING A ROAD OF SUCCESSION PLANNING ..	629
Trương Phan Hoàng Anh, Giang Ngọc Anh.....	629
THE IMPLICATION OF CONTACTLESS SERVICE AS A TOOL TO IMPROVE CUSTOMER REVISIT INTENTION	640
Linh, Nguyen Duy Yen*	640
TOURISM BRAND LOVE IN THE DIGITAL AGE: THE ROLE OF ONLINE TOURIST EXPERIENCES, TOURIST-BRAND RELATIONSHIP QUALITY AND SUSTAINABILITY	651
Thanh Nguyen Ngoc Le	651
CONDUCTING FOCUS GROUPS IN CROSS-CULTURAL SCHOLARSHIP OF TEACHING AND LEARNING (SoTL): A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY	662
Punithan Moganathas ¹ , Jenny Hill ² , Andy V.-M. Kok ² , Matt Barr ² , Ruffin Relja ^{2*} , Philippa Ward ² , Duong Tran Quang Hoang ³ , Quynh Phuong Tran ³	662
LEVERAGING DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION FOR SUSTAINABLE CORPORATE EVOLUTION IN VIETNAM	677
Nguyen, Tan Dat ¹ , Le, Dinh Thang ²	677

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND APPLICATIONS

FB-PROPHET MODEL FOR TIME SERIES FORECASTING IN SALES	691
Thanh Cong Tran	691
USING AI CODE IN C# PROGRAMMING	698
Nguyen Ha Giang.....	698
DETERMINANTS OF CONTINUANCE USAGE INTENTION OF MOBILE FOOD ORDERING APPLICATIONS (MFOAS) AMONG VIETNAMESE USERS: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF E- SATISFACTION	705
Lam Hoang Phuong ^{1*} , Nguyen Thi Kim Lien ² , Tien Hung Nguyen ³ , Vinh Long Nguyen ⁴	705
DECODING MARKETING INSIGHT: INSIGHT FROM OUTSIDE.....	718
Hoàng Thị Hằng, Trần Thành Công*	718
DIGITAL DISRUPTION AND DATA SECURITY: HOW FINTECH IS RESHAPING BANKING ...	724
Hoàng Văn Hiếu, Trần Ngọc Thiên Ngân.....	724

TRENDS AND ISSUES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

EFL LEARNERS' ATTITUDES AND LEARNING ENGAGEMENT IN COMMUNICATIVE GAME-BASED GRAMMAR TEACHING	736
Nguyen Thi Thanh Huyen ¹ , Tran Quoc Thao ²	736
APPROACHES TO TEACHING L2 LISTENING:.....	749
CLOSING THE GAP BETWEEN REAL-LIFE AND CLASSROOM-BASED LISTENING	749
Luu Thi Mai Vy	749
DEFINING ROLES OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN THE 21ST CENTURY LANGUAGE CLASSROOM	755
Ho Xuan Tien, Duong My Tham.....	755
EFL STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND LEARNING INVESTMENT IN PORTFOLIO - BASED ENGLISH WRITING LEARNING: A LITERATURE REVIEW	763
Ly Gia Huy ¹ , Tran Quoc Thao ²	763
EXPLORING EFL LEARNER IDENTITIES IN PROJECT-BASED LANGUAGE LEARNING AT A HIGH SCHOOL IN AN GIANG PROVINCE	774
Nguyen Hong Thien ¹ , Tran Quoc Thao ²	774
THE VALUES OF SYNTACTIC COMPLEXITY IN ACADEMIC WRITING: A LITERATURE REVIEW	791
THE ISSUE OF AMBIGUITY IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE.....	801
Nguyen Dinh Tuan	801
RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES ON JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL EFL STUDENTS' MOTIVATION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING	812
Huynh Thanh Nhon ¹ , Tran Quoc Thao ²	812
EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF WRITING ANXIETY ON VIETNAMESE ESL UNDERGRADUATES' WRITING PERFORMANCE: A QUANTITATIVE STUDY.....	821
Nguyen Ngoc Nguyen, Nguyen Hoang Phan.....	821
THE APPLICATION OF THE “FLIPPED CLASSROOM” MODEL IN TEACHING ENGLISH IN THE VIETNAMESE UNIVERSITY EDUCATION ENVIRONMENT	838
THE USE OF RESOURCE MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES IN EFLFLIPPED CLASSROOMS	847
Nguyen Quynh Thao Vy ^{1,*} , Duong My Tham ²	847
INSIGHTS INTO ENGLISH MAJOR STUDENTS' USE OF PHRASAL VERBS IN ACADEMIC WRITING.....	860
Do Thi Thanh Thuy, Tran Quoc Thao	860

LAW IN THE CONTEXT OF INTERNATIONAL INTEGRATION

LEGALISING INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY INFRINGEMENTS IN RUSSIA – A WAR TACTIC IN THE CONTEXT OF RUSSIA’S INVASION OF UKRAINE.....	869
Bui Thi Hong Ninh*	869
MODEL OF ASSET REGISTRATION WORLDWIDE AND LESSONS FOR VIETNAM IN IMPROVING ASSET REGISTRATION LAWS.....	880
Vu Anh Sao ^{1,2} , Nguyen Thi Xuan Mai ²	880
LEGAL ISSUES ARISING FROM THE DEVELOPMENT, IMPLEMENTATION, AND USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) - INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCES AND LESSONS FOR VIETNAM	887
Le Hoang Minh Huy*, Nguyen Thi Thu Ha, Dao Trong Duc, Ky Dieu Linh, Bui Thi Thuy Linh, Nguyen Nam Trung.....	887
SOUTH KOREA’S EXPERIENCES ON PROPERTY REGISTRATION LAW - LESSONS FOR VIETNAM	896
Vu Anh Sao, Pham Huynh Bao Oanh.....	896
THE RISE OF REMOTE WORK: LEGAL CHALLENGES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR EMPLOYMENT LAW IN VIETNAM	903
Nguyen Thi Xuan Mai ¹ , Nguyen Thi Ngoc Loan ²	903
CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK IN THE EMERGING AGE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE.....	910
Nguyen Thi Thu Trang	910
THE IMPACTS OF GLOBAL MINIMUM TAX ON FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT (FDI) CORPORATIONS IN VIETNAM.....	921
Trần Ngọc Thanh ¹	921
CROSS-BORDER E-COMMERCE ACTIVITIES AND TAX MANAGEMENT ISSUES	933
Le Huynh Phuong Chinh, Ngo Thi Khanh Linh, Pham Ngoc Lan Anh.....	933
EXPERIENCE IN KOREA AND CHINA ON TAX MANAGEMENT FOR CROSS-BORDER E-COMMERCE ACTIVITIES	941
Duong Anh Son ¹ , Tran Vang Phu ²	941
LEGAL PERSPECTIVE ON REGULATIONS RALATED TO PERSONAL INCOME TAX WHEN EARNING INCOME THROUGH E-COMMERCE PLATFORMS IN VIETNAM, TAKING THE CASE OF INDIVIDUALS DOING BUSINESS THROUGH TIKTOK APPLICATION.....	946
Nguyen Duc Tri ¹ , Hoang Minh Châu ²	946
THE COMPATIBILITY ON THE SCOPE OF MUTUAL LEGAL ASSISTANCE (MLA) IN CRIMINAL MATTERS AND THE CONDITIONS OF REFUSAL MLA IN CRIMINAL MATTERS BETWEEN VIETNAMESE LAW AND INTERNATIONAL TREATIES WHICH VIETNAM HAS SIGNED.	956

Pham Huynh Bao Oanh.....	956
TAX POLICY FOR E-COMMERCE OF COUNTRIES IN THE WORLD AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO VIETNAM.....	967
Nguyen Thanh Minh Chanh, Ha Thi Van Anh, Pham Lam Tam Nhu	967
LEGAL REGULATIONS FOR ENTERPRISE OBLIGATIONS TO PROVIDE INFORMATION ON E-COMMERCE PLATFORM	974
Truong Kim Phung*, Nguyen Hoang Chuong	974
“ROBOT TAX” – RECOMMENDATIONS FOR VIETNAM.....	981
Gian Thi Le Na, Pham Phuong Doanh.....	981
WTO APPELLATE BODY REFORM IN THE CONTEXT OF ESCALATING GEOPOLITICAL TENSIONS.....	988
Nguyen Nam Trung.....	988

IMPACTS OF STATE OWNERSHIP AND BUSINESS CHARACTERISTICS ON TAX AVOIDANCE: EVIDENCE IN VIETNAM.....	128
Huyen Ngoc Nguyen, Thanh Dan Bui	128
RUSSIA'S IMPACTS AND SCENES ON BEING BANNED FROM SWIFT	143
Lam Dang Xuan Hoa ¹ , Phan Ngoc Anh ²	143
THE ROLE OF ACCESS TO FINANCE AND THE ENTREPRENEURIAL INTENTION OF YOUNGERS IN THE SOUTHWESTERN PROVINCE, VIETNAM.....	151
Vu Truc Phuc*, Nguyen Dang Hat, Nguyen An Phu, Dao Le Kieu Oanh	151

THE PEDAGOGICAL IMPACT OF GRAMMARLY ON EFL WRITING COMPETENCY: AN EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION CONTEXT.

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Abstract

In today's technology-driven era, Automated Writing Evaluation (AWE) systems and Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) applications have become important tools for students to improve their writing skills. These digital tools, especially Grammarly, help students with various aspects of writing, including vocabulary, grammar, punctuation, and overall coherence. This study focuses on examining the experiences and perceptions of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students at a Vietnamese university who used Grammarly as a learning resource. The researchers used a mixed-methods approach, including a pre- and post-test in the classroom to measure changes in students' proficiency after using Grammarly. Twenty-two students in the experimental group completed a 5-point Likert scale evaluation, and ten students participated in interviews to share their experiences with the software. The findings of the study indicate that integrating Grammarly into English writing classes has positive effects on students' writing performance and the students generally have a positive view of Grammarly's capabilities.

Key words: *Automated Writing Evaluation (AWE), Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL), English as a Foreign Language (EFL), Grammarly, Mixed-Methods Research*

1. Introduction

In the age of globalization, the ability to communicate fluently in English is considered an essential skill for Vietnamese students. Many organizations have included international certifications such as IELTS, TOEFL, and TOEIC in their recruitment requirements. However, given the current large class sizes in Vietnam, with approximately 30 to 40 students in one class, it is a challenge for English teachers to provide detailed feedback on students' productive skills, especially writing. Therefore, students often lack opportunities to receive constructive feedback on their writing and struggle to compose complete and meaningful English paragraphs. This leads to the need for integrating CALL – Computer Assisted Language Learning – into ESL classrooms to alleviate teachers' burdens and enhance students' writing skills concurrently. Within CALL, automated writing evaluation (AWE) tools like Grammarly have become popular in the ESL community. This AI-powered tool helps learners self-correct their writing, enhancing grammar and vocabulary, and lessens teachers' marking load. While Grammarly has gained global acceptance as a useful writing assistance tool, its application mostly revolves around personal use for day-to-day communications such as writing emails, blog posts, and cover letters. In the context of academic

writing, previous studies have shown that Grammarly positively impacts students' writing skills. However, there is a notable lack of research on this topic within the Vietnamese context. For the reasons mentioned above, this study is conducted to investigate Grammarly's impact on English major students' writing skills, focusing on its use in writing complete essays and students' attitudes towards it. The research also hopes to contribute to CALL theory and promote Grammarly as a useful tool in Vietnamese English Second Language learning.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Writing skills and Its Importance in ESL's teaching and learning process

In the context of ESL instruction, writing proficiency is vital for academic success and professional adaptability (Rao & Durga, 2018). It acts as an instrument for knowledge consolidation and is pivotal in higher education settings (Shrestha et al., 2016; Adi Badiozaman, 2017). Ramadani (2013) reiterate that writing is a critical communication medium and an indicator of proficiency in reading, writing, and speaking. Teaching writing extends beyond language reinforcement; it involves guiding students towards meaningful discourse and preparing them for various contexts (Harmer, 2010; Hedge, 2005; Bowker, 2007). Dhanya & Alamelu (2019) and Helena (2018) further identify the classroom environment, feedback, motivation, student-teacher relationship, teacher income, training style, external factors, learning culture, and emotional aspects as additional influential factors.

Various pedagogical strategies have been proposed for writing skill development. These include Modeled Writing, Interactive Writing, PLEASE strategy, Mind-mapping, Guided Writing (Astrini et al., 2020; Cole & Feng, 2015; Mistar et al., 2014). Teachers play significant roles as leaders, facilitators, resources, and tutors (Gadd, 2017; Arumawati, 2018; Purnama, 2015). Their duties span selecting relevant writing topics, aligning topics with learning objectives, clarifying expected outcomes, fostering independent practice, and creating conducive learning environments (Hossain, 2015; Graham, 2019). Thus, successful writing instruction largely depends on the teacher's performance and their varied roles.

2.2 The Role of CALL and AWE in Teaching Writing Skills

Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) is a method that utilizes computer technology to aid language learning by offering easy access to educational materials and data (Ratnaningsih et al., 2019; White & Reinders, 2010). CALL offers numerous tools such as dictionaries, pronunciation tutors, quizzes, games, and writing software (Lee, 1998; Torat, 2013). Yang (2013) classifies CALL tools into tutorials, tools, tests, and packages to enhance language skills. Automated Writing Evaluation (AWE) is a branch of CALL used in education, especially for essay evaluation by considering factors like grammar, spelling, sentence construction, and word choice (Grimes & Warschauer, 2010).

AWE, introduced in the 1960s, combines elements from various fields such as educational measurement, computational linguistics, cognitive science, and pedagogy (Cotos, 2018; Elliot et al., 2013). The evolution of CALL and E-learning has revolutionized the field of language learning (Principi, 2017). The advancement of these technologies has made it possible to adopt innovative teaching methods and tools, making learning more interactive and efficient. Several studies worldwide have evaluated the impacts of CALL and AWE on writing skills. It assists teachers in grading student essays and provides opportunities for practice (Dikli, 2006). AWE offers several benefits as outlined by various researchers. Warschauer & Grimes (2008) highlight how it fosters active learning among students and alleviates teachers' workload. Lavolette et al. (2015) emphasize the immediate feedback provided by AWE to help students enhance their writing skills, exemplified by the MY Access software. Further, Grigoryan (2018) and Li & Hegelheimer

(2013) highlight how advancements in software and learning tools like grammar editing software can expedite improvement in writing skills and overall academic performance.

2.3 Functions and Benefits of Grammarly in Automated Writing Evaluation

Grammarly, established in 2009 by Max Lytvin, Dima Lider, and Alex Shevchenko, is a notable and innovative tool in Automated Writing Evaluation (AWE) (Jayavalan & Razali, 2018). It is highly regarded for its exceptional precision as an English grammar checker and its status as one of the most groundbreaking companies, benefiting 30 million users in improving their writing skills. The functionality of Grammarly encompasses various aspects, as highlighted by Bailey & Lee (2020) and O'Neill & Russell (2019b). It not only identifies over 300 types of writing mistakes but also offers checks for spelling, grammar, punctuation, vocabulary, and plagiarism. In recent years, Grammarly has introduced additional features such as a tone detector, mobile synonyms, consistency in writing, and tools for clarity and readability (Syafi'i, 2020).

One of the primary reasons Grammarly serves as a potent teaching tool to traditional methods is its ability to provide immediate, constructive feedback (Nova, 2018). Instantaneous feedback, grounded in learning theories such as behaviorism, helps in reinforcing correct behaviors and improving errors on-the-spot, allowing learners to better internalize corrections (Nova, 2018; Soegiyarto et al., 2020; Gain et al., 2019). Moreover, by offering insights on common mistakes (Moon, 2021) and providing an avenue for continuous practice, Grammarly aligns with the principle of repetition and reinforcement, known cornerstones in learning. The ubiquitous nature of digital tools like Grammarly ensures accessibility anytime, offering flexibility not seen in traditional educational setups (Means et al., 2013). Staples et al., (2015) point out that unlike traditional methods, which may suffer from instructor bias or variability in feedback, automated platforms guarantee consistency through their algorithm-driven responses. Beyond mere error identification, tools like Grammarly offer comprehensive explanations, aiding students in understanding their mistakes (Warschauer & Ware, 2006). This facilitates a personalized learning approach, letting students engage at their pace, revisiting content as needed, promoting deeper comprehension (Pane et al., 2015).

Although previous studies highlight the vital role and the significant impact of tools like Grammarly in writing skill development, certain gaps remain. Zhang (2021) and Stevenson (2016) focus on students' comprehension level of the edited version of their writing and the potential negative impacts of relying too heavily on AWE. Derakhshan et al. (2015) and Gao (2021) underscore the challenges and limitations of AWE, which include difficulty in using the tool, inability to answer student queries fully, and shortcomings in enhancing the logical structure of writing. Lorena & Ximena (2019) further elucidate the limitations by highlighting issues faced by students while using Grammarly. It may occasionally overlook content and context checks, unintentionally alter intended meanings, or provide feedback inconsistent with the author's intentions (Nova, 2018; Fitriana & Nurazni, 2021). Furthermore, while the free version of Grammarly effectively handles minor errors, the premium version offers more advanced features (Lailika, 2019). Lastly, the effectiveness of Grammarly is dependent on the quality of internet connectivity (Ummah, 2022). In terms of student attitudes towards Grammarly, studies by Miranty et al., (2021) and Ventayen & Orlanda-Ventayen (2018) found that students generally had positive views about the tool, with many reporting improved confidence and efficiency in their writing. However, limited studies exist in certain regions, like Vietnam, where Ngan & Tan (2020) research remains the sole work on Grammarly's impact. This study, therefore, seeks to fill this research gap by investigating the specific effects of Grammarly on this population by attempting to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent does Grammarly affect students' writing skills?

2. What are the students' attitudes towards using the free service of Grammarly to improve their writing skills?

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Process

The researcher adopted a mixed-method approach with both quantitative and qualitative research methods. For the quantitative part, two distinct groups were established: an experimental group and a control group. Both groups underwent two phases of testing including a pre-test and a post-test. The experimental sessions, spanning over 8.5 weeks, were conducted for every two-hour class meeting. The primary focus of the initial six weeks was the treatment, whereas the final two weeks were dedicated to analyzing students' results. The most prominent difference between the two groups was the method of assignment completion: the control group relied on traditional paper assignments, while the experimental group used Microsoft Word with Grammarly's features. The Grammarly tool was used to check different aspects of writing, including plagiarism, grammar, punctuation, vocabulary, and spelling. Both groups tackled the same writing topic for the pre-test and post-test. On the qualitative side, the experimental group also engaged in an additional questionnaire and a few of them were invited for a brief interview.

3.2 Research Participants

The research was conducted at 2 English writing classes at a university in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The sample is made up of 35 students majoring in English Language Studies. They were randomly divided into two groups. A control group with 12 students and an experimental group with 23 students. Most of the participants were aged between 19-20, with a minority of older students. Of the participants, there were 18 females and 17 males.

3.4 Research instruments

The research employed three distinct instruments for data collection: Pre-tests and Post-tests, a questionnaire, and interviews. Pre-tests and Post-tests were used to compare the writing abilities of the participants before and after the experimental interventions. Topics for the writing tests were selected from "Skills for Success: Reading and Writing 4" by Daise et al. (2011), ensuring the alignment with material students had previously familiarized in their course. Using these recognized standards and familiar topics ensured that the assessment was both valid and reliable. Moreover, a rubric was employed to evaluate different writing aspects such as content, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics. In addition to the tests, a questionnaire comprising 15 questions was distributed to 35 students. This aimed to gather information on their attitudes towards Grammarly, specifically its benefits, drawbacks, and influence on their writing skills. or added reliability and clarity, the content was translated into Vietnamese to eliminate potential misunderstandings. The responses were collected using a 5-point Likert scale. Finally, a group of 10 volunteers from the experimental set were selected for interviews. These interviews served as a platform to explore in greater depth the participants' experiences and perceptions of using Grammarly. By selecting a subset of participants and having a structured set of questions, the interviews aimed to provide valid insights and consistent data across different interviewees.

The quantitative analysis employed SPSS version 29 to analyze pre- and post-test data, while questionnaire data were analyzed under the 5-point Likert scale and using Cronbach's Alpha. Qualitative analysis involved recording, transcribing, and categorizing student interviews for a systematic content analysis process.

4. Findings and discussions

4.1 Pre-test and Post-test Analysis

Table 1***Descriptive Statistics of CG's Pre-Test and Post-Test***

Item	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Dev	Variance
CG's Writing Pre-test	12	2.50	7.00	9.50	8.1083	0.73294	0.5372
CG's Writing Post-test	12	3.00	6.50	9.50	8.2750	0.88844	0.7893

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the Control Group's (CG's) pre-test and post-test scores. The pre-test and post-test both had 12 participants. The pre-test scores had a range of 2.50, with a minimum score of 7.00 and a maximum score of 9.50. The mean score was 8.1083, which indicates that the average performance was high. The standard deviation was relatively low at 0.73294, suggesting that the scores were close to the mean. This is further supported by the variance of 0.5372. In the post-test, the range widened slightly to 3.00, and the minimum score dropped to 6.50. However, the maximum score remained consistent at 9.50. Interestingly, despite the lower minimum score, the mean post-test score increased to 8.2750, suggesting an overall improvement in the group's performance.

Table 2***Descriptive Statistics of EG's Pre-Test and Post-Test***

Item	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std.Dev	Variance
EG Writing Pre-test	23	2.40	6.70	9.10	8.4826	0.70624	0.4988
EG Writing Post-test	23	2.20	7.80	10.00	9.3304	0.60184	0.3622

For the Experimental Group's (EG's) pre-test scores (Table 2), the scores ranged from 6.70 to 9.10, with a range of 2.40. The average score was relatively high at 8.4826, and the standard deviation was fairly low at 0.70624. The low variance of 0.4988 further supported this relatively low dispersion of scores around the mean. Following the intervention, the post-test results exhibited a range of 2.20, with the minimum score rising significantly to 7.80 and the maximum score increasing to 10.00. Notably, the mean score increased to 9.3304, which indicates a considerable overall improvement in the EG's performance. The standard deviation decreased slightly to 0.60184, along with a decrease in variance to 0.3622. These values suggest that the post-test scores were even more tightly clustered around the mean than the pre-test scores, implying that the intervention had a relatively consistent positive impact on the group's performance.

Table 3***Results of Independent Samples t-test for Writing Pre-Test Scores***

Independent Samples Test											
Item		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		T-test for Equality of Means							
		F	Sig.	t	df	Significance		Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
						One-Sided p	Two-Sided p			Lower	Upper
Pre-test results	Equal variances assumed	,019	,890	1,469	33	,076	,151	,37428	,25470	-,14393	,89248
Pre-test results	Equal variances not assumed			1,452	21,693	,080	,161	,37428	,25778	-,16077	,90932

Table 3 displays the results of an Independent Samples t-test for pre-test writing scores between Control Group and Experimental Group. According to the Levene's Test, we assume equal variances between the two groups as the significance value (0.890) is more than 0.05. The t-test, both under the assumptions of equal and unequal variances, indicates no significant difference between the groups' pre-test writing scores as the p-values are greater than 0.05. The mean scores, score range, and minimum and maximum scores vary between the groups, with EG typically showing higher values than CG.

Table 4***Results of Independent Samples t-test for Writing Post-test Scores of CG and EG***

Independent Samples Test											
Item		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		T-test for Equality of Means							
		F	Sig.	t	df	Significance		Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Interval of the Difference	Confidence of the Difference
						One-Sided p	Two-Sided p			Lower	Upper
Post-test results	Equal variances assumed	3,893	,057	4,172	33	<,001	<,001	1,05543	,25296	,54079	1,57008
Post-test results	Equal variances not assumed			3,696	16,427	<,001	,002	1,05543	,28553	,45142	1,65945

Table 4 represents the results of an Independent Samples t-test for post-test scores. The Levene's Test suggests equal variances between the groups, with a significance level of 0.057, just above the typical threshold of 0.05. The t-test shows a significant difference in the post-test scores between the two groups, indicated by a p-value of less than 0.001 under both assumptions of equal and unequal variances. The mean difference of 1.05543 is significantly different from zero, supported by a 95% confidence interval that does not encompass zero (from 0.54079 to 1.57008 with equal variance assumed, and from 0.45142 to 1.65945 with unequal variance assumed). These results suggest that the intervention significantly improved the writing scores of the students. Considering the groups were equivalent in their abilities before the intervention, we can reasonably attribute the improvement in the post-test scores to the intervention itself.

4.2 Results from questionnaire**Table 5*****EG's Perceptions of Grammarly Use Experience***

Item	Mean Score
1. Grammarly is the grammar checker tool I usually use for checking my writing	4.09
2. I think Grammarly is really easy to use	4.23
3. Grammarly makes helpful suggestions for improving my writing	4.14
4. Grammarly has helped me to save time in revising my writing	4.32
5. Grammarly is convenient to use for correcting grammar	3.36
6. Grammarly has helped me corrected spelling in writing	4.10
7. I think Grammarly has helped me to understand more about English grammar rules	3.55
8. I did not need a technical person to help me use the Grammarly	4.23
9. I thought there was too much inconsistency in this system	3.64
10. I found the system unnecessarily complex	2.77

Item	Mean Score
11. Spelling is one of Grammarly's features contains of the incorrect and confusing word	3.09
12. I do not agree with some suggestions of Grammarly	3.41
13. Grammarly's feedback is not always helpful	3.50
14. I feel frustrated by using Grammarly when there are still many grammar issues	3.09
15. I am not sure with Grammarly's corrections	3.18

The mean scores presented in Table 5 provide insights into the English Group's (EG's) perception of their experience with Grammarly. The highest rated statements, with a mean score of above 4, were "Grammarly is the grammar checker tool I usually use for checking my writing" (4.09), "I think Grammarly is really easy to use" (4.23), "Grammarly makes helpful suggestions for improving my writing" (4.14), and "Grammarly has helped me to save time in revising my writing" (4.32). These scores reflect the students' reliance on Grammarly, their ease of use of the tool, its helpfulness in providing writing improvement suggestions, and the time-saving benefits they have experienced. On the other hand, some of the statements that received lower scores include "I found the system unnecessarily complex" (2.77), "Spelling is one of Grammarly's features contains the incorrect and confusing word" (3.09), and "I feel frustrated by using Grammarly when there are still many grammar issues" (3.09). These scores point to some areas of concern among students, including potential complexity of the system, issues with spelling features, and frustration when Grammarly does not catch all grammar issues.

4.3 Interview

In an exploration of the impacts of Grammarly software on English-major students' writing skills, a semi-structured interview was conducted with 10 students (S1 through S10) from the experimental group. Their participation was voluntary, and pseudonyms were used to ensure confidentiality. Frequency of use varied among participants. S1 stated, "I always use Grammarly to check grammar and vocabulary for my writing," while S2, S8, S9, and S10 emphasized regular use. S3 and S6 used Grammarly once or twice a week, S7 used it three times a week, while S5 admitted to rarely using the software. S4 had not used Grammarly, relying on teacher instructions for grammar improvement. Thus, the majority of participants used Grammarly frequently or at least once to three times per week.

The perceived usefulness of Grammarly was generally high among participants. Nine participants found Grammarly beneficial in checking grammar, spelling, punctuation, and plagiarism while saving them time in the proofreading process. Regarding time-saving, half of the participants (S1, S2, S7, S8, S10) claimed that Grammarly saved them an hour in checking their writing, while S3 and S6 saved approximately 30 minutes. S4, S5, and S9 were less concerned with the time saved, prioritizing the effectiveness of Grammarly in error-free writing.

In terms of strengths and weaknesses, nine participants acknowledged Grammarly's strengths, highlighting its speed, accuracy, sentence fluency suggestions, spelling and grammar correction, time-saving features, vocabulary suggestions, free access, convenience, and plagiarism-checking function. However, they also identified weaknesses. S1, S3, S8, S10 noticed some inflexible and unnecessary suggestions, while S2, S6, S7 were concerned about potential errors in complex sentences. S5 mentioned the need to purchase a premium version for enhanced services, and S9 worried about dependency on Grammarly stifling personal mastery of spelling and punctuation.

4.4 Data discussion

Assessing the first research question – "To what extent does Grammarly affect the students' writing skill?" – the data revealed that those who incorporated Grammarly into their writing practice scored higher in the post-test than their counterparts who didn't. The experimental group (EG) and control group (CG)

were initially assessed to be on similar proficiency levels as inferred from pre-test results. Post the intervention, however, EG outperformed CG in the post-test. EG's mean score ($M=9.33$) was higher than CG's mean score ($M=8.27$), indicating a significant improvement ($p\text{-value} < 0.001$). Also, the insignificant change in CG's pre ($M=8.11$) and post-test ($M=8.27$) scores contrasts sharply with the significant variation observed in EG's pre-test ($M=8.48$) and post-test ($M=9.33$) scores. This implies that the usage of Grammarly positively impacts the writing ability of students, affirming the benefits of CALL and AWE. Grammarly's efficacy as a writing enhancement tool can be attributed to several underlying factors. The software offers real-time feedback on grammar, punctuation, and sentence structure, facilitating immediate corrections and fostering a more iterative learning process. Moreover, the tool's recommendations on style and tone can refine a student's writing, making it not only grammatically correct but also more engaging and coherent. By consistently integrating these suggestions, students can internalize better writing habits and strategies, leading to evident improvements in their writing proficiency over time. These findings are in line with previous research by Dizon & Gayed (2021), Miranty et al., (2021), and Karyuatry et al. (2018).

Moving on to the second research question - "What are the students' attitudes towards using the free service of Grammarly to improve their writing skill?" - the data from the questionnaire and interviews suggest that students have a favorable attitude towards Grammarly and its impact on their writing skills. They found Grammarly user-friendly and effective in identifying errors in their writing. While recognizing the potential for mistakes, students appreciated the tool's time-saving capabilities and its contribution to their learning process. Additionally, students from the EG provided some more insightful feedback about their Grammarly experience. They noted the tool's capacity to enrich their grammatical knowledge and vocabulary usage, facilitate swift error detection, and foster a better understanding of English grammar rules. Interestingly, despite the limitations of the free version, they admired the tool's utility in tracking word count, detecting plagiarism, and providing a wide array of vocabulary options. These viewpoints align with the perspectives of Hadiat (2022) and Aidil (2019). Additionally, the numerous benefits that could enhance writing are also supported by Zinkevich & Ledeneva (2021) and Miranty et al. (2021).

5. Conclusion

5.1 Limitations of the study

While this study offers significant insights into the beneficial impacts of Grammarly and presents actionable recommendations for educators and learners to incorporate this software into their pedagogical practices, it is not without its limitations, which should be acknowledged and could potentially be addressed in future research.

Firstly, the sample size's limitation hinders the broad applicability of the findings. The research was set within a specialized English Language & Linguistics program that, during the period of interest, had only three distinct classes with 15-25 students in each. This limited participant selection, paired with unique learning conditions, can inadvertently compromise the study's external validity. Expanding the sample size would provide a more encompassing view of the software's impact. Secondly, the research's timeframe posed challenges. With the study squeezed into the final 8.5 weeks of an academic year, some research components were either fast-tracked or constrained in their frequency, potentially affecting the depth and comprehensiveness of the outcomes. Lastly, practical challenges also emerged. Due to a large number of students in the program, access to specific facilities like the Multimedia Room was limited. This required participants to frequently bring their personal laptops to class, which may have placed additional strain on them throughout the study's duration.

5.2 Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications

This study was conducted to explore the positive effects of Grammarly on improving students' writing skills, showing its potential in supporting the English teaching and learning process. While Grammarly is beneficial for students to develop their writing skills, it's important to note, however, that Grammarly cannot replace traditional teaching methods or teacher feedback. In addition, it can be especially useful for students who have a strong learning motivation and discipline to practice their writing skills.

On the other hand, while using Grammarly as a tool to give instant writing feedback for students, certain considerations should be taken, especially the students' heavy dependence on AWE tools which leads to limited language skills development. Learners should use Grammarly as a support tool to improve their knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, and always be aware of self-improvement.

In order to effectively integrate Grammarly into the classroom, students need proper training on how to use the platform and how to compare Grammarly's corrected version with their original text to improve their writing skills. They should also be aware that AWE tools are not always accurate; therefore, students should always double-check and rely on their own language knowledge and understanding when reviewing Grammarly's suggestions.

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