

## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter provides an overview of the present study on how Automated Writing Evaluation (AWE) tools support EFL students' academic writing based on their grammar proficiency levels. It outlines the background of the study, research question, objectives, scope, and significance, as well as key definitions and the structure of the thesis.

#### **1.1 Background of the Study**

Academic writing, as defined by Hyland (2019), is a form of writing that conveys acquired knowledge in a particular area of study that is characterized by a high lexical density, high nominal style, and impersonal constructions. At the university level, most EFL students are expected to be able to complete academic writing tasks such as essays, literature reviews, research proposals, and theses. These tasks are designed to amplify their genre and knowledge and composing skills (Hyland, 2019) and develop specific skills, such as the ability to demonstrate knowledge and understanding, make informed and independent reasoning, and research skills (Nesi & Gardner, 2012). Due to these new demands that academic writing poses, it can pose a significant challenge for EFL students.

There is a range of challenges that EFL students face in academic writing, including problems with the mechanics of text, socio-cultural differences, and psychological issues (Nawangsih et al., 2023). However, particularly in the Indonesian context, several studies found that most students agree that grammar, punctuation, and spelling are the most challenging aspects in academic writing (Fitria, 2021; Fitriana & Nuzrani, 2022; Nawangsih et al., 2022; Tambunan et al., 2022), which was likely due to the unawareness of the language (Armanda et al., 2023; Fitria, 2021). Academic writing style also differs significantly from their high school English lessons, featuring a distinct writing style that can challenge their academic

writing development (Wangchuk, 2023). In response to this, computerized feedback in the form of an Automated Writing Evaluation (AWE) system has become a possible alternative tool for both the learner and the teacher.

AWE is a technology that uses computer methods to analyze students' writing. It works by comparing a written text to a large database of writing in the same genre, written in answer to a specific prompt or rubric (Hockly, 2018). AWE tools such as Grammarly, Criterion, and QuillBot provide feedback on grammar, mechanics, vocabulary use, coherence, and organization, which are important to consider when writing in the academic context (Algburi et al., 2024; Miranty et al., 2023; Tambunan et al., 2022; Yoandita & Hasnah, 2024). Not only are the user-friendly interface and uncomplicated features (Armanda et al., 2022) worth mentioning, but AWE can also assist students by providing real-time feedback, which can lead to more time for teachers to help the students improve their writing content and organization (Fahmi & Cahyono, 2021). Moreover, due to the rising development of technology, AWE has become a readily available tool that is able to continuously improve, thus allowing for more appropriate feedback for the user (Liu, 2024). These features help AWE tools support university-level writing tasks such as essays, proposals, and research reports

However, despite the benefits AWE tools can offer, there are criticisms concerning the capacity of AWE to provide accurate and meaningful assistance (Anson, 2006; Ericsson & Hasswell, 2006; Ranalli, 2018). Several researchers do not perceive the notion that computers are capable of scoring human texts since it doesn't possess human inference skills and background knowledge (Anson, 2006). Furthermore, there is also fear that continued use of AWE tools may adjust their writing, whether consciously or unconsciously, to meet the criteria of the software rather than develop their own writing skills (Patterson, 2005). In addition, some AWE tools fail to offer adequate feedback and writing advice on content and organization, still indicating the necessity of teachers' feedback when using the tool (Wang & Wang, 2012). One particular recent research highlighted that AWE improves EFL students' writing skills with varying levels of effectiveness in accordance with the

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students' proficiency levels and that human intervention is essential to maximize its outcome (Aldosemani et al., 2023).

There have been several studies regarding the effectiveness and influence of AWE in Indonesia (Alam et al., 2023; Ambarwati, 2021; Dewi, 2022; Faisal & Carabella, 2023; Puri & Setianamudi, 2023; Tambunan et al., 2022; Yoandita & Hasnah, 2024). While most research concluded that AWE has a positive effect on EFL students' writing, some have also noted the need for proper student engagement and a measure of English proficiency to effectively use it. Therefore, this research has the objective to explore how the difference in proficiency level influences the facilitation of AWE tools on various aspects of academic writing. This study aims to fill the gap of how proficiency influences AWE usage by exploring tertiary-level EFL students with different levels of academic writing proficiency at one public university in Bandung, West Java, Indonesia. Specifically, it attempts to explore how students with different academic writing proficiencies adapt the AWE tool to meet their academic writing needs.

## **1.2 Research Question**

Based on the background of the study, the study is conducted to answer the following question: How does the AWE tool facilitate the academic writing of EFL students with different proficiency levels?

## **1.3 Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to investigate how the use of Automated Writing Evaluation (AWE) tools influences EFL students' academic writing, particularly in relation to their differing levels of writing proficiency. The focus of the study is on research proposals produced by tertiary-level EFL students, and how revisions across key aspects of writing, including grammar and mechanics, vocabulary and academic tone use, content development, as well as organization and cohesion, are facilitated by

AWE feedback. By analyzing students' engagement with AWE feedback during the drafting and revision process, the study seeks to explore how learners at different proficiency levels respond to automated feedback and how this shapes the development of their academic writing.

#### **1.4 Scope of the Study**

This study explores how EFL students with different levels of academic writing proficiency use AWE tools to facilitate the revision of their research proposals. The participants were three students from an English Education study program, each categorized as having low, middle, or high proficiency based on their final grades in grammar and academic writing courses. The AWE tools used in this study were Grammarly, QuillBot, and DeepL, which the participants utilized during both the drafting and revision stages of their writing. However, the analysis put more emphasis on the revision phase. Each student submitted two consecutive drafts of their research proposal, which were examined to identify the types of revisions supported by AWE tools. The analysis centered on four key aspects of academic writing: grammar and mechanics, vocabulary and academic tone, content development, and organization and cohesion. In addition to document analysis, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant to validate the findings and gain deeper insight into how they engaged with AWE feedback during the revision process.

#### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

- Theoretical significance

Theoretically, this study aims to enrich the literature and provide preliminary insights into further research on AWE as a writing assistant, focusing on how different proficiency levels influence students' perceptions when using an AWE tool. By exploring the students' writing processes and perceptions, this

research highlights the complex role that AWE has in using technology to support learning in EFL contexts. The findings may also inform future research focused on digital writing support and learner-centered feedback strategies.

- Practical implication

Practically, the research results have the potential to provide more information regarding the appropriate way to use AWE tools to facilitate students' academic writing. For EFL students, this research can be especially beneficial in providing not only surface-level corrections for fixing grammar but also supporting their overall writing development. Additionally, instructors and writing tutors may also use this research as a frame of reference on how students interact with AWE feedback, the challenges they face, and how students' proficiency plays a role in utilizing AWE tools. In a wider sense, the findings of this research may encourage learners to take a more evaluative and active role when using writing tools rather than relying on them passively.

- Policy considerations

This research may also be useful as a reference for educational stakeholders, especially in developing writing programs or instructional support. Since many teachers have limited time to provide swift and detailed feedback, AWE tools could help ease that burden by offering basic writing support. However, since AWE should not be a replacement for teachers' input, it should be introduced as an extra aid for students to use independently. With proper guidance from schools and institutions, AWE could be considered as part of writing instruction while also helping students learn how to use it responsibly.

## **1.6 Clarification of the Key Terms**

In order to avoid any misunderstanding that may occur regarding some concepts in the study, this section clarifies the following items:

- **Automated Writing Evaluation (AWE)** is a process of scoring and evaluating a learner's written work automatically through computer programs, as defined by Shermis and Burstein (2013).
- **Automated Writing Evaluation Tools** in the present study refer to the specific web-based program that incorporates AWE into its technology, making it possible for everyone to easily use. Some examples of AWE tools are Grammarly, QuillBot, DeepL, and, to an extent, ChatGPT.
- **EFL Students** indicated in this study are students who are studying English and live in countries where English is not a first or second language. EFL stands for English as a Foreign Language; thus, this study focuses especially on EFL university students with English as their major.
- **Proficiency** is widely assumed as the goal of language learning and teaching, with the assumption that the levels of proficiency can be identified (Harsch, 2016). The proficiency indicated in this study is the academic writing proficiency of the students, which can be seen from their writing aspects such as grammar and mechanics, vocabulary and academic tone, content development, as well as organization and cohesion.

## 1.7 Organization of the Paper

The study is organized into five chapters.

**Chapter one** is the general information relating to the study, highlighting the background, research problem, clarification of key terms, and the aim, purpose, scope, and significance of the study.

**Chapter two** is the literature review of current knowledge concerning the research study and its theoretical background, including appropriate theoretical frameworks and previous studies.

**Chapter three** is the description of the methodology utilized in the research, specifically its design, participants, data collection procedures, and data analysis techniques.

**Chapter four** presents the research findings that were found and then synthesized into a discussion of the summarized findings.

Lastly, **Chapter five** is the conclusion and recommendations of the research study, with the implications and limitations surrounding the study.

## **1.8 Concluding Remarks**

In essence, this study presents an outline for the study by introducing the rationale of the research as well as its purpose, significance, and scope. By examining how students engage with automated feedback during the writing and revision of their research proposals, this study aims to offer meaningful insight into both the Pedagogical potential and the limitations of AWE in real academic contexts. The following chapter presents the relevant theoretical background and prior research that inform the design and focus of this study.