



ANALYSIS OF GRAMMATICAL ERRORS IN STUDENTS' WRITING: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH AT SMPN 1 KUNDURAN

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ABSTRACT

The present study aims to analyze the types of grammatical errors in the English writing of junior high school students and the factors influencing these errors, from the perspectives of teachers and students. It employs a descriptive qualitative method with a phenomenological approach. Data were collected through interviews with 5 ninth-grade students and 3 English teachers at SMPN 1 Kunduran. The analysis followed a systematic process that included transcribing data, identifying errors, and classifying them. The findings show that the most common grammatical issues involve the use of verbs, particularly tenses and subject-predicate conformances, errors in spelling, articles usage, and prepositions. Contributing factors to these issues include internal factors, such as students' limited understanding of grammar rules and a lack of confidence in writing, and external factors, including first-language interference, insufficient practice, and limited exposure to English. The results of this study emphasize the importance of effective grammar instruction and regular practice in improving students' writing skills.

Keywords: EFL Students; Grammatical errors; Phenomenological approach; Writing skills.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis jenis-jenis kesalahan gramatikal dalam tulisan bahasa Inggris siswa sekolah menengah pertama serta faktor-faktor yang memengaruhi kesalahan tersebut berdasarkan perspektif guru dan siswa. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif dengan pendekatan fenomenologis. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara terhadap 5 siswa kelas IX dan 3 guru bahasa Inggris di SMPN 1 Kunduran. Analisis data dilakukan secara sistematis melalui proses transkripsi data, identifikasi kesalahan, dan klasifikasi kesalahan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa permasalahan gramatikal yang paling umum ditemukan berkaitan dengan penggunaan verba, khususnya tenses dan kesesuaian subjek-predikat, kesalahan ejaan, penggunaan artikel, serta preposisi. Faktor-faktor yang berkontribusi terhadap kesalahan tersebut meliputi faktor internal, seperti keterbatasan pemahaman siswa terhadap kaidah tata bahasa dan kurangnya kepercayaan diri dalam menulis, serta faktor eksternal, seperti interferensi bahasa pertama, kurangnya latihan, dan terbatasnya paparan terhadap bahasa Inggris. Hasil penelitian ini menegaskan pentingnya pembelajaran tata bahasa yang efektif dan latihan yang berkelanjutan untuk meningkatkan keterampilan menulis siswa.

kata kunci: Kesalahan gramatikal; Kemampuan menulis; Pendekatan fenomena; Siswa EFL

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INTRODUCTION

Writing is a complex skill that develops through continuous practice, structured learning, and supportive environments. In the school area, the activity of compiling texts requires a lot of vocabulary so that the writing becomes effective and does not lose its meaning. Qamariah et al., (2020), gave a firm line that when writing training takes place, students need to be able to choose the right grammar so that the meaning does not change. Junior high school students still often falter when asked to produce English writing. The realm of writing is often placed on the heaviest side of the EFL landscape. These difficulties usually grow from an unestablished basis regarding the writing process, how to organize ideas, and changing ideas until they become a unified text unit.

Difficulties during writing activities are still experienced by many students, especially in grammar and sentence patterns that have not been mastered (Derakhshan & Shirejini, 2020). In fact, mastery of writing relies heavily on mastery of vocabulary and sentence patterns. When the sentence structure shifts from its meaning, readers will be confused and guess what the meaning of the writing is. At the Indonesian junior high school level, this situation is present repeatedly. English did not grow as the initial language of the pupils; their daily use is almost non-existent in their lives. From there, the emergence of mistakes becomes something that can be understood. Grammatical defects that appear do not arise from random errors, but from the development of interlanguages, and the extent of the rules of English they understand. The most common forms include the selection of missed tenses, errors between the subject and the predicate, the use of prepositions, and articles (Tyas & Oktavia, 2025).

Outside of linguistic matters, the EFL arena itself plays a role in the growth rate of students' writing skills. English is hardly spoken outside of class; As a result, exposure to foreign languages is also reduced. Students also make the classroom the main source, sometimes the only one, to learn a language. This situation reduces the opportunity to practice writing in real relevance and fades students' confidence when they want to use English. From this, it can be seen that the obstacles to writing are not only a matter of lack of grammatical understanding, but also the result of the insistence of a wider learning environment. Ironically, these kinds of contextual elements are often overlooked in many studies on grammatical errors.

In addition, many students are still stunned when they have to re-examine their own writings. This indicates that their grammatical mastery is not yet solid enough to be used without outside support. Research on grammatical errors has actually accumulated. However, most research focuses only on categorizing and calculating different types of grammatical errors, referred to as static data. Such a perspective is indeed useful, but it does not fully show what students and teachers really experience in daily learning. Meanwhile, studies that direct the view to direct experience are still narrow. In fact, understanding how students and teachers deal with grammatical obstacles in real situations can open up a broader understanding. From that gap, this research moves, not only observing the form of error, but also tracing the driving factors, exploring the

feelings of students and teachers at SMPN 1 Kunduran through the phenomenological path. The emphasis on this experience aims to formulate a better English learning model for the needs of junior high school students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Writing is one of the language skills that has an important position, especially in learning English as a foreign language, EFL. However, the reality in the field shows that students at the basic level of education still do not really master this realm well (Faturrohman & Afriansyah, 2020). Writing activities are often seen as difficult because what is at stake is not only the pouring of ideas, but also how to sort and convert them into paragraph forms that readers can follow (Ahmad, 2022).

In this process, grammar occupies a fundamental layer. Its presence helps to keep the meaning legible, reduce misunderstandings, and keep the meaning from breaking everywhere. Therefore, grammar is often positioned as the core of language proficiency (Amin, 2022; Mufidah & Islam, 2022). Without sufficient mastery, students easily get stuck when they want to produce text that has a flow, continuity, and readability.

Grammatical errors that appear in the student's writing are not present in the empty space. There is encouragement that comes from the student, some from outside them. Internal factors, for example, limited grammatical comprehension and a lack of confidence when writing. External factors, the source as the influence of the mother tongue, lack of exposure to English, and lack of practice (Chu & Lou, 2022). These elements influence each other, leading students to difficulty mastering grammar while writing.

As the perspective in language studies changes, grammatical difficulties are no longer solely considered a bad habit. Nowadays, grammar mistakes are more often interpreted as part of the language acquisition process. Previous studies have contributed to this approach. Qamariah et al., (2020), found that students often make mistakes in the use of verbs and tenses, and then the impact spreads to the clarity of writing. Similar findings were also conveyed by (Putu et al., 2020): mistakes in making sentences indicate that the basis for sentence formation in many students is still not firmly embedded.

In addition, the errors that appear are influenced by the type of text written by the student. (Tlonaen, 2020) Stating that in the writing of certain types of text, grammatical errors often appear in noun phrases, subject-predicate relationships, and the use of suffixes. Seruni (2023), Finding another problem, when students write short stories, the structure of the writing encountered is very messy. Especially when students write in a simple past tense form. This finding proves that grammatical errors will be found in every different type of text, both descriptive and narrative texts.

Previous research also indicated a fairly repeated pattern of errors, namely structural clashes between their mother tongue and English that are often experienced by EFL students in Indonesia. Ratna Agustin (2022), found problems in articles and punctuation, while Made et al.,

)2022), highlighted word order and subject-predicate relationships. This local context explains that structural differences need more attention, because the challenges faced by students will change according to the existing curriculum in the school.

Beyond these elements, the learning environment plays a considerable role. Mohammad Rafiuddin Shumaila Malik & Waqar (2024), implies that students' learning experiences as well as interactions with teachers can cause the level of difficulties they experience to increase. Rahmawati et al., (2024), even demonstrated that fun teaching and learning activities can help students understand grammar rules more easily. Thus, they can write fluently because of reduced pressure and motivation. Meanwhile, Hasibuan (2018) highlights that lexicon-grammatical problems encountered in students' narrative texts are still frequent, and the findings lead to the importance of support from the early stages, especially at the junior high school level.

From the theoretical side, grammatical difficulties can be understood through the analysis of grammatical errors and interlinguistic theory. In Error Analysis, student errors are found to be systematic and meaningful rather than random. Meanwhile, Interlanguage Theory explains that students build a temporary language system influenced by their mother tongue and the target language they are learning. On that basis, mistakes such as the use of tenses or subjects with predicates can be interpreted as part of the second language learning process.

In general, various previous studies have shown that grammatical errors in students' writing are influenced by linguistic and contextual elements. While other research has focused on the issue of language structure, others have focused on learning environments and teaching practices. Even so, the largest portion of the study still dwells on identifying, grouping, and recording types of errors. Therefore, it is necessary to take a phenomenological approach to investigate all the problems behind the grammatical errors that occur.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This research uses qualitative descriptive methods from the perspectives of teachers and students. Using this method, the researcher hopes to be able to describe grammatical errors in students' English writing and the factors that influence them. The descriptive qualitative method, also known as the interpretive method, is based on the interpretation of data collected in the field. A qualitative approach was used to gain a deep understanding of these errors through interview data, thereby enabling the researcher to describe students' English grammar issues more comprehensively.

Research Setting and Participants

This study was conducted at SMPN 1 Kunduran and involved 5 ninth-grade students and 3 English teachers. The participants were selected because of their active roles in daily English lessons. Data collection involved qualitative interviews to understand their experiences. To

validate the results, observations of the students' writing assignments were also conducted, providing triangulation and supporting the reliability of the findings.

Instruments

The instrument used in this study was interviews, which were conducted with English teachers and students. Interviews with teachers are conducted to assess students' understanding and difficulties with grammar, while interviews with teachers aim to identify the types of grammar errors that most often occur and the factors that cause them.

Data Collection Procedures

The data collection method used in this study is a qualitative interview. Interviews are one of the data collection techniques often used in qualitative research that aims to reveal individual experiences and how they understand those experiences (Dursun, 2023). Interviews were conducted directly with students and English teachers at SMPN 1 Kunduran. In addition, the researcher used several relevant books, scientific journals, and previous research to support the analysis of grammatical errors and English writing skills. The data collection technique is carried out through the following steps:

1. Conduct interviews with students to find out their understanding of the use of grammar in writing and the factors that influence it.
2. Conduct interviews with English teachers to gain insight into the types of grammatical errors that students often make and the factors that cause them, based on teaching experience.
3. Review previous research as a reference to strengthen the theoretical foundation and support the analysis of research data.

Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis technique in this study uses descriptive qualitative analysis. The data were analyzed to understand the types of grammatical errors in students' English writing as well as the factors that influence the occurrence of these errors. The analysis was carried out on the data from the interviews through several steps, including data transcription, data identification, data classification, and interpretation. With this technique, it is hoped that the data that has been taken can support the construction of drawing conclusions (Mufidah & Islam, 2022).

FINDING

The findings indicate that grammatical errors are a key feature of the EFL experience at SMPN 1 Kunduran, and are strongly influenced by students' internal factors and the external learning environment.

Types of Grammatical Errors

The analysis shows that students struggle with several core components of English grammar, including verb morphology and word order.

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Grammatical Errors

No	Error Type	Description of Errors	Frequency Pattern
1	Verb Usage	Tense errors, subject–verb agreement, auxiliary misuse	Very High
2	Sentence Structure	Incorrect subject identification, word order issues	High
3	Articles	Misuse of “a/an/the”	Moderate
4	Prepositions	Incorrect use of “in/on/at”	Moderate
5	Spelling	Errors due to pronunciation–spelling mismatch	High

Table 1 shows the frequency of grammatical errors identified in this study. Errors in verb usage were the most common, highlighting serious concerns regarding students' understanding of the tense system in English. Sentence structure and spelling also posed significant challenges, which were classified as “High” in frequency.

1. Errors in Verb Usage and Subject-Verb Agreement

Verbs are the part of speech where mistakes are most commonly made. Students typically struggle to use the correct tenses, and they often use the base form of the verb instead of the past tense when it is required. For example, a student writes: "I have ate breakfast," this sentence shows confusion between past participle and past tense. Another example "Yesterday, I buy ice cream" Instead of "Yesterday, I bought ice cream," This sentence shows that students cannot distinguish between the use of the present tense and the past tense. They tend to use the grammatical form that they have memorized rather than understanding the grammar directly. Subject-verb errors are also found, such as when saying "He watch movies" instead of "He watches movies", which indicates a lack of subject-verb agreement. Students sometimes still make mistakes in using additional verbs, such as: "He is tried to call me." This indicates incorrect use of the auxiliary verb “be” in sentence construction, as it is unnecessarily added to a sentence that should have been in the past of the active voice.

2. Errors in Sentence Structure and Spelling

Sentence structure errors are caused by the wrong word order because they are directly translated from Indonesian. For example, when a student writes "He visits to Japan now" which show incorrect tense and unnecessary preposition use. Other examples are "I almost found 50 dollars" instead of "I found almost 50 dollars," This word order is wrong because of the placement of adverbial elements. This proves that students are still using their first language structure when composing English sentences. Spelling errors are also found when students often write English according to the pronunciation in Indonesian, because English is not their everyday language. Students may write "mousses" or "kriteria" because of the wrong pronunciation. This is because the flexibility of the mother tongue is different from the SVO (Subject-Verb-Object) order in English.

Factors Influencing Grammatical Errors

The result of this study identified several internal and external factors that affect grammatical errors.

Table 2. Dominance of Contribution Factors

No	Factor Type	Specific Factors Identified	Dominance Level
1	Internal	Limited grammar understanding, low confidence	Very High
2	External	First language interference, limited English exposure	High
3	Practice-related	Lack of writing practice and repetition	High
4	Instructional	Limited teaching time, complex explanations	Moderate
5	Technological	Overreliance on translation and grammar tools	Moderate

The results of this study identified several internal and external factors that affect students' grammar errors.

1. Internal Factors

An internal factor that influences grammatical errors is the student's limited understanding of basic grammar. Many students show a lack of mastery of grammar rules, especially in the form of verbs and sentence structure. In addition, students' lack of confidence in writing English and students have difficulty in maintaining the grammatical knowledge they have gained at school.

2. External Factors

External factors are influenced by the use of the first language or what we usually call the mother tongue, the lack of use of English, and the lack of practice. Students rely more on direct translation from Indonesian to English, resulting in inappropriate sentence structure and poor use

of English in daily communication. Also, students only learn and practice English while in school. These factors contribute to the cause of students' grammar errors.

3. Instructional and Environmental Factors

Other factors that cause grammatical errors in students are limited class hours, difficult textbook explanations, and a lack of intensive grammar learning. Dependence on translation tools is also a cause that affects students' lack of understanding of grammar.

Overall, in this study, students often made grammatical errors in their writing. This is also supported by the answers given by teachers and students during the interview. This pattern of errors indicates that they are struggling with basic grammar, basic language skills, and the reasons for their mistakes.

DISCUSSION

The results shown in this finding are in the form of structural differences between English and Indonesian, which are the cause of grammatical errors in SMP 1 Kunduran. When students work in an emotional state can exacerbate this problem as it is influenced by the language syntax, causing errors to increase in verbs and sentence structure. When creating tenses in Indonesian verbs, it will not change its shape, unlike English verbs. So that students have difficulties and eventually the use of the tense is wrong. This type of mistake shows that in the early stages of learning, they pass this stage, so they immediately use the rules of native grammar when designing English sentences. Mistakes like this are normal for students when developing a language. Indirectly, students are actively building their knowledge of the English language, even though their understanding is not yet fully formed.

This research supports the finding (Seruni, 2023), that the most common type of error in student writing is the wrong sentence structure. Similarly, this study supports (Hasibuan, 2018) reporting that subjects and verbs have no similarities, so this becomes a challenge for students. Mismatches between subjects and verbs in students' writing, such as "The girls go to the mall", suggest that they often make mistakes when trying to apply rules due to excessive plural markers. Another study also found the same error, related to sentence formation and the use of verb subjects, that they encountered in EFL learners, after predicting that this problem often occurs in EFL learners. Unlike other studies that only focused on the type of error, this study actually provided information about the factors that cause grammatical errors. Therefore, the form of grammatical errors is not only analyzed but must also be recognized as the cause of the error.

From a phenomenological perspective, this study reveals that students' writing experiences are closely related to anxiety and lack of confidence. As noted by (Long & Teopilus, 2023) the reliance on technology causes students to often procrastinate due to relying on Google Translate. Though this technology only helps in the short term, the use of Google Translate causes errors in the order of words because it cannot fully understand their meaning in real time. The use of these tools inhibits students' ability to think independently of their sentences. The theoretical contribution of this research allows the analysis of errors to be more than just a simple calculation

task. But on the other hand, teachers must be able to help students discover their identity and then motivate them. This mistake is not a mechanical error, but it shows how students struggle to find their true selves.

Grammatical errors made by students not only come from linguistic factors, but are also related to the difficulty of learning English. According to interlinguistic theory, learning a second language can create an intermediate language or a transition formed by the native language to the target language. Even though students are taught grammar in school, they still struggle when trying to apply the grammar teachings to their writing. This shows that there is a gap between understanding and how they use it. This scenario is common among EFL students because grammar teaching is not clearly communicated. So, more students are relying on their memories without knowing their understanding of how to operate good grammar while writing. That is why errors in tense, the use of subject-verbs, and sentence structures remain in the writing.

Apart from the factors mentioned above, the shaping of students' writing skills is influenced by the learning environment and students' exposure to English. The fact that has been found is that students do not use English in their daily lives, so they have difficulty when trying writing exercises in English, as well as causing their grammar knowledge to be not strong. Thus, their skills become limited in accuracy and capability. In addition, the application of technology, including online translation tools, can affect students' learning. Although a translator can help students, the resulting sentences do not necessarily conform to the rules of grammar. As a result, students only produce correct sentences without understanding the use of the structure. Pedagogically, it concludes that schools must create an adequate learning environment, encourage students to learn independently, and actively do their homework. To affirm this method, teachers must provide feedback on student performance, develop quality writing assignments, and encourage students to express their thoughts freely. In addition to paying attention to grammar rules in improving students' writing skills, teachers must also consider linguistic, pedagogical, and student psychology factors.

CONCLUSION

English grammar is one of the concepts that students at SMPN 1 Kunduran have been struggling to understand and apply, particularly in spelling, subject-verb agreement, and verbs in phrases. The internal causes that contribute to these errors include a lack of confidence and knowledge about grammar, while external causes include the language spoken at home and limited practice. From the findings of the current studies, it is evident that grammatical errors of learners are mainly due to linguistic differences and grammatical errors that are influenced by emotions and cognition. In this regard, it is important for this research to focus on the emotions of students, such as anxiety and low self-confidence, which affect grammar in writing because they come from cognitive activities. Consequently, it is apparent that teaching English grammar should consider the context of the learner since teachers need to give constructive feedback and allow more writing and practice to develop the grammatical skills of the students. Grammatical errors of English learners are common occurrences. It is clear, therefore, that to solve the above problem, teachers

should employ strategies that consider the psychology and cognition of students along with linguistic factors.

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