



Grammatical Error Analysis in EFL Students' Recount Text Writing

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ABSTRACT

Writing recount texts requires students to retell past experiences coherently while applying appropriate grammatical features, especially past tense forms, prepositions, noun pluralization, articles, pronouns, conjunctions, and punctuation. However, EFL students frequently experience difficulties in producing grammatically accurate recount texts. This study aims to identify and classify the most frequent grammatical errors found in students' recount text writing. The study employed a descriptive quantitative design involving 40 third-year students selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected from students' written recount texts about unforgettable personal experiences, which were written in class within 60 minutes. The data were analyzed using an error analysis procedure consisting of error identification, classification, tabulation, and percentage calculation. The errors were categorized into verb forms, prepositions, noun pluralization, articles, pronouns, conjunctions, and punctuation or writing mechanics. The findings revealed that verb form errors were the most frequent, occurring in 92.5% of students' texts, followed by preposition errors at 85%, noun pluralization errors at 75%, article errors at 57.5%, pronoun errors at 52.5%, conjunction errors at 37.5%, and punctuation errors at 22.5%. These results indicate that students had not fully mastered the grammatical features required in recount writing, particularly the consistent use of past tense forms. The study suggests that grammar instruction should be integrated with genre-based writing practice, explicit feedback, and remedial activities focused on students' recurring grammatical problems. The findings provide pedagogical input for English teachers in designing more effective writing instruction to improve students' grammatical accuracy and overall writing quality.

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KEYWORDS

Grammatical error analysis; EFL writing; recount text; grammar accuracy; writing instruction

INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the most demanding skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning because it requires learners to integrate linguistic knowledge, rhetorical organization,

genre awareness, and control of meaning into a coherent written product. Unlike speaking, which often allows immediate negotiation of meaning, writing requires students to plan, formulate, revise, and edit their ideas before the text reaches

the reader. Hyland (2003) emphasizes that second language writing is not merely the production of correct sentences but also the ability to construct meaning according to the expectations of particular readers, genres, and contexts. Similarly, Graham and Perin (2007) argue that writing development depends on students' ability to organize ideas, apply linguistic conventions, and revise text effectively. In EFL contexts, writing becomes more complex because students must compose texts in a language that is not commonly used in their daily communication.

Among the components of writing, grammar plays a crucial role in helping students express ideas accurately and meaningfully. Grammar enables writers to arrange words into acceptable phrases, clauses, and sentences so that meaning can be conveyed clearly. Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) state that grammar is not only a set of formal rules but also a resource for making meaning in communication. In academic and school-based writing, grammatical accuracy is important because errors may interfere with clarity, coherence, and reader comprehension. Ferris (2011) also explains that grammar-related errors in second language writing need serious pedagogical attention because they often affect the quality of students' written communication and their development as independent writers.

In the Indonesian EFL classroom, writing remains a persistent challenge for learners at different educational levels. Many students have difficulty expressing ideas in written English because they have limited vocabulary, insufficient grammar mastery, limited exposure to written English, and low confidence in composing texts. Studies in

Indonesian EFL contexts have shown that learners frequently experience problems in organizing ideas, using appropriate grammar, and developing coherent written texts (Ariyanti & Fitriana, 2017; Ismail & Ramadhan, 2019). These difficulties indicate that writing instruction should not only focus on producing final texts but also on identifying the specific linguistic problems that students encounter during the writing process.

One type of text commonly taught in English classrooms is recount text. Recount text is a genre used to retell past events or experiences in chronological order. Its generic structure usually consists of orientation, series of events, and re-orientation or concluding statement. Because recount text deals with past experiences, students are expected to use past tense forms, appropriate time connectives, personal pronouns, and clear event sequencing. Derewianka (1990) explains that recount texts are socially used to retell events for the purpose of informing or entertaining readers. Gerot and Wignell (1995) further state that recount texts are characterized by the use of past tense, temporal sequence, participants, and circumstances of time and place. Therefore, writing a recount text requires both genre knowledge and grammatical control.

However, many EFL students still produce grammatical errors when writing recount texts. These errors often involve verb forms, tense consistency, articles, prepositions, pronouns, plural nouns, conjunctions, and punctuation. Such problems are common because recount writing requires students to transform events into grammatically correct past-tense sentences. Research on EFL students' writing errors has shown that verb tense, subject-verb

agreement, word choice, prepositions, articles, and noun forms are among the most frequent problems in students' written texts (Darus & Ching, 2009; Watcharapunyawong & Usaha, 2013; Zheng & Park, 2013). These recurring errors suggest that students may have learned grammar rules separately but still struggle to apply them accurately in extended writing tasks.

Error analysis provides an important framework for understanding students' writing problems. Corder (1967) argues that learners' errors are significant because they reveal the learners' developing linguistic system and provide evidence of the language learning process. Errors should not be viewed merely as signs of failure; rather, they can be used as diagnostic information to understand students' interlanguage development. Richards (1974) also notes that error analysis helps teachers identify the sources, patterns, and significance of learners' errors. Through error analysis, teachers can determine which language forms require further instruction and which areas of writing need remedial support.

The concept of interlanguage further explains why learners produce systematic errors in second language learning. Selinker (1972) introduced interlanguage as the linguistic system developed by second language learners as they progress toward the target language. This system is influenced by learners' first language, incomplete knowledge of the target language, learning strategies, and communication strategies. In writing, students may transfer structures from Indonesian into English, especially when they translate ideas directly from their first language. This may result in errors in tense, word order, prepositions, articles, and plural noun forms. Brown (2007) similarly

explains that learner errors may arise from interlingual transfer, intralingual transfer, and developmental processes in language acquisition.

In EFL writing, grammatical errors can be classified and analyzed to reveal the most problematic areas for learners. Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982) classify learner errors into categories such as omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. James (1998) also explains that error analysis involves identifying, describing, explaining, and evaluating errors in learner language. These procedures allow researchers to move beyond general claims that students "lack grammar" and instead provide specific evidence of what grammatical features are most difficult. In classroom practice, such analysis is useful for teachers because it enables them to design instruction based on students' actual needs rather than assumed weaknesses.

Previous studies have consistently reported that EFL learners encounter serious grammatical difficulties in writing. Darus and Ching (2009), in their study of Malaysian learners, found that students frequently made errors in singular/plural forms, verb tense, word choice, prepositions, and subject-verb agreement. Zheng and Park (2013), comparing Chinese and Korean university students' writing, reported that errors in articles, nouns, verbs, prepositions, and sentence structure were common across learner groups. Watcharapunyawong and Usaha (2013), in a study of Thai EFL learners' writing, found that grammatical errors varied across text types, but verb forms, articles, and noun pluralization were recurrent problems. These findings show that grammatical errors are not isolated problems but common features of EFL writing development.

Studies in Indonesian contexts have reported similar patterns. Indonesian EFL students often face difficulties in applying English grammar because English and Indonesian differ significantly in tense marking, article usage, noun pluralization, and prepositional systems. Indonesian does not mark tense morphologically in the same way English does; therefore, students may have difficulty using past-tense verb forms consistently in recount writing. In addition, English articles such as *a*, *an*, and *the* do not have direct equivalents in Indonesian, which may lead to omission or misuse. These linguistic differences can explain why Indonesian learners often struggle with verb forms, articles, prepositions, and plural nouns in English writing (Ariyanti & Fitriana, 2017; Mbau & Sugeng, 2019; Sari, 2016).

Error analysis is particularly relevant in writing instruction because it helps teachers provide more focused feedback. Ferris (2006) emphasizes that corrective feedback can support second language writing development when it is selective, clear, and connected to instruction. Bitchener and Knoch (2010) also found that written corrective feedback can help learners improve accuracy in targeted linguistic features. However, feedback will be more effective when teachers know which errors are most frequent and pedagogically significant. Therefore, identifying students' recurrent grammatical errors in recount texts can help teachers prioritize grammar instruction and feedback strategies.

The importance of analyzing grammatical errors is also related to the broader goal of developing students' writing competence. Writing competence involves more than producing sentences; it includes the

ability to construct meaning, organize information, use appropriate grammar, and communicate effectively with readers. Hyland (2007) argues that genre-based writing instruction can help students understand how language works within particular text types. In recount writing, students need to understand not only the structure of the text but also the grammatical resources that support chronological retelling. Without control of past tense, time connectives, pronouns, and cohesive devices, students may fail to produce clear and accurate recount texts.

Despite the importance of grammar in recount writing, the article under revision shows that the initial manuscript still requires substantial improvement in establishing a clear research problem, strengthening the literature review, explaining the methodological basis, and linking findings to previous studies. The preliminary data indicate that students made frequent errors in verb forms, prepositions, noun pluralization, articles, pronouns, conjunctions, and writing mechanics. However, these findings need to be grounded in a stronger theoretical and empirical discussion. A systematic introduction is therefore necessary to clarify why grammatical error analysis in recount text writing is important, what gap the study addresses, and how the findings may contribute to EFL writing instruction.

Based on the discussion above, this study focuses on grammatical error analysis in EFL students' recount text writing. Specifically, it seeks to identify the most frequent grammatical errors made by students and to describe the grammatical categories that require greater pedagogical attention. The study is expected to contribute to English

writing instruction by providing empirical evidence of students' recurring grammar problems in recount writing. It also offers practical implications for teachers in designing grammar-focused writing instruction, developing remedial materials, and providing more effective corrective feedback. By understanding students' grammatical errors more systematically, teachers can support learners in improving both writing accuracy and overall written communication.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive quantitative design to identify, classify, and calculate the frequency of grammatical errors found in students' recount text writing. This design was appropriate because the study focused on describing the types and frequency of grammatical errors rather than testing the effect of a treatment. The analysis was conducted through an error analysis procedure to provide a systematic description of the students' grammatical problems in writing recount texts.

Research Participants

The participants of this study were third-year students in the 2021/2022 academic year. The population consisted of students from four classes. From this population, 40 students were selected as the sample through purposive sampling. The sample consisted of 31 female students and 9 male students. Purposive sampling was used because the selected students had already learned recount text and were considered able to produce written recount texts based on their learning experience. Therefore, their writing could provide relevant data for analyzing grammatical errors in recount text writing. The study was

conducted in the even semester of the 2021/2022 academic year. The research site was selected because the students had received instruction on recount text writing and were expected to have sufficient background knowledge about the structure and language features of recount texts.

Research Instrument

The main instrument of this study was a writing task. The students were asked to write a recount text based on their unforgettable personal experience. The writing task was chosen because recount text requires students to use past tense forms, chronological sequence, personal participants, time expressions, and cohesive devices. These language features made the text suitable for identifying grammatical errors.

In completing the task, students were given 60 minutes to write a recount text in the classroom. The text was expected to consist of at least three paragraphs representing the generic structure of recount text: orientation, events, and re-orientation. The expected length of the text was approximately 200–300 words. The students' written texts were then collected as the primary data of the study.

Categories of Error Analysis

The grammatical errors were classified into seven categories: verb forms, articles, prepositions, noun pluralization, pronouns, conjunctions, and writing mechanics. Verb form errors included incorrect tense use, misuse of past tense verbs, inappropriate auxiliary verbs, and errors in active or passive construction. Article errors included omission, addition, or misuse of *a*, *an*, and *the*. Preposition errors referred to incorrect, missing, or unnecessary prepositions. Noun pluralization errors

included the misuse of singular and plural noun forms. Pronoun errors involved incorrect personal, possessive, demonstrative, or reflexive pronouns. Conjunction errors included inappropriate or missing connectors between words, phrases, clauses, or sentences. Writing mechanics covered punctuation and capitalization errors that affected sentence clarity.

Data Collection Procedure

The data collection was conducted in several steps. First, the researcher obtained permission from the school and coordinated with the English teacher regarding the research schedule and classroom procedure. Second, the researcher explained the writing task to the students and briefly reviewed the structure and purpose of recount text to ensure that students understood the task. Third, the students wrote their recount texts individually within 60 minutes. Fourth, the researcher collected all students' texts and prepared them for analysis.

Data Analysis Technique

The data were analyzed using an error analysis procedure. The analysis involved four main steps: error identification, error classification, error tabulation, and percentage calculation. In the first step, the researcher read each student's recount text carefully and identified grammatical errors found in the text. In the second step, the identified errors were classified into the predetermined grammatical categories. In the third step, the number of errors in each category was tabulated to show the distribution of errors. In the fourth step, the frequency of each error category was calculated into percentages to determine which grammatical errors occurred most frequently. The percentage of each error

category was calculated using the following formula:

$$P = F / N \times 100\%$$

where P refers to the percentage of errors, F refers to the frequency of errors in each category, and N refers to the total number of errors. The results of the calculation were then interpreted descriptively to explain the most frequent grammatical problems found in students' recount text writing.

RESULTS

This section presents the results of the grammatical error analysis found in students' recount text writing. The data were obtained from 40 recount texts written by third-year students. The students were asked to write a personal recount text about an unforgettable experience. The analysis focused on seven categories of errors: verb forms, prepositions, noun pluralization, articles, pronouns, conjunctions, and punctuation or writing mechanics.

The results of the analysis showed that students made various grammatical errors in their recount texts. The most frequent errors occurred in the use of verb forms, followed by prepositions, noun pluralization, articles, pronouns, conjunctions, and punctuation. The distribution of students' grammatical errors is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Frequency and Percentage of Students' Grammatical Errors in Recount Text Writing

No.	Types of Errors	Frequency of Students Making Errors	Percentage
1	Verb forms	37	92.5%
2	Prepositions	34	85.0%
3	Noun pluralization	30	75.0%
4	Articles	23	57.5%
5	Pronouns	21	52.5%
6	Conjunctions	15	37.5%

7	Punctuation / writing mechanics	9	22.5%
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Based on Table 1, errors in verb forms were the most dominant errors made by students. Thirty-seven students, or 92.5% of the total participants, made errors in this category. These errors mainly occurred because students failed to use the correct past tense forms in recount texts. Since recount text retells past experiences, the use of past tense is one of its essential grammatical features. However, several students still used base verbs or present tense forms when describing past events. Some students also showed difficulty distinguishing between regular and irregular verbs, using auxiliary verbs correctly, and constructing active or passive sentences.

The second most frequent errors were preposition errors, which were found in 34 students' texts, or 85% of the participants. Students frequently misused, omitted, or added prepositions inappropriately. Common problems appeared in the use of prepositions such as *in*, *on*, *at*, *to*, and *from*. These errors indicate that students had difficulty selecting prepositions according to context, particularly in expressing time, place, and direction.

The third category was noun pluralization errors. Thirty students, or 75%, made errors in using singular and plural noun forms. Students often failed to add plural markers to countable nouns or used plural forms where singular nouns were required. These errors suggest that students still had difficulty recognizing countable and uncountable nouns and applying pluralization rules consistently in writing.

Article errors appeared in 23 students' texts, or 57.5% of the

participants. These errors included omission, addition, and misuse of *a*, *an*, and *the*. Some students omitted articles before singular countable nouns, while others used definite or indefinite articles in inappropriate contexts. This finding indicates that the English article system remains problematic for students, possibly because Indonesian does not have an equivalent article system.

Pronoun errors were found in 21 students' texts, or 52.5%. These errors included incorrect use of personal pronouns, possessive pronouns, demonstrative pronouns, and reflexive pronouns. Some students failed to maintain consistency between pronouns and their referents, while others used incorrect pronoun forms in sentence construction.

Conjunction errors occurred in 15 students' texts, or 37.5%. These errors involved the misuse or omission of conjunctions used to connect words, phrases, clauses, and sentences. Since recount text requires chronological organization, conjunctions and temporal connectors are important to help readers follow the sequence of events. The students' errors in this category indicate that they still needed support in using cohesive devices to connect ideas logically.

The least frequent errors were punctuation and writing mechanics errors, found in 9 students' texts, or 22.5%. These errors included incorrect use of commas, periods, capitalization, and sentence boundaries. Although the percentage was lower than the other categories, punctuation errors still affected the clarity and readability of students' recount texts.

Overall, the findings indicate that students still experienced substantial grammatical difficulties in writing recount texts. The dominant errors in

verb forms, prepositions, and noun pluralization show that students had not fully mastered basic grammatical features required in recount writing. These errors also suggest that grammar instruction needs to be integrated more explicitly with genre-based writing practice.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study show that the most frequent grammatical errors made by students occurred in the use of verb forms. This result is understandable because recount text requires consistent use of past tense forms to retell past experiences. Many students still used present tense or base verb forms when describing past events, indicating that they had difficulty applying tense rules in extended writing. This finding supports the view that tense use is one of the most persistent grammatical problems in EFL writing. Zheng and Park found that Chinese and Korean university students frequently made errors in verbs, nouns, articles, and prepositions, and that these errors were partly influenced by the learners' first language and developing interlanguage system.

The dominance of verb form errors also suggests that students may understand grammar rules at the sentence level but fail to apply them consistently in paragraph writing. This is consistent with Corder's view that learner errors are important evidence of language development because they reveal the learner's current linguistic system. Errors should therefore be treated not merely as mistakes to be corrected, but as diagnostic indicators of learners' grammatical development. In the context of this study, students' verb form errors indicate that they need more explicit practice in using simple past tense, irregular verbs, auxiliary verbs,

and tense consistency within recount texts.

Preposition errors were the second most frequent errors found in students' writing. This finding is consistent with previous EFL writing studies showing that prepositions are difficult for learners because their use is often context-dependent and not always directly translatable from the first language. Darus and Ching reported that Malaysian learners commonly made errors in prepositions, singular/plural forms, verb tense, word choice, and subject-verb agreement in English essays. In the present study, students' errors in using *in*, *on*, *at*, and *to* suggest that they had difficulty connecting grammatical form with contextual meaning, especially when expressing time and place in recount writing.

Noun pluralization errors were also frequent. This finding indicates that students had difficulty distinguishing countable and uncountable nouns and applying plural markers correctly. Such errors may be related to differences between Indonesian and English grammatical systems. Indonesian does not mark plurality in the same way as English; plurality is often indicated by context, reduplication, or quantifiers rather than obligatory suffixes. As a result, students may omit the plural marker *-s* in English or use plural forms inconsistently. Watcharapunyawong and Usaha found that Thai EFL students' writing errors varied across text types and were strongly influenced by first-language interference, including errors in verb forms, articles, and noun pluralization. This supports the interpretation that students' errors in the present study may be influenced by both interlingual and intralingual factors.

Article errors were also found in

more than half of the students' texts. The misuse or omission of *a*, *an*, and *the* is a common problem for EFL learners whose first language does not have an article system. In Indonesian, definiteness and indefiniteness are not always marked grammatically in the same way as in English. Therefore, students may omit articles before singular countable nouns or use *the* in contexts where an indefinite article is required. Bitchener and Knoch's study on written corrective feedback showed that focused feedback can help L2 learners improve the accuracy of English article use, indicating that article errors are teachable when feedback is systematic and targeted.

Pronoun errors in students' recount texts indicate that learners had difficulty maintaining reference and consistency across sentences. In recount writing, pronouns are important because students often retell personal experiences involving themselves and other people. Incorrect use of *he*, *she*, *they*, *we*, *his*, *her*, or *their* may confuse readers and weaken textual cohesion. This finding is in line with James' view that errors in learner language should be analyzed not only as grammatical deviations but also as problems that may affect meaning and communication. Therefore, pronoun errors should be addressed in writing instruction through exercises on reference, agreement, and cohesion.

Conjunction errors were less frequent than verb, preposition, noun, article, and pronoun errors, but they still represent an important issue in recount writing. Recount texts require chronological sequencing, so students need to use conjunctions and temporal connectors such as *then*, *after that*, *because*, *when*, *while*, and *finally*. Errors in conjunctions may cause the sequence

of events to become unclear. Hyland argues that writing instruction should pay attention to genre because each genre has particular linguistic and organizational features. In recount text, cohesive devices and time connectors are central features that help structure events chronologically.

Punctuation and writing mechanics errors had the lowest percentage, yet they still affected the quality of students' writing. Errors in capitalization, commas, periods, and sentence boundaries may reduce readability and make students' ideas difficult to follow. Although punctuation is sometimes considered a minor aspect, it plays a significant role in sentence clarity. Ferris emphasizes that grammar and mechanics errors in L2 writing deserve pedagogical attention, particularly when they interfere with meaning or occur repeatedly across students' texts.

The findings of this study are also consistent with broader research on EFL writing errors. Dulay, Burt, and Krashen classify learner errors into omission, addition, misformation, and misordering, and many of the errors found in this study fall into those categories. For example, omission appeared in missing articles and plural markers, misformation appeared in incorrect verb forms and pronouns, while addition appeared in unnecessary prepositions or articles. This classification helps explain that students' errors are systematic and can be analyzed pedagogically.

The present findings also support Selinker's concept of interlanguage. Students' grammatical errors suggest that they are developing an internal linguistic system that is influenced by Indonesian, English rules, and their own learning strategies. For instance, when students translate Indonesian sentences

directly into English, they may produce incorrect tense forms, omit articles, or use prepositions inaccurately. Brown also explains that learner errors may result from interlingual transfer, intralingual transfer, and overgeneralization. This means that students' writing errors are not random; they reflect specific learning processes that need to be understood by teachers.

From a pedagogical perspective, the findings indicate that English teachers should integrate grammar instruction into writing practice rather than teach grammar as isolated rules. Since the most frequent errors appeared in verb forms, prepositions, and noun pluralization, these areas should become priorities in remedial instruction. Teachers can provide model recount texts, guided writing practice, peer review, and focused corrective feedback. Ferris argues that written corrective feedback is more useful when it is selective and connected to instruction, while Bitchener and Knoch show that feedback can improve linguistic accuracy when it targets specific grammatical features.

Genre-based writing instruction is also recommended. Because recount text has specific social purposes, structures, and language features, students need to be taught how grammar functions within the genre. Teachers should explicitly explain that recount text typically uses past tense, temporal conjunctions, personal participants, and chronological organization. Hyland's genre-based perspective supports the idea that students write more effectively when they understand the relationship between text purpose, structure, and language features.

In summary, the findings reveal that students' grammatical errors in recount text writing were dominated by

verb form errors, followed by prepositions, noun pluralization, articles, pronouns, conjunctions, and punctuation. These findings are consistent with previous studies showing that EFL learners commonly struggle with tense, articles, prepositions, noun forms, and sentence-level accuracy. The results imply that students need systematic grammar support, explicit genre-based instruction, and focused corrective feedback to improve their accuracy in recount writing. Therefore, grammatical error analysis can serve as a useful diagnostic tool for designing more responsive and effective EFL writing instruction.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that EFL students still face substantial grammatical difficulties in writing recount texts. Based on the analysis of 40 students' written recount texts, the most frequent errors were found in the use of verb forms, followed by prepositions, noun pluralization, articles, pronouns, conjunctions, and punctuation or writing mechanics. Among these categories, verb form errors were the most dominant, indicating that students had difficulty applying past tense forms consistently when retelling past experiences. This finding is important because past tense is one of the main grammatical features of recount text.

The errors identified in this study show that students' problems in writing recount texts are not limited to sentence accuracy but also affect the clarity, cohesion, and readability of their writing. Errors in prepositions and noun pluralization indicate that students still experience difficulty applying English grammatical rules that differ from Indonesian. Errors in articles and

pronouns also show that students need more practice in using grammatical markers that support meaning and reference in written texts. Although conjunction and punctuation errors occurred less frequently, they still influenced the logical connection and organization of ideas in recount writing.

These findings imply that grammar instruction should be integrated with genre-based writing practice. English teachers need to provide explicit explanation, model texts, guided writing activities, focused corrective feedback, and remedial exercises based on students' recurring errors. In teaching recount text, special attention should be given to the use of simple past tense, irregular verbs, prepositions of time and place, plural nouns, articles, pronoun reference, chronological conjunctions, and punctuation. By using error analysis as a diagnostic tool, teachers can design more responsive writing instruction that addresses students' actual grammatical needs.

This study also suggests that future research should examine the causes of students' grammatical errors more deeply, including first-language interference, limited grammar knowledge, writing anxiety, and lack of exposure to English texts. Further studies may also compare grammatical errors across different text genres or investigate the effectiveness of corrective feedback and genre-based instruction in improving students' grammatical accuracy in writing.

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