



Decoding the Challenges: A Study of English Writing Errors Among EFL Students

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Keywords: English Language Teaching; Error Analysis; Writing Skill</p> <p>Received: 25 Sep 2023 Revised: 22 Oct 2023 Accepted: 2 Nov 2023</p>	<p>This study focused on analyzing the common errors made by students in their English writing skills. The study employed a descriptive research design, involving 100 EFL university students as participants. The primary data collection method was a writing test, and the collected data were analyzed using error analysis techniques. The findings showed that the most common errors made by the students were related to grammar, vocabulary, and spelling. The most common grammatical errors were associated with subject-verb agreement, verb tense, and articles. In terms of vocabulary errors, the study identified prevalent mistakes such as the incorrect use of word forms, inappropriate collocations, and confusion between homophones. Additionally, the analysis of spelling errors revealed that phonetic spelling mistakes were the most common, followed by misspelling of homophones and confusion of vowels. These findings highlight areas where students commonly struggle with their English writing skills and emphasize the crucial need for targeted instructional strategies to effectively address these challenges and improve students' proficiency in English writing.</p>

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1. INTRODUCTION

Writing skills in the English language play a crucial role in effective communication and academic success (Isma et al., 2023; Isma & Baharuddin, 2022; Khan et al., 2017). Proficiency in writing allows individuals to express their ideas, thoughts, and knowledge with clarity and precision (Fatimah, 2019). For students, strong writing skills in English are particularly vital as they navigate their academic journey and prepare for their future careers. However, despite the importance of writing, many students encounter challenges and difficulties in developing and expressing their ideas and thoughts effectively in written form (Cahya et al., 2023; Isma, 2018; Isma et al., 2023).

The ability to write proficiently in English involves various components, including grammar, vocabulary, sentence structure, coherence, and spelling (Cahya et al., 2023; Fatimah, 2019; Isma et al., 2023). Students often face difficulties in these areas, leading to errors that may hinder effective communication and comprehension (Isma & Baharuddin, 2022; Isma & Nur, 2023). Understanding the specific errors made by students in their English writing can provide valuable insights into the challenges they encounter and help educators and language instructors design targeted interventions to address these issues (Abdullah et al., 2021; Alghazo & Alshraideh, 2020; Özkayran & Yılmaz, 2020).



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Previous studies have identified various types of errors made by EFL learners in their writing. For example, studies by (Fitrawati & Safitri, 2021; Royani & Sadiyah, 2019) found that students had difficulty with subject-verb agreement, verb tense, and articles, which are common grammatical errors. Studies by (Karim et al., 2018; Zafar, 2016) also found that vocabulary errors, such as inappropriate collocations and limited vocabulary, were common in EFL learners' writing. Additionally, studies by (Fitrawati & Safitri, 2021; Fitria, 2020) identified spelling errors, such as phonetic spelling and misspelling homophones, as common errors made by EFL learners in their writing.

Those previous studies and preliminary results of the study revealed that the most common errors made by the students were indeed related to grammar, vocabulary, and spelling. These errors have a significant impact on the clarity and coherence of the students' writing. Grammatical errors encompassed issues such as subject-verb agreement, verb tense consistency, and sentence structure. Vocabulary errors included misuse or incorrect choice of words, leading to imprecise or ambiguous expressions. Spelling errors encompassed misspelled words or typographical errors that affected the readability and professionalism of the written work.

While numerous studies have investigated English language learning and writing skills, there is still a gap in the literature when it comes to a comprehensive analysis of the common errors made by students. This study aims to bridge the existing gap in the literature by conducting a detailed analysis of the common errors made by students in their English writing skills. By identifying these errors, this study seeks to provide educators, language instructors, and curriculum developers with valuable information to develop effective teaching strategies and support mechanisms.

This study aims to analyze the common errors made by students in their English writing skills. Specifically, the study focuses on identifying the most prevalent errors related to grammar, vocabulary, and spelling. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the existing body of knowledge in English language teaching and learning. By identifying the most common errors made by students, this study aims to highlight the areas that require special attention in the teaching and learning process. Additionally, it may serve as a foundation for future studies exploring effective pedagogical practices, instructional materials, and assessment methods to address these errors and promote better English writing skills among students.

2. METHODS

This study employed a descriptive research design to analyze the common errors made by students in their English writing skills. The research design aimed to provide a comprehensive overview of the errors present in the participants' writing assignments and identify the most frequent errors in the areas of grammar, vocabulary, and spelling. The participants in this study were university students enrolled in English writing courses at three universities in Indonesia. The total number of participants was 100, consisting of 42 male and 58 female students. The selection of participants from multiple universities aimed to ensure a diverse representation of students with varying language backgrounds and proficiency levels. The primary instrument used for data collection was a writing test. The writing test consisted of a prompt that required participants to write an essay within the range of 250–300 words. The prompt was designed to elicit a response that would showcase the participants' English writing skills and provide a sample of their written work. The participants completed the writing test under exam conditions, with a time limit of 60 minutes.

The collected data from the participants' writing assignments were analyzed using error analysis techniques. The analysis involved systematically examining the written texts to identify and categorize the errors made by the students. The errors were classified into different categories, such as

grammatical errors, vocabulary errors, and spelling errors. Each error was documented and counted to determine the frequency and prevalence of specific error types. The analysis of the data involved both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative analysis focused on calculating the frequency of errors in each category, while the qualitative analysis involved examining the specific characteristics and patterns of the errors. The results of the analysis provided insights into the common errors made by students in their English writing skills, specifically in the areas of grammar, vocabulary, and spelling.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Students' Grammatical Errors in Writing

The following figure represents the different types of errors and the number of instances of each error type. It is organized in descending order, with the most frequent error type at the top and the least frequent error type at the bottom.

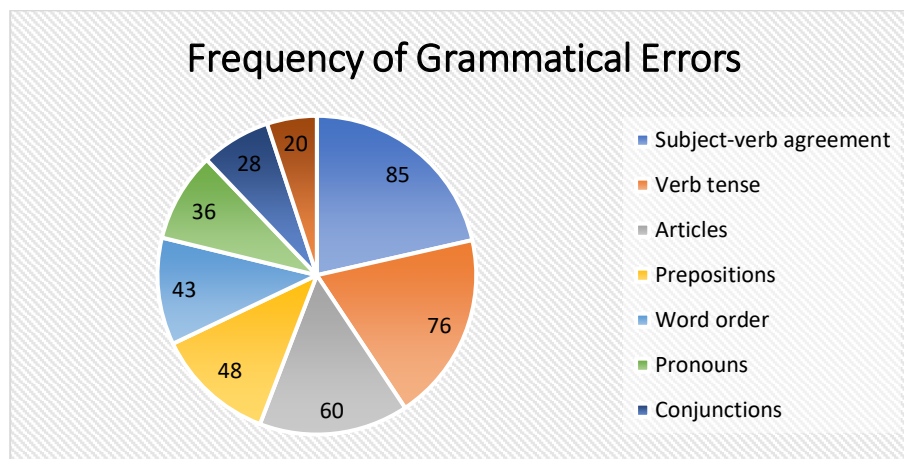


Figure 1. Frequency of Grammatical Errors

This figure presents the frequency of grammatical errors made by 100 students in their writing, with subject-verb agreement topping the list at 85 errors. Verb tense comes in second place with 76 errors, followed by articles with 60 errors, prepositions with 48 errors, and word order with 43 errors. Pronouns were the sixth most frequent error, with 36 instances, while conjunctions had 28 errors, and modifiers had the least frequency with 20 errors.

Subject-verb agreement is a crucial aspect of grammar as it ensures that the verb in a sentence agrees with the subject in terms of number and person. The high frequency of errors in this area indicates that many students struggle with this fundamental aspect of grammar. This could be attributed to the complexity of the English language or inadequate instruction on the topic. Verb tense errors are also common among the surveyed students. Verb tense is an essential component of writing as it helps to convey the time and sequence of events accurately. Students who make tense errors may struggle with understanding when to use past, present, or future tenses, leading to confusion in their writing. Article errors, which came in third place, may also pose a challenge to students. Articles are small but essential words that can greatly affect the meaning of a sentence. Misusing or omitting articles can make a sentence ambiguous or unclear. Preposition and word order errors can also affect the clarity and coherence of a sentence. Misusing prepositions or placing words in the wrong order can lead to awkward or confusing sentences. Pronoun and conjunction errors, while less frequent, may still hinder the flow and coherence of a sentence. Pronoun errors occur when students use the wrong pronoun or use it

ambiguously, leading to confusion for the reader. Conjunction errors, on the other hand, can affect the logical connection between ideas in a sentence. Lastly, modifier errors may indicate a lack of precision or clarity in the student's writing. Misusing modifiers, such as adjectives or adverbs, can change the meaning of a sentence or make it sound awkward.

The presented data highlights the most common grammatical errors made by the participants were subject-verb agreement, verb tense, and articles. These errors are often attributed to the influence of the first language, as well as the lack of exposure to correct language use (Ferris, 2011; Hyland & Anan, 2006). Furthermore, the complexity of English grammar may also contribute to these errors (Sermsook et al., 2017; Shintani et al., 2014). The findings of the current survey are consistent with prior studies on grammatical errors made by EFL students in their writing. For example, a study by Fitrawati & Safitri (2021) analyzed the grammatical errors made by EFL students in essay writing and found that the most frequent error was in verb use, followed by errors in nouns, articles, prepositions, and pronouns. This is consistent with the findings of the current survey, which also identified verb tenses and articles as common errors. Another study by Karim et al. (2018) conducted an error analysis of EFL learners at the secondary level and found that the most common errors were in verb tense, subject-verb agreement, articles, prepositions, and word order. This is also consistent with the findings of the current survey. A comparative study by Jodaie et al. (2011) of EFL teachers and intermediate high school students found that both groups agreed that correction of errors in word and verb categories is more important. This supports the findings of the current survey, which identified subject-verb agreement and verb tense as the most frequent errors.

Overall, the presented data provide valuable insights into the specific grammatical errors that the students struggle with in their writing. By identifying these errors, educators can better tailor their teaching strategies to address the areas where students need the most support. Additionally, the data can inform the development of targeted language instruction materials that focus on the most frequent errors made by EFL students.

3.2 Students' Vocabulary Errors in Writing

The following figure provides a clear representation of the data on the frequency of vocabulary errors made by students.

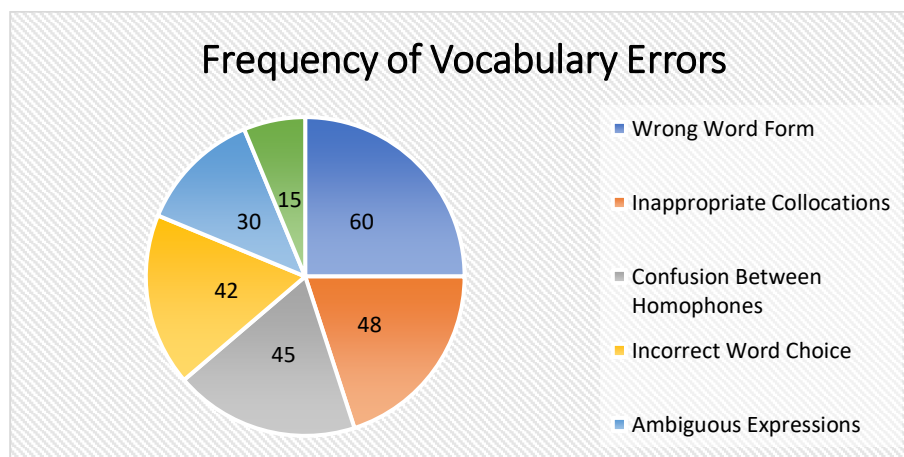


Figure 2. Frequency of Vocabulary Errors

The figure presents the most common error is the use of the wrong word form, with 60 instances. The next most frequent error is inappropriate collocations, with 48 instances, followed by confusion



between homophones with 45 instances. Incorrect word choice comes in fourth place with 42 instances, while ambiguous expressions had 30 instances. The least common error was redundant phrases, with only 15 instances.

Using the wrong word form is a common mistake among non-native English speakers. It occurs when students use a word in the wrong tense or form, leading to confusion or awkward sentences. This error can be attributed to the complexity of the English language and the many irregular verb forms. Inappropriate collocations, the second most frequent error, happen when students use words that do not naturally go together, leading to awkward or nonsensical sentences. This error can be corrected through targeted vocabulary instruction and exposure to authentic language use. Confusion between homophones, such as "their" and "there," can lead to errors in meaning and affect the clarity of the sentence. This error can be addressed through practice and memorization of commonly confused words. Incorrect word choice can also cause confusion and ambiguity in writing. This error can be avoided by developing a rich vocabulary and understanding the subtle differences in word meanings and connotations. Ambiguous expressions, such as idioms or metaphors, can be difficult for non-native speakers to understand and use correctly. This error can be addressed through explicit instruction and exposure to common expressions in context. Redundant phrases, the least frequent error, occur when students use unnecessary words or phrases in their writing, leading to wordiness and decreased clarity. This error can be addressed through editing and revision, with a focus on concise and effective communication.

The findings reveal that vocabulary errors are common among non-native English learners, with the wrong word form, inappropriate collocations, and confusion between homophones being the most frequent errors. These errors may be attributed to the lack of vocabulary knowledge, as well as the limited exposure to authentic English language use (Derakhshan & Karimian Shirejini, 2020; Qian & Lin, 2019). These findings are also consistent with prior studies on vocabulary or lexical errors made by EFL learners in their writing. A study by Siengsanoh (2021) examined the use of lexical collocations by Thai EFL learners in writing and found that they made several mistakes in terms of word choice. These studies support the finding of the current survey that inappropriate collocations are a frequent vocabulary error in EFL writing. Another study by Mahan (2013) analyzed lexical errors made by Norwegian intermediate and advanced students of English and found that they were labeled by their routes, effects, and influences. The study identified wrong word choice as a common issue in students' writing, which is consistent with the finding of the current survey that incorrect word choice is a frequent vocabulary error.

Therefore, the presented data highlights the importance of effective vocabulary instruction in EFL classrooms. Educators should prioritize teaching vocabulary in context and provide ample opportunities for practice and feedback to help students avoid common errors. Additionally, the data can inform the development of targeted vocabulary materials that address the specific areas where EFL students struggle the most. By improving their vocabulary skills, students can enhance the clarity and effectiveness of their writing.

3.3 Students' Spelling Errors in Writing

The following figure illustrates the frequency of spelling errors made by students in their writing, including phonetic spelling, misspelling homophones, confusion of vowels, and misspelling of common vowels.

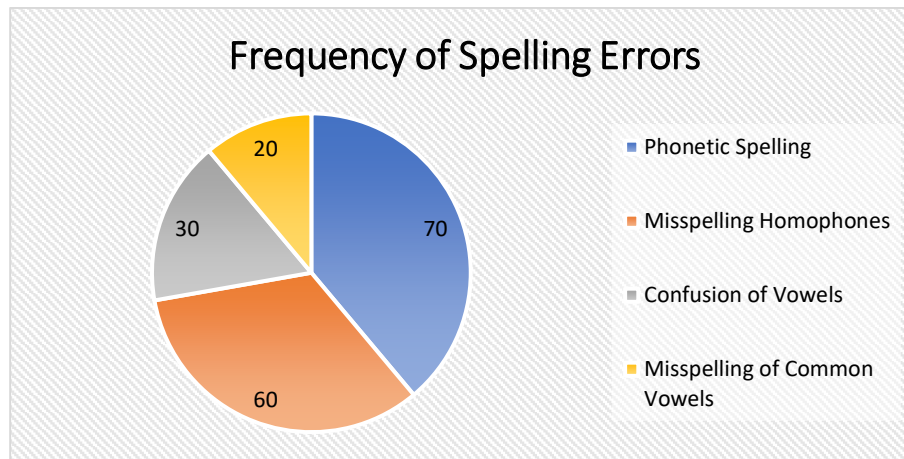


Figure 3. Frequency of Spelling Errors

This shows that the most common error is phonetic spelling, with 70 instances. The second most frequent error is misspelling homophones, with 60 instances. Confusion of vowels is the third most common error with 30 instances, and the misspelling of common vowels comes in fourth with 20 instances.

Phonetic spelling, the most common error, occurs when students spell words based on their sound rather than their correct spelling, leading to errors in meaning and clarity. This error can be attributed to a lack of exposure to written English or inconsistent spelling rules. Misspelling homophones, such as "their" and "there," can lead to confusion and errors in meaning. This error can be addressed through targeted spelling instruction and practice. Confusion of vowels can lead to errors in spelling and pronunciation. This error can be corrected through explicit instruction and practice in distinguishing between similar vowel sounds. Misspelling of common vowels can occur due to confusion between vowel sounds or inconsistent application of spelling rules. This error can be addressed through targeted instruction and practice in common vowel patterns.

In summary, the most common spelling errors made by the participants were phonetic spelling and the misspelling of homophones. These errors may be attributed to the lack of attention to spelling rules, as well as the lack of practice in spelling (Al-Sobhi et al., 2018; Albeshir, 2018; Fitria, 2020). Educators can use this information to develop targeted spelling instruction and provide feedback that addresses these specific areas of difficulty. By improving their spelling skills, students can enhance the clarity and accuracy of their writing.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study analyzed the common errors made by students in their English writing skills, specifically focusing on grammar, vocabulary, and spelling. Regarding grammatical errors, the analysis revealed that subject-verb agreement was the most frequent error, followed by verb tense, articles, prepositions, word order, pronouns, conjunctions, and modifiers. These errors indicate challenges in maintaining grammatical accuracy and consistency in students' writing. In terms of vocabulary errors, the study identified the use of the wrong word form as the most common error, followed by inappropriate collocations, confusion between homophones, incorrect word choice, and ambiguous expressions. These errors demonstrate difficulties in selecting and using appropriate vocabulary to convey precise meanings and ideas. The analysis of spelling errors showed that phonetic spelling was the most common error, followed by misspelling homophones, confusion of vowels, and



misspelling of common vowels. These errors indicate challenges in accurately representing the written form of words, which can affect the readability and professionalism of students' writing.

Based on these findings, it is evident that students face significant challenges in their English writing skills, particularly in the areas of grammar, vocabulary, and spelling. These errors can impede effective communication and hinder the clarity and coherence of their written work. Understanding the common errors made by students in English writing skills has practical implications for both educators and students. For educators, it allows them to develop targeted instructional strategies that address the specific needs and challenges of students. For grammatical errors, explicit instruction, practice activities, and feedback on subject-verb agreement, verb tense consistency, and sentence structure can be beneficial. Vocabulary instruction should emphasize appropriate word forms, collocations, and differentiation between homophones. Spelling instruction should include explicit teaching of phonetic rules, common spelling patterns, and strategies for proofreading and self-correction. By focusing on the identified problem areas, educators can design interventions that help students overcome their weaknesses and enhance their writing proficiency. For students, recognizing their errors and understanding the patterns can guide their self-directed learning and encourage them to seek additional support to improve their writing skills.

Furthermore, future research can expand on this study by exploring the underlying factors contributing to these errors. Factors such as the students' first language interference, instructional methods, and exposure to authentic English texts may play a significant role in shaping students' writing skills. Investigating these factors through qualitative research methods, surveys, or interviews can provide a deeper understanding of the root causes of the errors observed in this study. Additionally, future research can also examine the effectiveness of specific instructional interventions or strategies in addressing these common errors. Comparing the outcomes of different teaching approaches, incorporating targeted error correction techniques, or implementing technology-assisted writing tools can help determine the most effective methods for improving students' writing skills.

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