CHALLENGES FOR INDONESIAN EFL STUDENTS IN ENGLISH ACADEMIC WRITING

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Abstract: This study examines the challenges encountered by Indonesian EFL students in academic writing, specifically focusing on syntactical and morphological errors in scholarship application essays. The data comprised 20 essays from third-semester students in an academic writing course at a private Indonesian university. Two English language lecturers reviewed the essays twice to identify errors. The findings discovered that syntactic errors were the most common, with 132 instances (61.69%), followed by punctuation and capitalization errors with 50 instances (23.37%), and morphological errors being the least frequent with 32 instances (14.94%). Interlingual interference was the primary source of these errors, primarily as a result of a lack of experience and understanding of academic writing conventions. The study offers teaching recommendations for EFL teachers, emphasizing the importance of addressing learners' native language influences and providing targeted grammar instruction.
Keywords: *academic writing; challenges; errors; EFL students.*

INTRODUCTION

Writing is a basic language skill that is essential to communicating ideas, opinions, and feelings. It acts as a medium for the exchange and creation of concepts, feelings, and persuasive techniques (Wondim et al., 2024; Surfaifel et al., 2023; Subandowo & Sárdi, 2023). In addition, writing is a complex cognitive task that requires skillful simultaneous management of multiple components (Vandermeulen et al., 2024; Al-Hamzi et al., 2023; Bulqiyah et al., 2021). This includes proficiency with content, formatting, grammar, vocabulary, punctuation, and language tone at the sentence level. Beyond the phrase, authors need to combine and arrange material in a way that makes sense for paragraphs and compositions (Li, 2024; Siddiqui et al., 2023).

As a result, a common challenge in L2 writing is students' apparent inability to communicate effectively through writing, which lacks clarity, accuracy, and comprehensibility (Phyo et al., 2024; Abdi et al., 2024; Budiyono & Fadhly, 2023; Prabowo et al., 2024). Several factors contribute to students' writing challenges, including the intricate nature of the skill itself (Alzubi & Nazim, 2024; Pasaribu, 2022). EFL/ESL learners often encounter difficulties in producing L2 text, with errors serving as crucial indicators of language development in the learning process (Abubakir & Alshaboul, 2023; Xu & Casal, 2023; Hadianti et al., 2023).

Exploring academic writing within the TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) domain has emerged as a pivotal focus of research (Alkhateeb & Waleed Daweli, 2024; Ali et al., 2023; Satake, 2020). This emphasis likely stems from the growing importance of academic writing as students progress through higher levels of education (Siddiqui et al., 2023; Aknouch, 2022; Bulqiyah et al., 2021; Khansir & Pakdel, 2020; Mandarani, 2020; Nasseri, 2020). One of the issues which still the focus of the writiing research is the EFL/ESL students' errors in L2 writing. Several current investigations into writing errors have uncovered evidence suggesting that writing is frequently seen as the most tough element. of language acquisition.

Siddiqui et al. (2023) studied the EFL pupils' challenges in paragraph writing. This study seek to uncover errors in unity, develoment, and coherence in paragraph writing including the influential factors. The results of the study underscore the EFL students' most dominant errors due to paragraph unity, paragraph development, and paragraph coherence respectively. The keys factors to the errors making were the cramming culture and undue focus on grammar and a lack of quality feedback.

The study of EFL students' challenge in academic writing especially in lexical and syntatical errors was addressed by Chuenchaichon (2022). This study investigated expository paragraphs written by Thai EFL university students to uncover the frequent errors committed by the students. It reveals that spelling, capitalisation, semantic and good coherence are the most dominant errors found respectively. The finding also shows the factors to the errors are due to L1 intereference, literal translation, and lack of knowledge of English mechanics and grammar.

The investigation of errors in English writing was also done by Harun & Abdullah (2020). The study explored the syntatical and structural errors done by primary school students in Malaysia. The findings expose the most dominat errors made by the students were tense, punctuation, spelling, and vocabulary respectively. This study has revealed that the reasons of errors were both interlingual and intralingual transfers.

In the Indonesian setting, the issue of inaccuracies in English writing remains to be addressed. Aziz et al. (2020) looked into the linguistic faults made by Indonesian university EFL students. This study found that the use of markers, verb-tense, article, preposition, subject-verb agreement, and pronouns were the most common errors. Furthermore, the most common error type was omission, followed by addition, misformation, and misordering. Aside from the minor account of interlingual transfer and context of learning, the source of inaccuracy was found to be intralingual transfer.

Writing errors show a learner's proficiency across languages since they deviate blatantly from native speakers' grammatical conventions . Because each student has a varied level of English proficiency, there are numerous kinds of errors that can be made (Agustina et al., 2022; Paudel, 2022). For For example, if a student asks, "Do you have to drink tea?" They most likely exhibit a level of competency where all verbs require a pre-posed do auxiliary in order to form an inquiry. As a result, such a learner committed a mistake. At times, students struggle to distinguish between errors and mistakes. (Rattanadilok Na Phuket & Normah Othman, 2015)

Mistakes result from improper rule acquisition, in which language is wrongly encoded in the brain. These mistakes may arise throughout the teaching-learning process as a result of teachers who are not proficient in English grammar or students who have different understandings or misconceptions that become ingrained in them over time and affect how well they develop their English grammar (Harun & Abdullah, 2020).

Some people, including teachers, may confuse the difference between errors and mistakes. As a result, resolving errors and mistakes poorly might have negative impacts on students' comprehension and self-assessment of their language proficiency (Aknouch, 2022). As a result, in order to establish a firm knowledge, the distinction between errors and mistakes must be clarified methodically. During the language acquisition process, learners will experience both mistakes and errors. Making error is a crucial component of learning, highlighting the fact that acquiring a language entails making mistakes on a regular basis. That is to say that making errors is a necessary component of learning. These errors, which include misjudgments, miscalculations, and incorrect assumptions, have a significant impact on the process of learning. skills and information. Therefore, since making mistakes is a natural component of learning, it is acceptable for students to do so as they progress through the language acquisition process (Paudel, 2022; Satake, 2020).

Among the most important concept in the study of acquiring second languages is error analysis (Al-Hamzi et al., 2023; Ali et al., 2023).

It is centered on examining the mistakes made by L2 learners, comparing their standards of acquisition with those of the target language, and explaining the erros that are found. It highlights how crucial blunders are to L2 learners' interlingual systems. (Siddiqui et al., 2023). Interlanguage, often known as learner language, is the linguistic framework used by L2 learners who do not yet have complete fluency in the target language. These language learners frequently integrate rules from their mother tongue (L1) into the target language they produce (L2), creating new language systems that are different from both their L1 and the target language (Burhansyah, 2019).

Error Analysis entails comparing learners' interlanguage and target language to find deviations, which are labeled as errors. These errors serve as indications of learners' developmental stages in language acquisition, and they help to formulate hypotheses about the target language's rules. They provide insight into the strategies used by learners as they work toward acquiring the target language (Bryant et al., 2023; Burhansyah, 2019). EA arose in reaction to the limitations of contrastive analysis (CA), which can occasionally provide erroneous and uninformative predictions of L2 learners' errors. To identify similarities and contrasts between the structures of the two language systems, CA compares them. This allows it to foresee potential challenges that learners may encounter when acquiring a second language, which could ultimately result in errors (Chuenchaichon, 2022).

However, qualities noticed in interlanguage errors, as determined through contrastive analysis research, contribute in explaining specific grammatical errors stemming from first linguistic (L1) interference (Chuenchaichon, 2022). Error analysis allows for the identification of grammatical errors, the understanding of their underlying causes, and the provision of explanations for how these errors occur. This provides valuable insights for L2 learners, teachers, and researchers (Al-Hamzi et al., 2023; Pasaribu, 2021).

The errors found in the EFL students' writing were analysed and categorised into six distinct types based on the taxonomy of syntactical and morphological errors: error in the use of tenses, preposition, articles, voices, verbs, and omission and addition of morphemes. Table 1 shows the taxonomy of the syntactical and morphological errors.

Table 1. *The taxonomy of syntactical and morphological errors*

Syntactical Errors					Morphological errors
Tenses	Preposition	Articles	Active/Passive Voice	Verbs	
Simple past instead of present perfect	Omission of preposition	Omission of "the"	Passive auxiliary Be omssion	Ommission of verb "be"	Ommission of plural ending "s"
Simple present instead of present perfect	Addition of prepostition	Addition of "the"	Passive with interansitive verb Be addition	Addition of verb "be"	Misuse of plural errors and addition of plural ending "s"
Simple past instead of simple present	Misuse of preposition	Omission of "a/an"	Preposition addition	Misuse of verb "be"	Misuse of possesive "s"
Present progressive instead of simple present		Addition of "a/an"		Ommission of verbs	Incorrect use of comparative adjectives
Past perfect instead of simple past		Misuses of articles		Misuse of other verbs	Wrong word forms

Because of its ability to shed light on the language acquisition techniques employed by Indonesian EFL students when they compose written compositions, this taxonomy was especially selected. The researcher then went on to examine the sources of the mistakes that appeared in these narrative recount texts. It is suggested that these sources could be intralingual or interlingual. Errors resulting from interference or negative transfer from the learners' native language are referred to as intralingual sources, whereas errors resulting from interference within the target language itself are referred to as interlingual sources.

There are three main reasons why language acquisition errors occur: context of learning, intralingual transfer, and interlingual transfer (Chuenchaichon, 2022; Harun & Abdullah, 2020)

Interlingual transfer. This happens when students rely solely on their native language as their previous linguistic system, which unavoidably leads to interference. For example,

the phrase "the book of John" may be incorrectly translated as "John's book."

Intralingual transfer. Once learners have grasped certain characteristics of the new language system, they can apply these concepts to the target language. An example is the statement "Do they know how to swim?"

Context of learning. Errors may result from the teacher's instructional methods or the resources used, such as textbooks.

METHOD

This study took a qualitative descriptive method to examine syntactical and morphological errors in the academic writing of 20 third-semester Indonesian EFL students and the source of the errors. Each participant was required to compose an essay on why they deserved a scholarship abroad. Two English language instructors reviewed the essays twice to identify errors. The data was examined using a mix of error analysis models and content analysis. To identify the source of making errors (interlingual source, intralingual source or other context of learning), the interview method was addressed related to the students' views of the reasons for making errors in their writing.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The aim of this research was to identify syntactic and morphological errors in the academic writing of EFL students. A content analysis was employed to examine errors present in each sentence. The findings of the data analysis are shown in the following table 1.

Table 2. *The errors identified in the essay writing*

Classification of Errors	Types of Error	N	%
Syntactical Errors			
Tenses	"Simple past" instead of "simple present"	2	0.93
	"Simple present" instead of "simple past"	12	5.61
	"Simple past" instead of "past perfect"	3	1.40
	"Past perfet" instead of "simple past"	1	0.47
	"Simple future" instead of "simple present"	2	0,93
Preposition	Omission of preposition	15	7.01
	Addition of prepostition	3	1.40
	Misuse of preposition	7	3.28
Artiles	Omission of "the"	5	2.34
	Addition of "the"	9	4.21
	Omission of "a/an"	16	7.48
	Addition of "a/an"	2	0.93
Active/passive voice	"Be" omission	14	6.54
	Passive with interansitive verb	2	0.93
Verb	Ommission of verb "be"	23	10.75
	Addition of verb "be"	5	2.34
	Misuse of verb "be"	2	0.93
	Ommission of verbs	6	2.81
	Misuse of other verbs	3	1.40
		132	61.69
Morphological Errors			
	Ommission of plural ending "s"	18	8.41
	Misapplication of plural noun errors and addition of plural ending "s"	2	0.93
	Misuse of possesive "s"	6	2.81
	Incorrect use of comparative adjectives	4	1.87
	Wrong word forms	2	0.93
		32	14.94
Other Errors			
Punctuation	Ommision of punctuation	16	7.48
	Addition of punctuation	4	1.87
Capital letters	Addition of capital letters	14	6.54
	Ommision of capital letters	16	7.48
		50	23.37
	Total	214	100

The study identified 214 errors in the students' essays, with syntactic errors being the most prevalent (61.69%), followed by punctuation and capitalization errors (23.37%), and morphological errors (14.94%). Common errors included the omission of the verb 'be,' incorrect pluralization, and misuse of articles. These errors were primarily attributed to interlingual interference and a lack of familiarity with academic writing conventions. These results are consistent with earlier studies (Al-Hamzi et al., 2023; Pasaribu, 2021; Aziz et al., 2020; Harun & Abdullah, 2020), which also highlighted syntactic and morphological challenges in EFL students' writing. The results suggest a need for targeted grammar instruction and increased awareness of academic writing standards among EFL learners.

Syntactical errors
As previously discussed, syntactic errors manifest at the level of sentence structure, encompassing issues such as tense, prepositions, articles, voice, and verbs (Aziz et al., 2020). One significant challenge for students in academic writing is the accurate use and selection of tenses.

Errors in tenses
Errors in tense usage are among the most prevalent issues encountered in English writing. An illustrative example of such an error is provided below.

(1) When I <u>am</u> in the high school, I <u>take</u> english course.

(2) I <u>studied</u> hard for two years to finish my study.

(3) Now we <u>were</u> optimistic to get the scholarship.

(4) Last semester I <u>had taken</u> a TOEFL class.

Based on the four sentences above, it is evident that sentence 1 should use the simple past tense. It should read: "When I was in high school, I took an English course." Sentence 2 incorrectly uses the simple past tense and should instead use the past perfect tense: "I had studied hard for two years to complete my studies." In sentence 3, the correct tense to use is the simple present: "Now we are optimistic about obtaining the scholarship." Sentence 4 is written in the past perfect tense and should be rewritten in the simple past tense: "Last semester, I took a TOEFL class."

Errors in preposition
The apllication of prepositions in English writing by EFL students is still challenging. Errors in the practice of prepositions in students' academic writing are still frequently encountered as in the data below:

(5) I always <u>focus my</u> dream

(6) Every students must <u>to</u> motivate them to get their dreams.

(7) I am very interested <u>with</u> English course.

Errors in using prepositions are frequently observed among EFL students. Students often struggle with determining when to use prepositions and whether their usage is appropriate. This issue is exemplified in sentence 5 above, where the word "focus" should be followed by the preposition "on" for the sentence to be correct. In sentence 6, the preposition "to" in the phrase "must to motivate" is unnecessary because the modal "must" should directly precede the infinitive verb "motivate." In sentence 7, the preposition "with" does not suit the word "interested"; it would be more appropriate to replace "with" with "in."

Errors in preposition
The correct use of articles presents a significant challenge for EFL students. Common difficulties include determining whether a word in a sentence necessitates an article and selecting the appropriate article for a noun. Below are examples illustrating errors in the application of articles in student essays.

(8) My dream will come <u>a</u> true.

(9) It is my ambition to <u>get scholarship</u>.

(10) Every day I study hard only to <u>get scholarship</u>.

(11) Everyone must have <u>the dream</u>.

In sentence 8, the article "a" is unnecessary. Conversely, in sentence 9, an article "a" is necessary before the word "scholarship." Sentence 10 requires the article "the" before "scholarship" since it refers back to a previously mentioned scholarship. In sentence 11, the article "the" should be replaced with "a" because the sentence makes a general statement rather than specifying something particular.

Errors in passive voice
Errors in employing passive voice are prevalent in English writing. One frequent issue is the omission of the verb "be." Additionally, students often encounter difficulties with intransitive verbs when attempting to construct passive sentences. The following examples illustrate errors observed in the use of passive voice.

(12) The dream <u>should obtained</u> in the future.

(13) The project <u>was gone</u> well.

In sentence 12, the verb "be" is missing before the past participle verb "obtained." The sentence should be revised to read "The dream should be obtained in the future." In sentence 13, the use of the intransitive verb "was gone" is erroneous. The sentence should be corrected to say "The project went well."

Errors in verb

Incorrect utilization of verbs in English sentences is a common issue. Errors involving verbs frequently occur in the English writing of EFL students, including instances of omitting verbs, adding unnecessary verbs, and using verbs incorrectly. The following examples highlight errors observed in the use of verbs in the students' essays.

(14) The most important thing to do in the future to contintinue my study abroad.

(15) Most people or students are plan to go to abroad to study.

(16) Every student needs to be study hard to achieve his dream.

(17) Since I in semester one, I have practice my English.

In sentence 14, the verb "be" should be inserted between "thing" and "to do." In sentence 15, the verb "are" should be removed for correctness. Similarly, in sentence 16, the verb "be" should be omitted. In sentence 17, the verb "was" should be added between "I" and "in." Additionally, the verb "practice" should be changed to its past participle form, "practiced."

Morhological errors
Errors in addition and omission of morphem

Morphological errors are those that occur in the word formation process, involving either prefixes or suffixes (Al-Hamzi et al., 2023). These errors typically include the addition or omission of morphemes and incorrect word forms. Examples of errors at the morphological level are provided below.

(18) Many student have dream to go to other country for study.

(19) I look for some informations from internet.

(20) The students's ambition are so big.

(21) This is more big that I hope.

(22) I am so wellcome to study in the university.

In sentence 18, the words "student," "dream," and "country" should be pluralized by adding "s" or "es." In sentence 19, the suffix "s" should be removed from "information" because "information" is an uncountable noun and does not require an "s." In sentence 20, the possessive suffix "s" at the end of "students" should be replaced with an apostrophe following the "s," as per the rule for plural nouns ending in "s." In sentence 21, the comparative form of "big" should be "bigger," not "more big." In sentence 22, "wellcome" should be corrected to "welcome."

Other errors
Errors in addition/omission of puctuation and capital letters

Additional errors, aside from those mentioned above, include the addition and omission of punctuation marks and capital letters. These types of errors were the second most common in the students' essays, with approximately 20 errors in punctuation and 30 errors in capitalization identified. Examples of such errors found in the students' essay writing are provided below.

(23) I also have some strenghts such as discipline, motivated person and honest.

(24) For me, being awarded a scholarship to Taiwan, would be a once in a lifetime chance to fulfil both my academic and personal goals.

(25) during college i really managed my time well

(26) Some Indonesian People are motivated to continue their studies to other countries.

In sentence 23, a colon should follow the phrase "such as" to introduce the list of items. In sentence 24, the comma between "Taiwan" and "would" should be removed. Additionally, sentence 25 contains multiple errors: the initial letter should be a capital "D," the words "college" and "I" should be separated by a comma, and "i" should be capitalized. Lastly, in sentence 26, the initial letter of the word "People" should be changed to lowercase.

This study discovered that syntactical and morphological errors were both present in EFL students' essay writing. This finding reveals that the most common errors detected in the students' writing were syntactical errors, other errors (punctuation and capital letters), and morphological errors. Furthermore, the primary errors in writing were the use of verbs, articles, capital letters, punctuation, plural nouns, tense, and voice. The results are consistent with those of Siddiqui et al., (2023), Chuenchaichon, (2022), Pasaribu (2021), and Harun & Abdullah (2020), who exposed that syntactical blunders were the utmost common in academic writing among EFL students.

As previously said, error comes from three sources: interlingual source, intralingual source, and context of learning (Chuenchaichon, 2022; Harun & Abdullah, 2020). This study uncovered that interlingual, or native language interference, was identified as the predominant source of errors. Besides it was also apparent that minor influences of the intralingual transfer and context of learning were the reasons behind the errors (Aziz et al., 2020). However, this finding was different from Burhansyah's (2019) research that asserting the intralingual source as the main factors of the errors in the EFL students' writing. This indicates that the level of errors in mechanics and grammatical domain. The EFL students were still unfamiliar with the L2 linguistic system.

For future research, the researcher recommends interviewing EFL writing students to gather their perspectives on the writing process and sources of errors will allow researchers to do qualitative research and gain a deeper knowledge of the challenges they encounter while writing in English.

CONCLUSION

This study identifies syntactical and morphological errors in the academic writing of Indonesian EFL students, with interlingual interference being the primary source of these errors. The findings underscore the importance of targeted grammar instruction and awareness-raising regarding academic writing conventions. Future research should address the study's limitations, such as sample size and instrument accuracy, to further enhance the support for EFL students' academic writing skills.

The study results have the following implications. English teachers who teach writing should find the proper method to identify and overcome the students' errors in academic writing. One of the methods should be promoted by teaching them grammar properly and applying direct grammatical error correction or corrective feedbacks (Bryant et al., 2023; Crosthwaite et al., 2020).

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