

An Analysis of Grammatical Errors in Descriptive Texts of Eighth-Grade Students Using Error Analysis

Tiodor Sihotang^{a,1}, Selviana Napitupulu^{a,2}

^aUniversitas HKBP Nommensen Pematangsiantar, Pematangsiantar, Jl. Sangnawaluh, 21132, Indonesian

¹tiosihotang9@gmail.com, ²Selviananapitupulu@uhnp.ac.id

*Correspondent

INFORMASI ARTIKEL	ABSTRAK
<p>Article History: Received: 14 January Revised: 23 January 2026 Accepted: 26 January 2026 Published: 29 January 2026</p> <p>Kata Kunci: Kesalahan Tata Bahasa Teks Deskriptive Analisis Kesalahan Siswa EFL Interferensi Bahasa Pertama</p>	<p>Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis kesalahan tata bahasa yang dilakukan oleh siswa kelas delapan SMP Erlangga Pematangsiantar dalam menulis teks deskriptif. Bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa global memiliki peran penting dalam konteks akademik dan komunikasi, namun banyak pembelajar EFL di Indonesia masih mengalami kesulitan dalam menggunakan tata bahasa secara akurat dalam tulisan. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengidentifikasi jenis-jenis kesalahan tata bahasa yang dibuat siswa serta menganalisis penyebab terjadinya kesalahan tersebut. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain kualitatif deskriptif. Data diperoleh dari teks deskriptif yang ditulis oleh sembilan siswa dan didukung oleh wawancara singkat. Data dianalisis menggunakan prosedur analisis kesalahan dan diklasifikasikan ke dalam kategori omission, addition, misformation, misordering, dan spelling. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa terdapat 140 kesalahan tata bahasa dalam tulisan siswa. Kesalahan yang paling dominan adalah omission sebesar 33,57 persen, diikuti oleh misformation sebesar 25,71 persen dan spelling sebesar 20,00 persen. Penyebab utama kesalahan tersebut adalah interferensi bahasa pertama sebesar 51,43 persen, ketidakhati-hatian atau kurangnya perhatian terhadap ketepatan sebesar 37,14 persen, dan penerjemahan secara harfiah sebesar 11,43 persen. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa kesalahan tata bahasa siswa tidak hanya disebabkan oleh keterbatasan penguasaan tata bahasa, tetapi juga dipengaruhi oleh faktor psikologis dan pedagogis seperti rendahnya motivasi dan metode pengajaran yang kurang bervariasi. Oleh karena itu, disarankan agar guru menerapkan pendekatan pembelajaran menulis yang lebih interaktif dan berbasis proses untuk meningkatkan kesadaran tata bahasa dan ketepatan menulis siswa.</p>
<p>Keywords: Grammatical Errors Descriptive Text Error Analysis Efl Students Firs Language Interference</p>	<p>ABSTRACT This study analyzes the grammatical errors made by eighth-grade students of SMP Erlangga Pematangsiantar in writing descriptive texts. English, as a global language, plays an important role in academic and communicative contexts; however, many Indonesian EFL learners still experience difficulties in using grammar accurately in writing. This study aims to identify the types of grammatical errors produced by students and to analyze the causes of those errors. A qualitative descriptive research design was employed in this study. The data were obtained from nine students' descriptive texts and were supported by brief interviews. The data were analyzed using the error analysis procedures proposed by Gass and Selinker and were classified into the categories of omission, addition, misformation, misordering, and spelling. The findings revealed that a total of 140 grammatical errors were found in the students' writings. Omission was the most dominant error type, accounting for 33.57 percent, followed by misformation at 25.71 percent and spelling at 20.00 percent. The main causes of the errors were first language interference at 51.43 percent, carelessness or low attention to accuracy at 37.14 percent, and literal translation at 11.43 percent. These findings indicate that students' grammatical problems are not only caused by limited grammatical knowledge but are also influenced by psychological and pedagogical factors such as low motivation and less varied teaching methods. Therefore, it is suggested that teachers apply more interactive and process-based writing approaches to improve students' grammatical accuracy in writing.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">This is an open access article under the CC-BY-SA license.</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div>

How to Cite?

Sihotang, T., & Napitupulu, S. (2026). An Analysis of Grammatical Errors in Descriptive Texts of Eighth-Grade Students Using Error Analysis. *Education and Learning Journal*, 7(1), 10–17. <https://doi.org/10.33096/eljour.v7i1.1561>

1. Introduction

In the Indonesian EFL context, English is a compulsory subject taught at the junior high school level, where students are expected to develop competence in four language skills, including writing. However, writing is often considered the most challenging skill for Indonesian EFL learners because it requires not only the ability to express ideas but also grammatical accuracy and linguistic control (Al-Ghabra & Najim, 2022). In classroom practice, many students still struggle to produce grammatically correct texts, indicating that grammatical problems persist in EFL writing instruction in Indonesia.

Writing is a productive language skill that reflects learners' overall linguistic competence. Hyland (2022) states that writing involves expressing ideas, thoughts, and feelings in a structured and coherent manner. Similarly, Bitchener and Ferris (2021) argue that writing is a complex cognitive process that includes generating ideas, organizing them logically, and expressing them according to grammatical and syntactical rules. In this sense, grammar plays a crucial role in producing clear and meaningful written texts. When learners fail to apply grammatical rules accurately, their writing is likely to contain grammatical errors that may distort meaning and lead to misunderstanding (Kurniawan & Yundayani, 2023). Therefore, analyzing grammatical errors is essential in order to understand students' actual writing problems and linguistic limitations.

In the Indonesian EFL context, writing descriptive text is one of the important learning materials taught at the junior high school level. A descriptive text aims to describe a person, place, or object by using appropriate adjectives and the simple present tense (Hidayati & Sari, 2022). However, this type of text requires consistent control of several basic grammatical features, such as the use of to be, subject-verb agreement, noun phrases, and adjective order. For many EFL students, mastering these grammatical elements simultaneously is not easy. As a result, descriptive texts produced by students often contain grammatical errors, especially in sentence structure and verb usage. This condition was also found at SMP Erlangga Pematangsiantar, particularly among eighth-grade students.

Based on classroom observations conducted during the teaching and learning process, the students were taught descriptive text for approximately 40 minutes, including explanations of its social function, generic structure, and language features. After the explanation, the students were asked to write a descriptive text about their best friend within 30 to 40 minutes. The results of this activity showed that most students experienced difficulties in using grammar correctly, particularly in the use of articles, subject-verb agreement, and word order. Many sentences were grammatically incorrect, and several students' writings also showed interference from their first language.

Although English has been taught for years in Indonesian schools, many students still struggle to produce grammatically accurate writing. Several factors contribute to this problem. First, students' motivation to learn English is relatively low. Sari and Wahyuni (2023) explain that low learning motivation often leads to carelessness and repeated grammatical errors because students do not focus on the correctness of their writing. Second, the teaching method applied by the teacher tends to be traditional and teacher-centered. Hyland (2022) emphasizes that effective writing instruction should be process-oriented and encourage learners to actively experiment with language rather than merely memorize grammatical rules. Third, students' vocabulary mastery is still limited, which also affects their ability to construct grammatically correct sentences (Fitriana & Ginting, 2023). These

conditions indicate that students' grammatical errors are not caused solely by a lack of grammatical knowledge, but also by a combination of internal and external learning factors.

Several previous studies have investigated grammatical errors in students' writing. Napitupulu and Herman (2021) and Rahmawati and Yanto (2024) found that junior high school students commonly make errors in the forms of omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. These studies confirm that grammatical errors remain a serious problem in Indonesian EFL classrooms, particularly in students' writing. However, most of these studies were conducted in different regions and focused primarily on identifying error types rather than examining the learning contexts in which they occur.

Most previous studies paid limited attention to classroom learning conditions and students' motivation as contributing factors to grammatical errors. Therefore, this study proposes a different emphasis by not only analyzing the types and causes of grammatical errors but also relating them to the real classroom situation in SMP Erlangga Pematangsiantar. This integration between error analysis and classroom context constitutes the novelty of the present research.

The main problems addressed in this study are: what types of grammatical errors are made by the eighth-grade students of SMP Erlangga Pematangsiantar in writing descriptive texts, and what are the possible causes of these errors?

Accordingly, this study aims to analyze the grammatical errors made by the eighth-grade students of SMP Erlangga Pematangsiantar in writing descriptive texts. Specifically, the objectives are (1) to identify the types of grammatical errors made by the students in their descriptive writing, and (2) to analyze the possible causes of the grammatical errors committed by the students.

2. Method

This study employed a qualitative dominant descriptive research design with quantitative support to analyze grammatical errors made by eighth-grade students of SMP Erlangga Pematangsiantar in writing descriptive texts. The qualitative approach was used to describe and interpret the types and sources of students' grammatical errors in their natural classroom context, while the quantitative element was applied to calculate the frequency and percentage of each type of error. This design was chosen because it allows the researcher to present a clear and in-depth description of students' grammatical problems without any experimental treatment or manipulation (Creswell & Poth, 2024).

The writing topic "My Best Friend" was purposefully selected because it is familiar and personally meaningful to students. According to Hyland (2022) and Harmer (2021), topics related to learners' daily experiences can increase motivation and engagement in writing activities. By writing about their best friend, students are encouraged to express real ideas and feelings, use vocabulary they already know, and apply grammatical rules naturally. Therefore, this topic was considered effective for obtaining authentic writing data that truly reflects the students' actual language ability.

Three instruments were used in this research, namely the researcher, a writing task, and an interview guide. In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the primary instrument for collecting, observing, and interpreting data (Sugiyono, 2023). The writing task required the students to write a descriptive text entitled "My Best Friend", which served as the primary source of data for identifying grammatical errors. Meanwhile, the interview guide was used to gather additional information about the students' learning difficulties, motivation, and understanding of English grammar. To ensure data validity, methodological triangulation was used by comparing findings from students' written texts and interview responses. In addition, the interview questions were reviewed by an English teacher to ensure their content validity, clarity, and relevance to the research objectives. To enhance the credibility of the interview data, the interviews were

conducted in a semi-structured manner, recorded, and transcribed verbatim before analysis. Furthermore, to maintain data reliability, the same interview guidelines were used for all participants, and the analysis procedure followed consistent error classification criteria. The coding and classification of errors were conducted carefully and repeatedly to minimize subjective bias. These procedures ensured that the data obtained were credible, dependable, and suitable for in-depth analysis.

This study was conducted at SMP Erlangga Pematangsiantar in the 2024/2025 academic year and involved nine eighth-grade students, namely Abdul, Aulia, Danu, Khadizah, Nurri, Radit, Siti Fidray, and Zahra. The data collection procedure consisted of three main stages. First, the researcher conducted a short teaching session to explain the definition, structure, and language features of descriptive text. This stage was intended to refresh the students' understanding before they started writing. Second, the students were asked to write a descriptive text about their best friend within 30–40 minutes. This activity was designed to encourage students to express their ideas independently and to show their real language competence. Third, short interviews were conducted to explore the students' difficulties in writing, their awareness of grammar, and the factors that influenced their writing performance. Through these procedures, both linguistic data and contextual data were obtained to support the analysis.

The data in this study were analyzed using the steps of Error Analysis proposed by Gass and Selinker (2022:103). These steps were applied systematically to examine and interpret the grammatical errors found in the students' descriptive texts. The steps include identifying and classifying errors, calculating error frequency, analyzing error causes, reporting results, and drawing conclusions.

The first step was to identify grammatical errors by carefully reading the students' texts and marking the incorrect forms in their sentences. The second step was to classify the errors into the categories proposed by Al-Ghabra and Najim (2022): omission, addition, misformation, misordering, and spelling. The third step was to calculate the frequency and percentage of each type of error in order to determine which type occurred most frequently. The percentage of each error type was calculated using the formula adapted from Rahmawati and Yanto (2024):

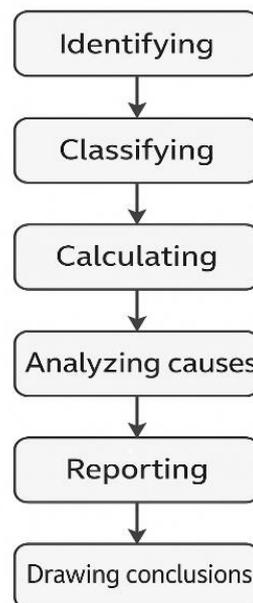


Figure 1. Concept Map of Data Analysis Based on Gass and Selinker's (2008:103) Steps of

$$x = \frac{N}{N_t} \times 100\%$$

where X is the percentage of a certain error type, N is the number of that error type, and N_t is the total number of all errors.

The fourth step was to analyze the causes of errors using the theory proposed by Putri and Siregar (2022), which classifies them into three main sources: carelessness, first-language interference, and translation. The fifth step was to report the results descriptively, explaining the dominant types of errors and their possible causes. Finally, the researcher drew conclusions based on the overall findings in order to summarize the students' grammatical problems and their implications for English language learning.

3. Result and Discussion

Result

Based on the analysis of nine descriptive texts written by the students, a total of 140 grammatical errors were identified and classified into five major types: omission, addition, misformation, misordering, and spelling. This finding indicates that grammatical inaccuracies are still a prominent problem in students' descriptive writing and suggests that students have not yet fully mastered basic grammatical rules. The detailed distribution of each student's errors is shown in the table below.

Table 1. Number of Errors per Student by Error Type

No	Student Name	Omission	Addition	Misformation	Misordering	Spelling	Total
1	Abdul	8	2	4	1	3	18
2	Aulia	6	1	3	1	5	16
3	Danu	6	3	5	1	2	17
4	Khadizah	5	2	4	1	3	15
5	Nurri	4	3	4	1	4	16
6	Radit	7	2	5	1	2	17
7	Siti	4	2	4	1	4	15
8	Fidray	3	1	3	2	2	11
9	Zahra	4	3	4	1	3	15
Total	-	47	19	36	10	28	140

After identifying the total number of errors, the researcher calculated the frequency and percentage for each type to determine which was most prevalent. The summary of the calculation results is shown below.

Table 2. The Calculation Results of Students' Errors

No	Type of Error	Number of Errors	Percentage
1	Omission	47	33.57%
2	Addition	19	13.57%
3	Misformation	36	25.71%
4	Misordering	10	7.14%
5	Spelling	28	20.00%
Total	-	140	100%

The findings reveal that omission was the most dominant error type (33.57%), followed by misformation (25.71%) and spelling (20.00%).

Omission errors were mainly caused by the absence of essential grammatical elements such as *to be*, plural *-s*, and the articles *a* or *an*. For example:

- *She my best friend in the class.* → *She is my best friend in the class.* (Abdul)

Misformation errors occurred when students used incorrect grammatical forms such as wrong verb agreement or gerund usage. For instance:

- *She like to drawing.* → *She likes drawing.* (Danu)

Spelling errors were mostly found in adjectives or common words, such as:

- *She is very beutiful and frendly.* → *She is very beautiful and friendly.* (Aulia)

In addition to identifying the types of errors, the researcher analyzed their possible causes through textual observation and brief follow-up interviews with the students. The results of this analysis are summarized in the following table.

Table 3. The Calculation Results of Error Causes

No	Cause of Error	Number of Errors	Percentage
1	Carelessness / Low Motivation	52	37.14%
2	First Language Interference	72	51.43%
3	Translation (Word-by-Word)	16	11.43%
Total	-	140	100%

The findings indicate that first-language interference (51.43%) was the most common cause of grammatical errors. Most students unconsciously transferred Indonesian sentence patterns into English, especially in word order and in the omission of grammatical markers such as *to be* and the plural *-s*. Carelessness (37.14%) was the second major factor, particularly evident in spelling mistakes and unnecessary word additions, indicating that students tended to write quickly without revising or checking their sentences. Meanwhile, word-by-word translation (11.43%) appeared when students directly translated their Indonesian sentences into English, often resulting in unnatural or incorrect structures.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that grammatical errors remain a serious challenge for Indonesian EFL students, particularly in writing descriptive texts. The dominance of omission errors suggests that students tend to simplify sentence construction by omitting essential grammatical elements such as the verb *to be*, articles, and plural markers. This phenomenon may reflect a developmental stage in which learners prioritize conveying meaning over grammatical completeness. Similar tendencies have been reported by Rahmawati and Yanto (2024), Al-Ghabra and Najim (2022), and Fitriana and Ginting (2023), indicating that this problem is not merely local but also typical among EFL learners in similar contexts.

More importantly, the high frequency of misformation and spelling errors reveals that students' difficulties are not only related to missing grammatical elements but also to inaccurate application of grammatical rules and limited lexical control. These errors suggest that students possess partial knowledge of English grammar but have not yet achieved sufficient automaticity in using correct forms. This supports Hyland's (2022) view that learners often apply incomplete or overgeneralized grammatical rules when their mastery of the target language is still unstable.

The analysis of error sources further strengthens the interpretation of these findings. The dominance of first language interference indicates that students still rely heavily on Indonesian sentence patterns when producing English texts. This reliance is understandable in an EFL context where exposure to English is limited and opportunities for authentic use are scarce. In such conditions, learners naturally fall back on their first language as a cognitive support system, as explained by Gass and Selinker (2022). Meanwhile, the role of carelessness suggests that some errors are not purely competence-based but are also related to students' low awareness of accuracy and limited habit of revising their writing. This implies that writing instruction in the classroom may have placed more emphasis on task completion than on the writing process itself.

From a pedagogical perspective, these findings have several important implications. First, grammar instruction should not be separated from writing practice; it should be integrated into meaningful writing activities that guide students to notice and reflect on their own errors. Second, teachers need to explicitly highlight the structural differences between Indonesian and English in order to reduce negative L1 transfer. Third, students should be trained to apply a process-based writing approach that includes drafting, revising, and self-editing, so that they develop greater awareness of grammatical accuracy rather than merely focusing on content. In addition, providing focused feedback on the most frequent error types, especially omission and misformation, may help students gradually internalize correct grammatical patterns.

Overall, this study suggests that students' grammatical errors should not be viewed simply as failures, but as indicators of their developmental stage in learning English. By responding to these errors through more reflective, contextual, and process-oriented teaching strategies, teachers can use error analysis not only as a diagnostic tool but also as a foundation for more effective grammar and writing instruction.

4. Conclusion and Suggestion

Conclusion

This study was conducted to analyze the grammatical errors made by eighth-grade students of SMP Erlangga Pematangsiantar in writing descriptive texts and to identify the causes of those errors. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that the students still experience considerable difficulties in applying English grammar accurately in written form. A total of 140 grammatical errors were found and classified into five categories: omission, addition, misformation, misordering, and spelling. Among these categories, omission was the most common error type, followed by misformation and spelling errors. This indicates that students have not yet fully mastered basic grammatical elements, such as the verb *to be*, plural forms, articles, and subject-verb agreement.

Furthermore, the analysis of error sources revealed that the students' grammatical problems were mainly caused by first language interference, followed by carelessness or low attention to accuracy, and literal translation. The dominance of first-language interference indicates that students still rely heavily on Indonesian sentence patterns when constructing English sentences. This condition reflects the typical situation of EFL learning in Indonesia, where students' exposure to English is mostly limited to classroom contexts. In addition, carelessness indicates that students often write without sufficient revision and proofreading, while translation errors suggest that they translate ideas word-for-word without considering structural differences between Indonesian and English.

Overall, this study concludes that students' grammatical errors are not only the result of limited grammatical knowledge but also influenced by psychological and pedagogical factors such as low motivation, limited writing practice, and less varied teaching methods. Therefore, improving students' grammatical accuracy should not focus merely on correcting errors, but also on developing students' awareness, motivation, and meaningful learning experiences that connect grammar with real communication.

Suggestion

Based on the findings of this study, English teachers are encouraged to use teaching strategies that emphasize comparisons between Indonesian and English sentence structures and to implement process-based writing activities such as drafting, revising, and peer feedback. These strategies can help students become more aware of their grammatical weaknesses and gradually improve their writing accuracy. Students, on the other hand, are expected to take a more active role by practicing writing regularly, checking their work carefully before submission, and using supporting tools such as dictionaries or grammar-checking applications.

In addition, school administrators and curriculum developers are advised to support improvements in the quality of English instruction by providing professional development for teachers and by integrating grammar instruction into more contextual and engaging writing activities. Future researchers are advised to include more participants, investigate other text types, such as narrative or recount texts, or use experimental designs to examine the effectiveness of specific teaching techniques in reducing students' grammatical errors.

Acknowledgements

The researcher would like to express sincere gratitude to the headmaster of SMP Erlangga Pematangsiantar, the English teacher, and the eighth-grade students for granting permission, providing support, and cooperating throughout the research process. Special thanks are also addressed to all parties who have contributed directly or indirectly to the completion and publication of this article.

Bibliography

- Bitchener, J., & Ferris, D. R. (2021). *Written corrective feedback in second language acquisition and writing* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Al-Ghabra, M., & Najim, R. (2022). Grammatical errors in EFL students' writing: An error analysis approach. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 18(2), 1105–1120.
- Brown, H. D. (2001). *Teaching by principles: An interactive approach to language pedagogy* (2nd ed.). Longman.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2024). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Dulay, H., Burt, M., & Krashen, S. (1982). *Language two*. Oxford University Press.
- Fitriana, R., & Ginting, S. A. (2023). An analysis of grammatical errors in students' descriptive writing. *Journal of English Teaching and Linguistics*, 8(1), 55–68.
- Gass, S. M., & Selinker, L. (2022). *Second language acquisition: An introductory course* (5th ed.). Routledge.
- Hidayati, N., & Sari, R. (2022). Teaching descriptive text in junior high school: Focusing on grammar and vocabulary. *Journal of English Language Teaching*, 6(1), 33–45.
- Hyland, K. (2022). *Second language writing* (3rd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Jabeen, A., Kazemian, B., & Mustafai, M. S. (2021). The role of error analysis in teaching and learning of second and foreign languages. *Education and Linguistics Research*, 7(1), 1–10.
- Kurniawan, D., & Yundayani, A. (2023). Grammar competence and students' writing accuracy in EFL context. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Literacy*, 7(2), 112–125.
- Napitupulu, S., & Herman. (2021). An analysis of grammatical errors in students' writing descriptive text. *Journal of English Educational Study*, 4(1), 23–35.
- Norrish, J. (1983). *Language learners and their errors*. Macmillan.
- Putri, R. A. (2013). An analysis of grammatical errors in students' writing. *Journal of English Education*, 2(1), 45–56.
- Rahmawati, D., & Yanto, E. S. (2024). Grammatical errors in Indonesian EFL students' descriptive texts. *Journal of English Education Studies*, 7(1), 101–113.
- Sari, M., & Wahyuni, S. (2023). Students' motivation and grammatical accuracy in EFL writing. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 9(1), 77–89.