

AN ANALYSIS OF EFL STUDENTS' GRAMMATICAL ERRORS IN RECOUNT TEXT WRITING AT AN ISLAMIC SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

Writing grammatical accuracy remains a persistent challenge for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, particularly in recount texts that require consistent use of past-tense forms. This study investigated the types of grammatical errors produced by eleventh-grade EFL students and the factors contributing to those errors in an Islamic Senior High School. A descriptive qualitative design supported by simple quantitative analysis was employed with 36 students from one purposively selected class. Data were collected through two recount-writing tasks, a 30-item questionnaire, and semi-structured interviews with five students and one English teacher. Students' errors were classified using Dulay, Burt, and Krashen's Surface Strategy Taxonomy, while questionnaire responses were summarized descriptively and interview data were analyzed thematically. The analysis identified 634 grammatical errors across the two writing tasks. Misinformation was the most frequent category (53.63%), followed by omission (26.03%), addition (10.25%), and misordering (10.09%). Questionnaire and interview findings indicated that first-language influence was the strongest perceived contributing factor (77.80%), followed by difficulties in writing recount texts (70.15%), while learning context, students' uncertainty during writing, and limited grammatical understanding also contributed. The findings suggest that EFL writing instruction should combine explicit grammar teaching with genre-based writing practice, noticing activities, guided revision, and constructive corrective feedback to help learners improve grammatical accuracy in meaningful writing contexts.

Keywords: grammatical errors, EFL writing, recount text, error analysis, grammatical accuracy.

INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the essential productive skills in English language learning because it enables learners to communicate ideas, express thoughts, and construct meaning through written language. Compared with other language skills, writing is considered one of the most cognitively demanding activities, as it requires learners to generate ideas, organize information logically, and apply appropriate linguistic knowledge simultaneously (Byrne, 1988; Zhang & Zhang, 2023). In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, successful writing requires learners not only to organize ideas effectively but also to communicate meaning accurately through appropriate language use. Therefore, communicative competence has become one of the primary goals of language learning, encompassing both linguistic knowledge and the ability to use that knowledge effectively in real communicative situations (Canale & Swain, 1980; Qasem et al., 2022).

Grammatical competence is a fundamental component of communicative competence because it provides learners with the linguistic knowledge required to construct meaningful and grammatically accurate sentences. Although effective communication involves multiple competencies, grammatical knowledge remains the foundation that enables learners to express ideas clearly and appropriately in written communication (Canale & Swain, 1980; Qasem et al., 2022). Because writing requires learners to apply grammatical knowledge accurately, insufficient grammatical competence often results in various grammatical errors that may hinder effective written communication. This competence is particularly important in recount text writing, which requires students to narrate past experiences using appropriate language features, especially the simple past tense. However, many EFL learners continue to experience grammatical difficulties when writing recount texts, resulting in errors that reduce the clarity and accuracy of their written communication.

From the perspective of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), grammatical errors are regarded as a natural and inevitable part of the language learning process rather than merely indicators of failure. During second language learning, learners gradually develop an evolving linguistic system known as interlanguage, which reflects their current knowledge of the target language and continuously develops through learning experiences and language exposure (Gass & Selinker, 2008). Therefore, grammatical errors should not merely be regarded as signs of failure but also as valuable evidence of learners' developing linguistic competence. Recent studies have further confirmed that the concept of interlanguage remains a useful theoretical framework for understanding grammatical errors and improving instructional practices in EFL writing classrooms (Matwangsang et al., 2025).

Building on this perspective, Error Analysis (EA) has become an important analytical framework for identifying, describing, and explaining learners' grammatical errors. Beyond classifying errors, EA provides valuable insights into learners' linguistic development and helps teachers design instructional strategies that address learners' actual grammatical difficulties (Corder, 1982). Therefore, analyzing grammatical errors not only reveals the forms of errors produced by learners but also provides insights into the underlying factors contributing to those errors. These insights are particularly valuable in EFL writing because they help teachers provide more targeted grammar instruction and writing activities that address students' actual learning needs.

Numerous studies have investigated grammatical errors in EFL students' writing across different educational contexts. Previous national and international studies consistently report that grammatical errors remain one of the most persistent challenges in developing students' writing proficiency, particularly in the accurate use of verb tenses, sentence structures, articles, and prepositions (Agustam et al., 2022; Kadan, 2023; Martiarini & Candra, 2019; Matwangsang et al., 2025). Across these studies, misinformation and tense-related errors frequently emerged as the dominant grammatical problems, indicating that

EFL learners continue to experience difficulties in applying grammatical knowledge accurately when producing written texts. Similar findings were also reported by Prihandani (2023) and Sipayung & Benarita (2023), who found that students' limited mastery of English grammar contributed to recurring grammatical errors in different writing genres.

Although these studies have substantially contributed to understanding the patterns of grammatical errors in EFL writing, most of them primarily focused on identifying error types based on students' written products. Only a limited number of studies investigated the underlying causes of grammatical errors by triangulating writing data with questionnaires and interviews. Furthermore, relatively few studies have examined grammatical errors in recount text writing within the context of Islamic Senior High Schools, leaving a need for more context-specific evidence regarding students' grammatical difficulties and the factors influencing their writing performance.

Despite these valuable contributions, several gaps remain in the existing literature. Most previous studies primarily focused on identifying grammatical error types based on students' written products, while relatively little attention has been paid to explaining the underlying causes through the integration of multiple sources of evidence. Moreover, grammatical error analysis in recount writing within the context of Islamic Senior High Schools remains underexplored, despite the unique instructional characteristics of this educational setting.

The novelty of this study lies in its integrated approach to investigating grammatical errors in EFL students' recount writing. Unlike many previous studies that primarily focused on identifying the types of grammatical errors through students' written texts, this study integrates multiple sources of evidence, including writing tasks, questionnaires, and interviews with both students and the English teacher, to examine not only the patterns of grammatical errors but also the factors contributing to their occurrence. Furthermore, by conducting the study in the context of an Islamic Senior High School, this research provides context-specific evidence that enriches the existing literature on grammatical error analysis and offers a more comprehensive understanding of EFL learners' grammatical development in recount text writing.

This study is expected to contribute to the field of Second Language Writing by providing a more comprehensive understanding of both the patterns and the underlying causes of grammatical errors in EFL students' recount text writing. By integrating findings from students' writing tasks, questionnaires, and interviews, the study offers empirical evidence that extends previous research, which has predominantly focused on identifying error types. In addition, the findings are expected to contribute to EFL pedagogy by providing English teachers with practical insights into students' grammatical difficulties and the factors influencing their writing performance. The findings may also serve as a practical reference for English teachers in developing grammar instruction, providing corrective

feedback, and designing guided writing activities that respond to students' actual learning needs. Based on these considerations, this study aims to identify the types of grammatical errors made by eleventh-grade EFL students in writing recount texts and to investigate the factors contributing to those errors at an Islamic Senior High School.

METHOD

1. Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to investigate the grammatical errors made by eleventh-grade EFL students in writing recount texts and to explore the factors contributing to those errors. A descriptive qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the primary objective of the study was to describe and interpret the types and causes of students' grammatical errors rather than to examine statistical relationships or test hypotheses (Creswell, 2023). Although frequencies and percentages were calculated to summarize the occurrence of each error type, these quantitative data were used only to support the qualitative findings and provide a clearer description of the error patterns. Therefore, this study was not designed as mixed-methods research because the quantitative analysis did not serve as an independent method of inquiry but merely complemented the qualitative interpretation of the findings.

2. Participants / Subjects

The study was conducted at an Islamic Senior High School during the 2025/2026 academic year. The participants were selected using purposive sampling, in which one eleventh-grade class was chosen because the students had completed instruction on recount texts as part of the English curriculum. This class consisted of 36 students who possessed the relevant knowledge and learning experience required to achieve the objectives of the study. The participants were approximately 16–17 years old and had studied English as a compulsory subject since junior high school. Based on the school's curriculum, they had reached the stage of learning recount text writing and were expected to apply appropriate grammatical features, particularly the simple past tense, in their writing. In addition, one English teacher who taught the selected class participated in the interview to provide complementary information regarding students' grammatical difficulties and classroom instructional practices.

3. Instruments

This study employed three research instruments, namely students' writing tasks, questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews. The writing tasks were used to identify the grammatical errors made by students in writing recount texts. The identified errors were then classified based on the Surface Strategy Taxonomy proposed by Dulay et al. (1982), which consists of omission, addition, misinformation, and misordering.

The questionnaire was administered to investigate the factors contributing to students' grammatical errors. It consisted of 30 items, including 28 close-ended items

measured using a four-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (4), and 2 open-ended questions that allowed students to provide additional explanations regarding their grammatical difficulties. The questionnaire was developed based on Brown's (2007) framework of factors influencing language learning and was reviewed by two experts in English language education to establish its content validity before being administered to the participants.

To obtain more in-depth information, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five purposively selected students representing different levels of writing performance and one English teacher who taught the selected class. The interviews aimed to explore students' perceptions of their grammatical difficulties and to gain the teacher's perspectives on students' common grammatical problems and the instructional practices implemented in the classroom.

4. Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected in four sequential stages. First, the students completed a practice recount writing task, in which they were asked to write a one-paragraph recount text based on their personal experiences. This task served as the initial source of data for identifying the grammatical errors commonly produced by the students. Second, the students completed a final recount writing task, in which they were instructed to write a more structured recount text consisting of three paragraphs that reflected the generic structure of a recount text, namely orientation, events, and reorientation. This task provided a more comprehensive source of data for examining the patterns of grammatical errors in students' recount writing. Third, all participants completed the questionnaire to identify the factors contributing to their grammatical errors. Finally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five purposively selected students and one English teacher to obtain more in-depth explanations of the students' grammatical difficulties and to clarify the findings obtained from the writing tasks and questionnaires.

5. Data Analysis

The data obtained from the students' writing tasks were analyzed using the Surface Strategy Taxonomy proposed by Dulay et al. (1982). The grammatical errors identified in the students' practice and final recount writing tasks were classified into four categories, namely omission, addition, misinformation, and misordering. The frequency of each error type was then calculated and converted into percentages using the following formula:

$$P = \frac{N1}{N} \times 100$$

P = Percentage of each error

N1 = Total error of each type

N = Total of whole errors made

The questionnaire data were analyzed descriptively by calculating the frequency and percentage of each response to identify the dominant factors contributing to students' grammatical errors. Responses to the open-ended questions were examined to complement the quantitative findings.

The interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis. First, all interview recordings were transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were then read repeatedly to gain a comprehensive understanding of the data. Subsequently, meaningful statements were coded and grouped into categories based on similar ideas. These categories were further interpreted to develop themes representing the factors contributing to students' grammatical errors. Finally, the findings from the interviews were triangulated with the results of the writing tasks and questionnaires to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

This study investigated two main aspects of students' grammatical errors in writing recount texts. The first aspect focused on identifying the types of grammatical errors produced by the students, while the second aspect examined the factors contributing to those errors through questionnaire and interview data. The findings from both research questions provide a comprehensive understanding of students' grammatical difficulties.

1. Types of Grammatical Errors

Table 1. Types of Grammatical Errors in Students' Recount Text

No	Type of Errors	First Writing	Final Writing	Total	Frequency
1	Omission	62	103	165	26,03%
2	Addition	23	42	65	10.25%
3	Misinformation	152	188	340	53,63%
4	Misordering	20	44	64	10,09%
Total		257	377	634	100%

As presented in Table 1 and Figure 1, misinformation was the most frequently occurring grammatical error, accounting for 340 errors (53.63%) of the total identified errors. This finding indicates that many students experienced difficulty in selecting appropriate grammatical forms, particularly when applying the simple past tense in recount writing. Omission ranked second with 165 errors (26.03%), suggesting that students frequently omitted essential grammatical elements, such as auxiliary verbs, articles, or inflectional morphemes. Meanwhile, addition ranked third with 65 errors (10.25%), and misordering with 64 errors (10.09%). These findings indicate that students

experienced grammatical difficulties across all four categories, with misinformation occurring much more frequently than the other error types.

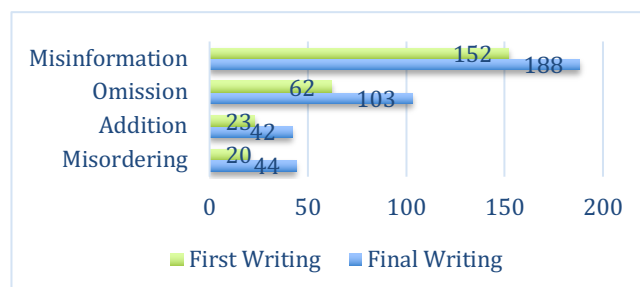


Figure 1. Distribution of Types of Grammatical Errors

The comparison between the practice and final writing tasks shows that grammatical errors were identified in both writing activities. Although the number of errors differed across the two tasks, misinformation consistently remained the most dominant error type, followed by omission. This pattern indicates that students continued to encounter difficulties in applying appropriate grammatical forms throughout the writing process, particularly in producing grammatically accurate recount texts.

To provide a clearer understanding of the grammatical errors identified in the students' recount writing, representative examples of each error type are presented in Table 2. Each example is accompanied by its corrected form and a brief linguistic explanation based on the Surface Strategy Taxonomy.

Table 2. Representative Examples of Each Types of Errors

Identification of Error in Sentence	Error Classification	Explaining the Error	Evaluating/Correcting the Error
We start our journey early in the morning from the village near the mountain.	Misinformation	The verb "start" should use past tense "started" because they already happened in the past	We started our journey early in the morning from the village near the mountain.
Before ending our trip, we took many photo of the sunset from the campsite.	Omission	The noun "photo" should be plural because it refers to more than one photo.	Before ending our trip, we took many photos of the sunset from the campsite.
That night, my friends and I walked to a cafe near the hotel to the relax .	Addition	The article "the" is not needed before a verb, and "relax" should be used as a base verb after "to".	That night, my friends and I walked to a cafe near the hotel to relax .

Last holiday, my friends and I decided to go hiking at Hills Mongkrang , a beautiful hill located near Mount Lawu.	Misordering	The word order is incorrect “Hills Mongkrang” should be “Mongkrang Hills”.	Last holiday, my friends and I decided to go hiking at Mongkrang Hills , a beautiful hill located near Mount Lawu.
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Based on the table above, it illustrates representative grammatical errors produced by the students in their recount writing. Among the four error categories, misinformation primarily involved the incorrect selection of verb forms, especially the use of present-tense verbs instead of the simple past tense. Omission errors commonly occurred when students omitted essential grammatical elements, such as auxiliary verbs or inflectional morphemes. Addition errors resulted from inserting unnecessary grammatical forms, particularly after auxiliary verbs, whereas misordering errors involved incorrect word order within sentences. These examples demonstrate the recurring grammatical difficulties experienced by the students and provide authentic evidence supporting the quantitative findings presented in Table 1.

2. Factors Causing Grammatical Errors

To identify the factors contributing to students' grammatical errors, a questionnaire consisting of 30 items was administered to all participants. The questionnaire explored students' perceptions of the difficulties they encountered when writing recount texts. The responses were analyzed to identify students' perceptions of the difficulties they encountered when writing recount texts. A summary of the contributing factors is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Summary of Contributing Factors Derived from Questionnaire Results

Contributing Factors	Questionnaire Items	Average Agree and Strongly Agree Responses	Interpretation
Difficulties in Writing Recount Text	Q7-Q10	70,15%	Major Factor
The influence of the Indonesian Language	Q11-Q12	77,8%	Major Factor

Limited Understanding of English Grammar	Q13-Q14	45,85%	Supporting Factor
Context of Learning	Q15-Q17	65,77%	Moderate Factor
Students' Condition when They are Unsure about Their Writing	Q18-Q20	66,67%	Moderate Factor

As presented in Table 3, the questionnaire findings indicate that several factors contributed to students' grammatical errors in writing recount texts. The influence of the Indonesian language emerged as the most prominent factor (77.80%), followed by difficulties in writing recount texts (70.15%). These findings suggest that students encountered challenges not only in applying English grammatical rules but also in organizing and expressing their ideas while producing recount texts. In contrast, limited understanding of English grammar received the lowest percentage (45.85%), indicating that although grammar knowledge contributed to students' errors, it was not perceived as the primary source of difficulty.

The questionnaire results also revealed that the context of learning (65.77%) and students' condition when they were unsure about their writing (66.67%) moderately influenced students' grammatical performance. These findings indicate that students' grammatical errors were shaped by multiple interrelated factors, including linguistic background, writing difficulties, learning experiences, and individual confidence during the writing process.

The interview findings supported the questionnaire results by providing deeper insights into the factors contributing to students' grammatical errors. Most students explained that they experienced difficulty expressing their ideas in English because they tended to think in Indonesian before translating their sentences into English. As a result, they often produced incorrect verb forms and sentence structures, particularly when using the simple past tense in recount texts. Several students also stated that they lacked confidence when writing because they were afraid of making grammatical mistakes. Several students commented:

"Yes, because when changing from Indonesian into English, I am still confused about whether there should be changes or not." (Student 1)

"It is more about vocabulary. I still do not know enough words, so I have to think about how to translate words from Indonesian into English." (Student 2)

"Because sometimes it is difficult to change Indonesian into English." (Student 3)

The English teacher confirmed that grammatical errors, particularly those related to the simple past tense, remained one of the most common problems encountered by

students when writing recount texts. According to the teacher, although students had learned the generic structure of recount texts, many still experienced difficulty applying grammatical rules consistently in their writing. The teacher also emphasized that students required more guided writing practice and continuous corrective feedback to improve their grammatical accuracy. As the teacher stated:

“That is why, as teachers, we have to introduce the structure first. When students speak, sometimes they do not really pay attention to the grammar they use. Sometimes they use present tense for everything, even though a recount text tells about events that happened in the past, so they should use past tense.” (English Teacher)

These interview findings strengthen the questionnaire results by confirming that students' grammatical errors were influenced not only by linguistic factors, such as first language interference and limited mastery of the simple past tense, but also by instructional factors related to writing practice and teacher feedback. The consistency of the findings across the writing tasks, questionnaire, and interviews also enhances the credibility of the study through methodological triangulation.

Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that misinformation was the most dominant grammatical error produced by the students, followed by omission, misordering, and addition. This indicates that the students experienced greater difficulty in selecting appropriate grammatical forms than in omitting or adding grammatical elements. According to Dulay et al., (1982), misinformation occurs when learners use an incorrect grammatical form instead of the correct one, reflecting incomplete mastery of the target language. In this study, most misinformation errors involved the incorrect use of the simple past tense, suggesting that although students understood the general structure of recount texts, they still had difficulty applying grammatical rules accurately when expressing past events. These findings highlight that grammatical competence remains a major challenge for EFL learners in recount text writing.

The predominance of misinformation errors can be explained through Interlanguage Theory (Gass & Selinker, 2008), which views grammatical errors as a natural stage in second language development. The questionnaire results showed that the influence of the Indonesian language was the strongest contributing factor to students' grammatical errors. Since Indonesian verbs do not change form to indicate tense, many students transferred the grammatical patterns of their first language into English, resulting in incorrect verb forms in recount writing. This finding is also consistent with Schmidt's (1990) Noticing Hypothesis, which suggests that learners acquire grammatical forms more successfully when they consciously notice the differences between their first language and the target language. The

recurring misuse of the simple past tense indicates that many students had not yet fully recognized or internalized these grammatical differences.

The present findings are consistent with previous studies conducted in both Indonesian and international EFL contexts. Studies in Indonesian EFL contexts similarly found that tense-related errors, particularly misinformation, were among the most frequent grammatical problems experienced by EFL students (Agustam et al., 2022; Nisak et al., 2017; Prihandani, 2023; Sipayung & Benarita, 2023). Comparable findings in International EFL contexts have also been reported by Kadan (2023) and Matwangsang et al. (2025), indicating that difficulties in using correct verb forms remain a common challenge for EFL learners across different educational settings. However, unlike many previous studies that primarily identified error types, the present study integrated students' writing tasks, questionnaires, and interviews to provide a more comprehensive explanation of both the grammatical error patterns and the factors contributing to their occurrence. This triangulated approach provides richer evidence than studies relying solely on students' written products, enabling a deeper understanding of not only what grammatical errors occur but also why they occur.

The questionnaire and interview findings further revealed that students' grammatical errors were influenced by several interrelated factors. Besides the influence of the Indonesian language, students also experienced difficulties in writing recount texts, particularly in organizing ideas while simultaneously applying grammatical rules. The context of learning and students' confidence when they were unsure about their writing also moderately influenced their grammatical performance. These findings suggest that grammatical errors cannot be attributed solely to limited grammar knowledge but should be understood as the result of interactions among learners' linguistic background, writing ability, classroom learning experiences, and individual learning conditions. This interpretation supports Brown's (2007) view that successful language learning is influenced by both linguistic competence and learning experiences that facilitate language acquisition.

The findings of this study have important implications for EFL writing instruction. Since first language interference emerged as the strongest contributing factor, grammar instruction should move beyond teaching isolated grammatical rules and instead emphasize meaningful language use within authentic writing activities. Teachers are encouraged to implement communicative and genre-based grammar instruction by integrating explicit explanations of the simple past tense with guided writing practice, model texts, noticing activities, and constructive corrective feedback. Such instructional practices may help students recognize the structural differences between Indonesian and English and apply grammatical forms more accurately in recount writing. Furthermore, by integrating writing analysis, questionnaires, and interviews, this study contributes to the field of Second Language Writing by providing a more comprehensive understanding of both the patterns

and the underlying causes of grammatical errors, thereby offering practical insights for improving grammar and writing instruction in EFL classrooms.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the types of grammatical errors made by eleventh-grade EFL students in writing recount texts and the factors contributing to those errors. The findings revealed that misinformation was the most dominant grammatical error, followed by omission, misordering, and addition, indicating that students experienced considerable difficulty in selecting appropriate grammatical forms, particularly when using the simple past tense. The questionnaire and interview findings further showed that the influence of the Indonesian language was the strongest contributing factor, followed by difficulties in writing recount texts, while the context of learning, students' writing conditions, and limited understanding of English grammar also influenced students' grammatical performance. Theoretically, this study contributes to the fields of Grammatical Error Analysis and Second Language Writing by extending the understanding of grammatical errors through the integration of Error Analysis and Interlanguage Theory with evidence obtained from writing tasks, questionnaires, and interviews. This integrated approach provides a more comprehensive explanation of both the patterns of grammatical errors and the factors underlying their occurrence in EFL recount writing.

Practically, the findings suggest that English teachers should integrate grammar instruction into meaningful writing activities through communicative and genre-based approaches, emphasizing explicit instruction on the simple past tense, guided writing practice, noticing activities, and constructive corrective feedback. The findings may also serve as a reference for schools and curriculum developers in designing learning experiences that integrate grammar and writing instruction to improve students' grammatical accuracy in authentic writing contexts. Since this study was conducted in one purposively selected eleventh-grade class at an Islamic Senior High School, the findings should be interpreted within this context. Therefore, future studies are recommended to involve more diverse participants and employ experimental research designs to investigate the effectiveness of writing-based grammar instruction and other pedagogical strategies in reducing grammatical errors and improving EFL students' writing proficiency.

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