

INVESTIGATING ENGLISH WRITING ERRORS AMONG SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN NORTH BALI: AN ERROR ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE (EFL) LEARNERS

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Abstract. Writing in English remains one of the most challenging skills for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, particularly in achieving grammatical accuracy. Although previous research has extensively classified grammatical errors, qualitative studies on the factors underlying these errors in high school students in North Bali are still limited. This study aims to identify the types of English writing errors and analyze the factors contributing to their occurrence. The study employed a qualitative case study design with data obtained through student writing assignments, semi-structured interviews, and learning support documents. Data were analyzed using the principles of Error Analysis and thematic analysis. The results identified five main categories of errors: omission, misinformation, misordering, overgeneralization, and global errors, with omission being the most dominant category. Interview analysis indicated that these errors were influenced by first language interference, limited grammatical knowledge, literal translation, limited exposure to English, and classroom learning experiences. These findings suggest that writing errors are the result of an interaction of linguistic, cognitive, and instructional factors. Pedagogically, the research findings emphasize the importance of contextual grammar instruction, meaningful writing practice, and constructive corrective feedback in EFL learning.

Keywords: Error Analysis; English Writing; English as a Foreign Language (EFL); Interlanguage; Language Transfer.

Abstrak. Menulis dalam bahasa Inggris tetap menjadi salah satu keterampilan yang paling menantang bagi pembelajar bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing (*English as a Foreign Language/EFL*), terutama dalam mencapai ketepatan tata bahasa. Meskipun penelitian terdahulu telah banyak mengklasifikasikan kesalahan tata bahasa, kajian kualitatif mengenai faktor-faktor yang mendasari kesalahan tersebut pada siswa SMA di Bali Utara masih terbatas. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengidentifikasi jenis kesalahan penulisan bahasa Inggris dan menganalisis faktor-faktor yang berkontribusi terhadap kemunculannya. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain studi kasus kualitatif dengan data yang diperoleh melalui tugas menulis siswa, wawancara semiterstruktur, dan dokumen pendukung pembelajaran. Data dianalisis menggunakan prinsip Analisis Kesalahan (*Error Analysis*) dan analisis tematik. Hasil penelitian mengidentifikasi lima kategori utama kesalahan, yaitu penghilangan (*omission*), informasi yang salah (*misinformation*), urutan yang salah (*misordering*), generalisasi berlebihan (*overgeneralization*), dan kesalahan global (*global errors*), dengan penghilangan sebagai kategori yang paling dominan. Analisis wawancara menunjukkan bahwa kesalahan tersebut dipengaruhi oleh interferensi bahasa pertama, keterbatasan pengetahuan tata bahasa, penerjemahan harfiah, minimnya paparan terhadap bahasa Inggris, serta pengalaman pembelajaran di kelas. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa kesalahan penulisan merupakan hasil interaksi faktor linguistik, kognitif, dan instruksional. Secara pedagogis, hasil penelitian menegaskan pentingnya pengajaran tata bahasa kontekstual, praktik menulis bermakna, dan umpan balik korektif yang konstruktif dalam pembelajaran EFL.

Kata Kunci: Analisis Kesalahan; Penulisan Bahasa Inggris; *English as a Foreign Language (EFL)*; Interbahasa; Transfer Bahasa.

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INTRODUCTION

English has become a dominant language in international communication, higher education, scientific publication, and global employment. Consequently, English writing is an essential learning outcome in EFL education because it enables learners to communicate ideas accurately and effectively in academic and professional contexts. However, writing remains challenging for EFL learners because it requires the simultaneous development of grammatical accuracy, vocabulary, organization, and coherence. Flower and Hayes (1981) conceptualize writing as a recursive cognitive process involving planning, translating, and revising ideas, while Brown (2007) emphasizes the integration of linguistic competence and communicative ability. These demands make grammatical errors particularly common among learners with limited English exposure.

Within Second Language Acquisition (SLA), learner errors are understood not merely as failures but as evidence of language development. Corder (1967) views errors as indicators of learners' developing knowledge, while Selinker (1972) explains them as manifestations of an evolving *interlanguage* system. Building on this perspective, *Error Analysis* provides a framework for identifying, classifying, and interpreting learner errors. Errors may result from first-language transfer as well as intralingual processes, including overgeneralization and incomplete understanding of the target language (James, 1998; Brown, 2007). Therefore, error analysis should examine not only the forms of errors but also the processes and learning conditions underlying their occurrence.

Recent studies have confirmed the continuing relevance of *Error Analysis* in EFL writing research. Karimiabdolmaleki et al. (2025) identified negative language transfer as an important source of grammatical errors, while Cheng (2023) demonstrated that structural differences between learners' first language and English influence second-language production. Yao (2026) further emphasized that learner errors are multifactorial and shaped by language transfer, proficiency, linguistic complexity, and exposure. In the Indonesian context, Suputra et al. (2013) identified omission, misinformation, misordering, overgeneralization, and global errors among senior high school students in Singaraja. More recent studies in tourism and hospitality education have similarly reported persistent omission errors, literal translation, and limited grammatical competence among Indonesian EFL learners.

Although these studies provide important evidence, they leave a specific gap. First, research on Indonesian EFL writing errors has largely examined university students, vocational learners, or ESP contexts, while senior high school students in North Bali remain underrepresented. Second, previous studies have generally focused on the frequency and

classification of errors, with limited qualitative investigation of how learners themselves explain the factors contributing to those errors. Thus, the relationship between observable error patterns and learners' own accounts of language transfer, grammatical knowledge, translation strategies, English exposure, and classroom experience remains insufficiently explored.

This study addresses this gap by integrating systematic analysis of students' written errors with qualitative exploration of learners' perspectives on the causes of those errors. This combination constitutes the study's principal novelty, as it moves beyond merely documenting error categories to examining how specific linguistic, cognitive, and instructional factors are perceived to shape error production among senior high school EFL learners in North Bali. Accordingly, this study addresses two research questions: (1) What types of English writing errors are produced by senior high school students in North Bali? and (2) How do senior high school students explain the factors that contribute to their English writing errors?

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case study design to investigate English writing errors among senior high school students in North Bali. A qualitative approach was selected because the study aimed not only to identify the types of writing errors produced by students but also to explore how learners understood and explained the factors underlying those errors within their natural learning context (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018).

The participants were selected purposively from [name(s) of school(s)] in North Bali. The school(s) were selected because they represent the research context of senior high school EFL learning in North Bali and provide access to students who had received formal English instruction, including writing instruction, within the national curriculum. The participants consisted of Grade XI and Grade XII students who had completed the compulsory English curriculum and had sufficient experience in producing English texts. The writing task involved approximately 25–35 students aged approximately [age range] years, consisting of [number] male and [number] female students [if relevant]. Based on their writing performance, 10–15 students were purposively selected for semi-structured interviews to represent varied levels of writing proficiency, including relatively higher, intermediate, and lower performance. This variation was intended to capture differences in students' experiences and explanations regarding the factors contributing to writing errors. Participant selection and data collection continued until the information obtained was considered sufficiently rich and thematic saturation had been reached.

Data were collected through methodological triangulation involving three sources: students' English writing tasks, semi-structured interviews, and supporting classroom documents. First, students completed a 250–300-word English essay on a familiar topic under classroom conditions. The essays constituted the primary corpus for the error analysis. Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected students to explore their experiences in learning English writing and their perceptions of grammatical difficulties, first-language influence, literal translation strategies, limited English exposure, and classroom instruction. Third, relevant classroom documents, such as writing assignments, teaching materials, and learning documents, were examined to provide contextual information about the English writing instruction experienced by the participants.

Data analysis was conducted in several systematic stages. First, all student essays were collected, coded, and transcribed into a data matrix. Second, each sentence and clause was examined to identify deviations from the target English grammatical system. Third, each identified error was compared with the expected grammatical form and classified into five categories: *omission*, *misinformation*, *misordering*, *overgeneralization*, and *global errors* (Corder, 1967; Richards, 1974; Dulay et al., 1982; James, 1998). Fourth, the researchers examined the linguistic context of each error and interpreted its possible source by considering interlingual transfer, intralingual transfer, developmental processes, and other contextual factors. The error analysis therefore moved from identification and classification to interpretation of the possible causes of each error pattern.

Interview data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. The analysis involved six stages: familiarization with the interview transcripts, generation of initial codes, identification of potential themes, review of themes against the coded data and the complete dataset, definition and naming of themes, and production of the final analytical narrative. Interview codes were then compared with the error patterns identified in the students' written work. For example, evidence of literal translation or first-language influence reported in interviews was examined in relation to the corresponding grammatical errors found in the essays. Classroom documents were analyzed descriptively to identify instructional conditions relevant to the students' writing experiences. Finally, findings from the three data sources were integrated through triangulation to compare, confirm, or explain convergent and divergent evidence.

The trustworthiness of the study was established using Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was enhanced through methodological triangulation and member checking of relevant interview

interpretations. Transferability was supported by providing detailed descriptions of the school context, participant characteristics, and research procedures. Dependability and confirmability were strengthened through systematic documentation of the data collection, coding, categorization, and interpretation processes. Ethical approval was obtained from the participating school(s), and written informed consent was obtained from all participants and their parents or guardians. Pseudonyms were used to protect participants' identities and maintain confidentiality.

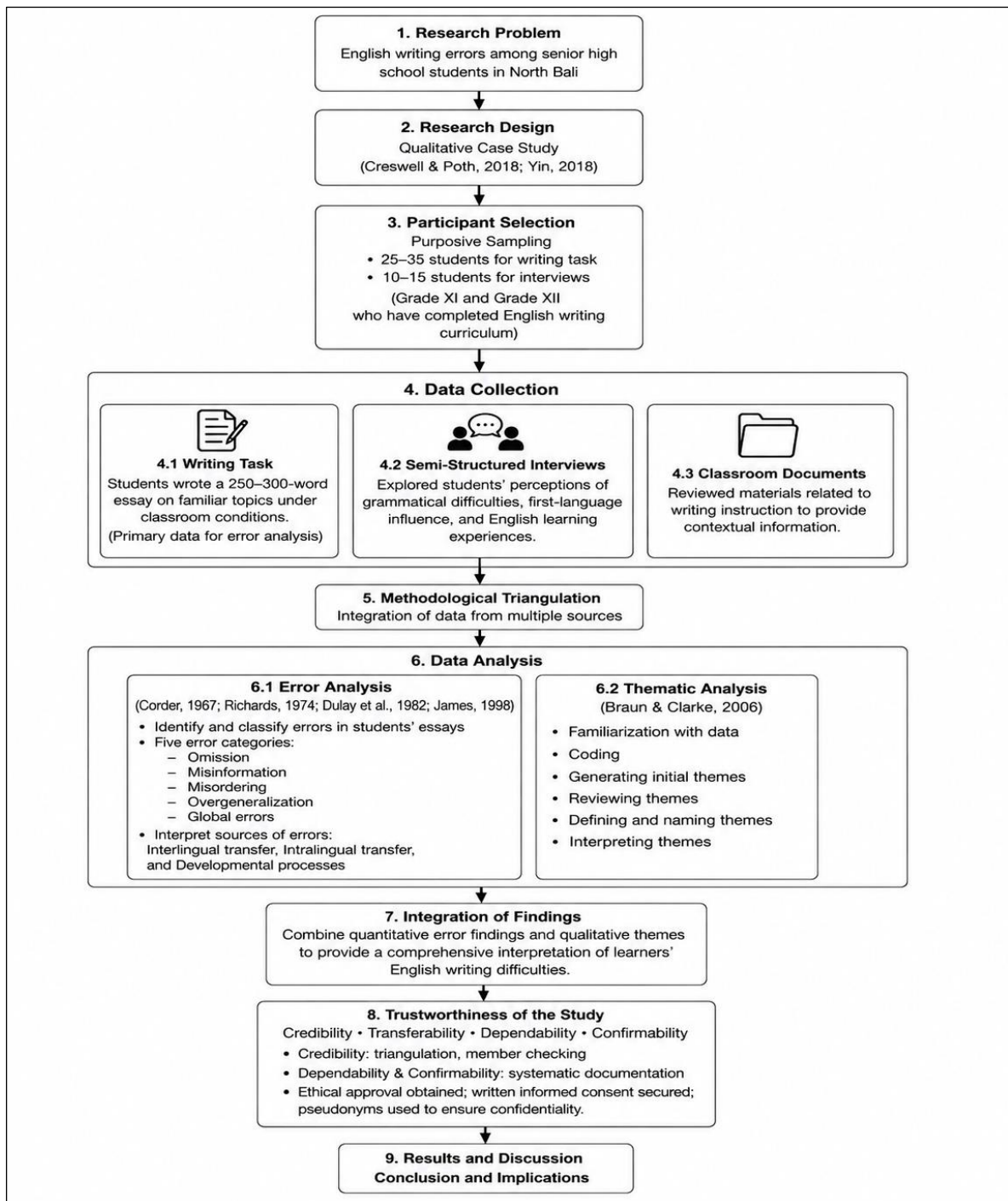


Figure 1. Research framework and methodological flow of the study

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 184 grammatical errors were identified from the students' English essays, indicating that grammatical accuracy remains a considerable challenge for senior high school students in North Bali. Consistent with the principles of Error Analysis (Corder, 1967), these errors were interpreted as evidence of learners' developing linguistic competence rather than as indicators of learning failure. The analysis classified the errors into five categories: omission, misinformation, misordering, overgeneralization, and global errors. Table 1 summarizes the distribution of the identified errors.

Table 1. Types of English writing errors among senior high school students in North Bali

Error Type	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Interpretation
Omission	77	41.8	Difficulty producing obligatory grammatical elements such as articles, auxiliary verbs, prepositions, and inflectional morphemes.
Misinformation	70	38.0	Incorrect selection of grammatical forms, particularly verb tense, subject–verb agreement, and prepositions.
Global Errors	27	14.7	Errors reducing sentence comprehensibility, mainly caused by literal translation from Indonesian.
Misordering	6	3.3	Incorrect word order influenced by Indonesian sentence patterns.
Overgeneralization	4	2.2	Overextension of English grammatical rules, particularly irregular verb forms.
Total	184	100	

As shown in Table 1, ‘omission’ emerged as the most dominant error category, accounting for 41.8% of all identified errors. The frequent omission of articles, auxiliary verbs, prepositions, and grammatical inflections suggests that learners had not fully acquired obligatory English grammatical features, many of which are absent or function differently in Indonesian. From the perspective of Interlanguage Theory (Selinker, 1972), these errors reflect an evolving linguistic system in which learners simplify grammatical structures while gradually developing English proficiency. Similar findings were reported by Suputra et al. (2013) and Kırkgöz (2010), indicating that omission remains one of the most persistent grammatical features in EFL writing.

The second most frequent category was ‘misinformation’ (38.0%), primarily involving incorrect verb forms, tense selection, subject–verb agreement, and preposition use. These findings suggest that students were generally aware of English grammatical rules but experienced difficulty applying them accurately in authentic writing contexts. By contrast, ‘global errors’ (14.7%) had the greatest impact on sentence comprehensibility because learners

frequently translated Indonesian sentence structures directly into English. These findings support Karimiabdolmaleki et al. (2025), who identified negative language transfer as a major source of grammatical errors, and Cheng (2023), who demonstrated that structural differences between learners' first language and English substantially influence written production. Overall, the identified error patterns indicate that students' writing reflects the combined influence of language transfer and developmental learning processes. To better understand the factors underlying these grammatical errors, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected participants. The thematic analysis identified five interconnected themes, which are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Factors Contributing to Students' English Writing Errors

Theme	Key Findings	Representative Response	Theoretical Perspective
First-language interference	Students formulated ideas in Indonesian before translating them into English.	"I usually think in Indonesian first before writing in English."	Language Transfer Theory
Limited grammatical knowledge	Students lacked confidence in tense usage, articles, and sentence structure.	"I know the meaning, but I am not sure about the grammar."	Error Analysis
Literal translation	Students relied on direct translation, resulting in inaccurate grammatical structures.	"Sometimes I translate every sentence from Indonesian."	Interlanguage Theory
Limited English exposure	English was rarely used outside the classroom.	"I only use English during English class."	Second Language Acquisition
Classroom learning experiences	Grammar learning emphasized rules more than meaningful writing practice.	"We study grammar, but we seldom practice writing essays."	Writing Pedagogy

The interview findings indicate that students' English writing errors are not attributable to a single linguistic deficiency but emerge from the interaction of linguistic, cognitive, and instructional factors. The predominance of first-language interference is particularly significant because many students reported formulating ideas in Indonesian before translating them into English. This finding suggests that the problem is not simply the transfer of Indonesian grammatical structures into English, but also the cognitive process through which learners construct meaning. When students lack sufficient English resources to formulate ideas directly in the target language, Indonesian functions as an initial conceptual and linguistic scaffold. However, direct translation may subsequently produce grammatical forms that are acceptable

in Indonesian but inappropriate in English. Thus, the findings reveal that language transfer operates together with limited target-language knowledge rather than independently.

This interpretation is consistent with *Interlanguage Theory* (Selinker, 1972), which views learner language as a developing system that is neither identical to the first language nor equivalent to the target language. The recurring errors identified in the students' writing can therefore be interpreted as evidence of systematic but incomplete rule formation. For example, difficulties with tense, auxiliary verbs, and articles suggest that students have begun to recognize the relevance of these grammatical features but have not yet consistently integrated them into their productive language system. The errors are therefore developmental in nature. Their recurrence indicates that students may have acquired declarative knowledge of grammatical rules but have not yet transformed that knowledge into automatic procedural competence during the cognitively demanding process of writing.

The findings also demonstrate the complementary value of *Error Analysis* and interview-based inquiry. The written texts revealed the linguistic forms of students' errors, whereas the interviews helped explain the processes underlying those errors. For instance, the identification of grammatical errors alone could indicate weaknesses in tense or article use, but students' accounts revealed that these problems were often connected to translation strategies, uncertainty about grammatical rules, and limited opportunities to use English. This demonstrates that error frequency alone cannot adequately explain why errors persist. A central contribution of the present study is therefore the integration of error patterns with learners' own explanations, allowing the analysis to move from identifying *what* errors occur to examining *why* they continue to occur.

Limited exposure to English outside the classroom further reinforces this pattern. Students' restricted opportunities to encounter and use authentic English may reduce the amount of meaningful input and interaction available for developing grammatical sensitivity. In this context, classroom instruction becomes particularly important. However, students' perception that instruction emphasizes grammatical rules more than meaningful writing practice suggests a possible gap between knowing grammar and using grammar. Grammar knowledge may remain largely declarative when learners are not given sufficient opportunities to apply it in communicative contexts. This finding indicates that recurring errors should not be addressed solely through additional rule explanation. Instead, learners need repeated opportunities to produce language, receive focused feedback, revise their texts, and reflect on the reasons for their errors.

Taken together, the findings support Yao's (2026) argument that learner errors are multifactorial and shaped by the interaction of language transfer, linguistic competence, proficiency, and exposure. However, the present study extends this perspective by showing how these factors are experienced and interpreted by senior high school learners in the North Bali EFL context. The findings suggest that first-language interference is most influential when combined with limited grammatical competence and insufficient English exposure. In other words, the same Indonesian–English structural differences may not necessarily produce persistent errors in learners who have stronger grammatical knowledge and greater exposure to English. The persistence of errors therefore appears to result from the interaction between the linguistic demands of English and the learning conditions available to students.

From a pedagogical perspective, these findings challenge approaches that treat grammatical errors as isolated forms requiring correction. Effective writing instruction should address the underlying processes that produce those errors. Contextualized grammar instruction can help students understand grammatical forms through meaningful texts and writing tasks, while contrastive activities can make differences between Indonesian and English structures more explicit. In addition, process-oriented writing that includes drafting, feedback, revision, and reflection can help students gradually transform explicit grammatical knowledge into more automatic writing competence. Corrective feedback should therefore be timely and explanatory rather than limited to marking errors as incorrect.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that English writing errors among senior high school students in North Bali represent developmental evidence of an evolving interlanguage shaped by the interaction of first-language influence, incomplete grammatical knowledge, translation strategies, limited exposure, and classroom experience. The principal implication of this finding is that improving writing accuracy requires more than correcting surface-level errors. It requires instructional support that connects learners' existing linguistic resources with meaningful opportunities to construct, revise, and use English. In this respect, the integration of Error Analysis with learners' perspectives provides a more comprehensive explanation of the causes and persistence of writing errors than text-based classification alone.

Table 4. Summary of Research Findings

Research Question	Major Findings	Implications
RQ1. What types of English writing errors are produced by senior high school students in North Bali?	Five categories of grammatical errors were identified, with omission, misinformation, and global errors emerging as the most frequent.	English writing instruction should emphasize obligatory grammatical elements, authentic writing practice, and contextual grammar learning.

RQ2. How do senior high school students explain the factors contributing to their English writing errors?	Students attributed their errors to first-language interference, limited grammatical knowledge, literal translation, limited English exposure, and classroom learning experiences.	Teachers should promote metalinguistic awareness, increase opportunities for authentic English use, and provide meaningful corrective feedback during the writing process.
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CONCLUSION

This study investigated English writing errors among senior high school students in North Bali using a qualitative Error Analysis approach. The findings identified five major grammatical error categories, with omission emerging as the most frequent, followed by misinformation, global errors, misordering, and overgeneralization. These errors reflect learners' developing interlanguage and demonstrate that English writing difficulties are shaped by the combined influence of first-language interference, limited grammatical knowledge, literal translation, restricted English exposure, and classroom learning experiences.

The study contributes to the literature by extending Error Analysis beyond the identification of grammatical errors through integrating textual analysis with learners' perspectives. The findings support Error Analysis, Interlanguage Theory, and Language Transfer Theory, suggesting that English writing errors are developmental rather than merely linguistic deficiencies. Pedagogically, the results highlight the importance of contextualized grammar instruction, meaningful writing practice, and constructive corrective feedback to improve students' grammatical accuracy and writing competence. Although the findings are limited to senior high school students in North Bali, they provide useful insights for English language teaching in similar EFL contexts. Future research may involve learners from different educational levels or regions and employ longitudinal or mixed-methods approaches to examine the development of English writing competence over time.

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