

An Error Analysis of Grammatical Errors in Students' Descriptive Texts at Universitas Terbuka

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Abstract : The focus of this research is on identifying grammar errors in students' descriptions of office spaces. Using Corder's (1974) taxonomy, four types of errors were identified: omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. Data were collected from eight students and analyzed qualitatively. The results show that misformation was the most frequent error, followed by omission, addition, and misordering. These findings suggest that students' writing skills are still influenced by incomplete language development and native language interference. The study recommends grammar-focused feedback and the use of authentic materials to improve students' accuracy and fluency in English writing.

Keywords: Descriptive Writing; EFL Learners; Error Analysis

1. Introduction

Listening, speaking, reading, and writing are the four primary components of language acquisition, and they should be delivered through an integrated instructional approach (Aydoğan & Akbarov, 2014). Elola & Oskoz (2010) stated that in the context of teaching writing in a second or foreign language, instruction typically emphasizes the use of writing as a means of capturing spoken language and reinforcing grammar and vocabulary. However, although writing is often used to reinforce grammar and vocabulary, it remains a skill that poses significant challenges due to its complex grammatical and lexical demands. While children generally acquire basic writing skills in their first language, only a small number are able to communicate their thoughts effectively through well-structured, logically organized, and purpose-driven writing (Brown, 2004).

Mastery of grammar is essential for students to produce written communication that is both accurate and meaningful (Gunn & McCallum, 2005, p. 41). However, grammatical knowledge holds little value if students are unable to apply it appropriately in real communication. English language learners are therefore expected not only to understand grammatical rules but also to use them effectively. According to Ellis (2006, p. 6), learners typically encounter two key challenges in learning grammar: understanding the grammatical rules themselves and internalizing those rules so they can be applied accurately in usage. Historically, during the pre-scientific period of language teaching, grammatical errors were largely disregarded, as instructional attention was centered more on the language being taught than on the learners' linguistic output. At that time, learner errors were not seen as important indicators of learning progress. Instead, it was widely believed by educators and linguists that errors were the result of ineffective teaching methods. The prevailing assumption was that if instructional strategies were perfected, errors would disappear, allowing learners to acquire the target language in its ideal, error-free form.

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In the context of Universitas Terbuka, which implements a distance learning model, many students face persistent challenges in writing grammatically accurate essays. One of the most prominent issues is the frequent recurrence of basic grammatical errors, particularly in areas such as verb tenses, subject-verb agreement, the use of articles, and prepositions. These persistent mistakes indicate that students often lack a solid grasp of fundamental grammar rules, even at the university level. Furthermore, most students show limited ability to self-correct their writing, suggesting that they have not yet fully internalized the grammatical structures required for accurate communication.

The distance learning model adopted by Universitas Terbuka may also contribute to this problem, as it reduces opportunities for direct, personalized feedback from instructors especially in writing. As a result, students receive less correction and targeted support regarding their grammar usage. Additionally, the influence of the students' first language, Bahasa Indonesia, can interfere with their English sentence construction, leading to structural errors that mirror Indonesian grammar patterns. Finally, many students prioritize conveying ideas over grammatical accuracy, focusing more on content delivery than on correct language use. These combined factors highlight the need for a deeper investigation into the grammatical errors found in students' writing, their underlying causes, and potential pedagogical responses.

Several studies have investigated tense usage and grammatical accuracy in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing, particularly in academic essays. These studies provide valuable insights into the types of errors commonly made by learners and the impact of tense mastery on the clarity and coherence of writing.

Farrokhi and Chehrazad (2012) examined the relationship between grammatical accuracy and writing quality among Iranian EFL learners. They found that the proper use of verb tenses contributed significantly to the overall coherence and clarity of student essays. The study highlighted that tense misuse often disrupted the logical flow of ideas and reduced the effectiveness of communication in writing.

Mubarak (2013) focused on Saudi university students and analyzed how verb tense proficiency influenced the organization and meaningfulness of their compositions. The findings revealed that students with better control of tense produced more structured and comprehensible essays, reinforcing the importance of tense mastery in academic writing.

In the Indonesian context, Sasmita (2019) explored the influence of tense usage in narrative texts written by EFL students. Her research showed that mastery of the past tense was essential in producing well-sequenced and logically connected narratives. The study emphasized that students who struggled with tense accuracy often failed to maintain chronological clarity in their writing.

Alfian and Rini (2020) conducted a study on grammatical errors in academic writing at an Indonesian open university. They found that verb tense errors were among the most frequent types of mistakes, negatively affecting the cohesion and readability of students' texts. The study also suggested that the nature of distance learning, with limited opportunities for real-time feedback, might contribute to persistent grammar issues, particularly tense confusion.

To respond to these findings and address the local challenges faced by students at Universitas Terbuka, this study adopts Error Analysis (EA) as proposed by Corder (1974). This approach focuses on identifying, categorizing, and analyzing the types of errors made by learners. Through this framework, the study aims to uncover the most common grammatical errors found in students' essay writing at Universitas Terbuka and to investigate the possible causes behind them. The findings are expected to provide valuable insights for language instructors, enabling them to design more targeted and effective teaching strategies to help students improve their writing accuracy.

Research Questions

Writing in English, particularly in descriptive texts, poses a considerable challenge for many students at Universitas Terbuka. Although students have been exposed to English grammar through formal instruction, their written texts often display recurring grammatical errors. These errors can disrupt clarity, weaken the effectiveness of written communication, and reflect underlying issues in second language acquisition. The presence of such errors indicates gaps in the learners' grammatical competence that need to be examined systematically. This study addresses the problem by focusing on:

1. What are the classifications of grammatical errors found in the descriptive texts of Universitas Terbuka students?
2. What are the possible causes of these grammatical errors based on Corder's taxonomy?

Objectives of the Study

This study aims to conduct a systematic analysis of grammatical errors found in the descriptive texts written by students at Universitas Terbuka. It seeks to identify the various types of grammatical errors that occur in their writing and to analyze their frequency. In addition, the study explores the possible causes of these errors by referring to Corder's (1974) error taxonomy, providing a theoretical foundation for understanding learners' language development and supporting future improvements in English language instruction.

2. Theoretical Framework.

Writing Skill in English as a Foreign Language (EFL)

Writing is considered one of the most challenging skills for EFL learners. It requires a combination of cognitive, linguistic, and organizational abilities. According to Hyland (2003), writing is a complex process involving generating ideas, organizing them logically, and presenting them in a coherent and grammatically accurate manner. For EFL students, writing competence is not only about fluency but also grammatical correctness, especially in academic settings.

Effective writing involves clarity of expression, logical organization of ideas, coherence, and grammatical accuracy. In academic essays, the use of correct grammatical structures, particularly verb tenses, plays a significant role in conveying the intended meaning accurately.

Error Analysis (EA)

According to Richards (2010), error analysis refers to the systematic identification and examination of mistakes found in the spoken and written output of second or foreign language learners. Its main objectives include evaluating learners' proficiency, understanding their learning process, and identifying common difficulties in language acquisition. Similarly, Brown defines error analysis as the process of observing, analyzing, and classifying deviations from the norms of the target language in order to uncover the learners' internal language systems. Synthesizing both views, error analysis can be defined as the process of identifying, classifying, and interpreting learner errors to gain insights into language learning challenges and to support more effective language teaching and material development.

One of the most prominent difficulties in foreign language learning lies in learners' psychological discomfort, particularly their fear of making mistakes during language use. Errors typically reflect an incomplete understanding of the language rules being studied. To overcome this issue, linguists apply a technique known as error analysis. As noted by Mahmoodzadeh (2012, in Al-Khresheh, 2016), error analysis is a method used to detect, categorize, and interpret mistakes made by learners of a second language (L2), and is widely regarded as an effective approach for examining learner errors. Keshavarz (1999, as cited in Ahmed et al.) further describes error analysis as a research and pedagogical tool involving the collection of learner language samples, the identification and classification of errors by type and source, and the assessment of their impact.

Types of Errors based in Corder (1974)

Corder (1974) is regarded as one of the key figures in the development of Error Analysis within the domain of second language acquisition. He argued that errors made by learners should not be viewed merely as failures, but as meaningful indicators of the language learning process. Through error analysis, researchers can gain insight into a learner's current level of linguistic competence and stage of development. Corder introduced a widely used taxonomy of errors, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) studies, including analyses related to grammatical elements like tense. His classification system identifies four major types of errors: omission, addition,

misformation, and misordering, all of which are applicable to examining tense-related issues in EFL learners' writing.

Omission refers to the absence of necessary grammatical elements. In terms of tense, this may involve omitting auxiliary verbs or verb tense markers (e.g., "She going to school" instead of "She is going to school").

Addition involves the insertion of unnecessary grammatical forms, such as using both an auxiliary and a past tense verb incorrectly (e.g., "He didn't went" instead of "He didn't go").

Misformation occurs when learners use the wrong form of a verb for the intended tense (e.g., "She go to the office yesterday" instead of "She went to the office yesterday").

Misordering refers to errors in the sequence of grammatical elements, such as placing auxiliaries or verbs in incorrect order (e.g., "Goes she to school every day?" instead of "Does she go to school every day?").

In addition to these four categories, this study adopts a fifth type of error commonly identified in recent literature: Tense Selection Error. Although not explicitly categorized by Corder, this type of error is highly relevant to EFL learners. It involves the inappropriate choice of tense that does not match the temporal context of the sentence (e.g., "I am going to the party yesterday" instead of "I went to the party yesterday"). Researchers such as Richards (1971) and James (1998) have supported the expansion of error categories to include tense misselection, especially in studies focused on academic writing.

Corder also made a crucial distinction between mistakes and errors. Mistakes are often performance-related and can be corrected by the learner themselves, while errors are systematic and reflect incomplete knowledge of the target language. This distinction is important in assessing students' written work, as persistent tense-related errors often indicate deeper linguistic gaps rather than mere slips.

By applying this adapted version of Corder's error taxonomy, this study aims to systematically identify and analyze the types of grammatical errors made by Universitas Terbuka students in their descriptive text. The framework provides a comprehensive lens through which to examine the frequency and nature of errors, thereby offering insights into areas that require targeted instructional support.

2. Method

This study uses a quantitative approach with an associative research type, because it aims to measure the extent to which human resource management strategies influence the company's competitiveness. This study is also explanatory, namely explaining the relationship between variables that have been formulated in the hypothesis.

The research will be conducted at PT. Agro Naiga Eternal, with a population of all employees working in the company that is the object of the research, especially those at the managerial level and who have direct involvement in HR management policies or practices. Sample on study This as much as 100 respondents,

3. Research Method

Research Design

This study employs a descriptive qualitative method with quantitative support, focusing on the analysis of grammatical errors in students' descriptive texts. The qualitative approach is used to identify and classify the types of grammatical errors based on linguistic categories, while the quantitative component is used to determine the frequency of each error type. The study is grounded in the theoretical framework of Error Analysis, particularly Corder's (1974) taxonomy, which enables a systematic examination of learner errors to understand their language development.

Data Source and Sampling Technique

The data for this research consist of written descriptive texts composed by students of Universitas Terbuka as part of their English writing assignments. The sampling technique used in this study is purposive sampling, where only texts that clearly represent descriptive writing and are composed independently by students were selected. A total of [insert number] student texts were chosen to ensure the data were sufficient for analysis in both

qualitative and quantitative terms. These texts vary in length and complexity, representing a range of student proficiency levels.

Method and Procedure of the Research

The procedure of this study follows the five steps of error analysis as outlined by Corder (1974):

1. Data Collection: Students' descriptive texts were collected from writing assignments.
2. Error Identification: All grammatical errors in the texts were carefully marked.
3. Error Classification: Each identified error was categorized into one of four main types: omission, addition, misformation, or misordering.
4. Error Quantification: The frequency of each error type was calculated to determine which errors were most common.
5. Error Explanation: Possible causes of the errors were interpreted based on linguistic theory, including interference, overgeneralization, and developmental stages of second language acquisition.

Instrument of the Research

The main research instruments used in this study include:

1. Student-written descriptive texts, which serve as the primary source of data.
2. An error analysis checklist, developed based on Corder's taxonomy, used to identify and classify the types of grammatical errors.
3. A frequency table, prepared to quantify the number of each error type and present the data in an organized and interpretable format.

These instruments enable the researcher to systematically analyze the grammatical errors and interpret both the qualitative and quantitative aspects of the data.

3.5 Population and Sample

The population of this research includes all Universitas Terbuka students enrolled in English writing courses that involve descriptive text assignments. The sample consists of 20 students whose texts were purposively selected based on relevance to the descriptive genre and the presence of grammatical content that allows for meaningful analysis. This purposive sampling ensures that the selected texts reflect the research focus and provide adequate data for detailed error analysis.

Data Analysis Technique

The data analysis in this study combines qualitative and quantitative approaches. In the qualitative analysis, grammatical errors were identified and categorized based on the four types proposed by Corder (1974): omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. Each error was recorded using the checklist and coded accordingly. In the quantitative analysis, the researcher calculated the frequency and percentage of each error type to determine which grammatical issues were most prevalent among the students. This information was presented in the form of tables and charts for clarity. The interpretation of data involved linking the identified errors to possible causes, such as first language interference, overgeneralization of grammar rules, or developmental factors, with reference to the theories of Corder (1974) and Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982).

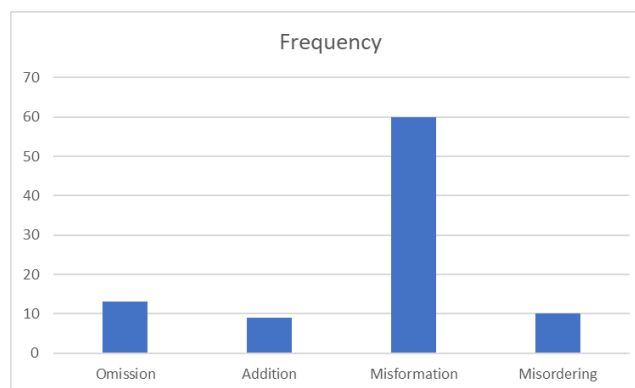
The combination of these techniques allows for a comprehensive understanding of the grammatical difficulties faced by students in writing descriptive texts in English.

4. Finding and Discussion

Table 1. Grammatical Error Classification Table According to Corder's (1974) Theory

No.	Student	Omission	Addition	Misformation	Misordering	Total Errors
1	Student 1	1	0	2	2	5
2	Student 2	1	0	2	0	3
3	Student 3	1	0	4	2	7
4	Student 4	0	0	0	0	0
5	Student 5	1	1	3	0	5
6	Student 6	0	1	2	0	3

No.	Student	Omission	Addition	Misformation	Misordering	Total Errors
7	Student 7	0	0	3	1	4
8	Student 8	1	0	3	0	4
9	Student 9	1	1	3	0	5
10	Student 10	0	0	2	0	2
11	Student 11	1	1	3	0	5
12	Student 12	1	0	3	0	4
13	Student 13	1	0	5	0	6
14	Student 14	1	0	2	0	3
15	Student 15	0	0	3	0	3
16	Student 16	0	1	3	1	5
17	Student 17	1	1	4	1	7
18	Student 18	1	1	4	1	7
19	Student 19	1	1	3	1	6
20	Student 20	1	1	3	1	6
	Total	13	9	60	10	92



Graphic 1. Distribution of Error Types Based on Corder

From the chart and table above illustrates the frequency of grammatical errors made by students in their descriptive writing, classified into four categories based on Corder's (1974) taxonomy: Omission, Addition, Misformation, and Misordering. Among these, Misformation errors are by far the most dominant, with a total of 60 occurrences, indicating that many students struggle with the correct use of grammatical forms such as tenses, word choices, and sentence structures. Some of the examples of misinformation made by the students are:

Student 1.

One company that is very concerned about the atmosphere of the workspace of its employee is Police Department.

Error : ...the workspace of its employee...

This error refers to the usage of the word ``employee``. The phrase "its employee" uses the singular form (employee), whereas the word "company" here refers generally to an organization that employs more than one person.

It should be ``One company that is very concerned about the atmosphere of the workspace of its employees is Police Department``.

Student 2.

``This office makes me comfortable because the lighting is very sufficient``.

Error : very sufficient..

This error refers to the usage of ``very`` in ``very sufficient``. The phrase "very sufficient" is not idiomatic in English. The word "sufficient" already means "enough" or

"adequate" — adding "very" makes it sound unnatural or awkward. Native English speakers rarely use "very" to intensify "sufficient" because the word itself already implies adequacy.

It should be "This office makes me comfortable because the lighting is sufficient."

Omission errors is the second error that students often made. It appears 13 times showing that some students tend to leave out necessary grammatical elements, such as articles, prepositions, or auxiliary verbs.

Some of the examples of omission made by the students are:

Student 1 :

``When in this space, there is a dynamic and inspiring atmosphere that encourages creativity and team productivity``.

Error : ``When in this space...``.

The phrase "When in this space" lacks a clear subject and verb. It is a dependent clause introduced by the subordinating conjunction "when," but it does not contain a complete idea. In English, time clauses like this must include an explicit subject and verb to be grammatically complete and meaningful. Without a subject, the clause becomes a sentence fragment, which is considered an error in academic writing.

It should be ``When we are in this space, there is a dynamic and inspiring atmosphere that encourages creativity and team productivity``.

Student 2:

"One company that is very concerned about the atmosphere of the workspace of its employee is Police Department."

Error : ``..... the workspace of its employee is Police Department``.

In this sentence, there is an omission of the definite article "the" before the proper noun "Police Department." In English, official institutions or well-known organizations usually require the definite article "the" when mentioned in a sentence (e.g., the Police Department, the United Nations, the Ministry of Health). Omitting "the" makes the sentence grammatically awkward and less natural, especially in formal or academic writing.

It should be "One company that is very concerned about the atmosphere of the workspace of its employee is the Police Department."

The third error that found in students` text is misordering. This errors follow closely with 10 occurrences, involving incorrect arrangement of sentence elements, which can affect clarity and fluency.

Some of the errors made by students are:

Student 1:

``I really like this office because it feels fresh, well-organized, and perfect for working with focus and peace of mind.``

The phrase "perfect for working with focus and peace of mind" is grammatically understandable but not idiomatic in English. It sounds like a direct translation from another language (such as Bahasa Indonesia) and does not follow the natural word order or phrasing typically used by native speakers.

It should be `` `I really like this office because it feels fresh, well-organized, and perfect for working in a peaceful and focused environment".

Student 2:

``Office room should be comfortable as possible, so that employees can work well and productively.``

The phrase "comfortable as possible" is incorrectly ordered. This error is classified as Misordering because the elements of the comparative phrase are in the wrong order, affecting the grammatical accuracy of the sentence.

It should be: "The office should be as comfortable as possible, so that employees can work well and productively."

The last error found in the students` text is addition. This errors occurred 9 times, are the least frequent and typically involve unnecessary or redundant words being inserted into the sentence.

Some of the errors made by the students are:

Student 1 :

“In my opinion, color game in Police Department's Office it's to show the assertiveness of the authority and courage of the police themselves.”

The phrase “it's to show” is an example of an Addition error, because the subject and verb “it is” are unnecessarily inserted into the sentence. Grammatically, the phrase “color game in Police Department's Office” already functions as the subject of the sentence. By adding “it's”, the sentence ends up with two subjects, which results in an incorrect and awkward sentence structure.

It should be “In my opinion, the color scheme in the Police Department's office shows the assertiveness of authority and the courage of the police themselves.”

Student 2:

“My office has a fairly simple meeting room that has beautiful and very fresh nature because our village office hall has many trees and many other interesting facilities.”

The combination “beautiful and very fresh nature” sounds awkward and unnatural. This phrase is not idiomatic in English. The word “nature” is typically used in general, abstract terms and is not normally modified with adjectives like “very fresh” in this way. This is an Addition error because the adjective “very fresh” is unnecessarily inserted, making the phrase grammatically awkward and stylistically incorrect.

Saying “many trees and other interesting facilities” already conveys the intended meaning clearly. There is a redundant use of the word “many” twice in a single sentence, which makes the structure repetitive. Repeating “many” is unnecessary and can be classified as an Addition error in Corder's framework.

It should be “My office has a fairly simple meeting room with a pleasant natural environment, as our village office hall has trees and other interesting facilities.”

Overall, the chart reveals that misinformation is the most significant problem in students' grammar, suggesting a need for more focused instruction on grammatical accuracy and usage in English writing. The relatively lower frequencies of the other error types still highlight areas of concern that should not be overlooked in language teaching.

Possible Causes of Grammatical Errors

The grammatical errors found in the descriptive writing of Universitas Terbuka students, classified according to Corder's (1974) taxonomy—namely Omission, Addition, Misformation, and Misordering—can be attributed to several possible causes. These causes are rooted in linguistic, cognitive, and pedagogical factors that influence second language acquisition.

Interlingual Interference

One major source of error is interference from the first language (L1), often referred to as negative transfer. As stated by Richards (1971) and supported by Brown (2007), learners tend to apply grammatical rules from their native language to the target language, resulting in structural mismatches. For example, Indonesian does not use articles such as *a* or *the*, which leads to omission errors like “Police Department” instead of “the Police Department.” Similarly, differences in word order and phrase construction cause misordering, such as “office room should be comfortable as possible” rather than the correct form “as comfortable as possible.”

Overgeneralization of Rules

According to Corder (1974) and Ellis (2008), overgeneralization occurs when learners apply rules beyond their appropriate contexts. This is evident in the use of expressions like “very sufficient,” where learners attempt to intensify an adjective that already conveys adequacy. Another instance is the addition of a redundant subject and verb as in “it's to show...” after an already complete subject, which results in structural redundancy.

Limited Exposure to Authentic Input

Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982) emphasize the importance of input in second language development. Errors such as “color game in the Police Department's office” and

“working with focus and peace of mind” are likely due to limited exposure to natural, idiomatic English. These phrases reflect literal translations from the students’ first language and a lack of familiarity with conventional English collocations like “color scheme” or “a peaceful working environment.”

Insufficient Grammatical Awareness

Many errors found in the data suggest a lack of explicit grammatical knowledge or revision strategies. Harmer (2007) notes that learners often do not recognize their own errors without external feedback. This is particularly evident in misformation errors involving verb forms or sentence structure, such as “this place making...” instead of “this place makes...”. These errors show that learners may produce grammatically incorrect forms due to incomplete understanding of rules or a lack of editing practice.

Developmental Stage in Language Acquisition

Finally, according to Pienemann’s Processability Theory, second language learners acquire grammatical structures in predictable developmental stages. Some of the errors—such as repeated words or incorrect phrase ordering (“protecting, protecting and serving”)—may reflect a stage where learners have not yet fully internalized more complex sentence constructions. These are considered developmental errors rather than signs of poor learning, and may improve with increased exposure and practice.

In summary, the grammatical errors identified in the student writing are the result of multiple, interacting factors. These include first language influence, overgeneralization, limited authentic input, weak grammar awareness, and developmental constraints. Understanding these causes is essential for improving English instruction. Teachers are encouraged to integrate contrastive grammar teaching, frequent feedback, and authentic reading and writing activities to help learners develop greater grammatical accuracy.

Conclusion And Suggestions

Conclusion

This study aimed to analyze the grammatical errors found in the descriptive texts written by students at Universitas Terbuka, using Corder’s (1974) taxonomy which includes four main categories: Omission, Addition, Misformation, and Misordering. A total of 92 errors were identified across 20 student writings.

Among the four categories, Misformation errors were found to be the most dominant, indicating that many students struggle with using the correct grammatical forms, such as verb tenses, word forms, and appropriate structures. This was followed by Omission, Misordering, and Addition errors in smaller but still significant frequencies.

The possible causes of these errors vary. Some stem from interference from the students’ first language (L1), while others are caused by overgeneralization of English grammar rules, lack of exposure to authentic English input, and insufficient grammatical awareness or editing skills. Additionally, some errors may be considered developmental, meaning the students are still in the process of acquiring more complex grammatical structures.

Overall, the findings of this research show that while students are able to express their ideas in writing, their grammatical control—particularly in terms of accuracy and idiomatic usage—remains limited. These errors highlight the importance of more focused instruction on grammar and writing, especially in contexts involving descriptive texts.

Suggestions

Based on the findings and analysis, several suggestions are proposed for teachers, students, and future researchers:

a. For English Teachers:

Teachers should provide more form-focused grammar instruction, particularly in areas where students frequently make mistakes, such as verb forms, article usage, and sentence structure. Incorporating error analysis activities in class can also help students become more aware of their grammatical choices. In addition, exposure to authentic materials (such as native-level texts, videos, and dialogues) should be integrated to improve idiomatic usage and vocabulary.

b. For Students:

Students are encouraged to read more English texts and practice writing regularly to enhance their familiarity with standard grammatical patterns. They should also actively seek feedback from teachers and make use of grammar-checking tools to support their learning. Participating in peer-editing activities can also help develop grammatical awareness.

c. For Future Researchers:

Future research can explore grammatical errors in different genres of writing (e.g., narrative, argumentative, or expository) to compare patterns across contexts. It is also recommended to examine errors using other taxonomies, such as Dulay, Burt, and Krashen's Surface Strategy Taxonomy, for deeper comparative insight. A larger sample size and a longitudinal approach could provide more comprehensive findings on error development over time.

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