Grammatical Errors in the Expository Texts of Eleventh Grade EFL Students at MA Al-Asy'ari Diwek Jombang

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ABSTRACT

The complexity of English grammar poses significant challenges for language learners, leading to various errors. This study employed a qualitative approach to investigate the categories of grammatical errors made by 138 students and the cause of error. The study gathered qualitative data through questionnaires and tasks completed by students. The findings revealed five key areas where students struggled with grammatical errors: noun phrases, verb phrases, word order, transformation, and verb and verb construction. These errors stemmed from various factors, including interference (25.80%), overgeneralization (87.09%), performance errors (96.77%), transitional competence markers (80.64%), communication strategies (64.51%), and teacher-induced errors (67.75%). Notably, performance errors had the most significant impact. However, additional research is necessary to explore learners' psychology in English classes to enhance teaching effectiveness. This research makes a significant contribution to the field of applied linguistics, particularly in understanding grammatical errors made by foreign language learners. The contribution reinforces the notion that error analysis is not only essential for evaluating learner progress but also serves as a diagnostic tool to improve teaching methods and develop more effective and accurate instructional materials

Keywords: English Grammar; Grammatical Error; Cause of Error; Qualitative Data

INTRODUCTION

The intricacies of English grammar pose challenges for learners, especially in writing, where grammatical accuracy is crucial (Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, & Finegan, 1999; Ellis, 2008; Quinones, 2022). The sentence highlights the importance of grammatical accuracy in writing and the challenges that learners face in achieving this accuracy. English grammar is complex, with many rules, exceptions, and nuances that can be difficult to master. The complexities of English grammar present significant obstacles for language learners, particularly in written production, where grammatical precision is paramount.

Because of the obstacles, many students make grammar mistakes and errors in their learning. Foreign language learners' errors can arise from multiple sources, including cross-linguistic influence (Odlin, 1989; (Ni'amah, 2025), limited meta-linguistic awareness (Bialystok, 1983; (Hu, 2011), over-generalization (Ellis, 2008; (Salsabillah, Ni'amah, & Kristanti, 2024), simplification (Klein & Perdue, 1997 (Bernardini, Ferraresi, & Miličević, 2016), and structural transfer from learners' native language (Selinker, 1972; (Shatz, 2016).

The occurrence of errors in English language instruction is a ubiquitous phenomenon, posing significant challenges for language learners and instructors alike (James & Garrett, 2014; Singh & Kaushik, 2020). From a scientific perspective, the sentence highlights the inevitability and complexity of errors in foreign language teaching, particularly in English. Errors can arise from various sources, including linguistic, cognitive, and affective factors. Thus, this study implicates error analysis, error correction, and language instruction. Those implications lead researchers to do the following.

a) conduct error analysis in identifying patterns and sources of errors, informing instructional practices and materials development,

b) investigate effective error correction strategies and their impact on language learning outcomes

c) explore the role of errors in language instruction, including how to balance accuracy and fluency in language teaching.

Numerous factors contribute to errors in English language learning, including linguistic interference from the learners' L1, which can significantly impact language acquisition (Odlin, 1989; Mertosono & Erniwati, 2023) that trigger scholars and researchers conducting error analysis mainly on grammar. The cause of writing problems propeled Putri (2023) investigate the types of learners' error and trace the source of error after classifying error types (see Figure 1), while this present study delved grammatical error for the sake of error correction and language instruction. Grammatical errors have also been investigated by referring to Dulay's et al theory that comprises omission, addition, misformation, and misordering (Anaktototy, Samponu, & Loppies, 2023), while this present study adopted Putri's (2023) classification on error types mainly on grammar, syntax, and lexical errors.
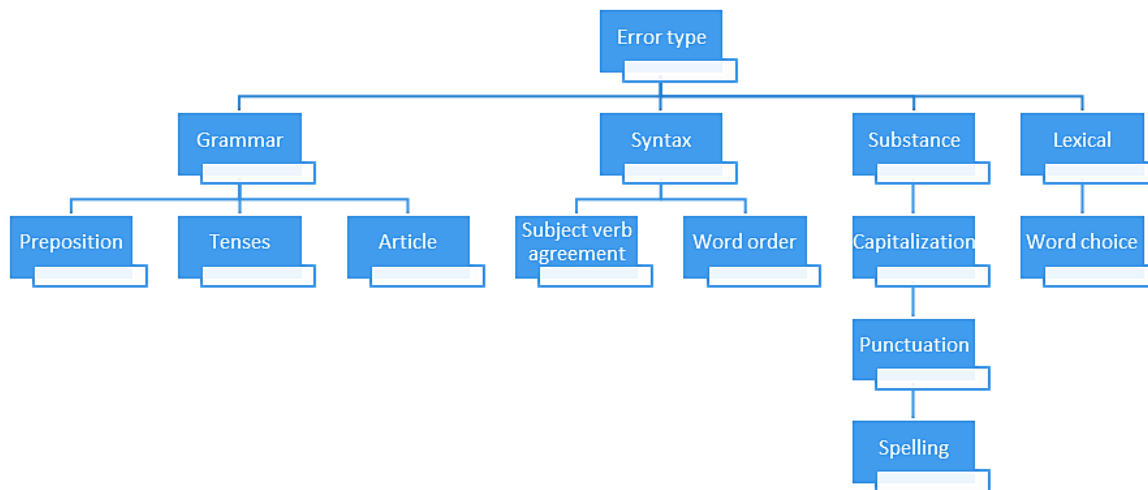

Figure 1. Types of Error (Adopted from Putri, 2023)
Source: Putri (2023)

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach, utilizing a descriptive study design to gather in-depth insights. A systematic research approach was employed in conducting the research. This design was chosen because it involved analyzing written language data, gathered in a natural setting, and interpreted through

descriptive analysis. The study aims to provide a detailed and nuanced understanding of the phenomenon through descriptive analysis.

The study collected qualitative data through student questionnaires and tasks, including exposition texts from 183 eleventh-grade students and questionnaire responses. Primary data consisted of exposition texts and questionnaire responses from 183 students, while secondary data included information from books, documents, and references like materials and syllabi.

The data of this study was all exposition texts written by eleventh-grade students of MA AL-Asy'ari Diwek Jombang. Purposive sampling technique was applied in taking data source with most grammatical errors. A number of 138 data were collected by implementing field research method.

In analyzing students' grammatical errors, there were three steps done namely identifying, classifying, and evaluating grammatical errors. In identifying the students' error, two error types among four of Putri (2023) become the main consideration—grammar and syntax. Next, the errors were classified into kinds of errors based on linguistic category taxonomy. Lastly, the students' responses on questionnaires were analyzed and discussed the result of the detected errors.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The grammatical errors made by students in exposition writing are noun phrase, verb phrase, word order, transformation, verb and verb construction. There were 49 errors on noun phrase, 49 errors on verb phrase, 12 errors on word order, 13 errors on transformation, 15 errors on verb and verb construction. Students' errors on noun phrase include determiners, nominalization, omission of plural suffix, and preposition (see Table 1).

Table 1. Errors on Noun Phrase

Type of Error	Data	Description
Determiner	If we want to be <u>a smart people</u>	The underlined words is in th plural form, the article <u>a</u> should b omitted
	Learning in school is <u>behaved fair</u>	The underlined words is unspecified noun, there should be the article <u>a</u> before the word 'behave'
Nominalization	It will make students <u>interesting</u>	The word 'interesting' must be adjective, it should be 'interested'
	workout than <u>watch</u> TV	The underlined word must be a noun, it should be <u>watching</u>
Omission of suffix -s/-es	The students can borrow <u>some book</u>	A noun which follows <u>some</u> must be plural that it must be <u>books</u>

		Many <u>reason</u>	The word many must be followed by a plural noun that it must be <u>reasons</u>
Preposition		Library is place <u>of which</u> students can study	'Library' is a 3D space, the proper preposition used is 'in which'
		<u>With</u> the existence of the library in school	'With' is denoting accompaniment, while the clause shows a mean of an action
		We <u>stop restaurant</u> and have lunch	<u>Restaurant</u> is a specific place that needs 'at' to show place on specific area
		At this time, <u>era globalization</u> in the world	'globalization' is a name/part of 'era', there must be preposition 'of' between them—'era of globalization'

Errors on determiner occured because of using the article 'a' before a plural noun whereas article 'a' is used to show a singular noun. The word <u>people</u> is a plural noun that does not need an article since an article is always followed by noun. On the contrary, the word <u>behave</u> is a noun that the article 'a' must be used. Regular plural nouns commonly use additional suffix -s/-es but irregular plural nouns—people, men, women, children, mice, *etc*. Errors on using English articles also found on junior high school students' descriptive text (Husnawan, 2021).

Errors on nominalization come about misuse of word form whether it is adjective or noun. The word <u>interesting</u> follows the word 'students' which is a noun that <u>interesting</u> must become 'interested'. Words which follow noun must modify the noun, that is adjective. The adjective includes determiner, ordinal, epithet, and classification. The word 'interested' is one of classification—the past participle. The word <u>watch</u> after the conjunction <u>than</u> must be a noun since there is <u>workout</u> which is also noun. The word <u>watch</u> is a verb, but 'watching' functions as a noun—the gerund.

Errors on omission suffix -s/-es found on missing suffix -s/-es after plural quantifier such as some, many, much, several, *etc*. There is a quantifier 'some' before the word <u>book</u> that is needed suffix -s to show plural noun. The word <u>reason</u> must be plural since there is a quantifier 'many' that suffix -es must be added on <u>reason.</u> Suffix -es is used for nouns with final letter -o and those end hissed sound such as -ch, -s, -ss, -sh, -x, -z. Omission of suffix -s also found on secondary students' essays as their most errors (Dada, 2015).

Errors on preposition is mainly a matter of indicating a place, an action performer, or a tool used in an action. 'Library' is a 3D space that 'in which' is the best preposition to indicate a library. The word <u>with</u> is typically describe an instrument used in an action, but the students wrote the word <u>with</u> followed by a noun which is not an instrument. Lastly, the word <u>restaurant</u> was written without any preposition,

whereas English always use preposition before adverb of place. Since restaurant is a particular place, it should be written 'at a restaurant'. High school students continued to make preposition errors in their writing, primarily due to issues with the target language itself, known as intralingual transfer (Pattiradjawane, 2018). Students' errors on verb phrase include omission of verb, and agreement of subject and verb (see Table 2).

Table 2. Errors on Verb Phrase

Type of Error	Data	Description
Omission of verb	Library a place where the students study	'Library' and 'a place' must b separated with an auxiliary verb–'Library is a place'
	The driver sleepy too	The words 'sleepy' is not a verb, so 'The driver' as a subject must be completed with an auxiliary verb—'The driver is sleepy too'
Agreement of subject and verb	It give positive activity	Subject 'it' is a singular subject, the verb follows must be added -s/-es—'It gives positive activity'
	We can reading books more comfortable	'can' is one of modal, so the verb follows must be infinitive—read

Errors on omission of verb occured mainly on using auxiliary verb. The students tended to miss auxiliary verb in writing Exposition text, such as missing 'be'. Omission was Matters on agreement of subject and verb were also missed by the students. They inclined missing suffix -s/-es on verbs that follow singular subject, and confsed on using the proper verb whether infinitive, gerund, or participle. Students' errors on word order is mainly placing noun on noun phrase (see Table 3).

Table 3. Errors on Word Order

Type of Error	Data	Description
Placing a verb	I more take pictures	'more' is an adverb while 'take' is verb; a subject must be followed by verb
Placing a noun	A sink to wash dirty	'dirty' is an adjective while 'wash' is a verb; an adjective can only modify an object or else become a noun--'dirt'
	all equipment kitchen	The word 'kitchen' modifies 'equipment', it is not viceversa
	and other culture negative	The word 'negative' modifies 'culture', it is not viceversa

Errors on word order happened because of the placement of verb and noun. The students disorientated the order of noun and verb on noun phrase. They wrote 'more take pictures' instead of 'take more pictures'; 'wash dirty' instead of 'wash the dirt'; 'equipment kitchen' instead of 'kitchen equipment'; 'culture negative' instead of 'negative culture'. Students' errors on transformation included the use of auxiliary and the verb form of participle (see Table 4).

Table 4. Errors on Transformation

Type of Error	Data	Description
Auxiliary verb	The books not wasting time	In negative sentence, the word not must follow 'be' or 'auxiliary verb'—'The books are not wasting time'
	Students not get information	In negative sentence, the word not must follow 'be' or 'auxiliary verb'—'Students do not get information'
	The user do not tend to waste money	Singular subject uses auxiliary verb 'does'—'The user does not tend to waste money'
Past participle	Cars should be ban	'be' must be followed by past participle—'be banned'
	Because library is complete with audio visual tools	'is' must be followed by past participle—'is completed'

Errors on transformation found on using auxiliary verb and past participle. The students confounded using 'be' and auxiliary verb in negative sentences, using auxiliary verb mainly for singular subject, and the pattern of past participle. They wrote 'books not wasting time' instead of 'books are not wasting time'; 'students not get information' instead of 'students do not get information'; 'the user do not tend to waste money' instead of 'the user does not tend to waste money'; 'cars should be ban' instead of 'cars should be banned'; 'because library is complete with audio visual tools' instead of 'because library is completed with audio visual tools'. Students' errors on verb and verb construction happened on writing the use of verb pattern (see Table 5).

Table 5. Errors on Verb and Verb Construction

| Type of Error	Data	Description
The use of 'to infinitive'	We go to restaurant to breakfast	The word 'to' must be followed by infinitive—'to have breakfast'
	I go to library read some books	The word 'to' must be followed by infinitive—'to library to read'

Errors on verb and verb construction occured mainly matters of using 'to infinitive'. The students mystified constructing to followed by noun instead of 'to infinitive'. They gravitated writing 'go to restaurant <u>to breakfast</u>' instead of 'go to restaurant <u>to have breakfast</u>' and 'go to library read' instead of 'go to library to read'.

Based on the research result on the Tables above, the students' errors were identified and classified based on syntax error in linguistic category taxonomy. The classification of errors include noun phrase, verb phrase, word order, verb and verb construction, and transformation. After finding the types of error, the sources of error were then analyzed based on the questionnaires (see Table 6).

Table 6. Students' Responses

Students' Responses	Yes (%)	No. (%)
Transfer rules from mother tongue to English	25.80	74.20
Understand the rules of English but cannot write it properly	87.09	12.91
Afraid and/or shy while writing in the class	96.77	3.23
Errors are essential matters to study	80.64	19.36
Make effort to write in English without considering the `correct grammar	64.51	35.49
The teacher of English engage the students during writing activities in the classroom	32.25	67.75

By referring to the responses on Table 6, the cause of students' grammatical errors was then classified into 6 namely interference, overgeneralization, performance error, markers of transitional competence, strategy of communication and assimilation, and teacher-induced error (see Table 7). The responses were then evaluated for the sake of enumerating the cause of students' grammatical errors (see Chart 1).
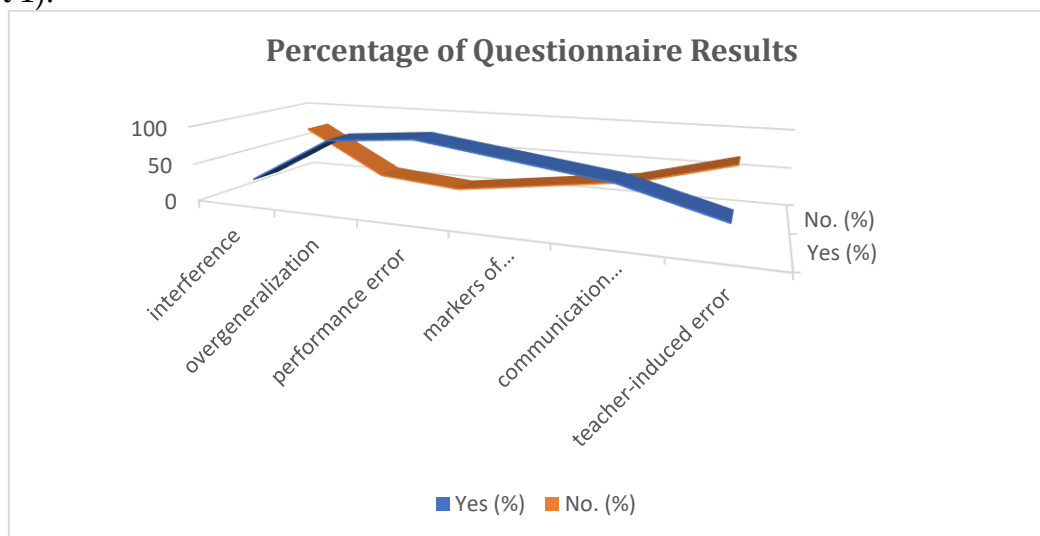
Chart 1. Six Causes of Grammatical Errors

Among six causes of students' errors, interference was the least cause while there were three main causes gave the most impact on students' expository writing namely being overwrought, understanding English rules but unable to write, and awareness on the importance of errors proposition. Interference as the most slight cause on expository writing opposes interference mainly mother tongue interference as the primary cause of errors in descriptive writing (Ni'amah & Kristanti, 2024). Matters of understanding language rules and psychological factors are also caused Arabic grammatical errors particularly on transitive verbs with preposition (Rahmat, 2021). Thus, understanding language rules is proven to be main cause of students' grammatical errors.

Table 7. The Causes of Students' Error

Cause	Percentage (%)
Interference	25.80
Overgeneralization	87.09
Performance error	96.77
Markers of transitional competence	80.64
Strategy of communication and assimilation	64.51
Teacher-induced error	67.75

Table 7 displays the largest cause of students' grammatical error is performance error. The error occured due to limitations in memory during speaking or writing, rather than a lack of knowledge about the rules. There are also overgeneralization and markers of transitional competence as the cause of students' grammatical errors. Students apply one grammatical rule broadly without considering exceptions, for example, "goed" as the past form of "go". The example occured since U-shaped pattern suggests that language development is not a straightforward progression but involves periods of apparent regression as children transition from memorizing forms to applying and refining grammatical rules (Taatgen & Anderson, 2002), while the term suppletion may serve as a convenient label for describing pairs like *went/*goed, a deeper analysis reveals distinct phonological and morphosyntactic mechanisms at play (Kayne, 2019). "Markers of transitional competence" errors reflect learners' efforts to construct the target language system and are a natural part of the interlanguage process (Selinker, 1972). It proves the students' difficulties in writing exposition text is mainly caused by students' feeling while writing in the class that effects their performances. However, their errors are a natural part of language acquisition and can provide insights into their language learning process.

CONCLUSION

There were five categories of EFL students' grammatical errors namely noun phrase, verb phrase, word order, transformation, verb and verb construction. Among those five categories, eleventh grade students' difficulties in exposition text writing were mostly on noun phrase and verb phrase. Students' grammatical errors on noun phrase included determiner, nominalization, omission of suffix -s/-es, and preposition, while students' grammatical errors on verb phrase incorporated omission

of verb and agreement of subject and verb. Those grammatical errors were caused by interference, overgeneralization, performance error, markers of transitional competence, strategy of communication and assimilation, and teacher-induced error. Among those six causes, performance error took the most influence. However, there might be bigger cause related to the students' internal factors. Thus, further research needs to be conducted such as figuring out learners' psychology in English class for the sake of English teaching improvement.

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