An Analysis Of Errors In Descriptive Texts Composed By Tenth-Grade Students At SMKN 5 Palu

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the types and frequencies of linguistic errors found in descriptive texts written by tenth-grade students of SMKN 5 Palu. The research employs a descriptive qualitative method to analyze students' written work using the error taxonomy proposed by Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982), which categorizes errors into omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. Data were collected from 32 students who completed a writing task focused on descriptive text production. The findings reveal a total of 278 errors across all samples, with misformation errors being the most prevalent (36.69%), followed closely by omission errors (35.25%). Addition errors accounted for 15.47%, while misordering errors represented 12.59% of the total errors. These results indicate significant challenges among students in applying correct grammatical structures, vocabulary, and sentence organization when writing descriptive texts. The study underscores the need for more focused instruction in grammar, vocabulary development, and writing practice to help students improve their descriptive writing skills. Additionally, the findings suggest that error analysis can serve as an effective diagnostic tool for identifying students' writing difficulties and guiding targeted pedagogical interventions. Overall, this research contributes valuable insights into the nature of writing errors in Indonesian EFL classrooms and highlights the importance of tailored instructional approaches to enhance students' writing competence.
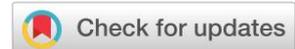
1. Introduction

Writing is widely recognized as one of the most challenging skills for language learners, particularly in contexts where English is taught as a foreign language (EFL). While listening and speaking often emerge naturally through exposure and interaction, writing demands deliberate mastery of language structures, vocabulary, and discourse organization (Hyland, 2019; Rahman & Weda, 2019; Adinda et al., 2025). Among the various text types that EFL students are required to produce, descriptive writing plays a crucial role because it develops learners' ability to describe people, places, objects, or events in clear and vivid language (Emilia, 2020). However, many Indonesian students still face significant obstacles in producing accurate and coherent descriptive texts.

In Indonesia, English is taught from the primary level up to tertiary education as part of the national curriculum. Yet despite years of formal instruction, many high school students continue to produce writing that contains numerous errors, particularly in grammar, vocabulary choice, and text organization (Utami et al., 2022; Anggawirya et al., 2021; Ananda et al., 2025). These errors can obscure meaning, reduce the clarity of communication, and hinder students' academic performance, especially when descriptive texts are required for examinations or further studies. Studies indicate that errors in writing not only reflect gaps in linguistic knowledge but also highlight issues related to teaching methods, student motivation, and insufficient writing practice (Widodo, 2021).

Error analysis offers valuable insights into the common difficulties faced by students and serves as a diagnostic tool to inform teaching practices (Corder, 1981; Ellis, 2016; Kyeongjae et al., 2025). By systematically identifying and categorizing errors, teachers can tailor instruction to address learners' specific needs, ultimately improving writing competence. Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982) introduced categories such as omission, addition, misformation, and misordering to classify errors, a framework that remains highly relevant in contemporary studies (Saville-Troike & Barto,

2017). Recent research emphasizes the importance of error analysis in EFL contexts to enhance pedagogical approaches and learner outcomes (Nassaji, 2021).

Descriptive writing is often used as a benchmark for assessing students' writing proficiency in Indonesian high schools. According to the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture (2021), descriptive texts form a core component of the English syllabus for the tenth grade. Writing descriptive texts enables students to express observations, emotions, and perceptions, fostering both linguistic and cognitive development. Nevertheless, crafting effective descriptive texts requires mastery of specific language features, such as adjectives, the use of present tense, logical organization of ideas, and appropriate vocabulary choices (Hyland, 2019; Dalyan et al., 2025). Many learners struggle to implement these features correctly, leading to frequent grammatical mistakes, lexical errors, and issues in textual coherence.

Preliminary observations at SMKN 5 Palu revealed that tenth-grade students often experience difficulties in writing descriptive texts. Common errors observed include incorrect verb tenses, misused adjectives, word order issues, and limited vocabulary, which collectively hinder students' ability to produce clear and accurate writing. Similar findings have been reported in other Indonesian contexts, suggesting that these challenges are widespread among EFL learners in vocational schools (Putri & Handayani, 2022). This situation underscores the importance of systematically identifying the types and frequencies of errors in students' writing to inform targeted instructional interventions.

Moreover, research indicates that error patterns vary not only by linguistic competence but also by educational context, learners' exposure to English, and instructional practices (Nassaji, 2021). Vocational high school students, such as those at SMKN 5 Palu, may encounter additional challenges because their English instruction is often tailored toward specific vocational purposes rather than general academic literacy (Yuliana & Arifin, 2023). As a result, their exposure to descriptive writing may be limited, contributing to persistent errors and insufficient writing proficiency.

Given these challenges, there is an urgent need for research that focuses on analyzing the errors found in students' descriptive texts. Such research can provide valuable data for teachers, curriculum developers, and policymakers seeking to improve English writing instruction. By identifying the specific types of errors students make, educators can design targeted remediation strategies, create more effective learning materials, and support students in achieving better writing outcomes (Widodo, 2021; Hyland, 2019).

Therefore, the present study aims to investigate the types and frequencies of errors found in descriptive texts written by the tenth-grade students of SMKN 5 Palu. It seeks to answer the following research questions: (1) What types of errors are commonly found in students' descriptive writing? and (2) What are the most frequent errors made by the students? It is hoped that the findings of this study will contribute to improving teaching practices in writing classes and ultimately enhance the writing proficiency of EFL learners in Indonesian vocational schools.

2. Methodology

This research employed a descriptive qualitative design to identify and describe the types and frequencies of errors found in students' descriptive writing. This design was selected because it allows the researcher to analyze students' writing in depth without changing the teaching and learning process. By using this approach, the study aimed to describe actual writing problems as they appear in the classroom context. This method is suitable for understanding common language errors based on real student work (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The participants of this study were 32 tenth-grade students at SMKN 5 Palu. All participants had recently learned descriptive text writing as part of the national English curriculum. This ensured that the students were familiar with the genre and actively engaged in writing activities at the time of data collection. The participants were selected from one intact class to represent a natural classroom setting.

Data were collected through a writing test administered during a regular English lesson. The students were asked to write a descriptive text based on a given topic prepared by the researcher. The writing task was developed according to curriculum guidelines and focused on key language features of descriptive texts, including grammar, vocabulary use, and text organization (Hyland, 2019). Students were given 45 minutes to complete the task under the supervision of their English teacher to ensure a controlled and fair testing situation.

After the writing session, all student texts were collected and coded anonymously to protect students' identities. Each text was then transcribed into a digital format to make the analysis more systematic and accurate. The researcher carefully read each text several times to gain a clear understanding of the students' writing performance. This step helped ensure that no errors were overlooked during the analysis process.

The data analysis followed the error analysis framework proposed by Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982). Errors were classified into four categories: omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. The frequency of each error type was counted to determine which errors occurred most often. To enhance the reliability of the analysis, another English teacher independently reviewed part of the data and the error classification. A high level of agreement between the two coders indicated consistent and reliable coding results (McHugh, 2012).

Ethical considerations were carefully addressed throughout the research process. Students' names were not included in the data, and all information was kept confidential. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the school administration, and the research was carried out in accordance with ethical standards for educational research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Results

This study aimed to identify the types and frequencies of errors found in descriptive texts written by tenth-grade students of SMKN 5 Palu. The writing samples collected from 32 students were analyzed based on Dulay, Burt, and Krashen's (1982) error analysis framework. The errors were categorized into four main types: omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. The analysis revealed a total of 278 errors across all student writing samples. The distribution of these errors is shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Types and Frequency of Errors in Students' Descriptive Texts

Type of Error	Number of Errors	Percentage (%)	Examples Found in Students' Writing
Omission	98	35.25%	*"She beautiful"* (missing verb "is")
Addition	43	15.47%	*"She is is my friend."* (double "is")
Misformation	102	36.69%	*"He have a new bag."* instead of "has"
Misordering	35	12.59%	*"Very she is kind."* instead of "She is very kind."
Total	278	100%	

The results indicate that misformation errors were the most frequent, accounting for 36.69% of all errors. Many students struggled with correct verb forms, subject-verb agreement, and the proper use of adjectives or determiners. Examples include incorrect verb conjugations like "He have a dog" instead of "He has a dog."

Omission errors were identified as the second most frequent type of error, accounting for 35.25% of the total errors found in students' descriptive texts. These errors occurred when students failed to include important grammatical elements required for correct sentence construction. Commonly omitted elements included auxiliary verbs, articles, and subject pronouns. This pattern suggests that students still had difficulties applying basic sentence structures in English. For example, several students wrote "She beautiful" instead of the grammatically correct form "She is beautiful," indicating a lack of awareness of the need for a linking verb in simple sentences.

Addition errors made up 15.47% of all identified errors in the students' writing. These errors occurred when students added unnecessary words or repeated certain elements within a sentence. Such additions often resulted in awkward or incorrect sentence structures. This problem may be related to students' uncertainty about correct grammatical forms, leading them to overuse certain words. An example of this error can be seen in the sentence "She is is my friend," where the auxiliary verb was repeated unnecessarily.

Misordering errors were the least frequent type of error, representing 12.59% of the total errors. These errors involved incorrect word order, which affected sentence clarity and meaning. Students often placed adverbs, verbs, or adjectives in inappropriate positions within a sentence. Although less common, misordering errors still showed that students struggled with English sentence patterns. For instance, the sentence "Very she is kind" demonstrates incorrect word placement, as the correct form should be "She is very kind." Overall, the findings show that students face significant challenges in accurately constructing English sentences, particularly in areas of grammar and word order. This suggests a need for focused instruction on grammar, sentence structure, and practice in writing descriptive texts. The detailed

identification of error types provides valuable insights for English teachers to plan targeted remedial activities to help students improve their writing skills.

3.2 Discussion

The findings of this study provide significant insight into the challenges faced by tenth-grade students at SMKN 5 Palu in writing descriptive texts. The analysis revealed that students produced various errors categorized into omission, addition, misformation, and misordering, with misformation errors being the most frequent. These results align with previous research suggesting that EFL learners often struggle with grammatical accuracy and sentence construction due to limited language exposure and insufficient practice in using English for writing (Hyland, 2019; Utami et al., 2022).

The dominance of misformation errors (36.69%) indicates that students frequently used incorrect word forms, such as misusing verbs, adjectives, or articles. For instance, errors like "He have a dog" instead of "He has a dog" show that students have not fully internalized basic rules of subject-verb agreement. This is consistent with Ellis (2016), who emphasizes that such grammatical errors are common among learners transitioning from knowledge of isolated vocabulary to producing connected discourse. Additionally, recent studies have highlighted that Indonesian students often confuse English tenses and forms because of differences from their native language structures (Putri & Handayani, 2022).

Omission errors accounted for 35.25% of the errors found. These errors, such as leaving out auxiliary verbs or articles (e.g., "She beautiful"), suggest that students lack confidence in constructing complete sentences. Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982) explain that omissions often occur because learners prioritize content words over grammatical structure, leading to incomplete sentences. Recent research underscores that omission errors are still highly prevalent among Indonesian EFL students, especially at the high school level, where limited classroom hours restrict opportunities for writing practice (Yuliana & Arifin, 2023).

Addition errors, which comprised 15.47% of total errors, included unnecessary repetition of words, such as "She is is my friend." These errors may result from students' overgeneralization of language rules or anxiety when writing in English, leading them to add words for emphasis or security (Saville-Troike & Barto, 2017). This pattern was also reported by Widodo (2021), who noted that Indonesian students sometimes include redundant words due to uncertainty about English sentence structures. Misordering errors were the least frequent at 12.59%. Examples like "Very she is kind" reflect difficulties in applying English syntactic rules, which often differ substantially from Indonesian sentence structures. This finding supports previous research suggesting that word order errors are common in learners from languages with different syntactic patterns (Nation, 2009; Oakhill et al., 2020).

Collectively, these findings emphasize that students at SMKN 5 Palu face considerable challenges in writing accurate and coherent descriptive texts. This issue is particularly significant given the role of writing in academic achievement and vocational training. According to Hyland (2019), writing is not merely a linguistic activity but also a social and cognitive skill requiring practice and feedback. The errors identified in this study suggest that students may benefit from more explicit instruction in grammar, structured practice in sentence construction, and increased opportunities for writing descriptive texts.

Furthermore, the results highlight the importance of error analysis as a diagnostic tool. By identifying specific error patterns, teachers can design targeted interventions, such as grammar-focused lessons or writing workshops, to help students overcome their difficulties (Nassaji, 2021). Research indicates that teaching metacognitive strategies, such as self-monitoring and revising, can significantly reduce writing errors and improve overall performance (Grabe & Stoller, 2019). This study, therefore, contributes valuable insights into the nature of writing errors among vocational high school students in Indonesia. Addressing these errors through focused teaching and practice could enhance students' writing skills and better prepare them for both academic and professional communication.

4. Conclusion

This study aimed to identify and categorize the common errors found in descriptive texts written by tenth-grade students at SMKN 5 Palu. Using Dulay, Burt, and Krashen's (1982) error analysis framework, the research found that students produced four main types of errors: misformation, omission, addition, and misordering. Among these, misformation and omission were the most dominant, showing students' struggles with grammar rules, especially verb usage, sentence completeness, and subject-verb agreement.

The results highlight that students still face significant challenges in applying basic grammar knowledge when writing in English. These errors not only reduce the clarity of students' writing but also indicate gaps in language instruction and students' limited writing practice. Therefore, it is crucial for English teachers to provide more focused instruction on sentence structure, grammar, and vocabulary development. Integrating regular writing activities with constructive feedback can help students become more aware of their common errors and improve their overall writing performance.

In conclusion, this study emphasizes the importance of error analysis in understanding student difficulties and improving writing instruction in EFL classrooms. The findings can be used by teachers and curriculum developers to design targeted interventions that address students' specific writing problems. Future studies may extend this research by exploring the causes of errors more deeply or testing the effectiveness of remedial teaching strategies.

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