



Identifying and Classifying Spelling and Vocabulary Errors in English Language Learning: an Error Analysis Approach

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the study: This study aims to identify and classify spelling and vocabulary errors made by students in the process of learning English. This study utilizes an error analysis approach to investigate students' written work, emphasizing spelling and vocabulary errors.

Methodology: This study utilizes an error analysis approach to investigate students' written work, emphasizing spelling and vocabulary errors. This study uses a descriptive qualitative method to analyze students' written assignments.

Main Findings: The findings indicate that the most frequent writing errors involve prepositions and pronouns, each accounting for 0.04%, followed by article at 0.07%, and word choice at 0.09%. The most frequent writing error identified is related to spelling, accounting for 2.52%. The most common vocabulary-related writing error was punctuation, accounting for 6.78%, followed by subject-verb agreement at 0.45%. Errors in fragments and capitalization each made up 0.23%, while errors in the use of tenses (0.07%) and omissions (0.04%).

Novelty/Originality of this study: The novelty of this research lies in its focus on two micro-linguistic aspects (spelling and vocabulary) that are rarely explored in previous studies. Using an error analysis approach, it identifies and categorizes students' errors, offering practical insights and contributions to improving the teaching of academic English writing at the tertiary education level.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Writing involves delivering messages from the author to the reader using written language. Hasani [1] defines it as the activity of expressing ideas, emotions, observations, imagination, beliefs, and experiences through written symbols as a means of communication. Meanwhile, Dalman [2] describes writing as a creative process of articulating ideas in written form to inform, persuade, or entertain.

Sudarman et al [3] states that writing aims to build students' writing proficiency, encourage their enjoyment of writing, and cultivate a constructive mindset through writing tasks. Similarly, Graves [4] highlights that writing can enhance cognitive abilities, foster personal initiative, boost self-confidence, and improve information-gathering skills.

Proficiency in English writing is a crucial skill for nursing students, especially in today's globalized world, where cross-cultural communication is increasingly common. This ability is not only important for academic success but also plays a vital role in clinical practice, including the preparation of medical documentation, nursing reports, and written communication with healthcare professionals and patients from

diverse language backgrounds. Analyzing linguistic elements in writing can deepen our understanding of writing quality and development, while also enhancing the teaching and learning of writing skills and strategies [5]. In nursing, English writing competence also serves as a gateway to accessing international scientific literature, staying updated with current medical knowledge, and actively participating in academic and professional discussions on a global scale.

Improving English writing skills remains a challenge for many nursing students. According to Webb and Nation [6] having a strong vocabulary foundation is essential for effective writing, especially in academic settings, where appropriate word choice greatly influences clarity and accuracy. Students often struggle with several issues, such as a limited grasp of English medical terms, difficulty forming well-structured and grammatically correct sentences, and a lack of confidence in articulating their ideas through writing. Additionally, the structural differences between English and their native language frequently lead to grammatical errors and improper punctuation. Although many nursing students are familiar with the specialized terminology of their field, they often have limited exposure to general and academic vocabulary, which are equally important for producing coherent academic texts.

A lack of consistent practice significantly hinders nursing students' development in English writing. The absence of specialized training programs tailored to language improvement limits students' opportunities to enhance their writing competence. As a result, many students experience low confidence and tend to avoid English-based assignments, particularly those involving academic or formal writing. Common issues in language learning, such as spelling mistakes and improper vocabulary usage are not unique to second language learners and may even affect native speakers. These difficulties often arise from limited understanding of language structure, interference from the first language, and insufficient vocabulary knowledge Schmitt [7], Richards & Schmidt [8].

The issue is exacerbated by teaching approaches that often treat spelling and vocabulary errors in a superficial manner. Instead of analyzing the root causes or recognizing recurring patterns, instructors may simply mark the mistakes without offering meaningful feedback. This leaves students unaware of why the errors occurred, increasing the likelihood of repeated mistakes in future writing tasks. Such minimal feedback often prevents students from developing a deeper understanding of language mechanics and self-correction strategies. Ferris [9] argues that effective error correction should involve not only identifying mistakes but also providing explanations and encouraging active student reflection. When instructors fail to distinguish between different types of errors, such as those related to grammar, vocabulary, or mechanics, students are less likely to internalize corrections and apply them in future writing tasks. Moreover, Hyland & Hyland [10] emphasize the importance of dialogic feedback, where teachers engage students in conversations about their writing, enabling them to better grasp the purpose behind revisions. Without this interaction, feedback becomes a one way process, reducing its pedagogical value and long term impact on writing development.

Prior research highlights that error analysis serves as a powerful tool to uncover recurring mistake patterns among EFL learners. Khansir [11] emphasizes that errors related to spelling and vocabulary rank among the most frequent challenges in EFL writing, warranting focused attention in teaching methods. Supporting this, Putri et al [12] suggest that systematically categorizing these errors enables educators to design targeted instructional materials that address the most prevalent mistakes. Meanwhile, Rahmawati et al [13] investigated lexical inaccuracies in student writing but did not thoroughly integrate these findings with spelling errors as part of a comprehensive examination of students' written output. Many earlier studies tend to aggregate diverse linguistic errors without delving deeply into the critical dimensions of spelling and vocabulary, which are essential for enhancing clarity and precision in student compositions. These recurring mistakes point to underlying difficulties in mastering written English. Furthermore, a large portion of the existing literature lacks a nuanced classification of errors grounded in specific linguistic categories, such as omission, addition, misformation, and misordering, especially within the scope of spelling and vocabulary errors.

Despite the growing emphasis on improving English language proficiency, particularly in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) contexts, most existing research has primarily focused on grammar and speaking skills, while spelling and vocabulary errors—especially in written communication—have received comparatively limited attention. Previous studies tend to treat these errors in isolation or as minor subcategories within broader linguistic analyses, resulting in a lack of comprehensive frameworks that classify and explain such errors systematically. Furthermore, there is a noticeable gap in localized studies that examine these errors within specific learner populations, particularly those in non-English-speaking countries where English is taught as a foreign language.

Given the increasing demand for competent English users in both academic and professional settings, there is an urgent need to explore the nature of learners' written errors to improve the effectiveness of instructional methods. Spelling and vocabulary mastery are essential components of language proficiency, and persistent errors in these areas can hinder learners' ability to communicate clearly and perform well in academic tasks.

The originality of this research lies in its targeted examination of two micro linguistic elements (spelling and vocabulary) which have not been the central focus in much of the previous literature. Utilizing an error analysis framework, this study identifies and categorizes student errors based on linguistic taxonomies such as omission, addition, misformation, and misordering [14]. Through this approach, the study offers a practical and novel contribution to enhancing the teaching of academic writing in English at the tertiary level.

This study investigates university students' spelling and vocabulary errors in English language learning through the framework of error analysis. As proposed by Corder [15], error analysis offers valuable insights into learners' interlanguage and helps identify patterns in second language development. The study aims to provide a clearer understanding of the linguistic difficulties students encounter in writing, which is considered one of the essential productive skills in mastering a foreign language [16].

This study contributes to applied linguistics by offering a focused analysis within the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, specifically addressing errors in spelling and vocabulary areas that have received comparatively less attention than grammatical structures. It introduces a refined perspective on error analysis by applying linguistic categories such as omission, addition, misformation, and misordering [14] to these micro linguistic elements. This model enhances the methodological tools available for language error research and can serve as a useful foundation for future studies with a more specialized focus.

Beyond its theoretical significance, this study also offers practical implications. The results can inform educators in the development of teaching resources, instructional strategies, and targeted interventions that are better aligned with learners' contextual and individual linguistic needs.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

2.1. Type of Research

This study employed a qualitative descriptive method aimed at identifying and classifying spelling and vocabulary errors found in students' writing. This approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to explore the natural occurrence of language errors without manipulating variables. An error analysis framework was applied to systematically examine the forms and causes of these errors, as suggested by Creswell [17] to provide a detailed depiction of the types of errors made by nursing students in English sentence writing. The qualitative method is appropriate because the data consist of students' written texts, allowing for in-depth exploration of error patterns, meanings, and underlying causes, in line with the data analysis techniques described by Miles & Huberman [18]. The error analysis framework, originally developed by Corder [15] is applied both as the theoretical foundation and as an analytical tool to systematically identify, classify, and interpret the errors in students' writing.

2.2. Population and Research Sample

The study was carried out at Widya Nusantara University, situated on Untad 1 Street, Palu. The participants consisted of 42 nursing students in their second year. Total sampling was applied, meaning all members of the population were included in the sample. The primary data collected comprised the students' English writing assignments created during the instructional activities.

2.3. Research Instruments

The main instrument used in this study was the students' written essays, which were collected as part of their writing course assignments. Each essay was written in English, with a minimum of 300 words, and followed a topic predetermined by the course instructor. In addition to the written texts, an observation sheet and short interviews were employed to collect contextual information and clarify specific errors. The researcher used a classification guideline based on the theories of Corder [15] and Dulay et al [14] to identify and categorize spelling and vocabulary errors.

2.4. Data Collection Techniques

The data were collected from students' written essays submitted as part of their coursework. All essays were collected, coded, and sorted for analysis. The researcher conducted a document analysis by carefully reading and marking errors found in each text. To enrich the study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected participants to understand the possible reasoning behind specific errors and their thought processes during the writing process.

2.5 Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis followed the error analysis procedure outlined by Ellis [19] and Corder [20], which involves several steps: gathering student writing samples, identifying and categorizing the errors, interpreting the underlying causes, and, when needed, quantifying the frequency and common patterns of these errors.

2.6. Research Procedures

This study followed a systematic procedure consisting of five main stages. First, in the planning phase, institutional approval was obtained, sampling criteria were established, and guidelines for error classification

were prepared. Second, during data collection, students' written assignments were gathered as the primary data source. Third, the data analysis involved reviewing each text to identify, classify, and quantify spelling and vocabulary errors. Fourth, clarification interviews were conducted with selected participants to explore possible causes of recurring errors. In the final stage, the findings were interpreted and reported through both narrative descriptions and tabular representations, followed by a comparative analysis with prior research to derive insightful conclusions and relevant educational implications.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Research Results

Drawing from the study's findings, which were derived from a complete sample, various error types were observed in the English sentence structures produced by Nursing Department students at Widya Nusantara University, Palu, as detailed in the following table.

Table 1. Grammatical Errors

Number	Types of errors	Percentage
1	Preposition	0.04%
2	Pronoun	0.04%
3	Word choice	0.09%
4	Article	0.07%
5	Spelling	2.52%

Table 1 illustrates that writing errors most frequently appear in the use of prepositions and pronouns, each representing 0.04% of the total. These are followed by article misuse (0.07%) and incorrect word choice (0.09%). The most prevalent error type is spelling, comprising 2.52% of all identified cases.

Table 2. Mechanical Error

Number	Types of Errors	Frequency	Percentage
1	Fragment	10	0.23%
2	Omission	3	0.07%
3	Tenses	2	0.04%
4	Subject-Verb Agreement	19	0.45%
5	Capitalization	10	0.23%
6	Punctuation	285	6.78%

Table 2 reveals that punctuation errors appear most frequently, constituting 6.78% of the total. Following this are mistakes involving subject-verb agreement at 0.45%. Both fragments and capitalization issues show equal occurrence rates of 0.23%. The least common writing issues are errors in tense usage and omission, representing 0.07% and 0.04%, respectively.

The following are common writing errors observed among students, accompanied by illustrative examples:

1. Preposition errors (0.04%) occurred when required prepositions were omitted, as seen in "I live Palu" instead of the correct form "I live in Palu".
2. Pronoun misuse (0.04%) included gender-related inaccuracies, such as "His name is Arum" instead of "Her name is Arum".
3. Word choice errors (0.09%) appeared in expressions like "I'm two siblings", which should correctly be "I have two siblings".
4. Article misuse (0.07%) involved inappropriate use before vowel sounds, e.g., "a independent woman" rather than "an independent woman".
5. Spelling mistakes (2.52%), the most frequent error, were seen in words like "Neadle" instead of "needle".
6. Sentence fragments (0.23%) included structures like "Brain is the keep memories", which should be revised to "The brain keeps memories".
7. Omission errors (0.07%) sometimes included unnecessary articles, such as in "a fried rice", which should be "fried rice".
8. Tense errors (0.04%) reflected inaccurate use of verb tenses for ongoing actions, for example: "I studied at Widya Nusantara" instead of "I have been studying at Widya Nusantara".
9. Subject-verb agreement errors (0.45%) occurred in constructions like "They has the authority", which should be "They have the authority".
10. Capitalization errors (0.23%) involved failure to capitalize proper nouns, such as writing "erope" instead of "Europe".

11. Finally, punctuation errors (6.78%) the most frequent were found in run on sentences or comma splices, as in "my hoby drawing", which should be revised to complete, grammatically correct sentences like "My hobby is drawing".

3.2. Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that several grammatical components significantly contributed to students' writing errors. Frequent issues were observed in the use of prepositions and pronouns, which affected the clarity and cohesion of sentences [21]. These results align with the study conducted by Aaqil et al [21], which also highlighted preposition misuse and subject–verb disagreement as recurring problems among ESL learners. Likewise, Ahmed et al [22] reported that improper word choice and article usage were major obstacles to effective written communication, supporting the present study's findings regarding lexical inaccuracies.

Moreover, consistent with Fitria's [23] findings, spelling errors were widespread and often disrupted meaning. The impact of fragmented sentences, omission of necessary elements, and tense inconsistencies also mirrors the conclusions drawn by earlier studies emphasizing syntactic complexity as a common barrier for non-native writers [16], [24]. Similarly, Kartika et al [25] and Elfa et al [26] observed that poor punctuation and capitalization reduced the readability and professionalism of academic writing, reinforcing the present study's argument that mechanics play a critical role in writing quality.

When examined more deeply, the causes of these errors appear multifaceted. As stated by Corder [20], first language interference is a major source of grammatical transfer errors, and this was evident in the data from the current research. Additionally, a lack of grammatical mastery—particularly regarding tenses, parts of speech, and subject–verb agreement—was confirmed as a dominant contributing factor, aligning with Richard and Schmidt's view in [8]. Furthermore, the findings corroborate Webb and Nation's [6] claim that limited vocabulary knowledge often leads to inappropriate word use and reliance on direct translation from the learners' native language.

Negative phonological transfer, as discussed by Odlin [27], was also evident in persistent spelling errors in the writing samples. The role of insufficient writing practice was consistent with Richards and Renandya's [16] assertion that regular writing opportunities are essential for developing fluency and accuracy. Additionally, the lack of consistent feedback mechanisms may allow recurring errors to remain uncorrected—a point emphasized by Ferris [28]. Psychological elements, such as anxiety and fear of making mistakes, further exacerbate writing difficulties, as Krashen noted in [29], and are clearly observable among the student participants in this study.

Environmental factors also played a role. Brown [30] argued that inadequate exposure to the target language can negatively affect a learner's linguistic intuition. This aligns with the present research, where limited immersion in English reduced students' ability to internalize proper language patterns. Taken together, the findings highlight a complex interplay between linguistic competence, cognitive factors, and the learning environment. These elements collectively influence the grammatical accuracy and expressive fluency of students' writing. Thus, a generalization can be drawn that error patterns in student writing are not merely isolated linguistic problems but are embedded within broader pedagogical and psychological contexts.

In terms of research novelty, this study offers a specific contribution by analyzing grammatical error patterns among nursing students—an academic group that is underrepresented in existing error analysis literature. While many previous studies focused on English or education majors, this research brings new insight into the writing challenges faced by learners from non-language disciplines. However, to fully emphasize this novelty, it is crucial to conduct a comparative analysis between this study's findings and those of previous works across different student populations and disciplines. This would further substantiate the unique aspects of error manifestation within specific academic contexts.

Based on the study findings, several important implications can be drawn for application in educational contexts. For English language instructors, this study provides a clearer understanding of the common errors made by students, allowing for the development of targeted teaching strategies that address learners' specific linguistic weaknesses. As Richards & Renandya [16] emphasize, effective instruction must be responsive to learners' needs, particularly when addressing difficulties in productive skills such as writing. Additionally, Ferris [28] argues that identifying recurring student errors is a critical step toward designing appropriate corrective feedback and instructional interventions. For students, these findings serve to raise awareness and increase motivation to improve language competence, especially in areas such as spelling and vocabulary. Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of error analysis in the field of foreign language acquisition and provides a practical foundation for improving the quality of English language curricula and instructional materials.

Drawing from the results of this study, it is recommended that structured English writing practice and peer feedback sessions be integrated into the curriculum for nursing students to help reduce recurrent writing errors. Educators may also consider utilizing direct correction techniques to address mistakes in student work immediately and effectively. Future research is encouraged to expand the analytical scope by including

grammatical and syntactic error types, employing a broader participant sample, and exploring alternative or mixed-method approaches for deeper investigation.

The results of this study provide meaningful implications for English language teaching, particularly in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The identification and classification of spelling and vocabulary errors can help educators better understand the areas where learners struggle in written communication. These insights can be used to inform the development of more targeted teaching strategies, including explicit instruction on common lexical and orthographic issues. Moreover, language instructors can use error patterns as diagnostic tools to assess student progress and tailor feedback more effectively.

On a broader level, this study contributes to the field of applied linguistics by highlighting the importance of addressing both vocabulary and spelling accuracy as integral components of writing proficiency. Unlike many studies that focus primarily on grammatical or syntactic errors, this research emphasizes the often-overlooked aspects of word-level accuracy, offering a more comprehensive understanding of learner language development.

Although this study offers meaningful insights, it is not without limitations. Firstly, the data were derived solely from written essays, potentially limiting the generalizability of the findings to other forms of language use, such as oral communication or informal digital interactions. Secondly, the research employed a descriptive analytical approach without incorporating statistical tests, which may have enhanced the robustness and comparability of the results.

Future research should consider involving a larger and more diverse sample, including learners from different educational levels, institutions, or regions, to provide a more generalizable perspective on error patterns. Finally, integrating quantitative analysis or mixed-method approaches would offer a more robust framework for interpreting the causes and frequency of learner errors.

4. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to identify and classify spelling and vocabulary errors in English language learning using an error analysis approach. Based on the analysis of students' written texts, it was found that spelling and vocabulary errors occurred frequently and took various forms, including misspellings, word choice errors, and incorrect word usage. These errors reflect common difficulties faced by EFL learners at the word level, often influenced by limited lexical knowledge, first language interference, and insufficient exposure to authentic English usage.

In light of the study results, it is advised to incorporate focused spelling instruction into the curriculum, emphasizing the most frequent error patterns. Contextual methods should be used in vocabulary teaching to enhance learners' accuracy in word usage and improve long-term retention. Furthermore, conducting regular diagnostic evaluations is essential to effectively identify and respond to each learner's specific challenges. Promoting frequent reading and writing exercises is also recommended, as they provide a natural way for students to strengthen their spelling and vocabulary skills over time.

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