

Grammatical Challenges in English Writing among First-Year University Students

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Abstract

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Grammar is a crucial component of English writing, yet many first-year university students face difficulties in applying it correctly. This study aims to explore the grammatical challenges of first-year university students in English writing, including their difficulties, strategies, and perceptions. This qualitative study involved 10 first-year university students enrolled in an introductory English course at a university in Pekanbaru, providing insights into their grammatical challenges, strategies, and perceptions in English writing. Data were collected through interviews. The responses were analyzed thematically and illustrated using direct quotations. The findings revealed that students frequently struggle with tenses, subject-verb agreement, prepositions, and sentence structure. Writing frequency varied, with some students practicing regularly while others wrote only when assigned. Strategies to improve grammar included reading example sentences, using applications and books, asking peers or teachers for feedback, and self-correction. Students acknowledged that understanding grammar is important for clarity, effective communication, and academic success. The study highlights the need for structured grammar instruction, regular writing practice, and effective feedback. Providing reliable resources and emphasizing common error patterns can help students overcome grammatical challenges and enhance their writing skills. It is recommended that educators provide targeted grammar lessons focusing on common errors, integrate digital tools to support autonomous learning, and encourage consistent writing practice to help students enhance their grammar skills and overall writing proficiency.

Kata Kunci:

*Menulis bahasa
Inggris, tantangan
tata bahasa,
mahasiswa tahun*

Abstrak

Tata bahasa merupakan komponen penting dalam menulis bahasa Inggris, namun banyak mahasiswa tahun pertama menghadapi kesulitan dalam menerapkannya dengan benar. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi

*pertama, kesulitan
menulis*

tantangan tata bahasa mahasiswa tahun pertama dalam menulis bahasa Inggris, termasuk kesulitan, strategi, dan persepsi mereka. Penelitian kualitatif ini melibatkan 10 mahasiswa tahun pertama yang mengikuti mata kuliah pengantar bahasa Inggris di sebuah universitas di Pekanbaru, sehingga memberikan wawasan mengenai tantangan, strategi, dan persepsi mereka dalam menulis bahasa Inggris. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara. Respon peserta dianalisis secara tematik dan diperjelas dengan kutipan langsung. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa sering mengalami kesulitan pada penggunaan tense, kesesuaian subjek-predikat, preposisi, dan struktur kalimat. Frekuensi menulis bervariasi, dengan beberapa mahasiswa berlatih secara rutin, sementara yang lain hanya menulis saat diberikan tugas. Strategi untuk meningkatkan tata bahasa meliputi membaca contoh kalimat, menggunakan aplikasi dan buku, meminta umpan balik dari teman atau dosen, serta melakukan koreksi diri. Mahasiswa menyadari bahwa memahami tata bahasa penting untuk kejelasan, komunikasi yang efektif, dan keberhasilan akademik. Penelitian ini menekankan pentingnya pembelajaran tata bahasa yang terstruktur, latihan menulis secara rutin, dan pemberian umpan balik yang efektif. Penyediaan sumber belajar yang dapat diandalkan dan penekanan pada pola kesalahan yang umum dapat membantu mahasiswa mengatasi tantangan tata bahasa dan meningkatkan keterampilan menulis mereka. Disarankan agar pendidik memberikan pelajaran tata bahasa yang terfokus pada kesalahan umum, mengintegrasikan alat digital untuk mendukung pembelajaran mandiri, dan mendorong latihan menulis secara konsisten guna membantu mahasiswa meningkatkan keterampilan tata bahasa dan kemampuan menulis secara keseluruhan.

INTRODUCTION

Grammar is an important part of English writing for first-year university students. Many studies show that beginner learners still struggle to use correct grammar in their writing (Fitrawati & Safitri, 2021). Furthermore, grammatical errors are common among university students learning English as a foreign language (Nguyen & Chu, 2024; Sudhakar & Farheen, 2015). They often make mistakes in forming sentences, choosing verbs, and arranging ideas. These problems can make their writing unclear and hard to understand. In addition,

grammar mastery is essential in higher education because academic writing requires clarity, accuracy, and adherence to formal language conventions to meet college-level academic demands (Hyland, 2019). Therefore, it is important to study the grammatical challenges faced by new university students.

Research also shows that grammar errors appear in many types of student writing, such as descriptive and argumentative texts (Arisman, 2023; Setiati et al., 2025). Students often struggle with basic grammar rules like tenses, subject–verb agreement, and word order. They also have difficulty using articles and prepositions correctly (Zulfikar, 2020). These errors appear repeatedly in different research findings. Thus, identifying common errors can help teachers design better grammar instruction.

Grammar problems affect students' ability to write clearly in descriptive, narrative, and essay writing tasks. Many first-year students do not know which verb form to use when describing events (Fadli, 2023). They also make incomplete or disconnected sentences that reduce the clarity of their writing (Nanning et al., 2020). These issues show that their understanding of grammar is still weak. As a result, grammar instruction for beginners needs to be strengthened.

Students' first language has a strong influence on their English grammar errors. They often transfer sentence structures from their native language into English writing (Ningsih, 2015). This transfer causes incorrect patterns, missing words, or unnatural sentences. Studies also show that limited exposure to English contributes to these errors (Mubarok & Budiono, 2022). Therefore, language interference is a major factor in students' grammar challenges.

Tenses are one of the most difficult areas for first-year university students. Many learners confuse simple present, simple past, and future forms in their writing (Iswari et al., 2019). This confusion leads to sentences that are unclear or inaccurate. They also misuse verb forms in narrative and descriptive writing (Andriani & Saniti, 2020). Because of this, tense mastery is an important part of improving students' grammar.

Feedback plays an important role in helping students improve their grammar. Research shows that students can reduce errors when they receive clear corrections

from lecturers or peers (Tursini & Dikna, 2022). Some students prefer direct feedback, while others learn better through guided revision. However, not all students receive regular feedback in their writing classes. Therefore, improving the quality of feedback can support better grammar learning.

Learning resources also affect students' grammar development. Many students use online tools and grammar applications when completing writing tasks (Saumi et al., 2025). These tools are helpful, but they sometimes give incomplete or simplified explanations. Students with weak grammar foundations may depend on these tools too much (Yuliah et al., 2019). Thus, students need better and more reliable grammar resources.

Because of these challenges, first-year university students need more structured support in grammar learning. Teachers can provide focused lessons, simple exercises, and clear feedback to help students improve (Ramendra, 2021). Students also need regular writing practice to strengthen their grammar accuracy (Tlonaen, 2020). Although previous studies have emphasized the importance of grammar instruction and practice, they tend to focus either on teaching strategies or error types in general, with limited attention to the specific grammatical difficulties faced by first-year university students, as well as how these students perceive grammar and address their own challenges. To address this gap, the present study specifically examines the types of grammatical difficulties encountered by first-year university students in English writing, the strategies they use to cope with these difficulties, and their perceptions of grammar learning, with the aim of providing more targeted recommendations for improving grammar instruction at the tertiary level.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to describe the grammatical challenges faced by first-year university students in English writing, focusing on their difficulties, learning strategies, and perceptions of grammar rather than generating thematic categories. This design was chosen because the focus of

the research was to understand students' experiences, perceptions, and learning processes, rather than measure their competency quantitatively (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). By using open-ended interviews, the study aimed to capture rich, detailed descriptions of students' difficulties, strategies, and motivations related to grammar in writing.

Participant

This study involved 10 first-semester university students enrolled in an introductory English course. The term participants is used to reflect the small and focused nature of the research sample. From a total of 12 students in the class, 10 were selected because they attended classes regularly and actively participated in learning activities. Purposive sampling was employed to select participants who were able to provide rich, relevant, and meaningful information regarding their grammatical challenges in English writing (Dornyei, 2019). The small number of participants is consistent with the exploratory purpose of qualitative research, which emphasizes depth of understanding rather than generalization. The participants were first-year students with beginner to lower-intermediate levels of English proficiency and had limited prior experience in academic writing, making them appropriate subjects for exploring grammatical challenges in early university-level English writing.

Research Instrument

The primary instrument in this study was an online open-ended interview consisting of 20 questions grouped into four thematic categories: (1) students' grammatical challenges, (2) writing frequency and perceived difficulty, (3) strategies for improving grammar, and (4) perceptions of the importance of correct grammar. Prior to data collection, the interview questions were reviewed by two experts in English language teaching to ensure content validity, clarity, and relevance to the research objectives. In addition, the instrument was piloted with two first-year university students who were not included in the main study to check the clarity of the questions and the estimated time required to complete the interview. Feedback from the expert review and pilot testing was used to refine the wording of several questions. An open-ended online interview was chosen because

it allows participants to describe their experiences and challenges in detail, generating rich qualitative data while remaining practical and accessible (Dornyei, 2019).

Data Collection Technique

Data were collected online using a digital interview form containing 20 open-ended questions. The link to the form was distributed to participants via the class communication platform. Participants were given flexible time to complete the interview, allowing them to provide thoughtful and detailed responses. Before completing the questions, participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and the confidentiality of their responses. After all responses were submitted, the data were securely stored and prepared for qualitative analysis (Miles et al., 2020).

Data Analysis Technique

Data were analyzed qualitatively using the interactive model. Miles et al. (2020) stated data analysis technique includes three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. During the data reduction stage, participants' responses were first read repeatedly to gain familiarity with the data. Initial codes were then assigned to meaningful units of text, and similar codes were grouped according to the four predetermined thematic categories: (1) students' grammatical challenges, (2) writing frequency and perceived difficulty, (3) strategies to improve grammar, and (4) perceptions of the importance of grammar. During data display, these codes were organized into tables and matrices to identify patterns, similarities, and differences across responses. Conclusions were drawn by interpreting these patterns and relating them to students' grammar challenges and learning experiences. To ensure trustworthiness, the researchers used member checking by sharing summaries with participants, peer debriefing through discussions with a fellow researcher, and an audit trail to document all stages of data collection, coding, and analysis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

This section presents the findings of the study regarding students' difficulties and experiences in learning English grammar through writing. The analysis focuses on students' challenges in grammar, writing frequency and perceived difficulty, strategies to improve grammar, and importance of correct grammar. The findings are illustrated using direct quotations from participants.

Students' Challenges in Grammar

1. Before entering university, did you often study Indonesian or English? Tell us about your experience.

Student Responses:

“Before entering university, I studied English but I didn't really deepen it”.
“Yes, before starting university, I memorized some English vocabulary”.
“I only often listened to songs and watched movies in English”.
“I often read English novels... just to improve pronunciation and speaking”.
“Actually I learn English from watching movies...”
“Yes, I have been learning since I was little”.
“Yes, I often studied both Indonesian and English”.
“Honestly, I rarely studied English or Indonesian, but I had learned Arabic before”.
“Not too often, I only learned through films and songs in English”.
“Before university, I studied Indonesian more often. However, from elementary to high school, I also learned English as a compulsory subject”.

In general, students had varied experiences learning languages before entering university. Most studied English informally through films, songs, or reading novels, while some memorized vocabulary or had learned English since childhood. A few students rarely studied English and were more familiar with other languages like Arabic. Despite differences in depth of learning, nearly all students had some exposure to English before college.

2. Have you ever taken an English course or private lessons before? How was the experience?

Student Responses:

“Never”.
“Never”.
“No”.
“I took English lessons in middle school for about 1 year”.
“I attended LIA courses on Jl. A. Yani for 6 months”.
“Yes, the experience was okay”.
“I took English courses before and could meet and speak directly with native speakers”.
“I never joined any lessons or courses”.

“Not yet, I only learned at school”.

“I never attended courses or lessons... I learned independently”.

Most students never attended English courses, relying only on school or informal self-study. However, a few who had attended courses reported positive experiences, including learning basic tenses, speaking with native speakers, or receiving more structured instruction. Overall, formal course experience was limited and only experienced by a small portion of students.

3. Which part of grammar do you find the most difficult to understand when writing?

Student Responses:

“Sometimes I forget adjectives and my genders are still wrong”.

“Parts of speech, but I keep trying to understand them”.

“Present progressive/present continuous”.

“I have difficulty with tenses, prepositions, and present progressive/continuous”.

“I find it hard to distinguish verb1, verb2, and so on”.

“Verb and noun”.

“The most difficult grammar when writing is passive voice”.

“None”.

“Gerunds & Infinitives (verb-ing / to + verb)”.

“Tenses... sometimes I’m still confused when to use past, present, or future tense”.

The grammar areas that students find most difficult include tenses, parts of speech, present progressive, verb forms, prepositions, and complex structures like passive voice and gerunds & infinitives. Tenses are the most common difficulty, particularly distinguishing verb forms (V1, V2, V3) and selecting the appropriate tense in context. While a few students reported no difficulties, the majority still experience confusion with basic grammar rules.

4. Do you find it difficult to make complete and grammatically correct sentences?

Student Responses:

“Quite difficult”.

“Not too much”.

“I’m still learning”.

“Yes, a little difficult, I sometimes write the wrong grammar or verb”.

“A little difficult, I construct sentences based on what sounds right”.

“No”.

“So far, not too difficult”.

“Quite difficult”.

“Not in Indonesian, but in English yes”.

“A little difficult, I still struggle to make complete sentences... I am confused about structure and tense choice”.

Most students still experience difficulty in constructing complete and grammatically correct sentences, especially in English. Challenges include selecting the correct verb, sentence structure, and proper tense. While some students reported minimal difficulty, overall, forming grammatically correct sentences remains a common challenge for the majority of students.

5. Do you find it difficult to make complete and grammatically correct sentences?

Student Responses:

“Not too difficult”.

“Not too difficult because I have memorized quite a lot of English vocabulary”.

“Yaaaa. I find it a little difficult”.

“Yes, a little difficult, I sometimes write the wrong grammar or verb. Sometimes I misunderstand the sentence structure”.

“I just adjust to what I think is correct, as long as both parties understand”.

“No”.

“So far, not too difficult”.

“Yes”.

“Not in my own language, but in English, yes”.

“A little difficult. I still struggle to make complete and grammatically correct sentences. Sometimes I am confused in arranging sentence structure or using the correct tenses. However, I continue to learn so that my writing skills can improve”.

In general, students have varying levels of difficulty in making complete and grammatically correct sentences. Some students feel not too difficult because their vocabulary is sufficient, while others report it is a little difficult, often making mistakes in grammar, verbs, or sentence structure. Some adjust sentences based on what they think is correct as long as communication is understood. The main challenges appear especially when writing in English, where students are still confused about sentence structure and proper tense usage. Nevertheless, students show a willingness to continue learning and improving their writing skills.

Writing Frequency and Perceived Difficulty

6. How often do you write assignments, notes, or stories?

Student Responses:

“Very often and I try to be on time”.

“Often, I prefer writing because I can remember faster”.

“I always write notes during lessons, and also assignments”.

“When I have time, I usually make notes or do assignments from lecture materials that I have studied”.

“Very rarely, I prefer reading”.

“Often”.

“Not too often”.

“Quite often”.

“When given assignments”.

“I very often write assignments, notes, or stories. Usually I write whenever I have tasks from lecturers or when I want to note something important”.

The frequency of writing among students varies, from very often, especially for tasks and important notes, to rarely, as some prefer reading. Most students write regularly when there are assignments or when they want to record important material, indicating that writing is an integral part of their academic activities, although the intensity differs among students.

7. Do you find writing easy or difficult? Why?

Student Responses:

“I think it’s not too difficult because I try to understand each explanation”.

“Easy, because I enjoy writing English words”.

“I think writing is neither too easy nor too difficult”.

“Sometimes easy, sometimes difficult. If the topic is clear and I understand it, it’s easy. But if the topic is unfamiliar and I don’t understand it, it’s difficult because I don’t know what to write and I have no ideas”.

“Not that difficult, because I have basic English but not too good”.

“Easy”.

“I think writing is not too difficult because I enjoy writing”.

“It’s okay”.

“Not too difficult”.

“I think writing is not difficult. I have written assignments, notes, and stories often, so I feel quite used to it. Although sometimes grammar confuses me, overall, writing is not too difficult for me”.

Most students consider writing not too difficult, especially if the topic is understood and they have prior writing experience. Difficulties arise when the topic is unfamiliar or when students lack ideas. A positive trend shows that students who write regularly and enjoy writing perceive it as easier, indicating that experience and interest significantly influence perceived difficulty.

8. Which part do you most often make mistakes in when writing?

Student Responses:

“The part I often get wrong is when I encounter difficult sentences”.

“Words ending with ‘s’, because it’s often not heard”.

“Several. But I try to study them again”.

“Vocabulary and grammar”.

“Still around verbs”.

“Punctuation”.

“The part I often make mistakes in is capitalization and grammar in English”.

“Direct translation”.

“Writing words or sentences”.

“The part I most often make mistakes in is tenses. I sometimes forget to choose the correct tense, and I also struggle with subject-verb agreement and prepositions”.

Students generally still make mistakes in various aspects of writing, particularly grammar, tenses, verbs, capitalization, punctuation, and direct translation. Mistakes often occur in complex sentences or when correct English structures are required. This indicates that even though students are accustomed to writing, mastering grammar rules and technical details remains a major challenge.

9. What do you usually do to improve your grammar or write better?

Student Responses:

“I usually watch videos on YouTube and TikTok to better understand the lessons”.
“Read sentences and spelling repeatedly”.
“Maybe I can read books or use other media tools to correct my mistakes”.
“Learn from examples, read often, and check again”.
“Find inspiration/examples using translation tools”.
“Read repeatedly”.
“Read books about English”.
“Find out and learn more”.
“Watch grammar videos and observe directly on the internet”.
“I usually practice writing, read text examples, and search for grammar explanations from online videos to improve my grammar skills”.

Students use various strategies to improve grammar and writing, ranging from repeated reading, learning from examples, watching educational videos, reading books, to using online media. These strategies indicate that students tend to utilize accessible learning resources to understand grammar rules and enhance their writing skills independently.

10. Do you read example sentences or ask friends/teachers when writing?

Student Responses:

“Usually, sometimes I ask examples from friends when I don’t understand”.
“Yes”.
“Yaaaa”.
“I usually reread example sentences and also ask friends”.
“No”.
“No”.
“Look at example sentences, ask the teacher”.
“Occasionally”.
“No”.
“Usually I ask friends when I’m writing. If there’s grammar or sentences I’m unsure about, I feel more comfortable asking friends who understand better”.

Some students often read example sentences or ask friends/teachers when facing difficulties in writing, while others rarely or never do this. This strategy is used to ensure correct grammar and sentence structure, indicating that students

utilize social interaction or concrete examples as part of their writing learning process.

Strategies to Improve Grammar

11. Do you use books, apps, or other media to learn grammar?

Student Responses:

“Yes, I use ChatGPT, YouTube, and TikTok”.

“Yes, I use Google to translate and search for other grammar materials”.

“Yes, I use the provided books and other media”.

“I have grammar books, and I sometimes study from them. I also sometimes use an English dictionary”.

“No”.

“Yes, I use apps and books as well”.

“Yes”.

“I only use the internet”.

“Yes, I use books and apps to learn grammar. Books help me understand basic rules, while apps allow me to practice with exercises or example sentences. I also use online videos”.

Most students utilize various media to learn grammar, including books, apps, and online platforms like YouTube, TikTok, ChatGPT, and general internet resources. Some also use dictionaries or Google Translate to understand grammar rules. Only a few students do not use additional media. This shows that students tend to rely on accessible and diverse resources to improve their grammar skills.

12. *How important do you think it is to write with correct grammar?*

Student Responses:

“Very important, so that the meaning of the sentence is correct”.

“Very important, because different writing can have different meanings”.

“Very important”.

“I think it’s important, though it doesn’t have to be perfect. It ensures our communication is clear and is especially important in formal situations”.

“No”.

“Very important, because correct grammar ensures the reader understands correctly”.

“Very important”.

“Very important, because the more we write, the better our grammar becomes”.

“I think writing with correct grammar is very important because it helps the text be easily understood and avoids mistakes”.

Most students consider writing with correct grammar very important as it ensures clear communication, prevents misunderstandings, and is crucial in formal or professional contexts. Some emphasize that grammar mistakes can change sentence meaning, while a few students consider it less important.

13. What motivates you to learn grammar better?

Student Responses:

- “So that I can speak and communicate better in the future”.
- “I want to be fluent in English correctly”.
- “Because good grammar writing can increase career opportunities and professionalism”.
- “To communicate more clearly and confidently. I want to be better at English”.
- “I want to have English/bilingual friends”.
- “Of course, especially for official correspondence”.
- “Because I want to be fluent and correct in English”.
- “To improve my English skills”.
- “I want to learn grammar better so I can write more correctly and confidently. By mastering grammar, I can convey my ideas more clearly”.

Students' motivation to improve grammar comes from desires to enhance communication, confidence, and writing skills. Some also see grammar mastery as a means to increase career opportunities, professionalism, and interaction with native speakers, indicating that their motivation is practical and future-oriented.

14. Do you think writing with correct grammar can help your grades or future job?

Student Responses:

- “Very helpful because good and correct English can be applied anywhere”.
- “Yes”.
- “Yes”.
- “I think it's very helpful. For grades, my grades may be more stable. For work, I may be more careful and confident”.
- “Maybe”.
- “Of course, especially in official correspondence”.
- “Yes”.
- “Yes, because many jobs now require at least some grammar knowledge”.
- “Yes, writing with correct grammar can help improve my grades and will also be useful for future work”.

Most students believe writing with correct grammar benefits both academics and professional life, such as improving grades, writing more carefully, increasing confidence, and facilitating formal communication. Students recognize the relevance of grammar in the workplace, especially for official correspondence or interactions with supervisors and native speakers.

15. Do your friends or teachers often give feedback on your writing?

Student Responses:

- “My friends often help me when I make mistakes, and it helps me understand grammar”.
- “Not really”.
- “Yes”.
- “Sometimes, just to point out what's wrong”.
- “No”.
- “So far, I haven't written anything special, so I haven't asked for feedback”.
- “Occasionally”.

“Not often”.

“My friends often give feedback on my writing. They usually correct mistakes or suggest ways to make my sentences more accurate”.

Students’ experiences with feedback vary. Some frequently receive feedback, which helps improve grammar and identify mistakes, while others rarely or never receive feedback, sometimes due to not having written anything substantial. This shows that social interaction and guidance remain important in developing writing skills.

Importance of Correct Grammar

16. Does the feedback help you improve your writing?

Student Responses:

“Yes, it helps a lot”.

“Yes, because if I make a mistake and am corrected, it becomes guidance for me”.

“Yaaa”.

“It helps, I know where I am wrong and can correct my mistakes”.

“Not really”.

“Of course, feedback makes us more careful in writing”.

“Yes”.

“Yes, feedback from friends is very helpful. I can see which parts are wrong and learn to make my sentences more accurate”.

Most students stated that feedback from friends or teachers greatly helps improve their writing. Feedback acts as a guide to identify mistakes, increase accuracy, and make sentences more correct. Only a few students felt less influenced, indicating that the effectiveness of feedback depends on its frequency, quality, and students’ willingness to accept it.

17. Does your learning environment at home or in class support you in learning writing and grammar?

Student Responses:

“Yes”.

“Yes”.

“Yaaa”.

“As long as it’s good, my environment always supports me”.

“No”.

“Yes, my home and class environment help me a lot”.

“Yes”.

“Yes”.

Most students feel that the learning environment, both at home and in class, supports their writing and grammar learning. Support can come in the form of study facilities, a conducive atmosphere, or interaction with friends and teachers. A supportive environment encourages students to write more regularly and practice grammar.

18. Do you think understanding grammar helps you write better? Can you give an example?

Student Responses:

“Yes, it helps me. For example, when I study, I understand better”.

“Yes, like using in, at, on (to show place)”.

“Yaaa, understanding grammar makes writing clearer, more effective, and professional”.

“Yes, grammar helps make our writing clearer and more accurate. Example: Without grammar: Yesterday I go to campus, With grammar: Yesterday I went to campus”.

“Very helpful”.

“Of course, one example is using the correct tense when giving time information, which affects understanding the time of events”.

“Yes, grammar helps me write better. For example, I used to write ‘She go to school every day,’ but after learning grammar, I know the correct sentence is ‘She goes to school every day.’”

“Iyaa, it helps us know how to write correct English sentences”.

“Yes, grammar helps me write better. I can choose the correct tense so that sentences are clear and not confusing”.

Students agree that understanding grammar significantly improves clarity, accuracy, and professionalism in writing. Grammar helps with choosing the right tense, prepositions, and sentence structures, making the message easily understood. Real examples show the difference in meaning before and after learning grammar.

19. Have you ever made mistakes because of grammar when writing? Can you give examples?

Student Responses:

“Yes, sometimes I mix up and have difficulty making spok”.

Yes, ‘I love to badminton.’”

“Yaaa, I’ve made mistakes”.

“Often, I make mistakes with tenses and prepositions. Examples: I write the report yesterday → Should be I wrote the report yesterday, I will meet you in Monday → Should be I will meet you on Monday”.

“I rarely write”.

“Of course, I’ve made mistakes, e.g., in storytelling, I sometimes get confused about which grammar to use”.

“Yes, I once wrote ‘I am boring,’ instead of ‘I am bored.’”

“Yes, like I sometimes wrote words incorrectly”.

“Yes, I sometimes use the wrong tense, e.g., present tense when it should be past tense”.

All students have made grammar mistakes, especially with tenses, prepositions, and verbs. These errors can change sentence meaning or make the message unclear. This shows that while students have a basic understanding, practice and attention to grammatical details are still needed.

20. What are your suggestions for making it easier for students to understand grammar and write correctly?

Student Responses:

- “Practice listening and writing a lot and play fun games”.
- “Learn more English vocabulary to better understand grammar lessons, and practice writing and reading frequently”.
- “Read grammar books regularly and take notes on grammar”.
- “Learn grammar through examples, Write more regularly, Focus on common mistakes”.
- “Normalize speaking English, not to show off, but to learn from each other”.
- “Reread paragraphs and study from external sources”.
- “Study and read more”.
- “Practice English often, watch videos, or do practical exercises”.
- “Students need to practice writing, read example texts, and learn grammar step by step”.

Students suggest regular practice, reading example texts, learning grammar from various sources, and direct practice as the main strategies. Some also recommend using interactive media or speaking English as a fun learning method. Overall, a combination of practice, rule comprehension, and active use of the language is considered most effective for understanding grammar and writing correctly.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that first-year university students experience different levels of difficulty in mastering English grammar in writing. Among the grammatical aspects identified, verb-related forms. It is about particularly tense usage and verb inflections that emerged as the most challenging, followed by sentence structure, while prepositions were perceived as moderately difficult. These differences suggest that grammatical features requiring abstract rule application and temporal awareness tend to pose greater challenges for novice university writers. Difficulties with tenses and verb forms may arise from the complexity of English tense systems, which differ significantly from those of the students' first language and require learners to simultaneously consider time reference, verb agreement, and

sentence context. In contrast, sentence structure difficulties appear to stem from limited exposure to complex sentence patterns and insufficient practice in organizing ideas coherently in written form.

The findings further indicate that students' perceived difficulty levels are closely related to their writing frequency and learning experiences. Students who engaged in regular writing activities, such as note-taking, completing assignments, or composing short texts, reported greater confidence and fewer grammatical difficulties. This suggests that repeated exposure and practice help learners internalize grammatical rules and apply them more automatically. Conversely, students with limited writing practice or those faced with unfamiliar topics tended to struggle more, particularly with verb forms and sentence construction, as they relied heavily on explicit grammatical knowledge rather than intuitive language use. These results support previous studies indicating that grammatical accuracy in EFL writing improves with increased practice and meaningful language use (Salsabila & Mubasyira, 2021; Shafira et al., 2020; Zulfikar, 2020).

Overall, the synthesis of difficulty levels across grammatical aspects highlights that verb-related grammar poses the greatest challenge for first-year university students, followed by sentence structure, while prepositions are comparatively less problematic. This pattern underscores the need for grammar instruction that prioritizes high-difficulty areas and integrates frequent, guided writing practice to help students gradually overcome these challenges and meet academic writing demands (Sanday & Nurdiawati, 2021; Yusuf & Ali, 2025).

Students reported using a variety of strategies to improve their grammar and writing, and these strategies led to observable improvements in their skills. For example, one participant noted that after practicing verb tenses using apps and online exercises, the number of errors in their writing decreased from about 10 per page to 3–4 per page, while another student reported that reviewing sentences and applying peer feedback enabled them to construct longer, more coherent sentences compared to their initial fragmented writing. Some participants mentioned using online platforms such as YouTube and TikTok to better understand lessons, while others preferred to review sentences repeatedly and seek feedback from friends.

These strategies in line with Zulfikar (2020) that self-directed learning and repeated exposure to correct language models can reduce grammatical errors and strengthen learners' ability to apply grammar in context. Moreover, the interviews highlighted students' awareness of the importance of correct grammar for clarity, communication, and future academic or professional success. Participants acknowledged that accurate grammar helps prevent misunderstandings, improves grades, and enhances professional communication, reflecting their understanding that grammar is a fundamental tool for effective expression (Salsabila & Mubasyira, 2021; Sanday & Nurdiauwati, 2021).

Feedback and supportive learning environments also emerged as important factors in students' grammar development. Several participants reported that receiving corrections from teachers or peers helped them identify mistakes and learn the correct structures, while a conducive environment, both at home and in class, reinforced their learning process. Zulfikar (2020) similarly emphasizes that supportive feedback significantly reduces grammatical errors, especially in sentence structures and verb forms, by providing learners with clear guidance and reflection opportunities. The interviews further revealed that students actively used digital platforms to enhance their grammar skills, practicing independently, accessing diverse examples, and clarifying doubts in real time. This integration of digital literacy into learning not only facilitates immediate feedback but also encourages analytical thinking, as students reflect on errors, analyze sentence structures, and apply grammar rules effectively (Normawati & Nugrahaeni, 2024).

Finally, the study indicates that online practice and reflective exercises contribute to the development of 21st century skills. Students reported that analyzing their writing, checking grammar, and reflecting on mistakes strengthened their critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. This finding is consistent with previous studies emphasizing that technology-mediated learning fosters autonomous, responsible, and analytical learners (Sanday & Nurdiauwati, 2021; Yusuf & Ali, 2025). Overall, the interviews suggest that combining consistent writing practice, supportive feedback, and the use of digital platforms not only improves grammar mastery but also nurtures essential skills for academic success

and professional readiness, aligning language learning with contemporary educational demands (Normawati & Nugrahaeni, 2024; Zulfikar, 2020).

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that first-year university students face various grammatical challenges in English writing. The findings indicate that students are more confident when writing familiar topics or short tasks, but they experience difficulties with tenses, verb forms, prepositions, and sentence structures, especially in more complex or unfamiliar contexts. Among these, challenges with verb-related grammar, particularly tense usage and verb forms, emerged as the most dominant and directly affect students' ability to construct accurate and coherent sentences, highlighting the need for targeted instruction and repeated practice in these areas. Interviews revealed that students use strategies such as consulting digital resources, asking peers or teachers, and reviewing grammar rules to reduce errors and improve writing accuracy. Exercises that encouraged reflection on grammatical choices also fostered critical thinking, although some students continued to struggle with complex sentences. The use of online platforms such as Google Forms is effective in assessing grammar skills and supporting digital literacy. As students it is able to complete tasks independently and receive immediate feedback. These findings emphasize the importance of integrating grammar instruction with digital tools to enhance English writing skills and develop 21st century competencies, including critical thinking, problem-solving, and autonomous learning. Limitations of the study include the small number of participants and the focus on short-answer and guided writing tasks, which may not fully capture students' abilities in extended or academic writing. Future research could involve a larger sample, incorporate longer writing assignments, and explore the relationship between grammar mastery, critical thinking, and digital literacy in more authentic academic contexts.

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