

**AN ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' ERRORS IN WRITING
DESCRIPTIVE TEXT AT THE TENTH GRADE OF SMA IT
TEBUIRENG 4 AL-ISHLAH**

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ABSTRACT

Writing is a fundamental yet challenging skill in English language learning, particularly in producing descriptive texts that require grammatical accuracy, appropriate vocabulary, and correct mechanical conventions. Although error analysis plays an important role in improving writing instruction, studies examining Indonesian EFL learners' descriptive writing using combined analytical frameworks remain limited. This study aimed to identify the types of errors made by tenth-grade students at SMAIT Tebuireng 4 Al-Ishlah and determine the most dominant error types. This study employed a descriptive qualitative design involving 96 students selected through random sampling. Students' descriptive texts were analyzed using Dulay et al.'s surface error taxonomy: omission, addition, misformation, and misordering and Brown and Abeywickrama's writing indicators: content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, mechanics, and style. The findings revealed 1,993 total errors. Misformation was the most dominant surface error (15.25%), followed by omission (11.14%), misordering (7.83%), and addition (4.21%). Meanwhile, mechanics errors were the most frequent writing quality problem (15.20%), followed by grammar (12.74%) and vocabulary (11.04%). The findings indicate that students mainly experience difficulties in grammatical accuracy, verb usage, spelling, capitalization, and vocabulary selection rather than idea development. Therefore, teachers are recommended to provide more focused instruction on grammar, writing conventions, vocabulary development, and the generic structure of descriptive text.

Keywords: *Error Analysis, Writing, Descriptive Text*

INTRODUCTION

English language learning encompasses four fundamental skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Writing serves as an essential communication tool that enables individuals to share their thoughts, emotions, and messages with others. Among the four language skills, writing stands out as particularly significant for helping students express their ideas both efficiently and clearly. In

English language learning, writing encompasses multiple text types, including argumentative, expository, narrative, and descriptive formats. In particular, descriptive writing helps students employ sensory details and detailed descriptions to create clear mental pictures for their readers (Efrini & Elga, 2020). This skill proves valuable in both educational contexts and practical situations, requiring students to effectively portray people, places, objects, or situations.

However, compared to other language abilities, writing demands more complex competencies, making it one of the most challenging aspects for secondary school students. Based on a preliminary discussion with the English teacher at SMAIT Tebuireng 4 Al-Ishlah, several problems were found in students' writing of descriptive texts. Students often make errors in verb usage and tense application especially simple present tense and the formation of proper sentence structures, students often rely on basic and repetitive vocabulary making their description less vivid and lacking variation, students have difficulty employing adjectives, specific nouns, and supporting details, and students repeatedly make similar errors even after receiving correction from the teacher. These problems hinder students' ability to produce effective descriptive texts; therefore, a systematic and theory-based analysis of their errors is necessary to identify specific patterns and inform more effective teaching practices.

To systematically address the errors found in students' writing, this study draws on error analysis as its primary theoretical lens. Error analysis is a systematic method used to identify, classify, and explain mistakes made by language learners. As stated by Astri et al. (2023), it is a linguistic approach that aims to investigate and categorize language errors in order to understand patterns of difficulty in language learning. According to Mukarromah and Suryanto (2022), this method provides valuable insights into the specific difficulties faced by learners when producing the target language. Furthermore, Karim et al. (2018) highlight that error analysis helps identify causes of errors that may originate from first language interference, overgeneralization of target language rules, or the application of inappropriate learning strategies.

This study is based on the identification that tenth grade students at SMAIT Tebuireng 4 Al-Ishlah demonstrate various types of errors in their descriptive text writing. This study therefore aims to identify the types of errors present in students' written descriptive texts and to determine which error types occur most frequently.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Error Analysis

Nguyen (2020) explains that writing errors commonly occur because students have limited mastery of linguistic components, such as vocabulary choice, word formation, and sentence construction. Therefore, error analysis focuses on three main indicators: (1) lexical errors, related to inappropriate vocabulary use; (2) morphological errors, involving incorrect word formation such as tense or plural forms; and (3) syntactic errors, related to sentence structure and word order.

In addition, Dulay et al. (1982) classify errors into four categories: (1) Omission errors, the absence of a necessary element such as prepositions, auxiliaries, or articles; (2) Addition errors, the presence of unnecessary elements including double marking, regularization, or simple addition; (3) Misformation errors, the use of incorrect grammatical forms or structures; and (4) Misordering errors, the incorrect placement of words or morphemes within a sentence.

Writing

Writing is one of the four fundamental skills that are crucial in English teaching and learning. Rahayu and Kusumastuti (2023) define writing as the process of combining ideas or thoughts to convey information through written media using appropriate sentence structure and vocabulary, underscoring that writing requires a structured process from pre-writing to editing. Dana and Dharmayanti (2021) further describe writing as a language skill used to articulate ideas and opinions through words that are organized into sentences and ultimately form paragraphs, reflecting the hierarchical complexity of writing as a skill.

In evaluating the quality of written work, this study refers to two frameworks. Muhaimin and Widyaningsih (2024) propose five key dimensions of writing quality: (1) Content, presenting main ideas and supporting details relevant to the topic. (2) Organization, ensuring logical sequencing of sentences and paragraphs. (3) Grammar, focusing on grammatical accuracy and varied sentence structures. (4) Mechanics, correct punctuation, spelling, and capitalization and (5) Vocabulary, the range and appropriateness of word choice. Building on this, Brown and Abeywickrama (2010) offer a more comprehensive framework with six indicators: (1) Content, (2) Organization, (3) Grammar, (4) Vocabulary, (5) Mechanics, and (6) Style, referring to the personal expression or tone that distinguishes a writer's work. This model is widely recognized in language assessment and writing pedagogy for its balanced and comprehensive approach, and is therefore adopted as the primary framework in this study.

Descriptive Text

In the context of this study, the type of writing specifically examined is descriptive text, which is the genre assigned to and most commonly practiced by tenth grade students. Descriptive text is a type of written discourse that aims to provide detailed information about the characteristics, features, and qualities of a particular subject to create a vivid picture in the reader's mind. As explained by Nurchaerani and Sadikin (2021), descriptive text represents a form of writing that portrays persons, places, or objects by detailing their specific attributes and characteristics in such a way that readers can visualize or imagine the subject being described. Royani and Saidah (2019), define descriptive text as a written composition that describes a specific person, place, or thing by elaborating on its characteristics, appearance, and distinctive qualities in a systematic manner. The structural organization of descriptive text typically consists of two main parts: identification, which introduces the subject being described, and description, which provides detailed information about its qualities or characteristics (Basri & Syamsia, 2020).

In the context of language learning and teaching, descriptive text serves as a fundamental genre that students must master to develop their writing competence.

The generic structure of descriptive text generally consists of two main components: identification and description. Meanwhile, Siregar and Dongoran (2020) elaborate this structure into four elements: identification, classification, description, and conclusion. With respect to its language features, descriptive text typically uses the simple present tense, as Azar (2003) identifies that this tense takes the verbal and nominal form. Additionally, descriptive text employs linking verbs, adjectives and compound adjectives, as well as action verbs to present a comprehensive portrayal of the described subject. The mastery of descriptive text writing is therefore essential for learners' overall language development and their capacity to engage in various forms of academic and professional communication.

Based on the theoretical frameworks discussed above, this study adopts Dulay et al. (1982) and Brown and Abeywickrama (2010) as the primary indicators for analyzing students' errors. The surface error taxonomy proposed by Dulay et al. (1982), comprising omission, addition, misformation, and misordering, is used to identify and classify the types of errors at the surface level of students' writing. The writing quality indicators proposed by Brown and Abeywickrama (2010), namely content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, mechanics, and style, are used to evaluate the overall quality of students' descriptive texts. The combination of these two frameworks provides a comprehensive and systematic basis for examining both the nature and the extent of errors in students' writing.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

The kind of this research was descriptive qualitative. In this study, the researcher aimed to find the type of errors that occur in students' writing, the type of writing errors most students make, and students' point of view about the causes of their errors in writing. The researcher has analyzed students' errors in writing descriptive text using the indicators proposed by Dulay et al. (1982) and Brown and Abeywickrama (2010). They are addition error, omission error, misordering

error, misinformation error, content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, mechanics, style.

Participant

The population of this research was students of the tenth grade at SMAIT Tebuireng 4 Al-Ishlah. There were 5 classes in the tenth grade of SMAIT Tebuireng 4 Al-Ishlah; they are X.1 (31 students), X.2 (33 students), X.3 (29 students), X.4 (37 students), and X.5 (36 students). The total number of tenth grade students at SMAIT Tebuireng 4 Al-Ishlah is 166 students. The sample of this research was selected using a random sampling technique through a lottery process to minimize bias and ensure objective representation of the population. As a result, three classes were chosen: X.1 (31 students), X.3 (29 students), X.5 (36 students), which were considered representative of the general academic characteristic of the tenth grade students in the school.

Research Instrument

This study employed documentation as the research instrument. Documentation was conducted by collecting students' descriptive text writing results obtained from the English teacher as part of regular classroom assessment, the students' writing products were then analyzed to identify the types and frequency of errors based on four categories: omission errors, addition errors, misinformation errors, and misordering errors and indicators of writing: content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, mechanics, and style. As well as to strengthen and clarify the findings derived from the document analysis.

Data Collection Technique

In collecting data, the researcher obtains documents from the school. This study uses data from the students' writing results as the main source of analysis. The writing results were provided by the English teacher and consisted of students' descriptive texts written as part of regular classroom assessment. The writer did not administer the writing test directly but analyzed the existing students' writing products to identify students' errors indicators. The students' writing results aid the writer in determining the types and frequency of errors made by students in writing descriptive texts, including omission errors, addition

errors, misformation errors, and misordering errors. Furthermore, the students' writing was assessed based six writing indicators: content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, mechanics, and style. Through the analysis of these documents, the researcher obtained authentic data that reflect the students' actual writing ability and support the objectives of this research.

Data Analysis Technique

The data analysis followed the model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), which consists of three stages. First, data reduction, in which the researcher classified students' errors into the four categories mentioned above and transcribed the interview results. Second, data display, in which the data were presented in an error recapitulation table and calculated using the percentage formula:

$$P = \frac{F}{N} \times 100\%$$

P = Percentage

F = Frequency of errors

N = Total number of errors.

Third, drawing and verifying conclusions, in which the researcher compared the findings from the document analysis results to determine the most dominant types of errors found in students' descriptive text writing.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

This study analyzed the writing errors of 96 tenth-grade students at SMAIT Tebuireng 4 Al-Ishlah in their descriptive text writing. The data were collected through documentation and analyzed based on the error categories proposed by Dulay et al. (1982) and the writing quality indicators proposed by Brown and Abeywickrama (2010). The total number of errors identified across all students

was 1,993. The following table presents the recapitulation of students' errors based on each indicator.

Table 1. The Results Percentage of Students' Errors in Writing Descriptive Text

No	Indicators of errors	Frequency of Errors (F)	Percentage of errors (%)
1.	Omission error	222	11.14%
2.	Addition error	84	4.21%
3.	Misformation error	304	15.25%
4.	Misordering error	156	7.83%
5.	Content	134	6.72%
6.	Organization	153	7.68%
7.	Grammar	254	12.74%
8.	Vocabulary	220	11.04%
9.	Mechanics	303	15.20%
10.	Style	163	8.18%
	Total	1993	100%

Based on Table 1, the findings reveal that among the four error types proposed by Dulay et al. (1982), misformation error was the most dominant, with a frequency of 304 occurrences (15.25%). Misformation errors occur when students use an incorrect grammatical form or structure, such as applying wrong verb forms, incorrect use of to be, or improper tense usage. This was followed by omission error with 222 occurrences (11.14%), in which students frequently omitted essential grammatical elements such as articles, prepositions, and auxiliary verbs. Misordering error ranked third with 156 occurrences (7.83%), reflecting difficulties in placing words or phrases correctly within a sentence. Addition error was the least frequent among the four categories, with only 84 occurrences (4.21%), indicating that students were less likely to add unnecessary elements to their sentences.

Regarding the writing quality indicators proposed by Brown & Abeywickrama (2010), mechanics errors were the most prevalent with 303 occurrences (15.20%), covering mistakes in spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. Grammar errors ranked second with 254 occurrences (12.74%),

reflecting widespread difficulty in applying grammatical rules consistently. Vocabulary errors were third with 220 occurrences (11.04%), indicating limited range and appropriateness of word choice. Style errors were recorded at 163 occurrences (8.18%), while organization errors amounted to 153 (7.68%), and content errors were the least frequent writing quality problem at 134 occurrences (6.72%).

Based on the overall findings, the students' ability in writing descriptive text can be categorized as low. This conclusion is supported by the relatively high frequency of errors found in both grammatical aspects and writing quality indicators. Misformation and mechanics errors appeared as the most dominant problems, indicating that many students still experienced difficulties in applying correct grammatical structures, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization consistently. In addition, the occurrence of omission, vocabulary, and organization errors shows that students still lacked mastery in constructing clear and accurate descriptive texts. Therefore, the findings suggest that students need further improvement and practice in grammar usage, vocabulary development, and writing mechanics to produce better descriptive writing.

Discussion

Based on the data obtained from students' written descriptive texts, the researcher identified and classified the errors found in students' writing. The errors type identified in this study include omission, addition, misformation, misordering, content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, mechanics, and style. Dulay et al. (1982) and Brown and Abeywickrama (2010) categorized them.

The first type of error made by students' in writing the descriptive was omission. Omission errors amounted to 222 occurrences (11.14%). Common patterns were observed: students omitted obligatory linking verbs "*She beautiful*" → "*She is beautiful*" and articles "*I live in big house*" → "*I live in a big house*". Toba et al. (2023) found that omission of grammatical function words particularly articles and linking verbs is among the most prevalent surface errors in Indonesian EFL learners' writing, attributing this pattern to the structural absence of such

elements in Bahasa Indonesia, which leads students to overlook them when forming English sentences.

The second type of error is addition. Addition errors were the least frequent surface error type with 84 occurrences (4.21%). One student wrote “*I am is second child*”, adding a redundant linking verb “is” after “I am”, a double marking error. According Saragi, et al. (2025), addition errors, while the least common among the four surface error types, reflect students’ tendency to over apply grammatical rules, often inserting additional morphemes or function words that create redundancy. The low frequency of addition errors in this study is consistent with similar findings in prior research, suggesting that students are generally more likely to omit obligatory elements than to add unnecessary ones.

The third type of error is misformation. Misformation errors were the most dominant category, totaling 304 occurrences (15.25%). Students consistently produced incorrect grammatical forms, particularly in the use of the linking verb “to be” and subject-verb agreement. One student wrote “*they is so very best*” instead of “*they are so very good*”, and another wrote “*Raffi Ahmad have a wife*” instead of “*Raffi Ahmad has a wife*”. These errors reflect a systematic failure to apply verb inflection rules, especially the third-person singular marker and the plural form of “to be”. Mukarromah and Suryanto (2022) confirm that misformation is among the most persistent error types in EFL learners’ writing, noting that students tend to substitute target language forms with incorrect alternatives due to insufficient internalization of grammatical rules, particularly in verb morphology.

The fourth type of error is misordering. Misordering errors accounted for 156 occurrences (7.83%). Two patterns were identified: adjective-noun inversion “*body who high*” → “*tall body*” and more severe misordering that produces unintelligible sequences “*Colour read much seed*” → “*The colour is red with many seeds*”. Masagus and Syahri (2022) attribute misordering errors in Indonesian EFL learners to negative L1 transfer, as Bahasa Indonesia follows a head modifier sequence placing the noun before its modifier which directly conflicts with the English attributive adjective pattern. When this L1 based

ordering is applied to English, it produces ungrammatical adjective placement that confuses the reader.

The fifth type of error is related to content. Content errors were the least frequent among the writing quality indicators with 134 occurrences (6.72%). Content problems appeared when students provided only fragmentary or insufficiently developed descriptions, such as student's text about watermelon which consisted largely of disconnected noun phrases without elaboration. Brown and Abeywickrama (2010) emphasize that content quality in writing depends on the relevance, specificity, and development of ideas. The relatively low frequency of content errors across the 96 students is encouraging, suggesting that most students had sufficient topical knowledge about their subjects, their primary challenges lay in expressing that knowledge accurately and fluently in English rather than in generating ideas themselves.

The sixth type of error is related to organization. Organization errors totaled 153 occurrences (7.68%). One student who began the text immediately with disconnected attributes "*fruit fresh, much water, shape circle, skin colour green*" without first introducing the subject through an identification paragraph. According Lutfiyah, et.al. (2021), organization errors in descriptive text are directly linked to students' unfamiliarity with the genre's two-part structure: identification followed by description. When the identification component is missing, the text fails to orient the reader and loses the coherence expected of descriptive writing.

The seventh type of error is related to grammar. Grammar errors totaled 254 occurrences (12.74%), ranking third overall. Students struggled particularly with linking verbs and verb form accuracy. One student wrote "*She beautiful and she has white skin*" omitting the linking verb "is", while another wrote "*she weight 50 kg*" instead of "*she weighs*". These errors indicate that students have not yet automatized the grammatical rules of English at the sentence level. According Astri et al. (2023) highlight that grammatical errors, particularly those involving linking verbs and subject-verb agreement, are among the most systematic and recurring difficulties in EFL learners' writing, as these structures operate

fundamentally differently in Bahasa Indonesia and therefore require explicit and sustained instructional attention.

The eighth type of error is related to vocabulary. Vocabulary errors totaled 220 occurrences (11.04%). Students frequently misused words or relied on repetitive, imprecise vocabulary. For instance, one student wrote “*she possess body who high and she that person very clever and she possess desire wish become*” in this sentence, the student repeatedly used the word “*possess*” in contexts where “*have*” or “*has*” would be appropriate, and another produced a description of a cat using incoherent word sequences “*Cat this popular as fur that thick and soft. Cat kind this usully in to see in region city*” that revealed a very limited descriptive lexicon. According to Saragi, et al. (2023), vocabulary limitation is a primary cause of incoherence in EFL students’ descriptive writing, as learners are unable to select precise words to represent their descriptions. This problem is especially consequential in descriptive text, a genre that requires varied and specific vocabulary to portray the subject clearly.

The ninth type of error is related to mechanics. Mechanics errors ranked as the most prevalent writing quality error with 303 occurrences (15.20%). Three recurring patterns were identified: capitalization errors “*chiharu shida*” → “*Chiharu Shida*” and “*japanese*” → “*Japanese*”, misspelling “*profesional*” → “*professional*” and “*freshes*” → “*freshness*”, and missing punctuation. Masagus and Syahri (2022), identified mechanics as a persistent problem in EFL descriptive paragraph writing, emphasizing that surface errors such as misspelling and punctuation omission disrupt the readability of student texts and impede communication of meaning.

The last type of error is related to style. Style errors reached 163 occurrences (8.18%). Some students produced highly fragmented and informal expressions such as “*I like buy seblak in near my home reason feeling this delicious and hot and to for eat with bright this cold*”, which lacks the structured and expressive register required by descriptive text. Brown and Abeywickrama (2010) describe style as the ability of the writer to convey meaning with an appropriate personal voice and genre-specific register. At the tenth-grade level,

many students are still developing their sense of written register, which explains the prevalence of informal and fragmented expressions that reduce the overall stylistic quality of their texts.

Taken together, the findings reveal that students at SMAIT Tebuireng 4 Al-Ishlah face the greatest difficulties in the areas of misformation, mechanics, and grammar all of which pertain to linguistic form and surface accuracy rather than content development. This pattern aligns with Lutfiyah, et.al. (2021) and Saragi, et al. (2025), who similarly found that Indonesian EFL students' writing problems are predominantly formal and surface-level. The evidence from students' actual texts confirms that instructional attention should be prioritized toward grammar form, orthographic conventions, and vocabulary development to reduce the systematic error patterns identified in this study.

CONCLUSION

This study analyzed the writing errors of 96 tenth-grade students at SMAIT Tebuireng 4 Al-Ishlah in their descriptive text writing, using the surface error taxonomy of Dulay et al. (1982) and the writing quality indicators of Brown and Abeywickrama (2010). A total of 1,993 errors were identified across ten categories. Among surface error types, misformation was the most dominant (15.25%), primarily manifested in incorrect use of linking verbs, wrong verb forms, and failures in subject-verb agreement. Omission ranked second (11.14%), with students frequently omitting obligatory elements such as articles, prepositions, and auxiliary verbs. Misordering followed (7.83%), especially in adjective-noun placement, while addition was the least frequent (4.21%). Among the writing quality indicators, mechanics errors were the most prevalent (15.20%), characterized by recurring capitalization errors, misspellings, and missing punctuation. Grammar errors ranked second (12.74%), reflecting persistent difficulties with linking verb usage and verb inflection, while vocabulary errors ranked third (11.04%), indicating limited lexical range and the tendency to misuse or repeat words. Style (8.18%), organization (7.68%), and content (6.72%) were comparatively less problematic, suggesting that students generally possessed

adequate topic knowledge but struggled to express it through accurate and varied language. These findings confirm that students' primary difficulties are concentrated at the surface level of linguistic accuracy particularly in verb morphology, grammatical form, orthographic conventions, and vocabulary selection rather than in idea development or content organization, a pattern consistent with prior research on Indonesian EFL learners.

Based on these findings, English teachers are recommended to prioritize explicit and targeted instruction in verb morphology particularly the correct use of linking verbs, third-person singular agreement, and present tense forms as well as orthographic conventions including capitalization rules and spelling patterns. Vocabulary development activities that expose students to more varied and precise descriptive language are also essential, given the high rate of lexical misuse and repetition observed in the data. Additionally, genre-based writing instruction that explicitly teaches the two-part identification-description structure of descriptive text is strongly encouraged, as this will help students produce more coherent, well-organized, and linguistically accurate descriptive texts. Future research may extend this study by investigating the causes of specific error types through learner interviews, or by examining the effectiveness of targeted instructional interventions on reducing these error patterns.

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