



# An Error Analysis in Writing English Essay at Junior High School

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## Abstract

Writing essay text is still difficult for most students at SMA Negeri 5 Aceh Barat Daya students. This study aims to analyze the errors made by students in their essay writing. This study conducted quantitative research. The test was given to 53 students as a technique of data collection. The result of the study showed that there were 582 total errors made by students. The errors are classified into 25.8% errors of subject-verb agreement, 20.6% errors of pronouns, 19.2% errors of adverbs, 17.2% errors of nouns, and 17.2% errors of simple present tense. The most prevalent error was subject-verb agreement because most students made a mistake pairing subjects with verbs.

**Keywords:** *error, analysis, writing, essay*

## Introduction

Writing skill plays an important role in English language learning by considering some benefits of linguistic proficiency. It reinforces language knowledge and facilitates the internalization of vocabulary, grammar structures, and syntactical conventions. Students engage in meaningful language mastery through writing and expressing ideas coherently and persuasively in a text (Taylor, 2019). Moreover, writing is able to create critical thinking, analytical reasoning, and problem-solving skills as students organize their thoughts, develop arguments, and construct narratives. Writing promotes creativity and self-expression and empowers students to convey their perspectives, experiences, and identities. Ultimately, proficiency in writing enhances students' language proficiency and equips them with essential communication skills for academic success, career advancement, and meaningful engagement in a globalized world.

The importance of writing skills in learning English cannot be overstated, as writing is a fundamental aspect of language acquisition and communication (Mullany & Stockwell, 2022). According to Metcalfe and Astle (2023), writing requires students to reinforce their understanding of English grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure. This means students internalize language rules and conventions by writing, improving their fluency and accuracy over time. Additionally, writing provides an opportunity for students to practice expressing their ideas and opinions in English, helping them develop their communication skills in both academic and real-life contexts.

The importance of writing as stated by Couchenour and Chrisman (2022) writing plays a crucial role in language proficiency assessments and academic achievement. Additionally, writing assignments are common across various subjects in academic settings, requiring students to analyze, synthesize, and articulate complex ideas in English (Blachowicz et al., 2021). Mastering writing skills is essential for academic success and opens doors to higher education and professional opportunities for English language learners. Therefore, writing skills are integral to the holistic development of English language learners, empowering them to communicate confidently and effectively in diverse contexts.

Essay writing is a written composition presenting a focused discussion or exploration of a particular topic or issue. It is a common form of academic writing used in educational settings to assess students' understanding, critical thinking skills, and ability to articulate ideas effectively (Wittman & Kindley, 2022). Essay texts can vary widely in length, structure, and style, depending on the assignment's purpose, audience, and context. Essay writing is a form of academic writing that presents a focused and structured discussion on a particular topic (Rose, 2022). Essay writing is a common assignment in educational settings, and it is designed to assess a writer's ability to express ideas coherently, support arguments with evidence, and demonstrate critical thinking skills. Essay writing comes in various forms and may cover a wide range of subjects, including literature, science, philosophy, history, and more.

In the error's analysis of previous studies, as found by Bidang Mulki et al. (2022), errors were discovered, namely verb tenses, sentence structure, connector, passive construction, subject-verb agreement, word order, articles, diction, mechanics, and unclear idea. The result of a study conducted by Fitrawati and Safitri (2021) the

most common one was in verb use. If teachers do not assist students in comprehending the concept of parts of speech and essential and nonessential clauses, these students will continue to make errors in their more advanced writing. In addition, Qamariah and Wahyuni (2020) analyzed students' errors in writing English text at SMK-SMTI Banda Aceh and found that there were 11 categories of grammatical error types: errors in using verbs, tense, singular/plural nouns, adjectives, preposition, to be, articles, modal/auxiliary, noun, objective pronoun, and phrasal verb with the total of grammatical made are 48 total numbers of errors that students produced in their writing.

Error analysis in students' writing is crucial as it offers invaluable insights into their language proficiency, comprehension of grammatical structures, and areas needing improvement (James, 2023). By systematically identifying and analyzing errors, teachers can highlight recurring patterns, misunderstandings, or gaps in students' grammatical mastery in writing, enabling feedback. Additionally, error analysis facilitates the development of metalinguistic awareness, empowering students to recognize and self-correct mistakes independently, thereby fostering greater accuracy and fluency in their writing (Richards, 2020). Moreover, understanding common errors enhances teachers' ability to adopt instructional strategies, scaffold learning experiences, and provide targeted interventions, ultimately nurturing students' growth as effective communicators and writers.

Writing essay text is still difficult for most students because they should express their ideas in the text. Students often have problems when composing essay writing because it demands more than mere transcription of thoughts; it requires the ability to articulate those thoughts in a structured, coherent, grammatically correct, and word-appropriate manner. This means that when writing essay text, the correct writing rules should be used. However, many students at SMA Negeri 5 Aceh Barat Daya still make errors in writing essay texts.

Therefore, the writer wants to analyze students' writing errors at SMA Negeri5 Aceh Barat Daya. The formulations of research problems are (1) what kind of errors are made by students? (2) What are students' most dominant errors when writing essay text?

## Method

This study's design is descriptive-quantitative. It is conducted at SMA 5 Aceh Barat Daya, a senior high school located in Aceh Barat Daya. The sampling was selected using the universal sampling technique because the total number of students was under 100. They are students of class IX. MIA 1 and IX. MIA 2 intake 2023/2024. The total number of subjects is 53 students.

This study uses tests as a data collection technique. In addition, the data from the testis obtained by students' tasks. The data analysis technique involves systematically identifying, categorizing, and examining the mistakes made by students in their essay writing. The researcher formulates the types and frequencies of errors, such as grammatical, lexical, syntactic, and discourse-related issues.

A comprehensive statistical approach is employed to analyze the errors in student essays, focusing on determining the errors' minimum, maximum, mean, median, standard deviation, and variance. The minimum and maximum values are identified to understand the range of errors made by students. The mean provided the average number of errors per student, offering a general overview of error frequency. The median, which represents the middle value when the errors are arranged in order, is used to understand the central tendency without the influence of outliers. Standard deviation measured the dispersion of errors around the mean, indicating how spread out the errors were. Lastly, the variance, which is the square of the standard deviation, provided a measure of the overall variability in the data. These statistical measures helped understand the distribution and frequency of noun errors, thus enabling targeted interventions to improve student writing.

## Results

After all of the tests had been analyzed based on the objective of the research, it was found that 582 errors were made by students regarding subject-verb agreement errors, pronoun errors, simple present errors, adverbs errors, and noun errors. The statistical measure is shown in the following table:

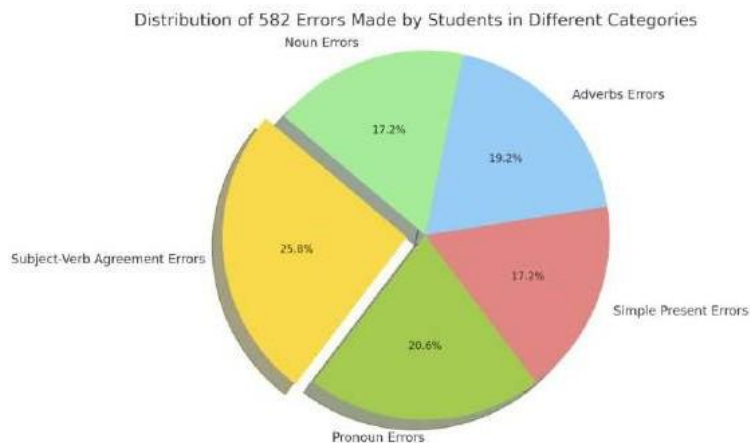
**Table 1. Statistical Data**

<b>Statistical Measure</b>	<b>Value</b>
Minimum	3
Maximum	25
Mean	56.64
Median	10
Standard Deviation	05.32
Variance	28.30.00

Statistical measures showed that the minimum number of errors made by a student was 3 errors. Conversely, the maximum number of errors was 25 errors, showcasing the challenges faced by some students in using grammar. These values highlight the wide range of proficiency levels among the students.

The mean number of errors was 56.64; each student made about 12 errors in their essays. The median number of errors was 10, meaning that half of the students made fewer than 10 errors. The median value is lower than the mean, indicating that a smaller number of students made a disproportionately high number of errors. The standard deviation was found to be 5.32, reflecting the average amount by which the errors deviate from the mean. This relatively high standard deviation indicates significant variability in the number of errors among students. The variance, which is the square of the standard deviation, was 28.30, reinforcing the extent of variability in the dataset. These measures of dispersion underline the necessity for tailored instructional strategies to address the specific needs of students with different proficiency levels in noun usage.

Based on the number of errors, students made different types of errors: Subject-Verb Agreement Errors, Pronoun Errors, Simple Present Errors, Adverb Errors, and Noun Errors. Each segment of the pie chart represents the proportion of errors within each category, highlighting the areas where students faced the most challenges.



**Figure 1. The Classification of Errors in Students' Essay Writing**

Based on the data above, it was determined that subject-verb agreement errors were the most dominant errors, comprising approximately 25.8% of the total errors (150 out of 582). This indicates a significant challenge for students in ensuring that subjects and verbs in their sentences agree in number and person. Pronoun Errors make up about 20.6% of the total errors (120 out of 582). These errors often involve the incorrect use of pronouns, such as using "he" instead of "him" or "them" instead of "his/her." This reflects students' difficulties in correctly matching pronouns to their antecedents regarding number, gender, and case.

Errors in the simple present tense account for 17.2% of the total (100 out of 582). These errors include incorrect conjugation of verbs in the present tense, such as "He goes to school every day" instead of "He goes to school every day."

This suggests a need for more practice and instruction on the rules governing present- tense verb forms. Adverbs errors constitute 19.2% of the errors (112 out of 582). Students often misplace adverbs or use them incorrectly, as in "He runs quick" instead of "He runs quickly." This category underscores the complexity of adverb placement and form students must master. Noun Errors represent 17.2% of the total errors (100 out of 582). These errors include issues such as incorrect noun forms, improper pluralization, or incorrect usage of articles with nouns.

### **Subject-Verb Agreement Errors**

Analyzing students' answer writing, it was found that most students made errors in using subject-verb agreement when writing essay text. It occurred when the subject of a sentence does not match the verb in number. For example, one common error is when a singular subject is paired with a plural verb, as in the sentence, "The list of items are long." Here, the subject "list" is singular, so the correct verb should be "is" instead of "are." Conversely, students sometimes pair a plural subject with a singular verb, such as in the sentence, "The books on the shelf is old." In this case, "books" is a plural subject and should be matched with the verb "are" to maintain agreement.

The study revealed that Subject-Verb Agreement Errors were the most prevalent among the 582 student errors, comprising approximately 25.8% of the total errors. Nail (2022) stated that this high incidence highlights a fundamental area of difficulty in English grammar for learners, reflecting both theoretical linguistic challenges and empirical findings from previous research. In addition, James (2021) explained that subject-verb agreement is a cornerstone of English syntax, requiring that subjects and verbs agree in number and person. For instance, the correct form "She goes to school" aligns the singular subject "she" with the singular verb "goes," whereas errors occur when this alignment is disrupted, such as in "She go to school."

Students often make errors in subject-verb agreement due to the complexity of English grammar rules and the influence of their native languages. English requires

that verbs agree in number with their subjects, meaning singular subjects take singular verbs, and plural subjects take plural verbs. This rule is complicated

by exceptions and variations in verb forms, particularly with irregular verbs and the use of auxiliary verbs. Students, especially those learning English as a second language, often face difficulties with these rules, leading to frequent errors. Additionally, the influence of their first language can interfere, as many languages have different rules for verb conjugation and agreement, which can be confusing when applying English grammar rules.

Furthermore, students may lack sufficient practice and feedback on subject-verb agreement. Inadequate exposure to correct sentence structures in both written and spoken English can hinder their ability to internalize these rules. Educational materials and classroom instruction might not emphasize this aspect of grammar enough, or students might not receive enough individualized attention to correct their mistakes. Moreover, the cognitive load in constructing sentences, especially under time constraints or in testing situations, can lead to the oversight of subject-verb agreement rules. This combination of rule complexity, first language interference, and insufficient practice contributes to the high frequency of subject-verb agreement errors among students.

In conclusion, the prevalence of subject-verb agreement errors in student writing underscores a critical area for grammatical instructions, which are the most common errors made by students in writing English. The result of the study is in line with the study of Nurjanah (2017), and Firdaus (2020), the subject of verb agreement is a part of grammatical rules in which students struggle to combine subjects with their pairs.

### **Pronoun Errors**

The analysis of errors in student essays revealed that pronoun errors accounted for approximately 20.6% of the total errors, with 120 out of 582 mistakes falling into this category. This substantial proportion highlights a significant area of difficulty for students. Pronoun errors include incorrect pronoun forms, mismatched antecedents, and issues with pronoun agreement in number and gender. Common examples include using "they" instead of "he/she" or confusing subjective and objective cases, such as "him went to the store" instead of "he went to the store."

The findings align with previous research, indicating that pronoun errors are prevalent in language learning. For instance, a study by Putri (2023) on second language acquisition found that pronoun usage is often challenging for learners due to the nuanced rules governing pronoun-antecedent agreement and pronoun



cases. This complexity is compounded by the fact that English has numerous pronouns with different functions and forms, making it easy for students to misuse them.

According to traditional grammar rules, pronouns must agree with their antecedents in number, gender, and case. For example, in the sentence "Each student must bring their book," the singular antecedent "student" incorrectly pairs with the plural pronoun "there," violating the rule of agreement. Such errors can confuse readers and disrupt the flow of the text. Previous studies have also highlighted the pedagogical challenges associated with teaching pronoun usage. A study by Didi and Ayuningtias (2019) pointed out that explicit instruction and practice in the rules of pronoun usage are crucial for reducing errors. They suggest that targeted exercises focusing on pronoun-antecedent agreement, pronoun case, and the use of reflexive and relative pronouns can help students improve their grammatical accuracy.

In conclusion, pronouns are one of kinds errors made by students in writing. This result is also supported by previous research conducted Putri (2023), Didi and Ayunintiyas (2019), who claimed that pronoun is one of the most common errors found in students' writing. However, the result of the study denied the study of Rahmawati et al., (2021), who stated that students are in the very good category in using pronouns in writing. It contrasts with the analysis of students' writing at SMA Negeri 5 Aceh Barat Daya, in which is pronouns are the second most dominant errors made by students in writing.

### **Simple Present Errors**

The study revealed that Simple Present Errors constituted 17.2% of the total 582 student errors. This highlights a significant challenge in mastering the simple present tense rules. Common errors include incorrect verb conjugation, such as using "go" instead of "goes" in the sentence "He go to school every day." Such mistakes suggest a fundamental misunderstanding of subject-verb agreement in the present tense and potential issues with memorization and application of grammatical rules.

Theoretically, the simple present tense is used to describe habitual actions, general truths, and states of being. According to traditional grammar instruction (Thornbury, 1999), the formation of the simple present tense involves adding an -s or -es to the base form of the verb for third-person singular subjects. However, students often struggle with these seemingly straightforward rules. According to

Sweller (2018), these difficulties were caused by the cognitive demands of processing and applying multiple grammatical rules simultaneously. The high frequency of simple present errors indicates that students might be overwhelmed by the rules, leading to frequent mistakes.

Students often make errors in using the simple present tense due to several factors. One primary reason is the complexity of English grammar rules regarding verb conjugation, especially for non-native speakers. In the simple present tense, verbs change form based on the subject; this rule can confuse learners from linguistic backgrounds where verb conjugation is simpler or entirely different. According to Ellis (2017), students' errors in using the simple present tense often stem from the complexity of English grammar rules, which differ significantly from their native languages, leading to confusion and mistakes. Similarly, Richards (2018) argues that such errors are common because learners struggle with the consistent application of tense rules, particularly in differentiating between regular and irregular verbs. Both experts highlight that these mistakes are a natural part of the language acquisition process and reflect the challenges learners face in mastering a new linguistic system. Additionally, irregular verbs and exceptions to standard conjugation rules add another layer of complexity, making it challenging for students to apply the correct forms consistently.

Another contributing factor is the limited exposure to and practice with the correct usage of the simple present tense. More advanced grammatical structures are often emphasized in many educational settings, leaving less time for reinforcing the basics. Students might not receive sufficient practice opportunities to internalize and use the rules correctly in their writing and speech. Moreover, the context in which the simple present tense is used to express habitual actions, general truths, and scheduled events. This gap in understanding and application underscores the need for comprehensive teaching methods incorporating the frequent, contextualized practice of the simple present tense to help students overcome these common errors.

In conclusion, the prevalence of simple present errors in student essays underscores the need for focused grammatical instruction and practice. The study's findings align with prior research conducted by Fitria (2019), Mukhsin (2016), and Masruddin (2023), all of whom observed frequent errors among students when using the simple present tense in their writing. This consistency

across studies underscores the persistent challenges students face in accurately applying this

grammatical structure, highlighting the need for continued attention and targeted interventions to improve their proficiency in written communication.

### **Adverbs Errors**

A study investigating common adverb errors in students' essay writing found that learners frequently struggle with correctly using adverbs, making mistakes that can be categorized into four types: addition, omission, misinformation, and mis ordering. Addition errors occur when students insert unnecessary adverbs, often leading to redundancy or awkward phrasing. For instance, writing "He ran quickly fast to the store" involves adding "quickly," which is redundant with "fast." Omission errors happen when an adverb is mistakenly left out, resulting in a sentence that lacks necessary detail or clarity, such as "She sings beautifully" instead of "She sings beautifully." Misinformation errors occur when students use the wrong adverb, which changes the sentence's intended meaning. An example would be "She spoke silent" instead of "She spoke silently," where "silent" (an adjective) is incorrectly used in place of the adverb "silently." Mis ordering errors involve placing an adverb in the wrong position within a sentence, disrupting the flow or confusing. For example, writing "He often is late" instead of the correct "He is often late." The study highlights the importance of targeted grammar instruction and practices to help students master the use of adverbs and improve their overall writing proficiency.

Students often make errors in using adverbs due to the complexity and variability of adverb placement and form in English. Unlike more grammatical components, adverbs can modify verbs, adjectives, other adverbs, and even entire sentences, each requiring different placement rules. Additionally, many adverbs are formed by adding "-ly" to adjectives, but there are numerous exceptions and irregular forms, leading to mistakes like using "quick" instead of "quickly."

According to Mila (2020), another significant reason for adverb errors is the influence of the student's native language. Different languages have various rules and conventions for adverb usage, and students often transfer these rules to English incorrectly. For instance, in some languages, adverbs might commonly precede verbs, which can lead students to structure English sentences in the same way incorrectly. Furthermore, students might not receive enough explicit instruction or practice with adverbs compared to other grammatical elements,

leaving gaps in their understanding. As a result, they struggle to correctly identify when and how to use adverbs, leading to frequent errors in their writing.

The study by Thamrin and Saragih (2024) supports previous findings that adverbs are commonly among the errors made by students. They highlight the challenges students face in using adverbs correctly in their writing. However, contrasting views are presented by Rochmawan (2023), who suggests that adverbs are less frequently a source of errors among students. This discrepancy challenges the consensus on the prevalence of adverb-related errors among students, indicating a need for further investigation into the factors influencing these differences in error rates across studies. Clarifying these discrepancies can contribute to more effective strategies for improving students' grammar skills and overall writing proficiency.

### **Noun Errors**

The result of this study found that adverb errors constituted a significant portion of the grammatical mistakes in student essays, accounting for 19.2% of the total errors. These errors typically involved misplacement of adverbs, incorrect adverb forms, and using adjectives instead of adverbs. For example, students often wrote sentences like "He runs quick" instead of "He runs quickly" or placed adverbs incorrectly as in "She almost drives every day" instead of "She drives almost every day." These findings indicate that many students struggle with the rules governing adverb usage, which can hinder the clarity and precision of their writing.

Adverbs are essential to sentence structure as they modify verbs, adjectives, or other adverbs, providing additional context such as manner, place, time, frequency, degree, and reason. According to Quirk et al. (2019), the correct placement of adverbs is crucial for maintaining the intended meaning and natural flow of sentences. The English language has specific syntactic rules for adverb placement, particularly with respect to verb phrases and the modification of adjectives. Mastery of these rules is necessary for effective communication and avoiding ambiguity in writing.

The prevalence of adverb errors observed in this study accordance with previous research. For instance, a study by Jirah (2019) also highlighted that learners of English as a second language frequently misuse adverbs, often due to interference from their native languages and a lack of explicit instruction on adverb placement and form. Another study by Johan (2020) noted that errors with

adverbs are common among learners at various proficiency levels, indicating that this issue requires ongoing attention in language instruction.

Given the findings of this study and prior research, targeted instruction on adverbs is necessary to improve students' grammatical accuracy. Teachers should focus on the rules governing adverb placement and form, using explicit teaching methods and providing ample practice opportunities. For example, exercises that involve sentence rewriting to correct adverb placement or transformation tasks that require changing adjectives to adverbs can be beneficial. Additionally, incorporating adverb usage into broader writing assignments can help students apply these rules in more authentic contexts. According to James (2021), students often make errors in noun usage due to interference from their native language, where the rules and structures for nouns may differ significantly. Similarly, Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (2022) point out that errors in noun usage can also result from developmental factors, where learners naturally make mistakes as they acquire new grammatical rules. Both experts emphasize that these errors are a normal part of the language learning process, highlighting the need for patience and targeted instruction to help students overcome these challenges.

### **Conclusion**

The study showed errors found in student essays, identifying a total of 582 errors. These errors were categorized into five main types: Subject-Verb Agreement Errors (25.8%), Pronoun Errors (20.6%), Adverb Errors (19.2%), Noun Errors (17.2%), and Simple Present Tense Errors (17.2%). The most dominant error type was Subject-Verb Agreement, indicating that students frequently struggle with ensuring that subjects and verbs agree in number and person. This category alone accounted for a significant proportion of the total errors, highlighting a widespread challenge in this area of grammar. The finding of the study showed the differences with other previous studies in which all students made errors in using subject-verb agreement.

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