



Error Patterns in Senior High School Students' Descriptive Texts Through Surface Strategy Taxonomy

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Article Info	Abstract
Received: 2026 - 06 - 01 Revised: 2026 06-18 Accepted: 2026 06-30 Keywords: Descriptive Text, Error Analysis, Surface Strategy Taxonomy. DOI: 10.24256/ideasv14i1.10175 Corresponding Author: Alfa Rizky Cahya Bagaskara alfabagas9@gmail.com Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, Universitas Muhammadiyah Purworejo, Purworejo, Jawa Tengah	<i>This study investigates error patterns in senior high school students' descriptive texts using the Surface Strategy Taxonomy framework, which classifies errors into omission, addition, misordering, and misinformation. While previous studies have examined writing errors on Surface Strategy Taxonomy error categories on descriptive texts at the secondary level, few analyze deeper into more detailed categories of writing errors occurred. This leaves a gap in understanding how students struggle with grammatical accuracy in this genre. The current research aimed to identify the most frequent types of errors and analyze the kind of mistakes that occurred in each. A descriptive qualitative design was employed, with 36 descriptive texts of students at SMA Negeri 7 Purworejo during the 2025/2026 academic year. The texts were analyzed to classify and calculate the frequency of each error type. The findings revealed that students produced all four categories of errors, with misinformation accounting for the highest proportion (45%), followed by omission (39%), addition (14%), and misordering (2%). These results indicate that learners often struggle with selecting appropriate grammatical forms, functional words, and word order, reflecting both interlanguage development and first language transfer. This study analyzes student errors while contributing to pedagogical practice by offering diagnostic insights into writing errors and identifying areas requiring explicit instruction and corrective feedback. The findings provide diagnostic insights for EFL teachers to design targeted instruction and improve students' grammatical accuracy in writing.</i>

1. Introduction

Language is one of the essential elements of human civilization and functions as both a communication tool and a community group's identity (Tumanggor et al., 2025). Language is an essential aspect of human life, serving as the primary means of communication and social interaction. Language is an amazing instrument that enables people to express complicated concepts, feelings, and experiences (Saidova & Ramazonova, 2025). Even though there are many languages in the world, English is one of the international languages that are spoken by many people worldwide. English is the predominant language in roughly 67 countries, while it is spoken as a secondary language or less in an estimated 27 other territories. (Dwyer, 2025). Aside from the mother tongue, English is used either as a second language or an international language (Husnaini et al., 2023).

English is separated into four main skills for EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners: speaking, listening, reading, and writing (Husnaini et al., 2023; Sudrajat et al., 2020). In a more general sense, English is divided into two categories: productive skills, like writing and speaking, which are linked to outputs or products that students produce after receiving inputs from reading and listening exercises, and receptive skills, like reading and listening, which are connected to the inputs that people understand when learning English (Kumala et al., 2018). Nonetheless, in the process of mastering English, every skill needs to be enhanced. However, English majors today face several difficulties when studying the language, especially when it comes to productive skills, including speaking and writing (Medina Jerez & Bajaña Pineda, 2024; Prasajo et al., 2023). Writing serves as a vehicle for conveying complex ideas and concepts (Raha & Setif, 2024). Although writing skill is crucial, many students face difficulties in learning writing skill because of various problems (Paramitha & Syahrul, 2021). Many countries, like Indonesia, include English in their national education curricula to encourage writing proficiency and other English language abilities because of its importance and difficulties (Andayani, n.d.; Pajarwati et al., 2021).

Kemendikbud (2016) stated that the goal of the English curriculum in Indonesia is to help students acquire critical and creative thinking abilities, self-assurance, and intercultural and communicative competence. Furthermore, Kemendikbud (2016) emphasizes that the inclusion of English in school curricula allows children to become fully immersed in the global world. In the end, it is believed that this ability would help students develop their critical thinking abilities, develop a stronger sense of self-worth, and accept diversity. In addition, Kemendikbud (2016) states that from an academic standpoint, the objective of English instruction is for students to attain the B1 standard of CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment). Global Scale - Table 1 (CEFR 3.3), (n.d.) informs that at this level, students are expected to be able to do the following: 1) maintain interaction and convey ideas/opinions in various contexts with clear articulation; 2) express the

main ideas that they want comprehensively; and 3) maintain communication even though there are brief pauses. Widyaningrum et al., (2024) acknowledged those multimodal texts, which combine many communication approaches, must be implemented to provide a rich and appealing communication experience. Align to this, Kemendikbud (2016) incorporates various texts across genres to strengthen students' English writing skills including descriptive text at the senior high school level.

Descriptive text is writing that provides readers with a clear account of a person, animal, thing, or location in order to help them grasp the subject matter (Fadhila et al., 2025; Suminar & Putri, 2018). Descriptive writing informs or describes an object to the reader (Fitriani et al., 2019). This kind of writing offers specifics on individuals, animals, objects, and locations (Purnamasari et al., 2021). A well-written description is similar to a "word picture," allowing the reader to visualize the item, location, or person (Sa'adah, 2020). Descriptive texts have two schematic structures: identification and description (Syifa et al., 2022). The object's introduction makes up the identification section's content, while the description section's content provides the object's specific appearance information. The simple present tense used in descriptive writing allows for the inclusion of broad, habitual, and repetitive activities (Johannes, 2021). The use of adjectives in a descriptive text is encouraged to create a vivid depiction of the object described. An adjective in grammar is a word whose primary syntactic function is to alter a noun or pronoun, providing additional details about the definition of the noun or pronoun (Nur Habibah Lbs, 2024). To effectively describe the thing, students must also possess a large vocabulary in English (Afiani, 2022). However, considering that they stress too much on word spelling and grammar, pupils feel anxious of making mistakes (Siregar & Ismahani, 2024). This leads us to the conclusion that there are several aspects that should be considered while pupils are learning English.

Sari et al., (2024) Writing is one of the areas of the language that students should be proficient in as it allows them to convey their ideas, feelings, and thoughts in a written form. Purnamasari et al. (2021) reveal that writing can be a challenging task because students must translate their thoughts into written form and take note of several elements of writing, including proper syntax, spelling, and a clear point. In addition, Kumala et al. (2018) find that when writing in English, pupils still have. Raha & Setif (2024) acknowledge two sorts of hypotheses that classify error causes in second language acquisition: intralingual, or developmental errors, and interlingual, or transfer errors. Furthermore, Agbay & Reyes (2019) describe intralingual and developmental errors as mistakes brought on by the target language. Due to their limited experience with target linguistic structures, students tend to overgeneralize, which leads to these errors. Furthermore, we categorize errors occurred in the Surface Strategy Taxonomy introduced by Dulay. Dulay et al. (1982) define the Surface Strategy Taxonomy as an approach to error analysis that categorizes mistakes based on the modifications learners make on the

surface structure of language, namely omission, addition, misordering, and misinformation (see Table 1). Raha & Setif (2024) claim that this strategy offers important insight into the mental processes involved in a learner's reformation of a second language, for this strategy has been extensively employed in numerous prior studies.

Table 1. Surface Strategy Taxonomy of Errors

Category	Description	Example (Incorrect)	Example (Correct)
Addition	The inclusion of something that should not be present in a well-formed speech	He doesn't goes.	He doesn't go.
Omission	The lack of a necessary component of a well-formed speech	She going to school.	She is going to school.
Misinformation	The misuse of a morpheme or structure	She is happy yesterday.	She was happy yesterday.
Misordering	The improper arrangement of a morpheme or set of morphemes inside a speech	What she is doing?	What is she doing?

Previous studies have investigated students' writing errors using the Surface Strategy Taxonomy. For instance, Kumala et al. (2018) shows that carelessness, first language interference, translation, instructor explanation, and grammatical incomprehension are some of the elements that affect students' writing grammatical errors, demonstrating a correlation between the number of factors students encountered and the frequency of writing errors, while Raha & Setif (2024) observe that particular error patterns are more common in particular types of errors. Additionally, Baruna et al. (2025) found that pupils were making grammatical errors in their writing on a regular basis, which was indicative of their language difficulties.

Although errors are common, Bitchener & Storch (2021) and Ferris (2020) emphasize that errors are inevitable in language learning and should be seen as developmental opportunities rather than failures. Collectively, these studies demonstrate the four categories of error, the pattern of the errors, their underlying causes, and their impact on the writing quality of students. However, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, no prior study has analyzed and discussed the error categories of Surface Strategy Taxonomy in smaller scopes. Therefore, this study contributes by examining error types in students' descriptive writing and discussing the notable flaws associated with each error type to gain a comprehensive understanding of students' limitations and behaviors in English writing.

2. Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design to examine the various types of errors that students made in their writing and to determine the frequency of each error. The participants were 36 tenth-grade students at SMA Negeri 7 Purworejo who had previously learned descriptive text writing. The data were collected during the researcher's teaching practicum at the school, in which students were assigned to write descriptive texts as part of their English learning activities. The data in this study were obtained through purposive sampling. The researcher selected students' descriptive texts based on specific criteria to ensure the relevance and quality of the data. First, the texts had to be written in the descriptive genre. Second, each text was required to have a complete structural organization, consisting of both *Identification* and *Description* sections. Third, the texts needed to be legible and comprehensible, allowing accurate identification and classification of errors. These criteria were applied to guarantee that the analyzed samples represented authentic and well-structured student writing suitable for error analysis using the Surface Strategy Taxonomy framework. Texts that did not meet these criteria were excluded from the analysis. The instrument of the study was the students' written texts, which were analyzed using the framework of Surface Strategy Taxonomy by (Dulay et al., 1982). The process of error identification and classification followed several steps. First, the students' descriptive texts were carefully read to identify grammatical and structural errors. Each error was marked and recorded in a checklist. Second, the errors were classified according to the four categories of the Surface Strategy Taxonomy: omission, addition, misinformation, and misordering. Third, the frequency of each error type was calculated and presented in tables and percentages to illustrate the distribution of errors. Finally, to ensure the reliability of the analysis, peer checking was conducted with a fellow EFL instructor to verify the accuracy of the classification. To ensure the validity and reliability of the analysis, the researcher referred to the guidelines of the Surface Strategy Taxonomy proposed by (Dulay et al., 1982) in classifying the errors. Furthermore, the researcher consulted with a supervising lecturer to confirm the accuracy of the categorization and interpretation. This combination of theoretical guidance and expert validation strengthened the trustworthiness of the findings and minimized potential bias in the classification process.

3. Result

The researcher discovered that errors occurred for each kind of error based on the examination of students' descriptive texts. The analysis's detailed outcome is shown in the table below.

Table 2. Result of the Analysis

Students' Number	Type of Errors				Total Errors
	Addition	Omission	Misinformation	Misordering	
S1	2	35	58	1	96
S2	4	12	19	1	36
S3	4	1	13	0	18
S4	1	22	30	0	53
S5	1	5	11	0	17
S6	1	3	5	0	9
S7	2	26	23	0	51
S8	4	51	64	2	121
S9	9	2	0	0	11
S10	9	16	22	0	47
S11	9	43	28	6	86
S12	3	8	9	0	20
S13	4	33	36	1	74
S14	1	10	24	0	35
S15	2	6	10	0	18
S16	23	25	36	5	89
S17	16	22	25	1	64
S18	10	15	21	1	47
S19	2	4	5	0	11
S20	1	12	8	0	21
S21	6	25	23	2	56
S22	17	7	13	0	37
S23	4	24	24	0	52
S24	6	8	7	1	22
S25	13	44	33	2	92
S26	5	9	16	1	31
S27	9	38	31	5	83
S28	11	22	19	0	52
S29	4	20	23	1	48
S30	1	4	14	0	19
S31	10	32	18	1	61
S32	2	11	8	1	22
S33	17	9	23	0	49
S34	15	25	33	5	78
S35	12	40	28	1	81
S36	5	15	18	0	38
Total	245	684	778	38	1745

In addition, the distribution of errors that occurred in the students'

descriptive texts is demonstrated in the chart below.

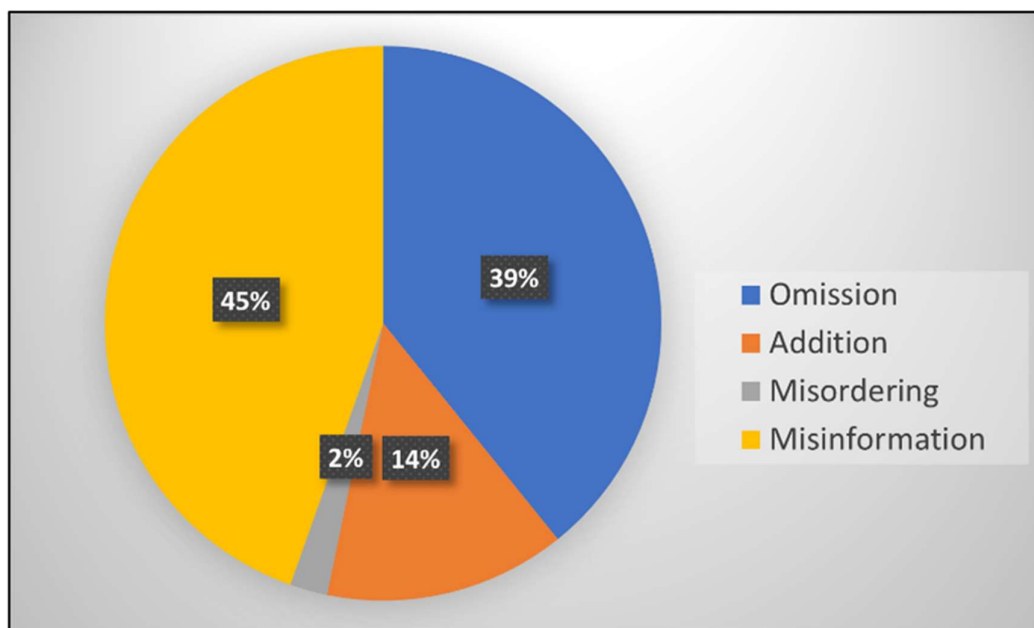


Figure 1. *Errors' Distribution in Students' Descriptive Texts*

The findings revealed that misinformation and omission errors occurred more frequently than other types. The dominance of misinformation errors can be attributed to several factors, including incorrect use of verb forms (V1, V2, V3), subject-verb agreement, and auxiliary verbs. Students also made errors in capitalization, punctuation, conjunctions, and prepositions, as well as typographical mistakes and inaccurate lexical choices (e.g., have vs. has, or using V-ing as a finite verb). These issues reflect incomplete mastery of both grammatical rules and writing conventions.

Omission errors, on the other hand, were largely influenced by students' tendency to leave out obligatory elements in sentence construction. Common omissions included plural markers (-s), articles, punctuation marks (commas and periods), and auxiliary verbs. Such omissions suggest transfer from the students' first language, which does not require these markers, into their English writing.

The predominance of misinformation and omission errors in this study shows a pattern that is partly consistent with previous research. Raha & Setif (2024) and Baruna et al. (2025) also reported misinformation as the most frequent error type, confirming that students often struggle with applying correct grammatical forms. However, Kumala et al. (2018) found omission errors to be slightly more dominant, with misinformation still accounting for 30% of the total errors, which is only 7% lower than omission. This similarity suggests that misinformation remains a major challenge across different contexts, while the variation in dominance between

omission and misinformation may be influenced by the genre of the text and the specific writing tasks assigned. Thus, the present study reinforces the recurring difficulty of misinformation while highlighting omission as another significant source of error in descriptive writing.

Although misinformation and omission errors were the most observed, all types of errors shared a common underlying cause: students' limited knowledge of how to construct accurate sentences in English. This highlights the need for explicit instruction on functional words, verb inflections, and sentence-building conventions to improve learners' writing accuracy in descriptive texts.

4. Discussion

This section presents a detailed analysis of the error types identified in students' descriptive texts, utilizing the Surface Strategy Taxonomy established by Dulay et al. (1982). Nevertheless, this study further breaks down each error into smaller groups, in contrast to earlier research that merely categorized faults into the four main Surface Strategy Taxonomy categories. Deeper insights into the areas where pupils struggle are provided by this more precise classification.

Addition

Addition errors occur when students add unnecessary elements in a sentence, resulting in redundancy or incorrect forms. Addition errors are characterized by the presence of extra morphemes, words, or symbols that distort the intended meaning or reduce clarity. In the analysis, the researcher found that addition errors accounted for 14% of the total error distribution. In this study, the researcher has classified several types of addition errors found in students' writing.

Morphological Addition

Learners sometimes added morphemes that were not required. For example, it was found that some students wrote *80 kilometers per hours* instead of *80 kilometers per hour*. This kind of error reflects students' tendency to overgeneralize plural markers. Paying attention to a word's singular and plural forms is essential to maintain the logical sense of a sentence.

Orthographic Addition

Orthographic addition was found in the form of unnecessary capital letters and punctuation. Several errors were found corresponding to this category of error. For instance, *He is a student And he is studying in the school* should have been *He is a student and he is studying in the school*. Similarly, *He rides a motorcycle, and wears a black helmet* should have been *He rides a motorcycle and wears a black helmet*. These errors indicate that students are not yet consistent in applying orthographic conventions, often inserting symbols or capitalization where they are not required.

Lexical Addition

Lexical addition occurred when students inserted unnecessary words or prepositions. For example, *He is mature mature and very smart* should have been *He is mature and very smart*. Another example found by the researcher is that students wrote *Around of the road* instead of *Around the road*. Such errors reveal redundancy and misuse of lexical items, which may stem from direct translation from the first language or lack of awareness of English collocation patterns.

Syntactic Addition

Syntactic addition was evident in the use of unnecessary conjunctions. For instance, students wrote *The material used is carbon, and that's why it is lightweight* should have been *The material used is carbon, that's why it is lightweight*. The addition of conjunction *and* after the comma reflects the ineffective writing method implied by students. This type of error shows that learners sometimes insert conjunctions excessively, leading to awkward or grammatically incorrect sentence structures.

Omission

Omission errors occur when students fail to supply certain linguistic elements that are required in a sentence. Unlike misinformation, where the form is present but incorrect, omission errors are characterized by the complete absence of morphemes, words, or symbols that should appear in the construction. In the analysis, the researcher found that omission errors accounted for 39% of the total error distribution. In this study, the researcher has classified several types of omission errors found in students' writing.

Morphological Omission

Morphological omission occurs when students neglect to include essential morphemes, such as possessive forms, comparative endings, or plural markers, when writing. In students' descriptive texts, this error appeared in various sentences. For instance, students wrote *80 kilometer* instead of *80 kilometers*, where the plural marker *-s* was omitted. In the other case, the omission of the comparative marker *-er* was also discovered. Students wrote *It makes him even sweet* instead of *It makes him even sweeter*. Another case was the omission of possessive markers, as in *local fishermen boats* instead of *local fishermen's boats*. These errors indicate that learners often neglect inflectional endings, which are crucial for grammatical accuracy in English text.

Auxiliary/Functional Word Omission

This type of omission occurs when students neglect the presence of functional words such as articles, auxiliary verbs, infinitive markers, or prepositions. These kinds of omission errors are also found in students' writing.

Considering article omission, students wrote *Mio Sporty has two wheels* instead of *A Mio Sporty has two wheels*. Referring to auxiliary verb omission, the researcher discovered that students wrote *the material that used in the F1 core is carbon* instead of *the material that is used in the F1 core is carbon*. Students also omitted prepositions, as in *two types suspension* instead of *two types of suspension*, and infinitive markers, as in *It functions as hearing aids regulate body temperature* instead of *It functions as hearing aids to regulate body temperature*. These omissions suggest that learners struggle with supplying functional words that are not present in their first language, leading to incomplete sentence structures in English.

Orthographic Omission

The term "orthographic omission" indicates the lack of essential orthographic markers like hyphens or punctuation in a sentence. For instance, in the writing, the researcher found *small to medium sized*, where it should have been *small-to-medium-sized*. This shows omission of the hyphen in a compound adjective. Punctuation omissions were also frequent, as in *our relationship is very close we often play together* instead of *our relationship is very close, we often play together*. Such errors indicate that there is a gap in students' understanding of written English conventions, especially in formal settings.

Structural Omission

Structural omission occurs when sentences are left unfinished or missing crucial components to communicate meaning. Several cases were found in students' texts. Students wrote *He is also stingy and likes to share*, neglecting the context of the word *share* by not giving additional information about what is shared. Another example is students wrote *This backpack is not just a simple for carrying books* instead of *This backpack is not just a simple thing for carrying books*. Such omissions result in unfinished sentences that fail to communicate ideas clearly. The errors indicate that students occasionally stop short of finishing their ideas, leaving gaps that make it tough to understand the statement.

Misinformation

Misinformation errors take place when pupils utilize the wrong form or structure of the language even while the relevant components are present. Such errors occur due to adopting the incorrect form as opposed to from leaving out or adding specific sentence components. In the analysis, the researcher found that misinformation error accounts for 45% of the total error distribution. In this study, the researcher has classified several errors associated with misinformation errors found in students' descriptive texts.

Orthographic Error

Orthographic errors are referred to as errors in the conventional English writing format, such as capitalization, spelling, and word combination. Such errors were discovered in the students' writing. For instance, some students wrote *indonesia* instead of *Indonesia* and *yamaha* instead of *Yamaha*, showing inconsistency in applying capitalization rules for proper nouns. Typographical mistakes such as *producted* for *produced* or *prom* for *from* also appeared, which in most cases did not change the meaning but reflected carelessness in spelling. For instance, students wrote *amrs* instead of *arms*. In addition, errors like *head lamp* instead of *headlamp* revealed students' limited awareness of conventional word formation in English. These errors demonstrate that students frequently identify the proper lexical item but fail to comply with standard orthographic criteria.

Morphological Error

Morphological errors occur when students misuse word forms or fail to follow morphological norms, like the misuse of verb forms. The researcher discovered that some students wrote *It can goes* instead of *It can go*. Another example is that students wrote *Rabbits had long ears* instead of *Rabbits have long ears*. The other error of this category is that students use the incorrect word form in the sentence they wrote. For instance, students wrote *it's teeth* instead of *its teeth*. These errors imply that students frequently neglect subject-verb agreement in a sentence and overgeneralize grammatical rules.

Syntactic Errors

Syntactic errors are errors in sentence construction, especially when it comes to subject-verb agreement and prepositional usage. For example, students wrote *it have* instead of *it has*. Such errors suggest that students face issues in understanding the subject-predicate agreement rules. Additionally, students also misuse the preposition words. In the text, the researcher found that a student wrote *from all kinds of Mio* instead of *of all kinds of Mio*. This finding showed that students struggled with selecting the appropriate relationship words while constructing sentences. These errors highlight the impact of first language transfer and students' challenges learning English syntactic rules.

Punctuation Errors

Punctuation errors occur when punctuation is misused or applied incorrectly, which impairs the meaning and clarity of a phrase. This error was also evident in students' writing. For instance, students wrote *he has kind nature, he never talks back to his parents* should have been written as *he is kind; he never talks back to his parents*. Similarly, *he has three siblings, two sister and one brother* was incorrectly punctuated and should have been *he has three siblings: two sister*

and one brother. These errors suggest that students have not quite fully understood how punctuation is utilized in English writing to form sentences and convey information.

Misordering

Misordering errors occurred when pupils set the incorrect arrangement of words or phrases within a sentence. The error could impair grammatical accuracy and a sentence's clarity. This error involves necessary and appropriate elements written in the wrong sequence. In this study, the researcher found that misordering errors account for only 2% of total error distribution. In this study, the researcher has classified several types of addition errors found in students' writing.

Adverbial Misordering

Students sometimes misplaced adverbial phrases in sentences. For example, *On the front side a Mio Sporty has one headlamp and two sign lamps* should have been *A Mio Sporty has one headlamp and two sign lamps on the front side*. Here, although the students' writing isn't necessarily incorrect, the placement of the adverbial phrase in the last part of the sentence suits the context better in the sentence. This error shows that learners are not yet fully aware of the conventional placement of adverbials in English, which often appear at the end of a sentence for clarity and naturalness.

Noun Phrase Misordering

Errors also appeared in the arrangement of words within noun phrases. This error occurred when students wrote expressions in improper arrangements. This affects the naturalness of students' writing. For instance, students wrote *side front* instead of *front side*. This error is much less frequent compared to other kinds of errors. Although the noun phrase misordering errors were few, this still indicates that sometimes, students may transfer word order patterns from their first language, resulting in unnatural or incorrect sequences in English.

Synthesis of Error Analysis

The analysis revealed that many students are still struggling in constructing accurate sentences in English. This results in frequent errors in their writing, especially misinformation and omission errors. The pupils find it more challenging to construct proper sentences as English is their second language. This alligns with (Khalilah, 2024) who views that understanding and mastering the phonological, morphological, syntactic, and lexical features of a second language can be difficult due to structural differences with the original language.

The main cause is that pupils don't have enough opportunities to utilize

English on a regular basis. This aligns with behaviorism theory, which views stimulus-response as one of the aspects that led to proficiency in grammar and reading (Estremera, 2023). Additionally, output hypothesis theory states that the main goal of classroom activities should be to develop comprehension and production skills so that L2 teachers can guarantee that students are not only able to comprehend messages but also able to express their own ideas in the target language in a clear and appropriate manner (Karim, 2025).

(Alkhudiry, 2022) stated that meaningful human engagement is essential for language learning, particularly for L2 development. Therefore, the interaction between teacher and students should be rich in English exposure. (Roy, 2018) mentions that comprehensible input is one of the most effective things for language acquisition. Additionally, (Owusu et al., 2022) also believes that it is a crucial instrument for language acquisition and learning. Through this interaction, students may improve the quality of their writing. For this reason, teachers should act as learning peers who provide students with assistance, insight, and exposure to English. In this manner, students will get more input, practice, and better progress in their learning.

5. Conclusion

Based on this study, students made all the mistakes listed in the Surface Strategy Taxonomy. Misinformation error accounted for the most frequent error in students' descriptive texts, although some errors appeared much less frequently than others. However, despite the number of errors found, the researcher views these mistakes not as flaws but as a natural part of the learning process. Errors are evidence of students' interlanguage development and should be seen as opportunities for growth.

In this sense, the study contributes to a positive view on error analysis, encouraging teachers to use errors diagnostically rather than punitively. Future research should expand the scope to include different genres of writing and larger samples across varied contexts. Comparative studies between proficiency levels may provide deeper insights into developmental stages of interlanguage.

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