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Dec 17, 2021

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## Grammatical Errors in Essay Writing of EFL University Bilingual Students: Suggested Strategies for Correction

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### Abstract

This paper explores grammatical errors in students' essay writing and strategies for correction in a higher education institution. This is an error analysis case study reported five students' essays were used to represent large group of students participating in this research. The research shows that each participant in this study has different types of errors that participants

encountered during essay writings. More importantly, there are several strategies to correct students' grammatical errors: using an online corpus database, teacher corrective feedback, and using peer correction working group. The implication for these strategies is that students are familiar with the proper and natural use of English after working with the online corpus. Besides, teachers can use their peers as a mentor for correcting other students' work. These two important strategies have pedagogical and social implications in students' learning and can become models for correcting other student's assignments.

**Keywords:** *strategies, errors analysis, grammar, essay writing, Indonesia*

### **Introduction**

The grammatical error is one of the vital language elements that becomes a debatable issue in language learning. By identifying grammatical errors, educators can help students to use grammar and rules accurately. Also, by studying the errors, learners can identify their strengths and weakness in language and grammatical use. Therefore, this study of grammatical errors is essential to be investigated further.

Globally, researchers have investigated the grammatical errors in many forms: the errors in the headline (Khodabandeh, 2007) and students' errors in the Arabic ESP context (Milewski, 2007). Many researchers in Indonesian contexts have explored grammar errors. For example, research conducted in a private university in West Java focusing on grammatical errors in academic writing (Limengka & Kuntjara, 2013). Besides, several other researchers have focused on grammatical errors in junior high school students' writing (Mustafa, Kirana, & Bahri, 2017). Despite these studies, they still recommend conducting further studies especially errors and strategies for correction.

Within the Indonesian context, research on error analysis has covered many aspects of writing and language learning. Kusumawardhani (2018) investigated the error analysis of derivational morphemes in EFL academic narrative writing the essay texts and identified that the mastery of morphemes can reduce the errors made by students in a narrative piece of writing. Sihombing, Nissa, and Estrelita (2016) explored the errors produced by university students in teaching English as a foreign language. They identified that most students produced errors in grammars, morphemes, and combinations of phrases. Besides, Yusnitasari and Suwartono (2020) identify top-ten grammar mistakes made by students in Indonesian higher education and those problems occur when students perform writing tasks. The investigations show that as non-native speakers of English, students frequently produce errors. What is missing from



the previous research is that none of the research provides effective ways and strategies to correct students' errors in writing tasks. There is limited information on the identification of errors and strategies used to reduce writing errors at university levels. Therefore, this study fills this knowledge gap by exploring error analysis in university students' essay writings and their strategies for error correction.

## 1 Literature Review

The literature review contains two important sections: the concept of grammatical errors and previous studies on essay grammatical errors.

### **The concept of grammatical errors**

Errors are related to the construction of rules which do not necessarily reflect those of the mother tongue or target language (Richards, 2014). The errors are caused by several factors including language transfers, intra-lingual interference, modality, sociolinguistic situation, and age (Richards, 2014). About this study, the grammatical errors relate to the misused application of grammatical rules.

Grammatical errors refer to the misuse of grammatical elements in any type of language application. The grammatical errors may include verb-agreement, parts of speech, collocation, verb-form and tenses. Therefore, grammatical errors in this study relate to the incorrect application of any grammatical rules in any language activities.

### **Previous studies on grammatical errors in essay writing**

Among ubiquitous studies in language and grammatical errors, we review the four most essential studies that strongly relevant to the current paper. They are errors in Nigerian secondary school contexts (Okoro, 2017), the frequency of grammatical errors in writing (Mohaghegh, Zar, & Shariati, 2011), and errors in advanced learners in preparing research proposals (Mardijono, 2015).

First, Okoro (2017) investigated the incorrect use of English in the Nigerian secondary school contexts. The study identified more than five hundred essays from secondary school students. The study identified several types of errors including verb form, misuse of the verb, verb agreement, and punctuation. The reasons why students committed errors is due to first language interference, intra-lingual transfer, and lack of students' awareness in applying English use. This study has implications for teachers of English where the well-prepared teachers regarding teaching materials can minimize the misuse of words in essay writing.

Second, Mohaghegh et al., (2011) explored the frequency of the grammatical errors: preposition, relative pronoun, article, and tense using the translation task. This study employed a quantitative research design with a total of 60 translation products. The translation tests use English and Persian languages. The finding of the study reveals that all students misused prepositions, half of them misused relative pronouns, and error in articles and tenses. Therefore, this study concluded that students were not aware of the use of the preposition. Hence, teachers should pay attention to the use of prepositions correctly by providing systemic and well-structured activities.

Third, Mardijono (2015) analyzed grammatical errors in seventeen research proposals in Indonesian private universities. The analysis employed linguistic taxonomic guidelines. The findings reveal that the most common types of students' errors relate to morphological and syntactical error domains. This study implies that teachers need to be aware of the advanced use of English to reduce the error production in writing English language research proposals. Further study of corrective feedback can help students to learn advanced elements of English. Fourth, Napoles (2016) investigated about the estimated amount of grammatical errors. This study focused on several major categories: an increasing number of errors, accuracy, and errors, and the impact of grammatical errors. The finding indicated there is a notable difference in the type of individual errors, accuracy and have substantial implications for pedagogical applications.

Some of previous research suggested several ways of providing corrective feedback for grammatical errors. Ellis (2009) have suggested the importance roles of teachers for corrective feedback of errors, the time to provide corrective feedback, the appropriate ways of giving corrective feedback, and suggested strategies for corrective feedback. Guibanguibang (2020) provides one of the effective ways to reduce grammar errors in written tasks is to provide one-to-one oral feedback and correction for students. Rosmaladewi and Abduh (2017) provide the suggestion for correction through collaborative works. The collaborative strategy is divided into two groups: a) collaborative pair correction and b) collaborative work among teachers and tutors to provide error correction towards students' written tasks.

Even though the several studies have investigated errors in language and grammar use of English, there is still a need to explore grammatical errors in students' essay writing papers. This is due to essay writing is one of the key elements in an English international test. This study is significant because students can predict the types of errors they produce and the number of errors.



## <sup>13</sup> Research Method

### *Research design*

This study is multiple case study research. The case refers to the phenomenon that is being investigated (Yin, 2011). The case to be investigated in this study is the phenomenon of grammatical errors produced by students, even though they have enough input and lessons for grammar because they have exposed to English since high schools. The reason for applying multiple cases is that this research investigates more than one participant. This multiple case study aims to analyze the contents of students' essay writing. Trilling & Jonkman (2018) describe that content analysis of the case relates to approaching among scholars to the computational analysis of media or writing content. The case study research application allows researchers to provide both quantitative and qualitative data (Yin, 2014). This research depicts both quantitative and qualitative findings.

### *Participants of the study*

Despite 100 students participating in this study, this research article only reports five bilingual participants. Within the multiple case study design, the researchers are allowed to report multiple individuals that can be used as multiple cases in the research (Yin, 2014). The main reason for choosing five participants is that there are some commonalities of grammatical mistakes produced by all participants. Because of these similarities, the researchers chose five of them that different semesters and different levels of students.

### *Procedures of data collection*

The procedures were, firstly, students given a topic to read a week in advance. Then students have to write an essay based on the topics that were given. They were provided one hour to complete a minimum of 250 words essay. To write a proper paper for publication, a learner at least has to master four crucial components of the language: listening, reading, speaking, and writing. Among these skills, one of the key criteria to determine the proficiency of learners is writing ability. This writing ability is delivered at four levels in the English department at some Indonesian universities: writing I, II, III, and IV. The research conducted at a public university in Indonesia indicated that students have scored below 500 for written expression and many students were unable to write 250 words of the essay within one hour. For this reason, this paper explores some grammatical errors in students' essay writing.

Then, the five participants (AA, BB, CC, DD, EE) were asked about effective ways to correct their writing. The semi-interviews last between 15 and 30 minutes in length. The five student participants are categorized as bilingual students because they can speak and write in both Indonesian and English in many different contexts.

#### *Data analysis*

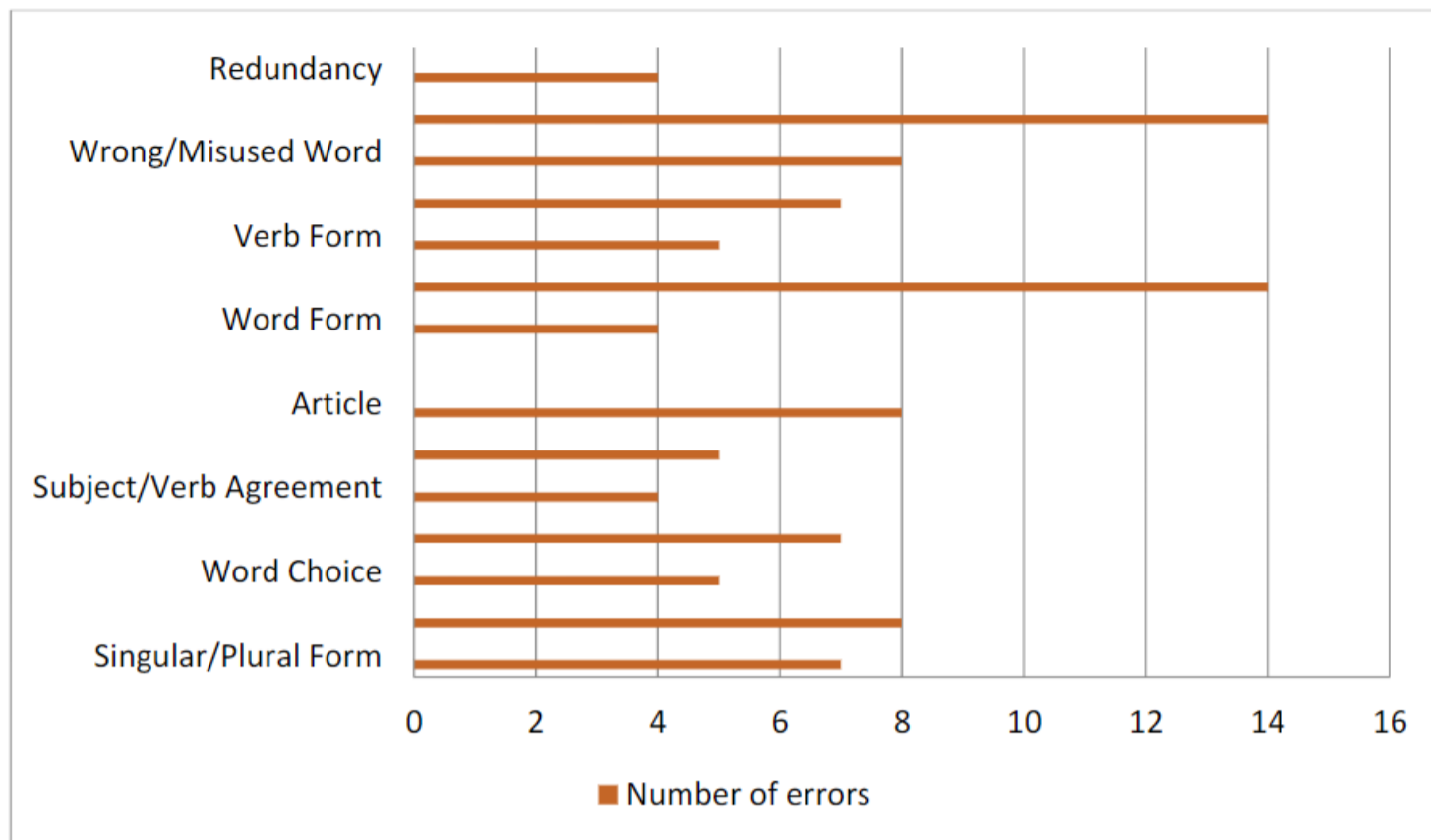
Data were analyzed and modeled through Ms. Excel's application. Then, the diagram and figure were placed into the paragraph writing. The result of Ms. Excel's analysis is quantitative forms relating to the types of errors in grammar. The semi-interview data as qualitative analysis form relating to the strategies for error corrections were categorized based on the most frequent themes that appear in the transcriptions. The presentation of findings depicts each participant when compared among them in the discussion section.

### **Findings**

#### **AA, participant one**

Each participant in this study has different types of errors that participants encountered during essay writings. Participant one has three major clusters of grammatical errors. The first major error faced by participant one was punctuation and spelling. The second major errors faced by participant one were verb forms, articles, misused of words, prepositions, singular and plural forms, and capitalization. Finally, the grammatical errors including redundancy, word form and subject/verb agreements, (see Figure 1 for details).

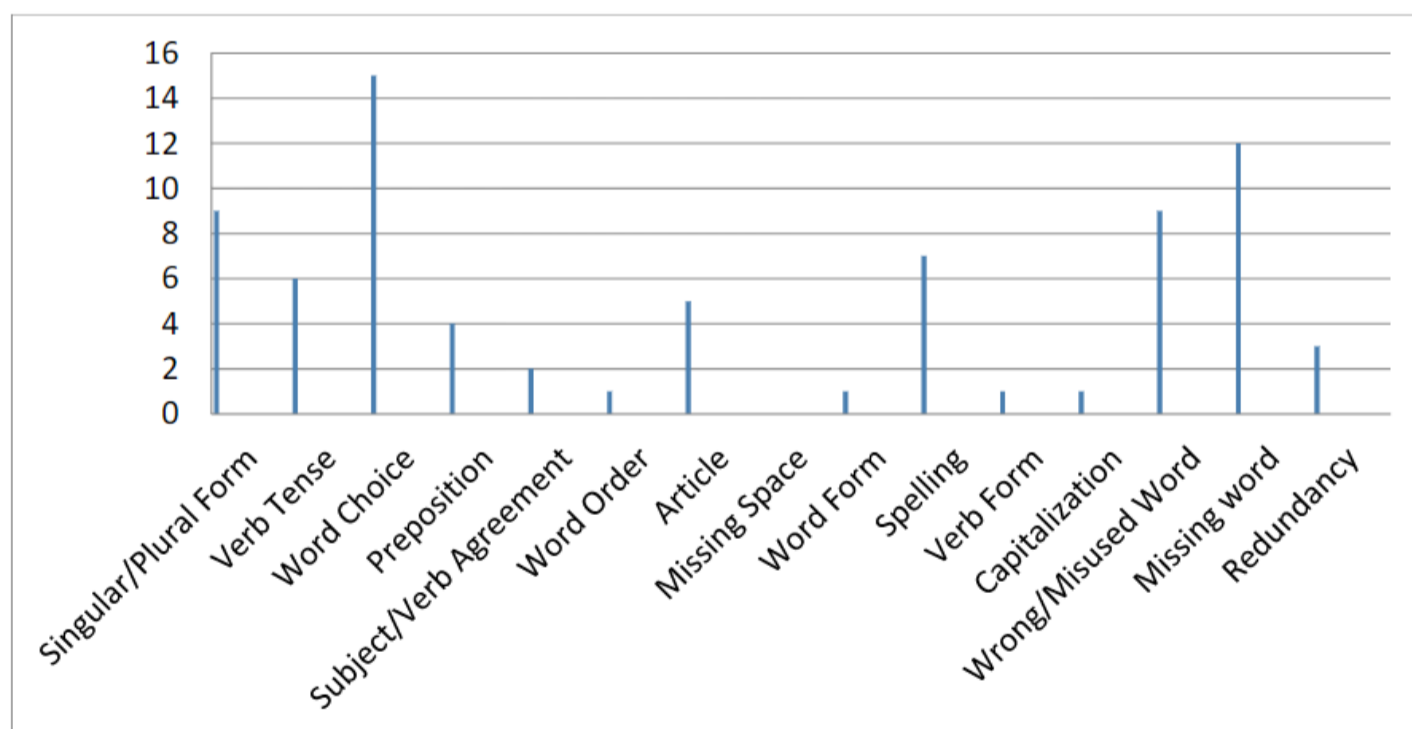




**Figure 1: Grammatical error of participant one**

### **BB, participant two**

Participant two has three major clusters of grammatical errors. The first major errors faced by participant two were singular and plural forms, word choice, and missing words. The second major errors faced by participant two were verb forms, articles, articles, verb tense, and redundancy. Finally, the grammatical errors include spelling, capitalization, and subject/verb agreements, (see Figure 2 for details).



**Figure 2: Grammatical error of participant two**

### CC, participant three

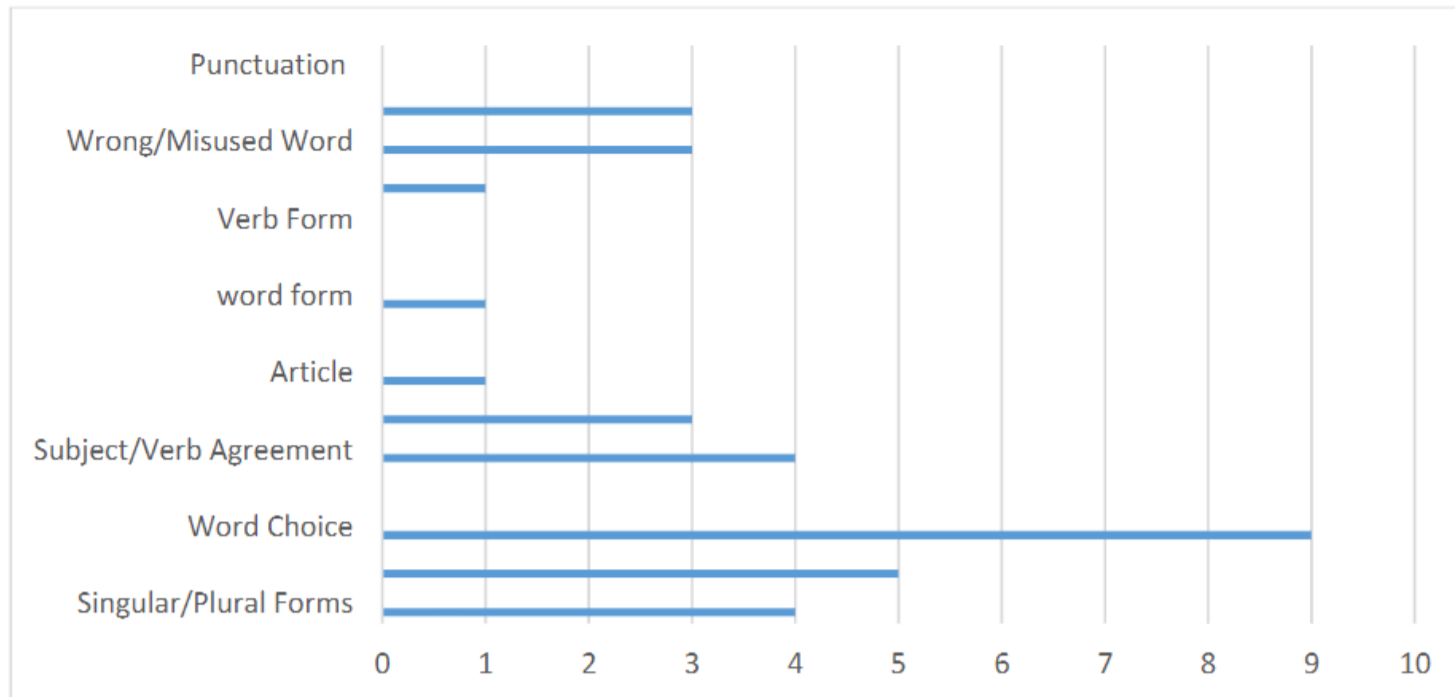
Participant three has four significant clusters of grammatical errors. The first major error faced by participant four was word choice. The reason was perhaps a student learns how to use words from dictionaries rather than natural contexts of how lexis is used. The second major error faced by participant three was verb forms, misused words, and articles. The third category of the grammatical errors included redundancy, word form, and subject/verb agreements. The final category was word orders, spelling, and missing words (see Figure 3 for details). Participant three seemed to have grammatical errors that reflect on morphological forms of words.



Figure 3: Grammatical error of participant three

### DD, participant four

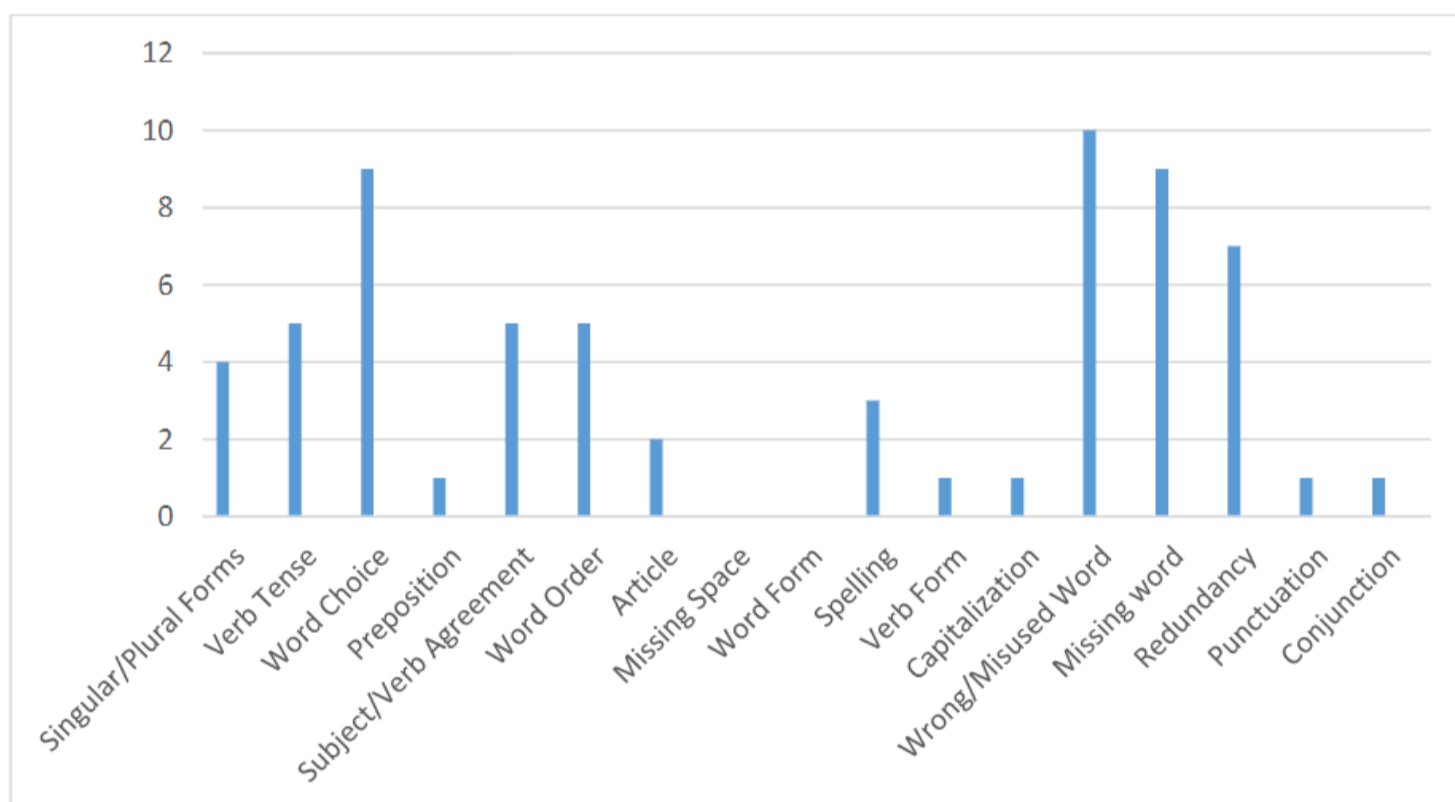
Participant four has three major clusters of grammatical errors. The first major errors faced by participant four were punctuation and spelling. The second major errors faced by participant four were verb forms, articles, misused of words, prepositions, singular and plural forms, and capitalization. Finally, the grammatical errors including redundancy, word form, and subject/verb agreements, (see Figure 4 for details).



**Figure 4: Grammatical error of participant four**

### EE, participant five

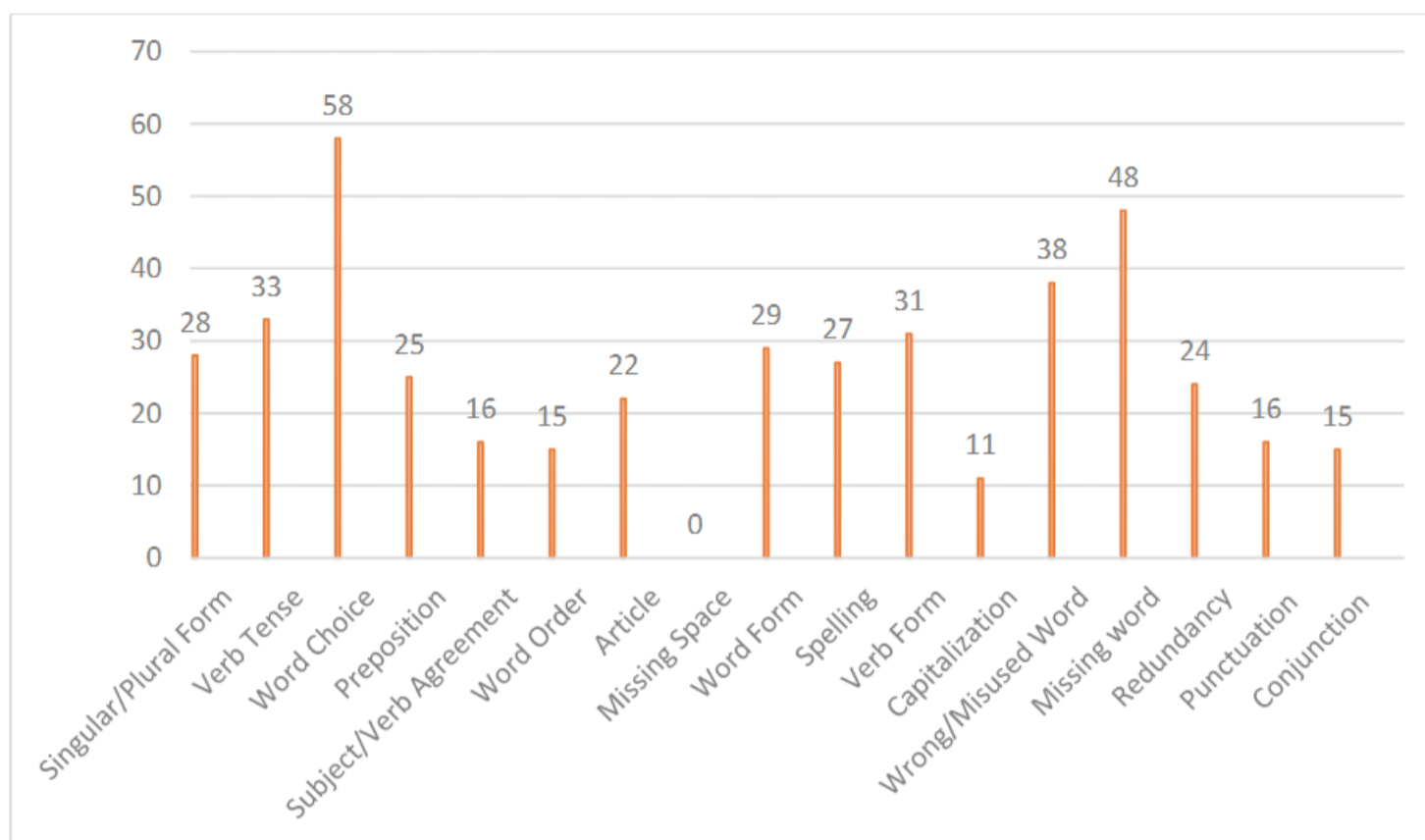
Participant five has three major clusters of grammatical errors. The first major errors faced by participant five were punctuation and spelling. The second major errors faced by participant five were verb forms, articles, misused of words, prepositions, singular and plural forms, and capitalization. Finally, the grammatical errors include redundancy, word form, and subject/verb agreements, (see Figure 3 for details).



**Figure 5: Grammatical error of participant five**



### The total grammatical errors of the five participants



**Figure 6: The total grammatical errors of the five participants**

Each participant in this study has different types of errors that participants encountered during essay writings. Participant one has three major clusters of grammatical errors. The first significant error faced by a participant was punctuation and spelling. The second significant errors encountered by participant one were verb forms, articles, misused of words, prepositions, singular and plural forms, and capitalization. Finally, the grammatical errors including redundancy, word form, and subject/verb agreements.

### Strategies for grammatical error corrections

The strategies to correct students' grammatical errors in essay writing are as follows:

The first strategy for error correction is that peer-correction. Teachers create peer group corrections of each mistake made by students. The step is that each peer group consists of three or four students, and one of them becomes the leader. Each leader will head the group and each participant will provide feedback on other students' essay writing. From these peer working, students feel relaxed and enjoy working with their peers. If they cannot provide a correct answer, they may the teacher for appropriate correction. Peer group working is a form of collaborative work strategy (Rosmaladewi & Abduh, 2017) that establishes a mutual partnership in learning particularly working on grammatical errors.

Further, Ellis (2009) has suggested the importance for corrective feedback of errors: recast, repetition, request for clarification, explicit correction, elicitation, and paralinguistic signal. These strategies are also applied for error corrective feedback in EFL bilingual students. These strategies are seen as effective in the context of teachers' roles in providing corrective feedback.

**Table 1: Teachers' corrective feedback**

Types of corrective feedback	Example
Recast	S: I am interested to try to do the research on T: to condut the research. I am interested to conduct the research on
Repetition	S: anxiety is speaking English T: anxiety IN speaking English
Clarification request	S: What are the factors make the year eight student of SMPN 2 Barombong anxious in speaking English? T: make?
Explicit correction	S: in home T: Not in home, at home
Elicitation	S: I was born June T: I was born...(in June).
Paralinguistic signal	S: I eat pizza yesterday T: I ate pizza yesterday (the teacher looked at the students's eyes and face)

The other strategy is for students to check the use of certain words within the English corpus databases. In this strategy, students perform several activities:

- a. Students identify the number of errors in their writing
- b. They classify the errors from the most common to the least number of errors
- c. They place the grammar or words into the corpus online database to check how the word is used.
- d. The search of the word uses takes place within the corpus.
- e. The corpus database provides the options of the correct and naturally used of the words based on the highest percentage of the word uses
- f. Students can check the correct word uses based on their errors.

## Discussion

From this study, it appears that the most common types of grammatical errors found in students' essay papers are morphological and syntactical errors. This finding seems similar to what has been found in a previous study by Mardijono (2015). This research indicates that how to form correct words and how to use certain words are the most common morphological and



syntactical forms of mistakes that occur in this writing. The possible reason for this similarity of types of errors is due to the participants in both studies being students from non-English speaking backgrounds. Those students are not familiar with the appropriate context of the use for certain grammatical English components due to the number of English lessons they receive is not sufficient enough for them to be able to master grammar accurately.

The types of grammar errors in this study rest on the interference of the first language. This language interference echoes the work of Okoro (2017) who study the incorrect use of grammar in Nigerian students' essay writing papers. One of the main reasons for this error is that students have lack awareness of the use of certain grammar and words in English. Besides, students have lack knowledge on the correct and natural use of grammar. This is due to the lack of correct input they receive in English lessons both inside classroom and outside schools. The lack of correct input is due to the availability of competent English teachers particularly those who master the use of correct grammar and words seems not many found in the English as foreign language contexts. This research finding has a similar implication with the previous study (Okoro, 2017) that studies the teachers of English should prepare themselves with effective examples and models of using certain grammar correctly within different contexts of use.

Further, word choice becomes one of the highest percentages of errors in essay writing. The finding of this study is similar to the work of Napoles (2016) investigating the number of grammatical errors. This study focused on the accuracy of word use which is similar to the choice of a word using this study. The difference is that the previous study more focuses on the most frequent accuracy of words, while <sup>12</sup> this study concentrates on the errors made by students naturally in their essay writing.

One of the most important features for the finding of this study is that this research focuses not only on identifying errors, but also provides suggestions for corrections. As we are aware that, not many previous investigations have revealed the suggestion for correcting the grammatical mistake of students. This aspect of study contributes to the understanding of errors on one hand, and, on the other, the possible suggested strategies for error correction of students' essay writing papers. The strategies for correcting grammatical mistakes through the web-based corpus can enhance the bilingual competence of students (Dangan & Dela-Cruz, 2021; Nadir & Auzarmi, 2021), the assurance of writing quality, and intercultural minded individuals (Abduh, Wello, & Rosmaladewi, 2021), and intercultural context of the use of words (Arifin, 2021). Therefore, <sup>14</sup> the findings of this study have contributed to the understanding root cause of grammatical errors and possible suggested strategies for grammatical error correction.



## Conclusion

From the analysis of the findings, it appears that participants in this study show grammatical errors such as word choice and word forms, followed by verb forms, spelling, articles, and missing words. To overcome their errors, students are encouraged to check how to use certain words in the online corpus database. Besides, using peer group correction can be a helpful strategy to provide feedback for other students' work. Even though they studied grammar for four semesters, they still encountered a large number of grammatical errors in their writing. The limitation is that these findings are only focused on grammatical errors. Therefore, it is essential to conduct further research and observation of students' errors in morphology, phonology, and spelling errors. It is recommended that research involving wider stakeholders and students including both oral and written language production can provide a comprehensive understanding of errors of language production.

## Pedagogical implications

<sup>1</sup> This study has both theoretical and practical educational implications. Theoretically, this study uncovers the errors and the types of errors produced by students. Further studies that encompass overarching elements of language errors in language learning and acquisition both from university contexts and from primary and secondary school contexts are important to be further explored. It is important that identifying errors, teachers can find the appropriate strategies to teach grammar and language use both inside and outside classroom contexts.

Practically, understanding and identifying errors can assist educators in preparing English language lessons and provide specific extra attention to certain elements of language and grammar. Educators can also provide some suggested ways to correct grammar and errors via face to face and online platform

## <sup>10</sup> Acknowledgment

This research article is funded by Ministry of Research and Technology/BRIN. For the correspondence of this article, please <sup>2</sup> contact Dr. Amirullah Abduh, Email: [amirullah@unm.ac.id](mailto:amirullah@unm.ac.id)

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