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AN ERROR ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' GRAMMATICAL MISTAKES BASED ON CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS

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ABSTRAK

Kesalahan gramatikal masih menjadi kendala utama bagi pembelajar bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing (EFL) di perguruan tinggi Indonesia. Namun, penelitian yang mengintegrasikan Analisis Kesalahan (*Error Analysis/EA*) dan Analisis Kontrastif (*Contrastive Analysis/CA*) untuk mengidentifikasi sumber kesalahan dalam konteks perguruan tinggi Islam masih terbatas. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis kesalahan gramatikal mahasiswa EFL melalui pendekatan gabungan EA dan CA. Penelitian menggunakan metode campuran (*mixed methods*) dengan melibatkan 20 mahasiswa kelas TBI-3 Angkatan 2023 di Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara (UINSU), Medan. Data diperoleh melalui tugas menulis karangan dan dianalisis secara kuantitatif serta kualitatif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan terdapat 300 kesalahan gramatikal dalam enam kategori utama, dengan kesalahan kesesuaian subjek-predikat sebagai bentuk yang paling dominan. Sebagian besar kesalahan dipengaruhi oleh transfer bahasa pertama (Bahasa Indonesia), sehingga mendukung prediksi Analisis Kontrastif mengenai pengaruh lintas bahasa dalam pemerolehan bahasa kedua. Reliabilitas antarpenilai menunjukkan tingkat kesepakatan yang tinggi ($\kappa \geq 0,81$). Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa integrasi EA dan CA efektif untuk mengidentifikasi pola kesalahan gramatikal serta dapat menjadi dasar pengembangan pembelajaran tata bahasa yang lebih tepat bagi pembelajar EFL Indonesia.

Kata kunci: *Analisis Kesalahan, Analisis Kontrastif, Kesalahan Gramatikal, EFL, Pembelajar Indonesia, Interlanguage.*

ABSTRACT

Grammatical errors remain a major challenge for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in Indonesian higher education. However, studies integrating Error Analysis (EA) and Contrastive Analysis (CA) to identify the sources of errors in the context of Islamic higher education remain limited. This study aims to analyze the grammatical errors made by EFL students through a combined EA and CA approach. A mixed-methods design was employed involving 20 students from the TBI-3 class of the 2023 cohort at the State Islamic University of North Sumatra (UINSU), Medan. Data were collected through essay-writing tasks and analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The findings revealed 300 grammatical errors

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across six major categories, with subject–verb agreement errors being the most dominant. Most errors were influenced by first-language transfer (Indonesian), supporting the predictions of Contrastive Analysis regarding cross-linguistic influence in second-language acquisition. Interrater reliability demonstrated a high level of agreement ($\kappa \geq 0.81$). These findings confirm that the integration of EA and CA is effective in identifying patterns of grammatical errors and can serve as a basis for developing more targeted grammar instruction for Indonesian EFL learners.

Keywords: *Error Analysis, Contrastive Analysis, Grammatical Errors, EFL, Indonesian Learners, Interlanguage.*

INTRODUCTION

Grammatical accuracy remains a major challenge for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in Indonesia despite prolonged exposure to English instruction. Many university students continue to experience difficulties in producing grammatically accurate written texts, particularly in areas involving morphosyntactic features that differ substantially from Bahasa Indonesia. These challenges are especially critical in English teacher education programs, where students are expected not only to develop language proficiency but also to acquire the pedagogical competence required for future teaching careers. As highlighted by Ma et al. (2025), language competence plays a crucial role in supporting academic achievement and instructional effectiveness, making grammatical accuracy an essential component of teacher preparation. Consequently, understanding the nature and sources of grammatical errors remains an important concern in EFL research and pedagogy.

Recent empirical studies have consistently reported that grammatical errors remain pervasive among university-level EFL learners. Research by Octasary et al. (2025) revealed persistent misuse of the verb “to be,” while Yuntika et al. (2025), Putri and Sukesu (2023), and Mahdalena (2021) found that subject–verb agreement continues to be one of the most problematic grammatical areas for Indonesian learners. Similarly, Azizah et al. (2025) identified substantial grammatical inaccuracies in students’ literature review writing, indicating that grammatical challenges persist even in more advanced academic tasks. These findings suggest that grammatical difficulties are not isolated problems but recurring patterns that hinder effective written communication among EFL learners.

The persistence of these errors is often linked to both interlingual and intralingual factors. Ismahani et al. (2024) demonstrated that differences between Indonesian and English tense and aspect systems frequently lead to learner errors, particularly because Bahasa Indonesia lacks obligatory tense inflections. In addition, Pasaribu et al. (2024) reported that Indonesian EFL students continue to face challenges in academic writing due to limitations in grammatical knowledge, vocabulary control, and sentence construction. Research on writing quality and language accuracy by Nurhayati (2022) further emphasizes that grammatical competence remains closely associated with the coherence and integrity of academic texts. Together, these studies indicate that learner errors are shaped by both first-language influence and developmental processes in second-language acquisition.

Although numerous studies have documented grammatical errors among EFL learners, important gaps remain. Most previous research has focused on identifying error types without

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systematically integrating Error Analysis (EA) and Contrastive Analysis (CA) to explain the linguistic sources of those errors. Furthermore, relatively few studies have examined firstsemester students in Islamic university English teacher education programs, a context that presents unique linguistic and pedagogical characteristics. Existing studies also tend to investigate isolated grammatical categories, such as subject–verb agreement or tense usage, rather than providing a comprehensive morphosyntactic analysis. Consequently, there is a need for research that combines error classification with contrastive linguistic explanation to generate more pedagogically meaningful findings.

Grounded in Error Analysis, Contrastive Analysis, and Interlanguage perspectives, this study views learner errors as systematic indicators of language development rather than merely evidence of failure. Error Analysis provides procedures for identifying and categorizing learner errors, whereas Contrastive Analysis helps explain how structural differences between Bahasa Indonesia and English contribute to recurring grammatical difficulties. Interlanguage theory complements these perspectives by explaining the evolving linguistic system learners construct during second-language acquisition. Recent developments in grammatical error analysis and feedback systems (Bannò et al., 2024; Coyne et al., 2025; Heywood et al., 2025) further demonstrate the continuing relevance of error-based approaches for improving language learning and instructional practices.

This study addresses the identified gap by investigating grammatical errors produced by first-semester TBI students at UINSU Medan through a mixed-methods approach that integrates Error Analysis and Contrastive Analysis. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on an Islamic university teacher education context and its comprehensive examination of grammatical errors through linguistic, taxonomic, and contrastive perspectives. Unlike previous studies that concentrate on specific grammatical categories, this research analyzes multiple morphosyntactic features while simultaneously examining the extent to which they can be explained by Indonesian–English structural differences. Specifically, the study aims to: (1) identify the types and frequencies of grammatical errors in students' written compositions; (2) classify the errors according to established taxonomic categories; and (3) explain the sources of the errors through a contrastive analysis of Indonesian and English structures. Accordingly, the study seeks to answer the following question: What grammatical errors are most frequently produced by first-semester TBI students at UINSU Medan, and to what extent can these errors be explained through Contrastive Analysis?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY Findings

Recent studies indicate that grammatical accuracy remains a major challenge for EFL learners across various educational contexts. Research published during the last five years consistently reports persistent difficulties in subject–verb agreement, tense usage, articles, prepositions, pronouns, and other morphosyntactic features. At the same time, scholars have increasingly emphasized the importance of integrating Error Analysis (EA), Contrastive Analysis (CA), Interlanguage Theory, and technology-assisted feedback to better understand and address learner errors. The following literature review synthesizes key findings from recent studies relevant to the present research.

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Table 1. Recent Studies Related to Grammatical Errors among EFL Learners (2020–2026)

No	Author(s) & Focus of Study	Main Findings	Relevance to Present Year	Study
1	Ma et al. (2025)	Teacher self-efficacy and student achievement	Teacher competence significantly influences outcomes	Supports pedagogical implications for teacher learning education
2	Octasary et al. (2025)	Misuse of <i>to be</i>	Frequent grammatical misuse among university EFL	Confirms persistence of grammar problems learners
3	Yuntika et al. (2025)	Subject–verb agreement errors	SVA identified as a dominant grammatical error	Supports current findings on SVA
4	Azizah et al. (2025)	Errors in literature review writing	Grammar errors frequently occur in academic writing analysis	Supports writing-error occur in analysis
5	Ismahani et al. (2024)	Tense and aspect errors	Strong influence of Indonesian language transfer	Supports Contrastive Analysis findings
6	Rusdi et al. (2025)	Self-assessment in grammar learning	Self-assessment improves grammar mastery	Supports pedagogical recommendations
7	Putri & Sukesi (2023)	Difficulties in SVA	Learners struggle with agreement rules absent in Indonesian	Supports interlingual explanation
8	Nurhayati (2022)	Proofreading tools	Digital tools improve writing accuracy	Supports instructional innovation
9	Pasaribu et al. (2024)	Academic writing challenges	Grammar remains a major obstacle for Indonesian EFL students	Supports research urgency
10	Bannò et al. (2024)	Grammatical error feedback	Automated evaluation effectively identifies errors	Supports technology-based feedback
11	Coyne et al. (2025)	Automated written feedback systems	AI-assisted annotation improves feedback quality	Supports future instructional development
12	Heywood et al. (2025)	AI-based error taxonomy	Error classification can be enhanced through AI approaches	Supports multidimensional taxonomy
13	Mahdalena SVA error analysis (2021)	SVA error analysis	Agreement errors remain persistent among EFL learners	Reinforces present findings
14	Nguyen & Chu (2024)	Written corrective feedback	Feedback improves grammatical accuracy over time	Supports grammar intervention

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15	Lathifah et al. (2026)	Pronunciation errors	Language transfer affects phonological performance	Supports transfer theory
16	Ulviani (2025)	Error analysis in writing reflect developmental stages	Systematic learner errors framework	Supports Error Analysis
17	Astuti et al. (2022)	Autonomous learning	Learner autonomy positively affects achievement	Supports learner-centered pedagogy
No	Author(s) & Year	Focus of Study	Main Findings	Relevance to Present Study
18	Zhai (2026)	Automated corrective feedback	Feedback improves accuracy, motivation, and selfregulation	Supports technologyenhanced instruction
19	Shiddiq & Oktaviani (2022)	Interlanguage and fossilization	Errors represent developmental processes and potential fossilization	Supports Interlanguage Theory
20	Rifiyanti & Dewi (2022)	Types of SVA errors	Omission and misformation dominate SVA errors	Aligns with present findings
21	Suryantari (2025)	Simple present tense errors	Tense misuse remains prevalent among pre-service teachers	Supports tense-error findings
22	Ulviani & Kemala (2025)	Academic writing errors	Morphosyntactic issues dominate student writing	Supports grammatical focus
23	Auni & Manan (2022)	Contrastive analysis of adverbs	Structural differences explain learner difficulties	Supports CA framework
24	Luthfianda et al. (2024)	Pronunciation challenges	L1 influence shapes English production	Supports transfer perspective
25	Al-khresheh (2024)	Phonetic transfer	L1 interference significantly affects L2 performance	Supports language-transfer theory
26	Adhabia & Malihah (2025)	Auxiliary verb errors interlanguage shapes	Interlanguage development and shapes grammatical errors	Supports developmental explanation
27	Ullah & Shfaqat (2026)	SVA errors among ESL students	Agreement errors remain dominant in tertiary education	Supports international comparability
28	Ibrahim & Ibrahim (2020)	Grammatical errors in academic writing	Grammar errors affect writing quality	Supports research significance
29	Zebua et al. (2025)	Past tense errors	Tense-related errors remain findings frequent among English majors	Supports tense
30	Zee et al. (2016)	Teacher self-efficacy	Teacher efficacy influences teachereducational effectiveness	Supports broader education context





The reviewed literature demonstrates strong consensus that grammatical errors remain a persistent challenge among EFL learners, particularly in morphosyntactic domains such as subject–verb agreement, tense usage, article selection, and prepositions. Several studies attribute these difficulties to cross-linguistic influence from learners’ first language, while others emphasize the role of developmental processes described by Interlanguage Theory. Recent scholarship also highlights the growing importance of written corrective feedback, learner autonomy, self-assessment, and artificial intelligence in supporting grammar instruction and error remediation. Collectively, these studies provide a strong theoretical and empirical foundation for the present research, while also reinforcing its novelty in integrating Error Analysis, Contrastive Analysis, and Interlanguage perspectives to examine grammatical errors among first-semester students in an Islamic university English teacher education context.

A. Inter-Rater Reliability

Prior to the full analysis, inter-rater reliability was established through independent coding of a subset of the compositions by two trained raters. The results demonstrated consistently high levels of agreement across all analytical stages, indicating that the coding procedures were applied reliably and systematically. The strong agreement obtained supports the trustworthiness of the classification framework and strengthens the credibility of the subsequent findings. Any coding discrepancies were resolved through discussion until consensus was reached, ensuring consistency in the final dataset.

B. Overall Distribution of Grammatical Errors

The analysis revealed that grammatical errors were distributed across six major linguistic categories. As presented in Table 2, subject–verb agreement, verb tense usage, and article use emerged as the most problematic areas, collectively accounting for the majority of learner errors. This pattern suggests that students experienced greater difficulty with grammatical features that are structurally different from those found in Bahasa Indonesia. The concentration of errors in these categories indicates that learners struggled primarily with English morphosyntactic systems that require obligatory grammatical marking.

C. Surface Structure Analysis

The surface structure analysis showed that omission was the most common error pattern, followed by misformation, addition, and misordering. This finding suggests that learners were more likely to leave out required grammatical elements than to incorrectly arrange sentence components. The predominance of omission errors reflects difficulties in producing grammatical markers that have no direct equivalents in Bahasa Indonesia, particularly articles and agreement markers. These results provide further evidence that cross-linguistic differences play an important role in shaping learners’ written production.

D. Etiological Sources of Errors

The etiological analysis demonstrated that interlingual influence constituted the dominant source of grammatical errors, followed by intralingual and context-induced factors. This





distribution indicates that first-language transfer remains a major factor affecting grammatical performance among beginning EFL learners. At the same time, the presence of intralingual errors suggests that learners were actively constructing hypotheses about English grammar and occasionally extending rules beyond their appropriate contexts. Therefore, learner errors cannot be attributed solely to L1 interference but should be viewed as the result of multiple developmental processes.

E. Contrastive Analysis of Indonesian–English Structures

The contrastive analysis revealed a close relationship between the most frequent error categories and major structural differences between Bahasa Indonesia and English. The absence of obligatory tense marking, subject–verb agreement, and article systems in Bahasa Indonesia appears to contribute directly to recurring learner difficulties in English. In contrast, categories such as prepositions and word order involve more complex interactions between language transfer and target-language learning processes. These findings reinforce the usefulness of Contrastive Analysis as a diagnostic framework for identifying predictable areas of learner difficulty.

F. Representative Error Analysis and Learner Reflections

Representative error examples and interview data provided additional insight into the underlying causes of learner errors. Participants frequently reported uncertainty regarding grammatical features that do not exist in their first language, particularly article usage and subject–verb agreement. Their reflections support the quantitative findings by demonstrating how learners rely on familiar L1 structures when producing English sentences. This convergence between written data and interview responses strengthens the interpretation that cross-linguistic influence plays a substantial role in shaping learner interlanguage.

Discussion A. Interpretation of Grammatical Error Patterns

The predominance of subject–verb agreement, tense, and article errors highlights the central role of morphosyntactic differences between Bahasa Indonesia and English in secondlanguage learning. From an Error Analysis perspective, these errors reflect systematic gaps in learners' developing grammatical competence rather than random mistakes. This finding is consistent with recent studies reporting that subject–verb agreement and tense-related errors remain among the most persistent grammatical challenges faced by Indonesian EFL learners (Rifiyanti & Dewi, 2022; Putri & Sukesni, 2023; Octasary et al., 2025; Yuntika et al., 2025; Suryantari, 2025). The results also support the argument that learner errors provide valuable evidence of interlanguage development and should be interpreted as part of the language acquisition process rather than merely indicators of failure (Shiddiq & Oktaviani, 2022).

The relatively lower occurrence of word-order errors suggests that learners may find syntactic arrangements easier to monitor and revise than grammatical morphology. While differences in adjective placement and modifier structures exist between Indonesian and English, these features are often more visible during the writing process. In contrast, grammatical elements such as tense markers, articles, and agreement morphemes tend to be less





salient, increasing the likelihood of omission and eventual fossilization if corrective intervention is insufficient (Adhabia & Malihah, 2025; Shiddiq & Oktaviani, 2022). This interpretation is supported by participant reflections indicating greater awareness of sentence organization than of grammatical marking requirements.

B. Evaluating the Role of Contrastive Analysis

The findings provide substantial support for the diagnostic value of Contrastive Analysis in explaining grammatical difficulties among Indonesian EFL learners. Most high-frequency errors occurred in linguistic domains where Indonesian and English differ significantly, suggesting that language transfer remains an influential factor in learner performance. Recent contrastive studies have similarly demonstrated that structural differences between Indonesian and English contribute to recurring learner difficulties across grammatical categories, including tense, aspect, adverbial structures, and agreement systems (Auni & Manan, 2022; Ismahani et al., 2024). However, the existence of intralingual errors demonstrates that learner language development cannot be explained solely through cross-linguistic comparison.

These results align with contemporary perspectives in second-language acquisition, which view learner errors as products of both language transfer and internal developmental processes. Interlanguage theory explains that learners actively construct linguistic systems that combine first-language influence with developing target-language knowledge, resulting in both interlingual and intralingual errors (Shiddiq & Oktaviani, 2022; Adhabia & Malihah, 2025). Rather than functioning as a fully predictive model, Contrastive Analysis serves as a useful diagnostic tool for identifying potential areas of difficulty and informing pedagogical intervention. The findings therefore support an integrated framework that combines Error Analysis, Contrastive Analysis, and Interlanguage perspectives.

C. Comparison with Previous Studies

The findings generally correspond with previous studies conducted in Indonesian EFL contexts, which have consistently identified morphosyntactic errors as a major challenge for learners. Similar patterns have been reported in studies focusing on subject–verb agreement, tense usage, article omission, misuse of auxiliary verbs, and grammatical inaccuracies in academic writing (Ibrahim & Ibrahim, 2020; Mahdalena, 2021; Rifiyanti & Dewi, 2022; Azizah et al., 2025; Ulviani & Kemala, 2025; Zebua et al., 2025). The recurrence of these error categories across different institutions and learner groups suggests that grammatical difficulties among Indonesian EFL learners are systematic and influenced by common linguistic factors rather than isolated contextual conditions. This consistency reinforces the importance of targeted instructional approaches designed to address persistent error patterns.

The present study extends previous research by integrating linguistic-category analysis, surface-structure analysis, and etiological analysis within a single framework. Unlike many earlier studies that focused primarily on identifying error frequencies, this study also examines the underlying causes of errors through contrastive and interlanguage perspectives, thereby providing a more comprehensive explanation of learner performance. Such an approach





contributes to a deeper understanding of grammatical development among EFL learners and offers stronger empirical support for pedagogical decision-making.

D. Pedagogical Implications

The findings suggest that grammar instruction should prioritize linguistic features that exhibit the highest levels of difficulty and strongest evidence of cross-linguistic influence. Explicit attention to subject–verb agreement, tense systems, and article usage may help learners recognize grammatical categories that are absent from Bahasa Indonesia. Furthermore, recent studies emphasize the importance of learner autonomy, self-assessment, and metalinguistic reflection in improving grammatical competence and reducing recurring errors (Astuti et al., 2022; Rusdi et al., 2025). Instructional practices should therefore combine explicit grammar explanation with opportunities for guided discovery, feedback, and sustained writing practice.

From an institutional perspective, the findings underscore the importance of evidencebased grammar instruction in English teacher education programs. Future teachers require not only grammatical knowledge but also an understanding of the common difficulties experienced by Indonesian learners. The growing use of automated written corrective feedback and AIassisted error detection systems also presents promising opportunities for supporting grammar development, self-regulation, and writing accuracy among EFL students (Bannò et al., 2024; Coyne et al., 2025; Zhai, 2026). In addition, strengthening grammatical competence among preservice teachers may contribute indirectly to improved student achievement, as teacher competence and self-efficacy have been shown to influence learning outcomes (Ma et al., 2025; Zee et al., 2016). Accordingly, integrating contrastive linguistic awareness, technologyenhanced feedback, and communicative grammar practice may contribute to more effective language learning and future classroom instruction.

CONSLUSION

This study examined the grammatical errors produced by first-semester TBI students at UINSU Medan through the combined use of Error Analysis and Contrastive Analysis. The findings indicate that students' grammatical difficulties are predominantly associated with subject–verb agreement, verb tense, article usage, prepositions, pronouns, and word order. The analysis further demonstrates that many of these errors are influenced by structural differences between Bahasa Indonesia and English, although intralingual factors also contribute to the development of learners' interlanguage.

The study contributes to the growing body of EFL research by providing empirical evidence that Contrastive Analysis remains a useful diagnostic framework when integrated with Error Analysis. From a pedagogical perspective, the findings highlight the importance of grammar instruction that explicitly addresses areas of cross-linguistic difficulty while also supporting learners in overcoming developmental language errors. Such an approach may help improve grammatical accuracy among prospective English teachers in Islamic higher education contexts.

This study is limited by its relatively small sample size and focus on a single student cohort within one institution. Future research should involve larger and more diverse participant groups, examine different writing genres, and employ longitudinal designs to explore the

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development of grammatical competence over time. Despite these limitations, the study offers meaningful insights into the grammatical challenges faced by Indonesian EFL learners and provides practical directions for evidence-based grammar instruction.

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