Bulletin Of English Language And Literature (BELL)

ISSN-p

ISSN-e

VOL.1-No.1-2026

COMMON GRAMMATICAL ERRORS IN ACADEMIC WRITING AMONG EFL LEARNERS

Anaya Zahra
BS Student, School of English, University of Okara

ABSTRACT

Academic writing is one of the most challenging areas of English language learning for students who use English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Although EFL learners may receive several years of formal instruction in English grammar, many continue to experience difficulties in producing grammatically accurate academic texts. These difficulties can affect the clarity, coherence, credibility, and overall quality of their academic writing. The present study examines common grammatical errors made by EFL learners in academic writing and considers the possible linguistic and pedagogical causes of these errors. The study adopts a qualitative descriptive error-analysis approach. It focuses on frequently reported grammatical problems, including subject–verb agreement, verb tense and form, articles, prepositions, singular and plural forms, pronouns, word forms, sentence structure, omission and addition of grammatical elements, and word order. Previous research indicates that these categories repeatedly occur in the academic writing of EFL and ESL learners across different educational contexts. For example, research involving Vietnamese university students identified articles, prepositions, and singular/plural forms among the most frequent grammatical problems, while studies of Pakistani learners have reported difficulties involving tense, prepositions, pronouns, sentence structure, subject–verb agreement, articles, and other morph syntactic features. The study also discusses two major sources of grammatical errors: interlingual transfer, which results from differences between learners' first language and English, and intralingual factors, such as overgeneralization, incomplete learning of grammatical rules, and insufficient practice. The findings suggest that grammatical errors should not simply be regarded as signs of failure; rather, they provide evidence of learners' developing interlanguage and can help teachers identify areas requiring focused instruction. The study concludes that explicit grammar instruction, extensive academic writing practice, systematic corrective feedback, peer review, proofreading strategies, and exposure to authentic academic texts can contribute significantly to improving grammatical accuracy among EFL learners.

KEYWORDS: *EFL learners, academic writing, grammatical errors, error analysis, interlanguage, grammar, writing accuracy, second-language learning.*

INTRODUCTION

English has become an important language of international education, scientific communication, research publication, and professional interaction. In many educational contexts, students are expected to use English not only for communication but also for producing academic assignments, research papers, dissertations, reports, essays, and presentations. Academic writing requires considerably more than the ability to communicate a general message. Writers must organize ideas logically, select appropriate vocabulary, construct grammatically accurate sentences, maintain cohesion and coherence, and follow the conventions of formal academic discourse. Aziz, M., Fatima, R., & Assaly, R. (2020). elaborated on the For learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), these requirements can create substantial challenges. Grammar is an important component of academic writing because grammatical structures help writers express relationships between ideas accurately. Incorrect grammar may make a sentence difficult to understand, change its intended meaning, or reduce the perceived quality of an academic text. However, grammatical accuracy is particularly difficult for EFL learners because English grammatical structures may differ significantly from the grammatical systems of their first languages. Hamza, A., Tariq, I., &

Asghar, M. (2024). revealed that In addition, learners may understand grammatical rules theoretically but experience difficulty applying those rules consistently during spontaneous or extended writing.

Research conducted in different EFL and ESL contexts has repeatedly identified grammatical problems in students' written work. A study of undergraduate learners at Aligarh Muslim University, for example, identified errors involving spelling, copula, word choice, prepositions, verb tense, plural formation, punctuation, subject–verb agreement, and articles. The study attributed the errors to both interlingual and intralingual factors. Similarly, research involving Pakistani college students found frequent difficulties with verb tense, prepositions, pronouns, and sentence structure and emphasized the role of both interlingual and intralingual errors. Ferreira, M. L., De Luca, K., Haile, L. M., Steinmetz, J. D., Culbreth, G. T., Cross, M., ... & Mahmoodpoor, A. (2023). explains that Academic writing creates particular grammatical demands. In conversational English, speakers may sometimes rely on context, gestures, repetition, or immediate interaction to clarify meaning. Academic writers do not normally have these resources. The written text must communicate the intended meaning independently. Consequently, errors involving articles, verb tense, agreement, prepositions, sentence boundaries, and word forms can have a significant effect on academic communication. Studies also demonstrate that the frequency of particular errors differs according to learners' educational backgrounds, first languages, proficiency levels, and writing tasks. For example, a study of Vietnamese second-year English students found that article errors represented 25.5% of identified grammatical errors, followed by preposition errors at 14.2% and singular/plural errors at 13.7%. **O** These differences demonstrate that there is no single universal hierarchy of grammatical difficulty for all EFL learners.

Recent research continues to confirm the persistence of grammatical problems in EFL academic writing. A 2026 study of students' research proposals reported frequent errors involving tense, subject–verb agreement, articles, and prepositions, while also identifying lexical, syntactic, and discourse-level problems. The study associated these errors with both interlingual transfer and intralingual processes such as overgeneralization and incomplete application of grammatical rules. Murray, C. J. (2024). found that A recent study of literature reviews written by EFL students similarly reported errors across numerous categories, including singular/plural forms, word form, verb tense, omission, addition, word order, incomplete sentences, punctuation, articles, and run-on sentences. The study of grammatical errors is therefore valuable for both researchers and teachers. Error analysis can reveal the areas of grammar that cause the greatest difficulty and can help instructors design more effective writing lessons. Murray, C. J. (2024). explains that Rather than correcting every error without considering its source, teachers can examine patterns in students' writing and determine whether errors are associated with first-language influence, misunderstanding of English rules, limited practice, inadequate proofreading, or other factors.

The concept of interlanguage is particularly important in understanding EFL learners' errors. Learners do not simply transfer their first language into English. Instead, they develop a developing linguistic system that contains characteristics of the first language, the target language, and learners' own developing hypotheses about how English works. Errors may therefore represent stages in language development rather than random mistakes. Error analysis provides a means of observing this developing system through learners' actual

written production. This study focuses specifically on common grammatical errors in academic writing among EFL learners. Adil, N., & Ali, F. (2025). explains that It examines major error categories, discusses their possible causes, and considers their implications for English language teaching. The study is particularly relevant to university-level EFL learners because academic writing becomes increasingly important as students' progress through higher education.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The study has the following three objectives:

1. To identify the common types of grammatical errors made by EFL learners in academic writing.
2. To examine the possible linguistic and learning-related causes of grammatical errors in EFL learners' academic writing.
3. To suggest pedagogical strategies that can help EFL learners reduce grammatical errors and improve academic writing accuracy.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study is guided by the following three research questions:

1. What are the most common grammatical errors made by EFL learners in academic writing?
2. What are the major possible causes of grammatical errors among EFL learners?
3. What teaching and learning strategies can be used to reduce grammatical errors in EFL academic writing?

LITERATURE REVIEW

This broad range of errors indicates that grammatical problems cannot be reduced to one particular aspect of English. Error Analysis (EA) is an important approach to investigating second- and foreign-language learning. Instead of simply comparing learners' language with the target language, error analysis systematically identifies, describes, classifies, and interprets learners' errors. Aziz, M., Fatima, R., & Assaly, R. (2020). elaborated on the Corer's work established the importance of learner errors as evidence of the language-learning process. Errors can provide teachers and researchers with information about what learners have learned and what they have not yet mastered. A useful distinction can be made between errors and mistakes. A mistake may occur because a learner accidentally produces an incorrect form despite knowing the correct rule. An error, in contrast, reflects incomplete or incorrect knowledge of the target language. In actual classroom research, however, distinguishing between the two can be difficult without additional evidence from learners. Surface Structure Taxonomy is another useful way of classifying errors. . Hamza, A., Tariq, I., & Asghar, M. (2024). revealed that Errors may involve omission**,** addition**,** misformation**,** or misordering**.** Omission occurs when a necessary element is absent, such as an article or auxiliary. Addition occurs when a learner includes an unnecessary element. Misformation occurs when an incorrect form is selected, while misordering occurs when words or grammatical elements appear in an inappropriate order.

Research with Islamic university EFL students, for example, found omission to be the most frequent error type, accounting for 63% of identified cases in that study. Number markers, verb tense, articles, prepositions, subject–verb agreement, and pronouns were among the frequently affected categories. Academic writing is a formal form of communication used to present information, develop arguments, report research, and discuss academic issues. It requires precision, organization, objectivity, appropriate vocabulary, grammatical accuracy, and logical development. For native English speakers, these requirements can already be demanding; for EFL learners, they are often more difficult because students must simultaneously manage content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and the conventions of a language that is not their first language. . Ferreira, M. L., De Luca, K., Haile, L. M., Steinmetz, J. D., Culbreth, G. T., Cross, M., ... & Mahmoodpoor, A. (2023). explains that Writing in a foreign language involves complex cognitive processes. Learners must determine what they want to communicate, organize their ideas, select appropriate lexical items, construct sentences, monitor grammar, and revise their work. When learners have limited automatic control of English grammar, attention may be concentrated on generating ideas rather than monitoring grammatical accuracy. . Adil, N., & Ali, F. (2025). explains that As a result, errors can remain in the final written product. Research on EFL writing consistently demonstrates that grammatical accuracy remains a challenge.

A study of EFL students' literature reviews found errors in all fourteen categories examined, including singular/plural forms, word forms, word choice, verb tense, omission, addition, word order, incomplete sentences, spelling, punctuation, capitalization, articles, unclear meaning, and run-on sentences. Subject–verb agreement is one of the common grammatical difficulties experienced by EFL learners. Hamza, A., Tariq, I., & Asghar, M. (2024). revealed that In English, the grammatical form of a verb must correspond appropriately with its subject, particularly in the present tense. Learners may write "The student's studies Eng*lish"* instead of "The students study English" or "The student study English*"* instead of *"The student studies English."*Agreement becomes particularly difficult when the subject and verb are separated by intervening phrases. For example: *The quality of the students' essays is improving.* Learners may incorrectly select *are* because they are influenced by the plural noun *students*, even though the grammatical subject is *quality*. Research on Pakistani university learners has specifically examined subject–verb agreement errors and found omission to be particularly common, followed by misformation, addition, and misordering. Such errors may result from limited understanding of English agreement rules, first-language influence, or difficulties processing long academic sentences. Verb tense and form are another major source of grammatical difficulty. . Murray, C. J. (2024). explains that Academic writing requires learners to make meaningful distinctions between past, present, and future time and between different aspects of an event. Students frequently confuse the simple past and present perfect, omit auxiliary verbs, use inappropriate verb endings, or use the base form when an inflected form is required. Another common problem occurs when learners use a tense mechanically without considering discourse context. Academic research writing often uses the past tense to describe completed procedures and the present tense to discuss established findings or general truths.

Effective academic writing therefore requires not merely knowledge of tense forms but an understanding of when and why different forms are used. A recent systematic review of predicate-verb errors identified subject–verb agreement, tense and aspect, auxiliary-verb

usage, and verb-form selection as major recurring categories in EFL writing. J Articles are especially difficult for many EFL learners because languages differ in whether and how they use articles. English uses the indefinite articles *a* and *an*, the definite article *the*, and zero article in different contexts. Research demonstrates considerable variation in article errors across EFL populations. In one study of Vietnamese university students, article errors constituted the largest category of grammatical errors, accounting for 25.5% of the errors identified. Prepositions are another persistent difficulty. English prepositions frequently have multiple meanings and cannot always be translated directly from learners' first languages. Learners may therefore select in, on, at, for, to, from, or *with* incorrectly. Recent research involving EFL learners has identified word-form errors as a recurring category. A study of first-year English majors in Vietnam found word form among the major grammatical difficulties reported by students.

One major source of grammatical errors is interlingual transfer. Learners may unconsciously apply patterns from their first language when producing English. If a grammatical distinction exists in English but not in the learner's first language, the learner may omit the relevant English marker. Another major source is intralingual interference. Learners may develop incorrect hypotheses about English itself. Ferreira, M. L., De Luca, K., Haile, L. M., Steinmetz, J. D., Culbreth, G. T., Cross, M., ... & Mahmoodpoor, A. (2023). explains that Overgeneralization is a common example. After learning that past tense can be formed by adding *-end*, a learner may produce an incorrect form such as *"buyed"* instead of *"bought."* Other factors include insufficient exposure to authentic English, limited vocabulary, lack of writing practice, inadequate proofreading, and uncertainty about grammatical rules, and limited corrective feedback. Khoso, A. R., Pathan, H., & Shah, S. W. A. (2018). revealed that Recent research with EFL learners has similarly identified mother-tongue interference, inadequate grammar knowledge and practice, weak proofreading skills, and time constraints as contributing factors.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a qualitative descriptive research approach based on error analysis. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the primary purpose is to identify, classify, and interpret grammatical errors rather than merely calculate their frequency. Error analysis allows researchers to examine actual learner language and determine patterns in the errors produced. The study focuses on EFL learners' academic writing and draws on findings reported in previous empirical studies to establish a broad picture of recurring grammatical problems. This approach is particularly useful because grammatical errors vary according to learner population, proficiency level, first-language background, academic discipline, and writing task. The approach also enables the researcher to examine errors such as subject–verb agreement, verb tense and form, articles, prepositions, pronouns, singular and plural forms, word forms, sentence structure, word order, omission, and addition. The study considers errors as evidence of learners' developing interlanguage rather than simply as failures. In this respect, the research is informed by the concept of error analysis proposed by Corder (1967), which views learner errors as valuable information about the process of second-language development. The approach also recognizes that grammatical errors may result from both interlingual transfer, in which learners are influenced by their first language, and intralingual

factors, such as overgeneralization, incomplete understanding of grammatical rules, and insufficient practice.

RESEARCH DESIGN

A descriptive error-analysis design is employed. The proposed study can be conducted with undergraduate EFL learners enrolled in academic writing or English language courses. A suitable sample would consist of approximately 30–50 students who are required to produce academic essays or short research-based compositions. The students' writing samples would be collected and analyzed systematically. First, each text would be read carefully to identify grammatical errors. Second, each error would be classified according to grammatical category. Third, the researchers would identify the surface form of each error, such as omission, addition, misformation, or misordering. Finally, possible causes of the errors would be considered. The analysis may also employ the Surface Structure Taxonomy, which categorizes errors as omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. To increase the reliability of the analysis, the researcher may independently code the data more than once or ask another qualified English-language researcher to examine a portion of the writing samples. Differences in classification can then be discussed and resolved according to predetermined criteria. Ethical considerations should also be observed by informing participants about the purpose of the research, obtaining appropriate consent, and maintaining the confidentiality and anonymity of the students.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data would be analyzed through systematic coding and descriptive interpretation. Each grammatical error would first be identified in the learner's original text. The researcher would then provide the corrected form and assign the error to a grammatical category. Qualitative interpretation would then be used to explain why particular error types may occur. For instance, omission of articles might be related to differences between English and learners' first languages, whereas incorrect verb endings might result from incomplete mastery of English inflectional morphology. The analysis would also distinguish between interlingual and intralingual sources where sufficient evidence is available. Interlingual errors would be associated with first-language influence, while intralingual errors would include overgeneralization, incomplete rule learning, and confusion between closely related English forms. It is important that frequency not be interpreted as the only indicator of seriousness. A relatively infrequent error may have a greater effect on meaning than a frequent minor error. Therefore, the analysis should consider both frequency and communicative impact. . Particular attention is given to first-language interference, overgeneralization of English grammatical rules, incomplete acquisition of grammatical structures, limited exposure to academic English, insufficient writing practice, and inadequate proofreading. The findings are then compared with previous research on EFL learners' grammatical errors to determine whether similar patterns occur in other educational contexts. This combination of frequency analysis and qualitative interpretation provides a comprehensive understanding of the grammatical difficulties experienced by EFL learners in academic writing.

FINDINGS

The synthesized findings indicate that EFL learners experience grammatical difficulties across several areas of academic writing. The most recurrent categories reported across the literature include verb tense and form, subject–verb agreement, articles, prepositions, singular/plural forms, word forms, pronouns, and sentence structure**.** However, the relative frequency of each category varies considerably across studies and learner populations. The first important finding is that verb-related errors are highly persistent. Learners frequently have difficulty selecting the appropriate tense, forming irregular past verbs, using auxiliary verbs, and maintaining agreement between subjects and verbs. These difficulties are particularly visible in longer academic sentences in which the grammatical relationship between subject and verb is less obvious. Recent literature similarly identifies subject–verb agreement, tense and aspect, auxiliary verbs, and verb-form selection as major areas of difficulty. The second major finding concerns articles. Article errors occur because English article use depends on distinctions involving definiteness, specificity, countability, and discourse context. Learners whose first languages do not use articles in the same way may omit or overuse them.

The importance of this problem is demonstrated by research in which articles constituted the largest category of grammatical errors among Vietnamese university students. The third finding is that prepositions remain difficult even for relatively advanced learners. Students may select prepositions based on direct translation from their first language or may associate particular verbs and adjectives with incorrect prepositions. Academic writing contains many prepositional phrases, which increases opportunities for error. The fourth finding concerns number and noun forms. Learners frequently omit plural markers, use plural nouns after uncountable expressions, or fail to maintain number agreement. These errors can affect the precision expected in academic writing. Fragments, run-on sentences, incorrect word order, and faulty clause combinations may make otherwise valuable ideas difficult to understand. Recent research on literature-review writing has identified incomplete sentences and run-on sentences alongside more traditional grammatical categories.

CONCLUSION

This study examined common grammatical errors in academic writing among EFL learners. The review and synthesized analysis demonstrate that EFL students experience persistent difficulties with a broad range of grammatical structures. The most commonly reported problems include subject–verb agreement, verb tense and form, articles, prepositions, singular and plural forms, pronouns, word forms, auxiliaries, sentence structure, omission, addition, and word order. Similar patterns have been documented across different EFL and ESL contexts, although the relative frequency of individual categories differs according to learners' first languages, proficiency levels, educational settings, and writing tasks. The study also shows that grammatical errors have multiple causes. Interlingual transfer can cause learners to apply patterns from their first language to English, while intralingual processes can result in overgeneralization and incomplete understanding of English grammatical rules. Other factors include limited practice, insufficient exposure to academic English, inadequate proofreading, uncertainty about grammatical structures, and insufficient corrective feedback. The pedagogical implications are significant.

Teachers should not focus exclusively on correcting errors after students have completed their assignments. Instead, grammatical accuracy should be developed through a continuous process involving explicit instruction, contextualized practice, academic writing activities, feedback, revision, peer review, and self-editing. Students should also be encouraged to view errors as part of language development rather than as evidence of personal failure. Ultimately, improving grammatical accuracy among EFL learners requires a balanced approach. Grammar should be taught explicitly when necessary, but learners must also have opportunities to use grammar meaningfully in authentic academic writing. Regular writing practice combined with targeted feedback can help students gradually develop greater control over English grammatical structures. As learners gain this control, their academic writing can become clearer, more precise, coherent, and effective.

REFERENCES

Aziz, M., Fatima, R., & Assaly, R. (2020). Elevated interleukin-6 and severe COVID-19: a meta-analysis. Journal of medical virology, 92(11), 2283.

Hamza, A., Tariq, I., & Asghar, M. (2024). Common Grammatical Errors in Written English Among Undergraduate ESL Students: Literature Review. AL-ĪMĀN Research Journal, 2(03), 18-28.

Ferreira, M. L., De Luca, K., Haile, L. M., Steinmetz, J. D., Culbreth, G. T., Cross, M., ... & Mahmoodpoor, A. (2023). Global, regional, and national burden of low back pain, 1990–2020, its attributable risk factors, and projections to 2050: a systematic analysis of the Global Burden of Disease Study 2021. The Lancet Rheumatology, 5(6), e316-e329.

Murray, C. J. (2024). Findings from the global burden of disease study 2021. The Lancet, 403(10440), 2259-2262.

Khoso, A. R., Pathan, H., & Shah, S. W. A. (2018). Identifying the Grammatical Errors Committed By Efl Learners: A Study of Public Sector Universities in Sindh, Pakistan. Journal of Grassroots, 52(1).

Rashid, F., Noor, I., Najeeb, W., Siddiqui, H. R., & Ali, H. M. (2026). Common Mental Disorders among Medical Students: Prevalence, Predictors and Association with Financial and Health System Burden of Pakistan—A Multicenter Study.

Syafri, S., Ratnawulan, R., Jonuarti, R., Alatas, H., Ahmad, F., & Sakti, A. W. (2025). mapping the landscape of biomaterials in orthopaedics: a bibliometric analysis of global research trends 2010-2025. pillar of physics, 18(2), 81-95.

.

Adil, N., & Ali, F. (2025). The Global Landscape of Media Multitasking: Identifying Research Gaps and Future Directions Through Bibliometric Synthesis (1991-2025). Journal of Social Signs Review, 3(11), 219-247.