An Analysis of Student's Errors in Writing Narrative Texts at Grade XI of SMAN 3 Tanjungbalai: A Qualitative Study on the Causes and Improvement Strategies

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Abstract
This study investigates the types and causes of errors made by Grade XI students at SMAN 3 Tanjungbalai in writing narrative texts, and explores strategies for improvement. Utilizing a qualitative descriptive method, the research focused on surface-level errors categorized under Dulay, Burt, and Krashen's Surface Strategy Taxonomy: omission, addition, misformation, selection, and misordering. Data were collected through narrative writing tasks completed by ten students and analyzed using document analysis. The findings revealed a total of 454 errors, with misformation (30.84%) as the most frequent, followed by selection, omission, addition, and misordering. These errors predominantly stem from intralingual and interlingual interferences, indicating gaps in grammar mastery, vocabulary use, and structural organization. The study highlights the importance of targeted instructional strategies and genre-based writing approaches to support students' development in narrative writing. Recommendations are offered for educators to focus on structured grammar teaching, vocabulary enhancement, and writing process awareness.
Keywords: narrative writing, error analysis, surface strategy taxonomi, EFL learners, writing instruction, grammar errors, qualitative research

Introduction

English is a global language used in communication, business, politics, and education(Gau et al., 2021). In Indonesia, English is taught as a foreign language from early levels and is a compulsory subject in schools. However, students often face challenges in learning it, especially in writing(Koilara et al., 2020).

Writing is one of the four fundamental language skills, along with reading, speaking, and listening. It helps students express ideas, feelings, and opinions clearly. According to (Koilara et al., 2020), writing involves grammar, vocabulary, and the ability to organize ideas. Academic writing includes several types: expository (to explain), persuasive (to convince), narrative (to tell a story), and descriptive (to describe in detail).

Narrative writing, in particular, is often difficult for students because it requires creativity, structure, and vocabulary mastery. At SMAN 3 Tanjungbalai, many Grade XI students struggle with writing narrative texts. The main issues include: (1) difficulty in completing writing tasks, (2) limited ability to develop ideas, and (3) poor vocabulary mastery.

Considering these problems, the researchers conducted a study entitled "An Analysis of Students' Errors in Writing Narrative Texts at Grade XI of SMAN 3 Tanjungbalai: A Qualitative

Study on the Causes and Improvement Strategies" to examine the types and causes of student errors and explore possible situations.

Students often face difficulties in completing narrative writing tasks. This problem is commonly linked to their struggle in organizing ideas, using appropriate grammar, and developing coherent storylines. One of the main contributing factors to this issue is the students' limited vocabulaty, which hinders their ability to express ideas effectively and creatively in English.

This study is limited to the analysis of errors found in narrative writing produced by Grade XI students at SMAN 3 Tanjungbalai. The research particularly focuses on surface-level errors, such as grammatical and lexical mistakes, to identify common patterns and provide insights for improving students' writing proficiency.

Literature Reviews

This study applies "error analysis" as the main theoretical foundation to examine students' mistakes in writing, particularly using the taxonomy of Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982), which classifies errors into omission, addition, misformation, selection, and misordering. Writing narrative texts, common in high school EFL contexts, requires mastery of grammar, vocabulary, and structure. Error analysis distinguishes between interlingual and intralingual errors, viewing them not as failures but as part of the language learning process. As noted by (Murtiana, 2019), analyzing such errors enables teachers to better understand learners' difficulties and adjust instruction to support their writing.

Error in writing refers to systematic deviations made by language learners as they attempt to construct sentences in a second language. These errors are not random but indicate developmental stages in learners' interlanguage. According to Dulay (1982), common types of surface-level errors include omission, addition, misformation, selection, and misordering. (Widarlina Laia, 2024) found that Indonesian high school students frequently made grammatical errors in narrative writing, particularly in verb tense and usage. (Koilara et al., 2020) also reported that students' difficulties were rooted in limited vocabulary and poor structure, suggesting the need for more targeted instruction. Supporting this, (Purba et al., 2024) argued that such errors stem from learners' internalized but incomplete language rules, highlighting the cognitive processes behind these patterns. Overall, these studies confirm that analyzing writing errors helps educators understand learner challenges and improve teaching strategies.

Error and mistake are two distinct concepts in error analysis. An error refers to a systematic deviation from the rules of the target language, indicating that the learner has not yet fully mastered a certain aspect of the language. For example, consistently writing "He go to school yesterday" instead of "He went to school yesterday" reflects a rule gap rather than a one-time slip. (Seddik, 2023) found that grammatical errors such as omission, addition, misformation, and misordering are systematic among EFL learners, highlighting the influence of their interlanguage structures. These errors are valuable because they help teachers identify persistent learning gaps and design appropriate teaching strategies. In contrast, a mistake is a performance error that occurs when a learner temporarily fails to apply a rule they actually know—often due to fatigue, distraction, or pressure—and such mistakes are typically self-correctable when the learner becomes aware of them.

Error Analysis, as proposed by Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982), is widely used in language classrooms to identify systematic patterns in students' writing. It helps teachers focus on specific linguistic problems and improve instructional methods. (Seddik, 2023) applied Corder's five-step EA model and found frequent grammar and word-level errors among EFL learners, often caused by interlingual and intralingual factors. Similarly, (Mubarok & Budiono, 2022) conducted an error analysis on student theses and identified 11 types of grammatical and mechanical errors, showing how EA guides curriculum priorities. (Albelihi &

Al-Ahdal, 2024) also emphasized the predictive power of EA by identifying fossilized errors in article use, prepositions, and subject-verb agreement, which persisted despite corrections. These studies demonstrate that EA is not only diagnostic but also crucial for long-term learning improvement and targeted intervention.

Errors in EFL or ESL learners' writing typically stem from two mains sources: interlingual and intralingual factors. Interlingual errors result from negative transfer from the first language (L1), such as applying native grammatical structures or word order to the second language (L2); for instance, (Seddik, 2023) found that Egyptian EFL students exhibited sentence- and word-level errors caused by L1 interference, along with insufficient practive and occasional carelessness. In contrast, intralingual errors arise from within the learner's developing interlanguage system, involving overgeneralization, incomplete application of rules, or false hypotheses; one study reported 182 intralingual errors compared to 102 interlingual ones in descriptive writing, suggesting that learners are often actively internalizing rather than translating rules. Supporting this, research on Turkish EFL students revealed that 84% of errors were intralingual, while only 16% stemmed from interlingual factors (Kusmaryani & Fitriawati, 2023). According to (Mertosono & Erniwati, 2023), as well as Richards' framework, intralignual errors like "He goed" reflect overgeneralization and analogy, which, though developmental, still require correction. Meanwhile, interlingual errors, though less frequent, tend to be systematic and persistent, as seen in Kurdish learners' misuse of articles fue to direct L1 transfer (Kaweera, 2013). Long-term intralingual errors may also become fossilized, as noted by (Albelihi & Al-Ahdal, 2024), who observed repeated mistakes in article use, prepositions, idiomatic expressions, and subject-verb agreement among Saudi learners despite ongoing feedback. Lastly, contextual and instructional elements—such as limited exposure to correct language input, inadequate writing practice, and reliance on communication strategies—further intensify both error types, as shown in a Tadulako University study that identified diverse errors across orthographic, syntactic, lexical, and punctuation domains (Mertosono & Erniwati, 2023).

In writing, learners commonly make five types of errors: omission, addition, misformation, selection, and misordering. Omission occurs when essential elements are left out, such as in "a strange thing happen to me yesterday," where the missing "-s" in "happen" reflects a morphological omisiion. At the syntactic level, omission may involve missing sentence components, as in "must say also their names?" where the subject is absent. Addition is the opposite, where learners insert unnecessary items. Morphological addition appears in "The books is here," while syntactic addition is evident in "I stayed there during five years ago," which contains redundant time expressions. Misformation refers to incorrect structures, particularly in verb forms—such as using "eated" instead of the correct irregular form "ate," as in "The dog ate the chicken" (Gau et al., 2021). Selection errors involve choosing the wrong word form: morphologically, this is seen in "My friend is oldest than me," and syntactically in "I want that my friend comes here." Lexical selection errors occur when learners use inappropriate or non-standard vocabulary for the context. Lastly, misorderinginvolves incorrect word placement, including lexical errors like "key car," morphological issues like "getting upping," and syntactic misordering as in "he is dear to me friend."

According to Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982), Error Analysis involves several systematic steps to identify and understand learners' errors. The process begins with collecting a sample of students' language, followed by identifying which parts deviate from standard usage. After errors are recognized, they are described and classified—commonly using categories like omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. The next step is explaining the possible causes of these errors, which may relate to interlingual or intralingual influences. Finally, the errors are evaluated to determine their impact on communication and to inform teaching

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strategies. These steps help educators better understand students' interlanguage development and design more focused instruction.

The main objective of Error Analysis (EA) is to identify the specific obstacles learners encounter in acquiring a second language so that educators can adjust their teaching emthods accordingly. AsNorrish (1987) notes, EA provides insight into learners' weaknesses, making it useful for designing curricula and targeted remedial activities. Expanding on this, Corder (as cited in (Seddik, 2023)) explains that EA has both theoretical and practical importance: theoretically, it helps uncover how language is acquired and practically, it guides teachers on which areas need emphasis. By uncovering consistent patterns in learners' errors, EA becomes a powerful tool not only for evaluation but also for instructional planning and reflection. Additionally, EA is beneficial to researchers as it uncovers the subconscious strategies learners apply in the learning process. Corder emphasized that errors reflect learners' attempts at forming and testing hypotheses, which is vital for understanding second language acquisition. Supporting this, (Kusmaryani & Fitriawati, 2023) found that learners often create incorrect interlanguage rules, especially in grammat and sentence structure, and that identifying such trends can help trace developmental stages and error fossilization. From the learner's viewpoint, EA helps them become more conscious of their own progress. According to Corder (as cited in (Albelihi & Al-Ahdal, 2024)), errors should be recognized as part of the learning journey rather than signs of failure. Their study showed that when Saudi EFL learners became aware of their recurring errors—such as in article use and subject-verb agreement— they were able to engage in metacognitive thinking and make improvements. Therefore, EA not only supports effective teaching and research but also encourages learners to turn their mistakes into meaningful learning experiences.

Errors in second language learning are generally caused by two main factors: interlingual and intralingual interference. According to Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982), interlingual errors occur when learners transfer rules or patterns from their first language (L1) into the second language (L2), which leads to incorrect structures. For example, directly translating word order to grammat from L1 often results in sentence errors. On the other hand, intralingual errors arise from the learner's incomplete understanding of the L2 system itself, such as overgeneralization, incomplete rule application, or false concept hypotheses. These developmental errors reflect natural stages in learning, where students from incorrect rules based on limited exposure or misunderstanding. Dulay emphasize that both types of errors are a normal part of the learning process and analyzing them provides insight into the learner's internal language development.

Writing is a complex cognitive and linguistic process that involves encoding ideas into structured language using correct grammar, vocabulary, and organization. In EFL contexts, it functions both as a communication tool and a means to support language learning (Bhowmik, 2021). Writing requires planning, organizing, and revising, making it one of the most demanding skills (Isma et al., 2023). Students who treat writing as a process tend to show better coherence and language use. Academically, writing is essential for demonstrating knowledge and engaging with disciplinary discourse (Latifa & Kurniawan, 2023), and genre based instruction helps learners produce purposeful, well-organized texts.

In EFL/ESL instruction, writing development is most effectively achieved through a genre-based approach, which introduces students to various text types according to their communicative purposes and structural conventions. This method not only reinforces grammar and vocabulary but also equips learners with skills to organize ideas based on context and purpose. (Latifa & Kurniawan, 2023) highlighted that explicit genre instruction improves coherence and purposeful writing. Students learn to differentiate between types of writing such as recount, which retells events chronologically (Sukma, 2015); report, which presents factual information systematically (Bhowmik, 2021); and discussion, which explores opposing viewpoints before concluding (Setiati et al., 2025). Explanation texts describe

processes or reasons with logical sequencing and linking devices (Isma et al., 2023), while analytical exposition develops argumentation through thesis, evidence, and conclusion (Albelihi & Al-Ahdal, 2024). In contrast, hortatory exposition aims to persuade with recommendations and modal verbs (Kusmaryani & Fitriawati, 2023). News items train learners to report facts concisely and formally (Hemiyadi & Kamaliah, 2021), while anecdotes encourage narrative creativity (Koilara et al., 2020). Narratives foster structured storytelling and personal expression (Widarlina Laia, 2024), and procedure texts focus on clear, step-by-step instructions using imperatives (Mertosono & Erniwati, 2023). Descriptions enhance students' ability to depict details vividly with strong vocabulary (Seddik, 2023), and reviews combine summary and evaluation to build critical and reflective writing skills (Isma et al., 2023). Altogether, genre-based writing instruction supports learners' martery of both language form and communicative function.

The writing process is a recursive approach involving stages of planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing, aimed at developing learners' metacognitive awareness and writing strategies. Rather than treating writing as a final product, it emphasizes idea development and refinement over time. (Isma et al., 2023) highlight that fuiding students through each stage reduces anxiety and enhances clarity. Pre-writing involves idea generation and outlining; drafting focuses on content creation; revising improves organization and logic; editing addresses grammar and mechanics; and publishing allows feedback and reflection. Especially in EFL contexts, this process-based approach fosters fluency, structure, and learner autonomy (Latifa & Kurniawan, 2023). Teachers play a key role by providing feedback and scaffolding, which significantly improves students' final output and language awareness (Isma et al., 2023)

Writing is a cognitively and emotionally demanding skill, especially for EFL/ESL learners who often face psychological barriers like anxiety and low confidence due to the lack of real-time interaction (Bhowmik, 2021). Linguistic challenges in grammar, vocabulary, and cohesion further hinder clarity and fluency, often stemming from limited language exposure and insufficient feedback (Isma et al., 2023). Organizing ideas logically, particularly in complex genres like exposition or discussion, also proves difficult. Additionally, learners struggle to manage the cognitive load of planning, structuring, and editing simultaneously, especially without genre awareness (Latifa & Kurniawan, 2023). These challenges highlight the need for explicit instruction, feedback, and strategic writing support.

The main purposes of writing in an EFL context include expressing thoughts and emotions, sharing information, and persuading readers. (Bhowmik, 2021) emphasizes that writing allows learners to reflect, build confidence, and connect language with personal meaning. In academic settings, writing is also used to explain, describe, and present structured arguments. (Latifa & Kurniawan, 2023) highlight that genres like reports and expositions help students develop clarity, objectivity, and critical resoning. Furthermore, persuasive writing tasks train learners to evaluate multiple viewpoints and defend their stance effectively. (Setiati et al., 2025) point out that these tasks support higher-order thinking and strengthen students' ability to communicate arguments logically.

Writing consists if several key aspects, including grammar, vocabulary, organization, mechanics, and style, all of which contribute to producing clear and effective texts. Grammar is essential for sentence accuracy, while vocabulary ensures appropriate word choice. Organization helps structure ideas logically, and mechanics—such as punctuation, capitalization, and spelling—support readability. (Mubarok & Budiono, 2022) emphasize that frequent grammar errors, particularly in tense and subject-verb agreement, affect clarity. (Isma et al., 2023) highlight that vocabulary misuse, such as incorrect word forms and collocations, often leads to confusion in meaning. Meanwhile, (Seddik, 2023) found that mechanical errors like punctuation and capitalization are among the most common mistakes in EFL writing, which often disrupt sentence boundaries and overall comprehension.

Addressing all these aspects is crucial for improving students' writing quality and language proficiency.

The writing process involves several recursive stages—planning, drafting, editing, and producing the final version. In the planning stage, learners generate and organize ideas, which helps improve focus and coherence (Bhowmik, 2021). During drafting, students translate ideas into sentences without worrying about correctness, allowing creativity to emerge (Latifa & Kurniawan, 2023). The editing phase addresses grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics, often supported by peer or teacher feedback (Isma et al., 2023). Finally, the completed version reflects the result of revisions and allows students to publish or share their writing, which enhances confidence and writing quality (Hemiyadi & Kamaliah, 2021). Together, these stafes promote better writing performance and support learner autonomy.

Writing plays a crucial role in language learning as it helps learners internalize grammar, expand vocabulary, and develop structural awareness. (Bhowmik, 2021) states that writing not only supports language development but also enhances learners' ability to express ideas and emotions meaningfully. (Latifa & Kurniawan, 2023) emphasize that through writing, especially genre-based instruction, students build academic literacy and develop personal voice. (Setiati et al., 2025) add that writing improves critical thinking, particularly in argumentative tasks where students construct and support logical claims. Moreover, (Hemiyadi & Kamaliah, 2021) highlight that the process of writing strengthens metacognitive skills such as planning, reviewing, and self-correction. These insights confirm that writing is not just a product of language learning but a key tool for cognitive, academic, and communicative growth.

In EFL/ESL instruction, a text is seen as a coherent and purposeful language unit, not merely a group of sentences, but one that conveys meaning within a specific context (Latifa & Kurniawan, 2023). A well-formed text shows thematic progression and logical structure, distinguishing it from unrelated sentence groupings. Texts vary by purpose and genre —such as narrative, expository, or argumentative—and follow specific conventions (Bhowmik, 2021). From a discourse perspective, effective texts are shaped by context, audience, and purpose, requiring learners to understand and apply genre and register appropriately (Mertosono & Erniwati, 2023). Teaching these aspects helps students progress from sentence-level writing to full, meaningful text production.

Text types, or genres, are forms of writing that serve specific purposes—such as narrating, explaining, instructing, or persuading—and are essential in EFL instruction to enhance both accuracy and communication skills. Genre-based teaching helps learners organize content, apply appropriate grammar, and adjust tone according to purpose (Latifa & Kurniawan, 2023). Common genres include narrative, descriptive, expository, argumentative, procedural, and report/news item, each with distinct structures and language features (Bhowmik, 2021). Teaching these genres equips students for real-life writing tasks and promotes clearer, more structured writing. (Mertosono & Erniwati, 2023) found that many student errors stem from poor genre awareness, highlighting the importance of genre instruction in developing both writing competence and critical thinking.

A narrative text is a genre that recounts a sequence of past events, typically structured with orientation, complication, resolution, and sometimes a coda, to guide readers through a coherent storyline (Qatrinada & Apoko, 2024). Written mainly in past tense, it uses time markers, action verbs, and direct speech to enhance engagement. While its primary purpose is to entertain, it can also convey cultural values or moral lessons. In EFL contexts, narrative writing fosters creativity and supports the development of vocabulary, grammar, and organization. However, students often face challenges in tense use and coherence, emphasizing the need for targeted instruction (Falihah et al., 2022)

The main purpose of narrative text is to entertain or amuse readers through storytelling. Structurally, it typically includes four stages: Orientation, which introduces characters, time,

and setting (Kurniawan, 2024); Complication, where a central conflict emerges and drives the story forward (Susanto & İrmayani, 2023); Resolution, where the conflict is resolve dand the story reaches closure (Anderson & Anderson, 1997, as cited in (Kurniawan, 2024)); and optionally, a *Coda* or Re-orientation, which offers a final reflection or moral lesson. These elements work together to build a coherent and engaging narrative that not only entertains but also conveys meaning or insight.

Narrative texts use specific language features to convey events, characters, and emotions effectively. The simple past tense is dominant, anchoring actions in a completed timeframe (Kurniawan, 2024). Action verbs and temporal connectives (e.g., ran, then, after that) are essential for dynamic storytelling and chronological flow; however, students often misuse or overuse them (Tahang et al., 2024). Descriptive language enhances imagery through adjectives and adverbs, while direct speech adds realism and character depth. (Yin, 2023) found that direct reported speech (DRS) enlivens the narrative and increases reader engagement, making both description and dialogue crucial for effective storytelling.

Method

This research employed a qualitative descriptive method to analyze students' errors in writing narrative texts. The study was conducted at SMAN 3 Tanjungbalai, focusing on ten Grade XI students selected from different classes to ensure a range of writing abilities. The data were collected through a writing test, where students were asked to compose a narrative text under controlled classroom conditions. The main instrument used was document analysis. Students' written texts were examined to identify and classify errors. The analysis focused on surface-level errors using Dulay's Surface Strategy Taxonomy, which includes omission, addition, misformation, selection, and misordering. The frequency of each error type was calculated and presented in percentage form to determine the most common writing issues among the students.

Finding & Discussion

Table 1. The Classification of the Errors Commited by Each Students

No.	Students' Name	Kinds of errors					Σ Errors
		OM	AD	MF	S	MD	
1	WR	-	-	2	-	-	2
2	M.SA	2	1	4	2	-	9
3	M.AGR	3	3	3	4	-	13
4	AL	5	3	8	7	1	24
5	MPJ	16	6	12	19	4	57
6	NK	14	14	14	14	12	68
7	SAP	2	1	7	2	2	14
8	ARS	24	17	36	29	22	128
9	RNS	9	12	16	4	5	46
10	K	12	12	38	14	17	93
	Σ Errors	87	69	140	95	63	454

The abbreviations used in this study refer to the five categories of surface strategy taxonomy: OM (Omission errors), AD (Addition errors), MF (Misformation errors), S (Selection errors), and MD (Misordering errors), as proposed by Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982).

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Table 2. The Frequency and Percentage

NO	Kinds of Errors	Frequency	Percentage
1	Ommision	87	19,16%
2	Addition	69	15,20%
3	Misformation	140	30,84%
4	Selection	95	20,93%
5	Misordering	63	13,87%
	TOTAL	454	100%

Based on the results of the analysis, a total of 454 errors were identified in the students' narrative writing. These included 87 omission errors (19.16%), 69 addition errors (15.19%), 140 misformation errors (30.83%), 95 selection errors (20.92%), and 63 misordering errors (13.87%). The highest frequency was found in misformation errors, while the lowest was in misordering.

The errors was classified using Surface Strategy Taxonomy as proposed by Dulay, which includes omission, addition, misformation, selection, and misordering. These categories highlight how students alter surface structures by omitting, adding, misforming, or misordering elements in a sentence.

Misformation errors were the most dominant, often caused by a lack of understanding of grammar rules such as verb tense, subject-verb agreement, and word forms. These errors suggest the need for more focused instruction and feedback to help students internalize correct grammatical structures.

In conclusion, students need to improve their mastery of English, especially in narrative writing. Teachers are encouraged to provide guidance on narrative text elements, including its generic structure and language features, to enhance students' writing competence.

Conclusion

The objective of this research was to identify the types of errors made by Grade XI students of SMAN 3 Tanjungbalai in writing narrative texts during the 2024/2025 academic year. Based on the analysis of 10 student writings, a total of 454 errors were found, categorized using Surface Strategy Taxonomy into omission (87 items), addition (69), misformation (140), selection (95), and misordering (63). The findings show that misformation was the most frequent error, indicating that students struggle most with using correct grammatical forms in their narrative writing.

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