Article

An Analysis of the Eleventh-Grade Students' Present Tense Errors in Writing Report Text

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ABSTRACT

Mastering the simple present tense is crucial for writing factual texts like reports, yet many Indonesian EFL students struggle with it. This study identifies the types and causes of present tense errors in report texts written by seventeen eleventh-grade students at MAN 22 Jakarta. Using a qualitative descriptive method and Dulay, Burt, and Krashen's Surface Strategy Taxonomy, the errors were classified as omission, addition, misformation, or misordering. A total of 187 errors were found, with misformation being the most common. The main causes were interlingual transfer, limited grammar knowledge, and direct translation from Bahasa Indonesia. Interviews confirmed that minimal practice and exposure also contribute to these errors. The findings underline the need for contextualized grammar instruction and engaging writing activities to help EFL students write more accurately and confidently.

Keywords: *Simple Present Tense, Grammatical Errors, Report Text, Error Analysis*

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INTRODUCTION

The English has been taught in Indonesian schools from an early age, starting from elementary to senior high school, as part of the national effort to prepare students for global communication. In today's digital age, exposure to English is no longer limited to the classroom; modern technology, online platforms, and international content demand a practical understanding of English, particularly in reading and writing. English is increasingly regarded not only as a subject to pass in examinations but also as a vital skill for lifelong learning and employment. The globalized nature of education and the workforce has placed additional pressure on students to develop functional and accurate English language skills (Zainuddin & Delavari, 2024). Yet, despite years of formal instruction, Indonesian students still face significant challenges in using English correctly, especially in writing (Adam et al., 2021). Writing is considered the most difficult language skill among EFL learners because it involves organizing ideas, selecting appropriate vocabulary, and applying correct grammar all at once (Astuti, 2016; Hyland, 2004). Unlike speaking, writing requires more conscious control over language use and greater attention to form, making it a more cognitively demanding activity for learners.

Many students struggle not only with idea development but also with the mechanical aspects of writing, such as grammar and sentence structure (Rosmiaty et al., 2023). These challenges become more visible when students are tasked with composing longer texts that require both fluency and accuracy. One of the most persistent issues found in student writing is the misuse of verb tenses, particularly the simple present tense, which is essential for expressing general truths and factual information (Purba et al., 2023). Misuse of this tense can alter the intended meaning of a sentence or lead to confusion, especially when students

attempt to describe general facts using inappropriate temporal references. Many students make verb mistakes such as missing the -s for he, she, or it, choosing the wrong helping verbs, or confusing present and past tenses. These errors often appear in writing tasks at all school levels. These difficulties suggest that many learners have not fully internalized the basic tense rules required for academic writing. Even students who have been learning English for many years may still produce sentences like "He go to school every day" or "The sun rise from the west", reflecting basic misunderstanding of tense usage (Fitrawati & Safitri, 2021).

These grammatical problems are often linked to structural differences between English and Bahasa Indonesia. In the Indonesian language, verbs do not inflect for tense, and meaning is often conveyed through adverbial time markers instead. As a result, many students rely on their first language system when composing sentences in English. Unlike English, Bahasa Indonesia does not mark verb tenses morphologically, which can lead students to transfer their native sentence patterns into English, causing what is known as interlingual errors. This phenomenon is especially common in early stages of learning, where L1 structures strongly influence L2 output. In addition, some errors arise not from the mother tongue but from confusion within English itself, such as overgeneralizing rules or misapplying patterns, known as intralingual errors (Richards, 1971; Wu & Garza, 2014). For instance, students might apply a regular verb rule (add -s for third person singular) to all verbs indiscriminately, even in contexts where it is incorrect. These issues are compounded by limited opportunities to use English in authentic contexts, lack of corrective feedback, and emphasis on passive learning in grammar instruction (Lightbown & Spada, 2013)Without sufficient practice and meaningful use of grammar in context, students may resort to memorization rather than developing an intuitive understanding of how English grammar works.

One genre that requires strong command of the simple present tense is report text. Which aims to classify and describe general information about people, animals, places, or phenomena in an objective and factual manner (Diana, 2020). It plays a key role in helping students develop academic writing competence that reflects scientific reasoning and the ability to communicate factual information clearly. A report text is often used in school assessments to test students' ability to write in a structured and factual manner. A typical report text starts with a general classification and is followed by detailed descriptions. For instance, a student writing about elephants might begin with "Elephants are large mammals," followed by facts about their habitat, physical features, and behavior. The logical sequencing and clear structure of report text makes it an ideal genre for training students in the use of present tense to express universal truths. The simple present tense is used throughout the report to emphasize the general, timeless nature of the information. It signals that the facts being presented are not limited to a specific time, but are generally accepted as true across contexts.

Despite its importance, many students find it difficult to apply this tense consistently and accurately in report writing. Even when they are aware of the grammatical rules, learners may revert to incorrect patterns under pressure or when unsure about how to phrase a sentence. Mistakes such as "Elephant live in jungle" or "It eating grass" are common and reflect both developmental and instructional gaps. These errors suggest that students may not have received sufficient practice or individualized feedback in writing, particularly on form-focused elements. Some students may understand the concept of report text but still lack the grammatical precision to express facts correctly. Others may confuse report text with descriptive text, which, while similar in topic, allows for more subjective or specific descriptions and does not always demand the same level of tense consistency. This confusion is especially common when instructional emphasis is placed on content over form, leaving grammatical accuracy underdeveloped.

Previous studies have investigated tense-related errors in various types of student writing. For example, Perlin et al. (2020) found that university students often made misformation errors, while Fauziah (2022) reported that omission and addition errors were most common among eighth-grade students. These findings suggest that tense-related errors persist across different proficiency levels and educational stages. However, most of these studies focused on descriptive or narrative texts and younger learners. Studies at the high

school level, particularly among eleventh-grade students, are still limited, even though this group is preparing for more cognitively demanding writing tasks. Research on report texts written by eleventh-grade students, who are at a crucial stage of preparing for high-stakes academic writing, remains limited.

In a classroom observation at a senior high school in Indonesia, several students were found to write report texts with recurring errors in simple present tense use. This classroom context offers real-life insights into the specific writing challenges students face, particularly in transitioning from general understanding to precise application of grammar rules. For example, a student wrote "Cheetah is fast animal. It hunts at morning." These errors involve missing articles, misused verb forms, and incorrect word order, all of which compromise the clarity of the report. Such patterns suggest that students not only need more practice in writing but also more targeted support in understanding tense usage within specific text types. Teachers may be aware of the errors but may lack the tools, time, or training to diagnose them effectively or to tailor instruction to meet the learners' developmental needs.

Understanding error sources is especially important in EFL contexts where exposure to the target language is often limited to the classroom. This understanding is essential for designing more effective teaching strategies, creating materials that address students' actual needs, and helping learners build a stronger foundation in English grammar, particularly for academic writing genres like report text. Furthermore, this study seeks to contribute to the growing body of research in EFL writing by focusing on the underexplored intersection between tense usage and genre-specific demands. Ultimately, the study aims to improve both teaching practices and learner outcomes by offering practical, data-driven recommendations for grammar instruction in Indonesian high schools.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative research method because it aims to describe the grammatical errors made by eleventh-grade students in using the simple present tense in report text writing. The participants of this study were 17 students from class XI Science Program at MAN 22 Jakarta. They were selected using purposive sampling, as they were considered suitable for this study due to their focus on language learning. The students were between 16 and 17 years old and had been studying English as a foreign language for several years.

The subject of the study was the students' writing in the form of report texts. The main instrument used was a writing task, followed by a semi-structured interview. The students were asked to write a report text about an animal, which had to contain 150–200 words. This task was designed to naturally prompt the use of the simple present tense, since report texts are factual and commonly use this tense. After the writing task was completed, the texts were collected and used as the primary data source.

The steps of the research were as follows:

Collecting the Data

Students were given a writing task to compose a report text. They wrote it during their English class without using a dictionary or any external help. After completion, the texts were submitted and collected by the researcher.

Identifying the Errors

Each student's writing was read and analyzed. Errors in the use of the simple present tense were identified in each sentence or clause. These errors were then classified using the Surface Strategy Taxonomy by Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982), which includes four types of errors: omission, addition, misformation, and misordering.

Describing and Analyzing the Errors

After identifying and classifying the errors, the researcher analyzed them using the error analysis approach. The causes of errors were explored through follow-up interviews. These interviews helped explain why students made certain mistakes, such as confusion over verb rules, translation from Bahasa Indonesia, or lack of grammar practice.

Calculating the Percentage of Each Error Type

The frequency of each type of error was counted and converted into percentages using the following formula:

$$P = \frac{f}{N} \times 100\%$$

Where: P = Percentage of a particular type of error

F = Frequency of the specific error occurred

N = Total number of errors identified

The combination of writing analysis and student interviews allowed the researcher to understand not only what errors students made, but also the possible reasons behind those errors. This method ensured that the results would be more reliable and could be used to improve grammar teaching in EFL classrooms.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Students' Frequency of Simple Present Tense Errors

One This study aimed to identify the types and causes of simple present tense errors in report text writing by eleventh-grade students at MAN 22 Jakarta. Based on the writing test results from 17 students, a total of 187 grammatical errors related to the simple present tense were identified. These errors were classified using the Surface Strategy Taxonomy by Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982), which consists of four categories: omission, addition, misformation, and misordering.

Table 1. Frequency of Simple Present Tense Errors per Student

No.	Students' Initial Name	Types of Errors				Total Errors
		O	A	MF	MO	
1.	ANC	3	2	5	1	11
2.	ANPR	3	3	3	1	10
3.	AR	3	3	5	2	13
4.	BAM	2	2	3	1	8
5.	CAS	2	2	4	0	8
6.	FMN	3	2	6	2	13
7.	KEC	6	4	5	2	17
8.	KLB	5	3	6	1	15
9.	LAA	2	2	3	1	8
10.	MTY	3	1	4	1	9
11.	NKI	3	1	5	1	10
12.	RKP	4	4	4	2	14
13.	RS	2	2	5	0	9
14.	SAZA	3	2	5	1	11
15.	SS	2	2	4	1	9
16.	SS	3	2	4	1	10
17.	YAM	4	2	5	1	12

This distribution reveals significant variation in error frequency among students. High error counts, such as in KEC and KLB's texts, suggest lower mastery of tense rules or less effective writing strategies. According to Saville-Troike (2012) such differences can stem from learner motivation, previous exposure to English, and individual cognitive styles. Dörnyei (2001), further emphasizes that intrinsic motivation and anxiety levels play an influential role in students' accuracy during writing tasks., observing the spread of errors shows that no student in this group produced an error-free text. This underlines that simple present tense mastery remains a key challenge for senior high school students in EFL contexts, even after years of formal instruction.

Another notable point is that students who made more omission and misformation errors tend to struggle with morphological inflection, such as adding -s/es to verbs and using auxiliary verbs correctly. This indicates a gap between students' receptive knowledge and their productive skills in grammar use (Fareed et al., 2016). It also suggests that while students may recognize correct forms during exercises, they often fail to apply them accurately under writing conditions that require idea generation and language production simultaneously.

This pattern reinforces the argument that frequent and contextualized writing practice is essential. According to Hyland (2004), writing proficiency develops not just from memorizing rules but through consistent practice in authentic tasks that require students to retrieve and apply grammar knowledge in meaningful ways.

Types of Simple Present Tense Errors

Table 2. Percentage Distribution of Simple Present Tense Error Types

Error Type	Frequency	Percentage
Omission	53	28.34%
Addition	39	20.86%
Misformation	76	40.64%
Misordering	19	10.16%
Total	187	100%

As shown in Table 2, the most common type of error was misformation (40.64%), followed by omission (28.34%), addition (20.86%), and misordering (10.16%). These findings reflect patterns often seen in EFL learners, where mastery of verb forms and structures is incomplete despite formal instruction. The data indicate that misformation errors dominate students' simple present tense mistakes. This aligns with Dulay, Burt, and Krashen's (1982) classification of intralingual errors, highlighting that students are still generalizing incorrect forms. The high occurrence of omission errors supports the influence of interlingual transfer from Bahasa Indonesia, where verbs do not inflect for tense or person (Prasetyo et al., 2022).

Addition and misordering errors, although less frequent, show that some students apply grammatical markers redundantly or misplace them within the sentence structure. Such misuse demonstrates partial rule application and aligns with Richards (1971)) observation that learners create transitional hypotheses about the target language.

Examples of Errors in Students' Report Texts

To illustrate the actual mistakes made by students, Table 3 gives authentic examples of erroneous sentences, the correct forms, and brief explanations. These examples help clarify how each error type appears in real writing.

Table 3. Examples of Simple Present Tense Errors by

Error category	Example	Correct form	Notes

Subject-verb agreement	The bird live in the forest	The bird lives in the forest	Subject and verb do not agree in number (singular/plural)
	Elephants eats vegetables	Elephants eat vegetables	Plural subject incorrectly paired with singular verb
	It have sharp claws.	It has sharp claws	Common with irregular verbs like have/has
Verb form / tense	The cat play with its tail.	The cat plays its tail	Incorrect present verb form for third person singular subject
	They eats chicken and fish.	They eat chicken and fish	Misuse of singular verb with plural subject
	Bird can flies in the sky.	Bird can fly in the sky	Modal "can" should be followed by base verb
Missing "Be" Verb	Elephants are big animals.	Elephants are big animals	Missing "be" verb in nominal sentence
	My cat so cute and fluffy.	My cat is so cute and fluffy	'Is' required in present simple nominal structure
	They friendly and playful.	They are friendly and playful	"Are" needed for plural subject in descriptive sentence

The examples in Table 3 vividly demonstrate the specific areas where students tend to make errors when applying the simple present tense in factual writing. These samples confirm that the most frequent difficulties relate to subject-verb agreement, correct verb inflection, the proper use of auxiliary verbs ("be" verbs), and accurate word order when adverbs or auxiliaries are involved.

Consistent with Dulay, Burt, and Krashen's (1982) Surface Strategy Taxonomy, the errors shown can be categorized into misformation (e.g., incorrect verb forms like live instead of lives), omission (e.g., missing "is" in My cat so cute), addition (e.g., redundant auxiliaries, although not exemplified here, were also found in other sentences), and misordering (e.g., misplaced adverbs or verbs).

These mistakes highlight the fact that students are in an intermediate stage of interlanguage development, as described by Selinker (1972). They have acquired the general rules of simple present tense but fail to apply them consistently, especially when required to produce spontaneous, extended texts like report writing. Richards (1971) further supports this by emphasizing that such errors reflect the learners' transitional hypotheses about L2 grammar, which are systematic but incomplete.

The repeated omission of "be" verbs in nominal sentences is a clear sign of negative transfer from Bahasa Indonesia, where such copulas are not obligatory in similar structures. In the examples provided, students directly translated Indonesian nominal sentences into English without inserting the necessary auxiliary. Meanwhile, incorrect subject-verb agreement (The bird live) and faulty verb inflection (Bird can flies) demonstrate how learners often confuse English morphological rules, particularly when verbs must be conjugated to match the subject or modified in modal constructions. According to Lightbown and Spada (2013) these morphological elements are notoriously difficult for learners whose L1 does not use inflectional morphology extensively.

Misordering, such as in Cats usually is playful, reflects syntactic misplacement that occurs when learners apply L1 word order patterns or fail to grasp English adverb placement conventions. Although less frequent than other errors, such word order issues still disrupt sentence clarity and are typical among learners who rely heavily on translation (Wu & Garza, 2014).

Therefore, these concrete examples reinforce the statistical findings from Tables 1 and 2 They show that error correction efforts must focus not only on isolated grammar drills but also on raising learners' awareness of how English structures differ fundamentally from Indonesian ones. Teachers should provide clear contrastive examples and encourage students to write directly in English rather than translating.

Student's Perceptions about Grammar Difficulties

The interview data revealed several contributing factors behind the students' simple present tense errors in their report texts. One of the main aspects is their varying levels of motivation and interest in learning English. Student 1 explained that English is not an enjoyable subject because it is perceived as complex and demanding extra effort to fully understand. In contrast, Student 2 and Student 3 expressed a moderate level of interest in English but admitted that grammar, particularly the use of tenses, remains the most challenging part for them to grasp accurately.

Another issue reported by all three students is the limited sources of grammar knowledge. While classroom instruction is their primary source of learning, they often feel that teacher explanations alone do not sufficiently help them master the simple present tense. To overcome this, they rely on supplementary resources such as YouTube videos or other online materials. Student 3, in particular, prefers independent learning through the internet, believing that alternative explanations make it easier to understand tense rules.

A common habit among the students is their tendency to think in their first language when writing in English. They shared that they usually form ideas and sentences in Bahasa Indonesia before translating them word-for-word into English. This translation process often results in grammatical errors, as the sentence structures and verb usage in Bahasa Indonesia differ significantly from those in English. They recognized that this habit makes it difficult to produce sentences with correct tense forms and proper verb agreement.

Discussion

The dominance of misformation errors supports the notion that students struggle not with understanding meaning but with executing grammatical form. As Dulay et al. (1982) assert, surface errors such as these offer valuable insight into learners' interlanguage. Moreover, the findings align with Saville-Troike (2012) theory that both interlingual and intralingual factors contribute to error formation. The omission and addition errors reflect not only transfer from Bahasa Indonesia but also possible overreliance on memorized structures, rather than flexible grammatical understanding. These findings are further reinforced by Wu and Garza's (2014) view that limited exposure to authentic input and feedback leads to fossilized grammatical inaccuracies.

The results of this study confirm that eleventh-grade students at MAN 22 Jakarta still encounter substantial difficulties in using the simple present tense accurately when writing report texts. The predominance of misformation errors, as shown by the findings, indicates that students often apply incorrect verb forms and misuse grammatical markers despite prior instruction. This supports the idea presented by (Richards, 1971) and Dulay et al. (1982) that such errors stem from incomplete knowledge and intralingual factors, such as overgeneralization and faulty rule learning.

The significant number of omission errors suggests a strong influence of interlingual transfer from Bahasa Indonesia, which does not inflect verbs for tense or person. Learners tend to transfer L1 structures when constructing L2 sentences, resulting in the omission of auxiliary verbs or third-person singular markers. Furthermore, the qualitative data from student interviews provide additional insights into why these errors occur. Many students admitted to first formulating sentences in their mother tongue and then translating them word by word into English. This habit of mental translation aligns with the concept of negative transfer and has been shown to be a major source of grammatical inaccuracies (Wu & Garza, 2014). Such strategies often lead to mismatched word order and the omission or addition of grammatical elements that are not required in the L1 but are obligatory in English.

The findings also reflect limitations in instructional practices. Although students receive formal grammar lessons, they often lack sufficient opportunities to apply these rules in

authentic writing contexts. Hyland (2004) and Fareed et al. (2016) emphasize that writing proficiency requires not only understanding grammatical rules in isolation but also using them consistently within meaningful communicative tasks. The students' preference for supplementary online learning through videos further indicates that classroom instruction may not fully address their learning needs. These observations highlight the crucial role of repeated practice and contextualized feedback. Fossilization, as discussed by Selinker (1972), can occur when errors become habitual and are not systematically corrected. Teachers should therefore implement more interactive and engaging grammar activities that focus on both form and meaning. Integrating grammar instruction within genre-based writing tasks, such as producing factual report texts, can help bridge the gap between knowledge and practical application.

In line with Purba et al (2023), using varied media such as quizzes, games, and collaborative writing can increase students' motivation and reduce anxiety, which are known factors influencing writing performance (Dörnyei, 2001)Additionally, encouraging students to think directly in English rather than relying on L1 translation can gradually reduce interlingual errors and foster more natural language production.

This study reaffirms that simple present tense errors among Indonesian high school students are the result of both linguistic and pedagogical factors. By addressing these through improved instructional strategies and more communicative grammar practice, teachers can help students enhance their grammatical accuracy, particularly in factual genres like report texts.

CONCLUSIONS

This study investigated the simple present tense errors made by eleventh-grade students in writing report texts and explored the contributing factors behind these errors. The findings revealed that missformation and omission were the most common error types, indicating persistent difficulties with verb forms and auxiliary usage among Indonesian EFL learners. The analysis showed that such errors were mainly caused by interlingual transfer from Bahasa Indonesia, incomplete mastery of grammatical rules, and the habit of translating sentences directly from the first language into English. The interview data confirmed that limited practice, lack of consistent exposure, and a preference for thinking in Bahasa Indonesia rather than English further contributed to students' difficulties. These results emphasize the need for more explicit and context-based grammar instruction integrated into writing activities. Teachers should provide frequent opportunities for students to apply grammar rules through guided writing, interactive exercises, and meaningful feedback. By addressing both linguistic and pedagogical factors, it is expected that students' grammatical accuracy in factual writing can be significantly improved, preparing them for academic and real-life communication in English.

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