

Writing Errors Analysis: Subject-Verb Agreement Made by EFL Students

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ABSTRACT

Writing is a crucial skill in language learning, yet numerous students still struggle with grammatical accuracy, particularly subject-verb agreement (SVA). Previous studies have exposed students' errors in SVA but most of them focused on school-level learners, leaving limited research on undergraduate academic writing. Thus, this study aims to identify and analyze SVA errors in the academic writing of English Education students at Tadulako University. Utilizing a descriptive qualitative design, data were obtained from the background and discussion sections of ten undergraduate theses and analyzed through Dulay et al.'s (1982) Surface Strategy Taxonomy, which includes omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. The findings present that omission errors as the most frequent (10 cases), mostly involving the omission of auxiliary verbs be (is, are, was, were) and verb endings such as -s or -ing. Misformation errors (6 cases) appeared when students used incorrect verb forms, particularly in mismatching singular and plural agreement. Next, addition errors (4 cases) occurred when unnecessary auxiliaries or suffixes were inserted into sentences, creating redundancy. The last, misordering errors (1 case) reflected difficulties in arranging subject-verb structures according to English syntax. These results indicate that students' main difficulties lie in maintaining auxiliaries and singular-plural concord, showing the influence of both interlingual and intralingual factors. Overall, these results emphasize the importance of needs-based grammar instruction and ongoing error analysis to enhance learners' grammatical accuracy to produce a qualified academic writing

Keywords: *Academic Writing, Error Analysis, Subject-Verb Agreement***Article History:**Received 29th September 2025Accepted 19th October 2025Published 21st October 2025

INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the essential skills in language learning, playing a vital role in students' academic success and personal expression. It requires not only the ability to clearly organize ideas but also accuracy in grammar, which is a complex component of writing. Grammar governs how words are formed and arranged in sentences, making it crucial for effective communication (Ur, 2011). Despite its importance, many learners frequently commit grammatical errors that diminish clarity and effectiveness in both spoken and written communication (Brown, 2007).

Among the most common grammatical errors in English writing is subject-verb agreement (SVA). Subject-verb agreement ensures grammatical concord between the subject and the verb in terms of number and person. Errors in this aspect can disrupt clarity and undermine the academic quality of students' work. This issue is particularly challenging for Indonesian learners, as the Indonesian language does not apply singular-plural distinctions in the same way English does.

As a result, Indonesian learners often face difficulties such as omitting auxiliaries, misusing verb inflections, or misapplying plural markers. Previous studies (Hasanah & Habibullah, 2020; Sholehah et al., 2023; Mayasari & Sari, 2024) have shown that the most prevalent errors in students' writing include omission, addition, and misformation. These

errors are often attributed to interlingual transfer, intralingual factors, and limited grammar knowledge.

While numerous studies have examined SVA errors among secondary school students in descriptive and narrative texts, fewer studies have focused on these errors in undergraduate academic writing, particularly in formal genres such as theses. This gap underscores the need for further analysis to better understand how advanced learners apply SVA rules in academic contexts, as their writing demands a higher level of grammatical precision.

Error analysis provides valuable insights into learners' interlanguage development. Corder (1981) emphasized that errors are systematic and reflect learners' current stage of acquisition rather than mere failures. Dulay et al. (1982) introduced the Surface Strategy Taxonomy, classifying errors into omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. This taxonomy is particularly useful for analyzing SVA errors, as it identifies how learners construct sentences and where they deviate from standard grammar rules.

Understanding the frequency and patterns of these errors enables educators to design targeted interventions. These may include explicit grammar instruction, corrective feedback, and structured practice aimed at addressing specific weaknesses. By focusing on SVA errors, educators can help students enhance their grammatical accuracy and overall writing quality.

Given the significance of subject-verb agreement in academic writing and the scarcity of studies at the undergraduate level, this research aims to identify and analyze SVA errors in students' theses at Tadulako University. By focusing on this specific context, the study seeks to fill a critical gap in the literature and provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by students.

The findings of this research are expected to yield important pedagogical implications for improving grammar instruction. By enhancing the accuracy of academic writing among English Education students, the study aims to contribute to their overall academic success and better equip them for future professional endeavors.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design to identify and analyze subject-verb agreement (SVA) errors in undergraduate students' academic writing. The data were taken from the background and discussion sections of ten theses written by English Education students at Tadulako University, selected through purposive sampling from the last two academic years. Documentation in the form of theses served as the main instrument since they represent authentic academic writing. Data collection followed Ary et al.'s (2010) steps of document analysis, which involved selecting the theses, identifying sentences with potential SVA errors, extracting them, and classifying each error according to (Dulay et al., 1982) Surface Strategy Taxonomy. The analysis was conducted using (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005) procedure of collecting samples, identifying, describing, and explaining errors before drawing conclusions. Errors were then categorized into omission, addition, misformation, and misordering, with explanations regarding their nature, possible causes, and implications for improving students' grammatical accuracy.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The data, taken from the background and discussion sections of ten undergraduate theses, were analyzed using (Dulay et al., 1982) Surface Strategy Taxonomy, which includes omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. The analysis reveals that all four types of errors occurred, showing that subject-verb agreement remains a challenge even at the undergraduate level.

Errors of omission

The following are sentences containing omission errors made by undergraduate students.

Table1. Errors of Omission

Informant	Errors	Explanation	Correct Forms
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Writing Errors Analysis: Subject-Verb Agreement Made by EFL Students

AF	By speaking, people can communicate with other someone usually <u>face</u> some troubles in social interaction like he or she cannot produce his ideas, arguments and feeling communicatively. The students <u>stuck</u> on the teachers' explanation, they only paid attention to the teacher until the end of the lesson. The students <u>exposed</u> to use a new learning media so that they cannot use a conventional method in learning English.	The verb <i>face</i> omits the suffix -s required for a third person singular subject (someone). The auxiliary verb <i>were</i> is omitted for a plural subject. The auxiliary verb <i>were</i> is omitted for a plural subject.	By speaking, people can communicate with others. Someone usually faces some troubles in social interaction like he or she cannot produce his ideas, arguments and feeling communicatively. The students were stuck on the teachers' explanation, they only paid attention to the teacher until the end of the lesson. The students were exposed to use a new learning media so that they cannot use a conventional method in learning English.
ANS	Therefore, length and speeds, different accent of the speakers, lack of vocabulary and lack of concentration the major problems encountered by students.	The auxiliary verb are is omitted for a plural subject.	Therefore, length and speeds, different accent of the speakers, lack of vocabulary and lack of concentration are the major problems encountered by students.
ASF	The researcher <u>choose</u> to focus on visual media because it helps students enhances their ability to memorize vocabulary, and increases their interest in learning.	The suffix -s for the singular verb is omitted.	The researcher chooses to focus on visual media because it helps students enhances their ability to memorize vocabulary, and increases their interest in learning."
S	In this way, the researcher <u>believe</u> that students will not feel bored in English class and will be better able to understand the meaning of words as well as express their feelings and ideas in English.	The suffix -s for the singular verb is omitted.	In this way, the researcher believes that students will not feel bored in English class and will be better able to understand the meaning of words as well as express their feelings and ideas in English.
TD	Stage six is <u>allow</u> the discussants to talk for 5 minutes or so. The following procedure that Reski Amalia (2017) applied <u>divided</u> into 7 steps.	The suffix -ing is omitted after the auxiliary verb <i>is</i> . The auxiliary verb <i>is</i> is omitted for a singular subject.	Stage six is allowing the discussants to talk for 5 minutes or so. The following procedure that Reski Amalia (2017) applied is divided into 7 steps.
WA	The students <u>afraid</u> to making mistakes when speaking English. It can be a big problem for the students if they did not mastering pronunciation because if they have bad pronunciation it <u>make</u> other people did not understand about what they want to say.	The auxiliary verb are is omitted for a plural subject. The suffix -s is omitted for the singular subject <i>it</i> .	The students are afraid to making mistakes when speaking English. It can be a big problem for the students if they did not mastering pronunciation because if they have bad pronunciation it makes other people did not understand about what they want to say.

Based on the table above, omission errors are found in 7 out of 10 theses analyzed. The most frequent cases involve omitting auxiliary verbs *be* (is, are, was, were), followed by omitting the suffix **-s** in third-person singular verbs and the **-ing** form after auxiliaries. This indicates that the students still face difficulties in consistently using auxiliaries and verb inflections required for correct subject-verb agreement.

Errors of Addition

The following are sentences containing addition errors made by undergraduate students.

Table 2. Errors of addition

Informant	Errors	Explanation	Correct Forms
AF	That <u>is made</u> the students be passive or we called as teacher center. This feature can offer unique opportunities for students to improve their speaking. This <u>is allow</u> the students to post a video side by side with a video from another creator on TikTok	An unnecessary auxiliary verb <u>is</u> is added before the past verb <u>made</u> . An unnecessary auxiliary verb <u>is</u> is added before the main verb <u>allow</u> .	That <u>made</u> the students be passive or we called as teacher center. This feature can offer unique opportunities for students to improve their speaking. This <u>allows</u> the students to post a video side by side with a video from another creator on TikTok
ASF	The researcher choose to focus on visual media because it helps students <u>enhances</u> their ability to memorize vocabulary, and increases their interest in learning.	The suffix <u>-s</u> is unnecessarily added to the verb <u>enhance</u> , which should agree with the plural subject <u>students</u> .	The researcher choose to focus on visual media because it helps students <u>enhance</u> their ability to memorize vocabulary, and increases their interest in learning.
TR	The advantages of using Canva it is a free mobile and web-based application, Canva also provides a variety features such as: Creating presentations, posters, wallpapers, resumes, banners, invitations, cards and brochures that <u>allows</u> to help students express their ideas and creativity in the form of engaging in writing.	The suffix <u>-s</u> is unnecessarily added to the verb <u>allow</u> , which should agree with the plural subject <u>brochures</u> .	The advantages of using Canva it is a free mobile and web-based application, Canva also provides a variety features such as: Creating presentations, posters, wallpapers, resumes, banners, invitations, cards and brochures that <u>allow</u> to help students express their ideas and creativity in the form of engaging in writing.

Addition errors appear in 4 out of 10 theses. The most frequent cases involve inserting the auxiliary *is* unnecessarily before a main verb. Other errors include adding the suffix *-s* where it was not required. This indicates that the students are often confused in distinguishing auxiliaries from main verbs, which results in redundancy and ungrammatical sentences.

Errors of Misformation

The following are sentences containing misformation errors made by undergraduate students.

Table 3. Errors of Misformation

Informant	Errors	Explanation	Correct Forms
AMZ	Media PowerPoints can also <u>be use</u> in fields of study English for learning English language skills include four types, four types of skill that are listening, speaking, reading, and writing.	The verb <u>use</u> is misformed since the passive construction after <u>can be</u> requires the past participle <u>used</u> .	Media PowerPoints can also <u>be used</u> in fields of study English for learning English language skills include four types, four types of skill that are listening, speaking, reading, and writing.
MR	One of the main obstacles often encountered <u>is</u> limited vocabulary and a Poor command of grammar.	The verb <u>is</u> is misformed since the compound plural subject requires <u>are</u> .	One of the main obstacles often encountered <u>are</u> limited vocabulary and a Poor command of grammar.
NM	The multiple choice and matching words test <u>has</u> 10 questions, while the make simple sentences test has 5 questions.	The verb <u>has</u> is misformed since the compound plural subject requires <u>have</u> .	The multiple choice and matching words test <u>have</u> 10 questions, while the make simple sentences test has 5 questions.
TD	The process <u>are</u> as follows:	The verb <u>are</u> is misformed since the singular subject <u>process</u> requires <u>is</u> .	The process <u>is</u> as follows:
TR	The advantages of using Canva <u>it is</u> a free mobile and web-based application, Canva also provides a variety features such as: Creating presentations, posters, wallpapers, resumes, banners, invitations, cards and	The verb <u>is</u> is misformed since the plural subject <u>advantages</u> requires <u>are</u> .	The advantages of using Canva <u>are</u> a free mobile and web-based application, Canva also provides a variety features such as: Creating presentations, posters, wallpapers, resumes, banners, invitations, cards and

WA	brochures that allows to help students express their ideas and creativity in the form of engaging in writing.	The verb <i>ate</i> is misformed since the plural subject <i>aspects</i> requires the verb <i>are</i> .	brochures that allows to help students express their ideas and creativity in the form of engaging in writing.
	Language aspects <i>ate</i> those that make the students' speaking abilities poor.		Language aspects <i>are</i> those that make the students' speaking abilities poor.

Misformation errors are identified in 5 out of 10 theses. The most common cases included using *are* with singular subjects or *has* with plural subjects. This indicates that the students frequently fail to apply the correct singular-plural distinction in verb forms, reflecting limited mastery of subject-verb agreement rules.

Errors of Misordering

The following are sentences containing misordering errors made by undergraduate students.

Table 4. Errors of Misordering

Informant	Occurrence	Types of Errors	Correct Forms
TD	The following steps <i>applied are</i> ;	Misordering	The following steps <i>are applied</i> ;

Misordering errors are found only in 1 out of 10 theses. The main case occurs when the subject and verb were placed in the wrong order, such as "The following steps applied are." This indicates that the students' first language structure may influence their English sentence construction, leading to unnatural word order.

Discussion

Based on the data presented in finding, the most frequent type of Subject-Verb Agreement (SVA) error found in the students' writing was omission errors, with a total of 10 occurrences. The students often left out necessary verbs or auxiliary verbs, such as *is*, *are*, *was*, *were*, which are essential for maintaining correct subject-verb agreement. The tendency of omission errors found in this study is consistent with the findings of previous research. omission was the most dominant error type in students' essays, mainly caused by first language influence, lack of exposure, and carelessness (Dasra et al., 2023) that omission errors, particularly in the use of the third person singular suffix *-s* and auxiliary verbs, were often the result of both interlingual and intralingual factors (Pangga & Bunau, 2019). Interlingual errors stem from negative transfer, as Indonesian does not require auxiliary verbs or inflectional morphemes, while intralingual errors emerge from incomplete application of grammatical rules or overgeneralization. These findings suggest that omission is not merely random but reflects systematic challenges learners face in supplying obligatory grammatical features when writing in English.

The second most common error is misformation, with 6 occurrences, where students used an incorrect verb form that does not match the subject, for example, using *are* with the singular subject *process*. Misformation errors often arise from learners' confusion in applying subject-verb agreement rules, especially in distinguishing between singular and plural verbs. Previous studies have also found similar results. Misformation was reported as the most frequent error in students' paragraph writing, caused by the misuse of verb endings *-s/-es* and the verb *to be* (Mayasari & Sari, 2024). Likewise, misformation, alongside omission, is found to dominate subject-verb agreement errors in undergraduate thesis abstracts (Febrianti & Said, 2022). These findings suggest that misformation errors reflect incomplete mastery of grammatical rules and the tendency to overgeneralize patterns.

Meanwhile, addition errors are found 4 times, indicating that some students tended to insert unnecessary auxiliaries or suffixes that resulted in incorrect agreement between subject and verb. Addition errors often occur due to intralingual factors, particularly learners' ignorance of editing processes and unawareness of grammar rules, which lead to redundancy (Hardi et al., 2022). Addition errors are often also identified in students' writing, such as double marking of auxiliaries, which weakened sentence accuracy (Mayasari & Sari, 2024).

Next, the least frequent error is misordering, with only 1 occurrence, which shows that very few students misplaced the subject and verb in their sentences. Misordering is also noted

in thesis abstracts, often resulting from L1 transfer where Indonesian word order influenced English sentence construction (Febrianti & Said, 2022). These findings confirm that addition and misordering, though less frequent, still demonstrate the influence of learners' interlanguage and their struggle to differentiate between obligatory and non-obligatory structures in academic writing. Overall, the data confirm that omission and misformation are the dominant SVA errors, reflecting students' main difficulties in applying subject-verb agreement rules correctly in their writing.

CONCLUSION

This study finds that English Education students at Tadulako University made four types of Subject-Verb Agreement errors in their theses: omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. Omission and misformation are the most frequent, indicating that students struggle with auxiliaries and singular-plural concord, while addition and misordering appear less often. These errors suggest that subject-verb agreement remains a challenge even at the undergraduate level. It is recommended that teachers must provide explicit grammar instruction, corrective feedback, and targeted exercises to help students improve their accuracy in academic writing.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors thanks to Journal of English Language and Education for publishing this article.

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