

Grammatical errors in cadets' writing during competition: An analysis of what and why

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Abstract

Writing in English poses substantial challenges for vocational school cadets, particularly in maintaining grammatical accuracy under contextual constraints. These difficulties become more pronounced in competitive settings characterized by time pressure, limited opportunities for revision, and heightened cognitive demands. When writing tasks are performed under such conditions, cadets may struggle to organize and express their ideas accurately and coherently. The study aims to identify the types, frequency, and underlying causes of grammatical errors produced by cadets from three study programs at Politeknik Ilmu Pelayaran Semarang during an English writing competition. Employing a descriptive qualitative design, the research applies Dulay's surface strategy taxonomy and McDowell's error analysis procedure to examine writing samples collected from sixteen participants. The findings reveal that misinformation was the most dominant error type (73.90%), followed by omission (15.89%), addition (9.98%), and misordering (0.23%). The errors were primarily attributed to intralingual transfer, followed by interlingual transfer, while time constraints during the competition also contributed to the occurrence of errors. These results indicate that internalized but incomplete grammatical knowledge, rather than first-language interference alone, played a central role in the cadets' performance. These findings can be used for further research and developing English for specific purposes learning materials, especially for improving writing skills related to the scientific fields of sea transportation cadets, whether it be nautical science, marine engineering, or port and shipping management.

Keywords: Cadets, competition, errors, grammar, writing

INTRODUCTION

Writing is widely recognized as one of the most challenging skills for learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) to acquire. Despite the frequent occurrence of grammatical errors in their

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written production, writing remains particularly important for cadets because it supports their academic performance, professional maritime communication, and participation in competitive contexts where clarity and accuracy are essential, beside it is a productive skill that needs complex knowledge (Eddraoui et al., 2023), exposure, and creativity (Wensi Alka et al., 2023). Even many undergraduate students consider this skill an intricate one to master (Gebremariam & Hiluf, 2023). It is understandable on the one hand and undeniable on the other hand since writing is a productive skill along with speaking (Anggarini, 2022). The result of productive skill is a product-composed thing in terms of passage, text, story, essay, or article from the writer's mind by generating ideas and thoughts, considering the tone of the text, and constructing well-formed sentences (Anaktototy, 2023). Moreover, various fundamental aspects such as capitalization, convention, grammar, vocabulary, punctuation, and mechanics are required to be performed in the writing process (Paudel, 2022).

This difficult skill becomes a challenge, hindrance, or even a nightmare for those who pursue an education at a higher level such as PIP Semarang as one of the vocational educations under the Ministry of Transportation (Park, 2022). Prospective students at this school, for example, are required to get a certain score on English tests for some categories (Rokita-Jaśkow, 2023). While the phenomenon of the test takers from Asia mostly had the lowest score in writing (Tarmizi et al., 2023). During such a test, the test takers were given a limited time to make a composition based on certain criteria and topics (Park, 2022). This phenomenon also happens during a contest competition where a contestant or participant needs to construct a text with limited time and short mobility to rewrite, reread, and reconstruct (Freeman & Marian, 2022).

Errors in writing are an inevitable part of the learning process (Arini & Fadilla, 2021). Whether in one's first language or a foreign language context, individuals commonly make mistakes while composing texts (Hadi et al., 2022). These errors can be observed, analyzed, and classified with the consideration of problems faced by students to yield better composition the next time (Hidayati et al., 2024). Recognizing and correcting these errors is crucial for improving writing skills, as it allows learners to refine their language proficiency through continuous practice and feedback (Maqueda, 2022). Moreover, understanding that errors are a normal part of language acquisition encourages a positive approach toward learning and development in writing abilities (Suryoputro et al., 2023).

Reguieg's investigation of grammatical errors during an exam of first-year master students at the Department of English (Idami et al., 2022), Aziz's research on English department students essay study held by Bolsunovskaya and Rymanova was regarding Engineering students had difficulty in their academic writing (Crosthwaite et al., 2021), analysis of abstracts written by Thai students Even though there were many previous studies regarding grammatical errors, most of them have strived merely to find out the type of errors from some experts and the factors of the error (Zahid, 2023). Most previous studies on grammatical errors in EFL writing have predominantly been conducted in formal classroom environments, particularly within writing courses and academic instructional settings (Yani, 2021). These studies generally examine students'

written production under structured pedagogical conditions, where feedback, revision opportunities, and teacher scaffolding are available. While such contexts provide valuable insights into learners' grammatical development, they may not fully capture students' spontaneous performance under high-pressure conditions.

Research investigating writing performance in competitive settings remains relatively limited (Virlan, 2022). Writing competitions represent a distinct context characterized by time constraints, limited revision opportunities, and heightened psychological pressure. Unlike classroom-based writing tasks, competitive writing requires immediate language production without systematic teacher intervention. Studies on language use in high-stakes or performance-driven environments suggest that cognitive load and situational stress may significantly influence linguistic accuracy (Hultgren & Molinari, 2022).

Therefore, this study seeks to extend previous research by examining grammatical errors produced during an English writing competition involving maritime cadets. By identifying the types and frequency of errors, as well as the underlying causes, this research provides insights into learners' real-time grammatical competence beyond instructional settings. The findings are expected to contribute to English for Specific Purposes (ESP) pedagogy, particularly in designing targeted instructional interventions for maritime cadets in subsequent professional communication courses (Nabila et al., 2023). This focus on competitive performance as a research setting highlights the novelty of the present study and strengthens its contribution to the field of error analysis in vocational EFL contexts.

Building upon these considerations, the present study investigates grammatical errors produced by maritime cadets during an English writing competition at Politeknik Ilmu Pelayaran Semarang. Specifically, this research aims to (1) identify the types of grammatical errors based on Dulay's surface strategy taxonomy, (2) determine the frequency distribution of each error category, and (3) analyze the underlying causes of the errors in relation to intralingual transfer, interlingual transfer, and contextual factors such as time constraints. By situating error analysis within a competitive and time-pressured setting, this study seeks to provide empirical evidence of cadets' grammatical performance beyond classroom instruction and to inform pedagogical strategies in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses within maritime education.

METHOD

This research employed a descriptive qualitative design to identify the types of grammatical errors, determine the most frequent error categories, and analyze the sources of the errors. A descriptive qualitative approach is appropriate for error analysis studies as it enables systematic classification, interpretation, and explanation of linguistic deviations in naturally produced texts (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Dulay et al., 1982; R. Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2025). This method is to present detailed information on a specific phenomenon to get a deep understanding of the case using error analysis (EA) (Hidayati et al., 2024).

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The participants in this study were participants of the English Writing competition at PIP Semarang from all three study programs (Otoluwa et al., 2022). The authors used purposive sampling in which the participants here were chosen based on certain criteria including their study program and total words of their writing (Chen et al., 2023). Therefore, 16 participants' writings were collected. Table 1 shows the data of research participants.

Table 1. The research participants

Code	Study program	Gender	Total Words
1	Nautical studies	Male	868
2	Port and Shipping Management	Male	716
3	Nautical studies	Male	1271
4	Nautical studies	Male	629
5	Nautical studies	Male	453
6	Marine Engineering	Male	880
7	Marine Engineering	Male	823
9	Port and Shipping Management	Female	411
10	Port and Shipping Management	Female	820
11	Marine Engineering	Male	821
15	Marine Engineering	Male	915
21	Nautical studies	Male	1051
30	Nautical studies	Male	982
31	Nautical studies	Male	1604
32	Nautical studies	Male	1004
36	Nautical studies	Male	1080

Data for this study were collected after an Internal English Writing Competition organized by the Language Unit (Rizal & Zulaefa, 2023). English writing was one of the main competition categories and attracted a substantial number of participants, as it required cadets to complete a written task on a predetermined topic within a strict time limit. Time-bound writing tasks of this nature are commonly employed in EFL research to elicit spontaneous language production and to reveal learners' authentic linguistic competence under performance pressure (Lysanets et al., 2024; Zhang & Zhang, 2022).

All compositions were produced digitally using Google Docs. Access links were distributed by the competition committee at the start of the session and automatically closed once the allocated time expired, preventing further revisions. The use of cloud-based writing platforms in controlled academic

settings has been increasingly adopted in recent years due to their effectiveness in standardizing task conditions and preserving the originality of learners' texts (Aldossary, 2022). This procedure ensured that all writing samples reflected real-time language production rather than post-task editing.

Following data collection, the written texts were compiled and analyzed using an error analysis framework combined with a descriptive qualitative approach (Erickson, 2022; Harefa & Sibarani, 2023). Error analysis was selected as it remains a widely accepted method for examining interlanguage development and identifying systematic patterns of learner errors in EFL writing (Ali, 2024). The classification of error types was guided by Dulay's Surface Strategy Taxonomy—namely omission, addition, misformation, and misordering—which continues to be recognized as a foundational framework in error analysis studies. To ensure methodological rigor, the analytical procedures followed structured stages adapted from contemporary outlines of error analysis procedures (N. C. Ellis, 1999; Moesarofah & Rahayu, 2025).

The initial stage of analysis involved identifying and correcting errors found in the cadets' writing. The researchers conducted a close, sentence-by-sentence examination of each text and manually tracked errors using the *Track Changes* feature in Microsoft Word. This tool enabled systematic annotation of identified errors, deletions, and proposed corrections, while maintaining transparency in the proofreading process. Manual error identification remains a recommended practice in qualitative error analysis, particularly when dealing with complex grammatical and syntactic features (Idami et al., 2022).

In the subsequent stage, all identified errors were extracted and transferred into Microsoft Excel for coding. Each entry included the original sentence containing the error, the coded error type, the linguistic unit affected (e.g., word, phrase, clause), and the corrected form (Idami et al., 2022; Rahayu & Moesarofah, 2022). This structured coding process facilitated systematic comparison across texts and minimized the risk of misclassification.

After the coding process was completed for the entire corpus, the researchers quantified the frequency of each error type using the COUNTIF function in Microsoft Excel. Quantification of error frequencies is a common practice in mixed qualitative–quantitative error analysis, as it enables researchers to identify dominant error patterns while retaining interpretive depth (Adriyanti et al., 2022; Liu, 2022). The error types were then sorted from the most frequent to the least frequent to determine salient error tendencies across the dataset.

The final stage of analysis involved interpreting the quantified data to uncover possible underlying sources of errors. These interpretations were informed by linguistic theory, task conditions, and learner-related factors such as time pressure and cognitive load. Rather than treating errors merely as deficiencies, this study views them as indicators of learners' interlanguage development and adaptive strategies in a competitive writing context (Gibriel, 2020; Hermawar et al., 2021).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

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Results

The data for this study were obtained from an Internal English Writing Competition organized by the Language Unit of Politeknik Ilmu Pelayaran (PIP) Semarang (Unit, 2023). The competition was conducted as part of an institutional language development initiative and functioned as an authentic writing assessment, a context widely recommended in recent second language writing research for eliciting natural language production under controlled conditions (Ayubi, 2024).

The participants comprised sixteen cadets representing four different academic levels, namely semesters 1, 3, 7, and 8. The inclusion of cadets from diverse stages of study was intended to capture variation in writing proficiency and academic writing experience, as differences in exposure to English instruction and disciplinary discourse typically emerge across academic progression (Richards, 2017). All participants voluntarily took part in the competition and completed the task under identical conditions.

Each participant was allotted one hour to compose a written text in response to the prompt "*The Crisis of Your Life.*" The task was designed to stimulate reflective and narrative writing, which has been shown to facilitate idea development and the use of a wider range of linguistic and rhetorical resources in second language writing (Fu, 2024). The uniform time constraint ensured comparability across texts and mirrored common academic writing situations (Biskjaer et al., 2019).

The resulting dataset consisted of sixteen written documents, which were collected, anonymized, and compiled to form a small-scale learner corpus. The total word count of the corpus was 14,328 words, with an average length of approximately 890 words per text, ranging from 400 to 1,600 words. Such variation in text length is characteristic of learner corpora and provides a meaningful basis for examining linguistic patterns and developmental differences in student writing (Egbert et al., 2022).

Based on the examination of the 16 corpus texts, a total of 843 grammatical errors were detected and classified into four categories addition (Pahamzah, 2022), omission, mis formation, and mis ordering as summarized in Table 2 below.

Table 2. The calculation results of students' errors

Types of error	Number of occurrences	Description of Frequency
Addition	84	Occasionally occurred, often resulting from unnecessary use of or insertion of articles.
Omission	134	Frequently occurred, primarily involving the omission of the verb to be and articles.
Misformation	623	The predominant category of inaccuracy identified in nearly all texts
Misordering	2	Infrequently encountered, manifested solely in a limited number of isolated instances

Total	843
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The discussion section should be explicitly connected to the research questions and the theoretical framework established in the introduction and literature review, as it functions to interpret the findings rather than merely restate them (du Plessis-Hay, 2022). Unlike the introduction, which frames the research problem and identifies gaps in existing studies, the discussion section is expected to demonstrate how the present study advances readers' understanding of the investigated phenomenon. This advancement is achieved by explaining the meaning, implications, and relevance of the findings in relation to prior research, thereby positioning the study within the broader scholarly conversation.

Based on the quantitative analysis conducted in this study, the findings revealed that misinformation errors were the most frequently occurring error type in the cadets' writing. Out of a total of 843 identified errors, misinformation accounted for the largest proportion, indicating that cadets experienced considerable difficulty in producing correct grammatical forms despite demonstrating awareness of basic sentence structures. This pattern suggests that learners tended to apply incorrect rules or overgeneralize grammatical forms, a phenomenon commonly associated with interlanguage development in EFL contexts. Such errors reflect partial mastery of grammatical systems rather than a complete lack of knowledge, thereby providing insight into the learners' developmental stage.

Omission errors emerged as the second most frequent error category. The relatively high occurrence of omission errors implies that cadets often failed to supply obligatory grammatical elements, such as articles, auxiliary verbs, or inflectional morphemes, particularly under time-constrained writing conditions. This tendency may be attributed to cognitive overload, where learners prioritize meaning and idea expression over formal accuracy. In contrast, addition errors ranked third in frequency, suggesting that although cadets occasionally inserted unnecessary linguistic elements, this strategy was less dominant than misinformation and omission. The presence of addition errors may indicate learners' attempts to compensate for uncertainty by inserting redundant forms as a safety strategy.

Misordering errors were found to be the least frequent, with only two occurrences identified across the entire corpus. This finding suggests that word order rules may be relatively more stable in the cadets' interlanguage system, possibly due to repeated exposure to basic English sentence patterns in prior instruction. Alternatively, the low frequency of misordering errors may indicate that such errors are more easily noticed and self-corrected by learners during real-time writing, even under limited time conditions.

Overall, the hierarchy of error frequency—misinformation, omission, addition, and misordering—demonstrates that the primary challenges faced by the cadets lie in grammatical accuracy and form selection rather than sentence organization. These findings extend existing literature on EFL error patterns by

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confirming that grammatical misformation remains a dominant issue in time-bound academic writing tasks. Consequently, this study moves the discussion beyond simple error categorization by highlighting how task conditions and learner cognitive processes interact to shape error production, thereby contributing empirical evidence to ongoing discussions of interlanguage development and writing pedagogy.

The text analyzed has a range of 400- 1600 total words with the average of 890s word per text and 14328 per total word from all of the text. Types of error calculation in 16 corpus text are presented below in detail as per code.

Table 3. Detail calculation of cadets' errors

Code	Total Words	Addition	Omission	Mis formation	Mis ordering
TEXT 1	868	17	15	36	1
TEXT 2	716	1	1	19	0
TEXT 3	1271	21	29	82	0
TEXT 4	629	3	1	34	0
TEXT 5	453	1	9	24	0
TEXT 6	880	8	17	91	0
TEXT 7	823	4	2	26	1
TEXT 9	411	2	8	34	0
TEXT 10	820	1	2	15	0
TEXT 11	821	2	6	25	0
TEXT 15	915	4	14	70	0
TEXT 21	1051	6	5	43	0
TEXT 30	982	2	5	44	0
TEXT 31	1604	5	8	26	0
TEXT 32	1004	4	12	27	0
TEXT 36	1080	3	0	27	0

The data above revealed that Text 3 is the dominant output contributing the most errors of the three types of errors with total errors of 132 errors in one text while Text 10 provided the least number of errors of all types with a total error of only 18 errors. The researcher found that mis formation is the highest. Mis

formation here refers to wrong input in the right place of the sentence (Fiorella & Pilegard, 2021). All texts confirmed the mis formation errors with a total of errors 623. The study detected several kinds of mis formation errors with the categories and examples below:

1. Mis formation of personal pronoun
(Error) : he want me to follow **he** (Text 6, Paragraph 3)
(Reconstruction) : he wanted me to follow **him**
2. Mis formation of gerund and to infinitive
(Error) : Dream is easy **to changing** (Text 32, Title)
(Reconstruction) : Dream is easy **to change**
3. Mis formation of verb (To be, Modal, main verb)
(Error) : when I **am** still in junior high school (Text 4, paragraph 1)
(Reconstruction) : when I **was** still in junior high school
(Error) : We **inviting** more friends to get drunk (Text 2, paragraph 1)
(Reconstruction) : We **invited** more friends to get drunk.
4. Mis formation of article (a, an, the)
(Error) : even when they started the conversation with me (Text 4, paragraph 2)
(Reconstruction) : and even when they started **a** conversation with me
5. Mis formation of adjective
(Error) : You must be more **success** than us (Text 1, paragraph 1)
(Reconstruction) : You must be more **successful** than us

The second highest of errors is omission (Zahid, 2023). From a total of 16 writings, only one text, Text 36, did not employ any omission error entirely. After deeper analysis, omission errors occurred in some aspects below:

1. Omission of To be
(Error) : I not accepted in the test (Text 9, paragraph 1)
(Reconstruction) : I **was** not accepted in the test
2. Omission of article
(Error) : I joined again to be **soldier** (Text 5, paragraph 4)
(Reconstruction) : I joined again to be **a soldier**
3. Omission of preposition
(Error) : I **wait** announcement from 06.00 am until 10.00 pm (Text 5, paragraph 3)
(Reconstruction): I waited **for** the announcement from 06.00 am until 10.00 pm
4. Omission of plural
(Error) : People are advised not to leave their **house** to reduce the rate of spread of this virus (Text 21, paragraph 4)
(Reconstruction) : People are advised not to leave their **houses** to reduce the rate of spread of this virus

The third position is addition. This refers to a unit or an item which must not be occurred in that place. Only 9.98% of the total percentage did learners, here participants of the English Writing competition committed additional items at the word level or the sentence level (Zarei & Navidinia, 2024).

1. Addition of To
(Error): They **to** supported me every day (Text 1, paragraph 5)
(Reconstruction) : They supported me every day
2. Addition of article

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(Error) : Those issues were just **a** fake information (Text 21, paragraph 10)

(Reconstruction): Those issues were just fake information.

3. Addition of preposition

(Error): I realized that my time here is no **in** longer enough (Text 21, paragraph 9)

(Reconstruction): I realized that my time here is no longer enough.

4. Addition of To be

(Error): I **was** became a loner (Text 2, paragraph 2)

(Reconstruction): I became a loner

The last is Mis ordering where cadets misplaced the item in a sentence whether it was a statement, a question, a clause, or even only a phrase (Van & Tran, 2023). Hardly did the students make this kind of error. the data shown was only 2 errors of 843 as categorized as mis ordered errors. Both happened in noun phrase order in which the position of to be is still the same as question order and the other occurred in real question since the context in the text is a direct question as in conversation. The sentences are:

*I did not know **who are they*** (Text 1)

*"Why **you don't** register for university?"* (Text 7)

The first excerpt above is a noun phrase that should be reconstructed to I did not know who they are. The noun phrase here resides as the object of the sentence. The second one is in the form of a question where the auxiliary should fall before the subject (Ma et al., 2024). In this Error Analysis, it is undeniably incorrect although the question, in informal communication, is still understandable.

Discussion

Some previous research reached the same findings that omission led the errors occurring in the learners' output (Rizwan, 2023). Some others found that mis formation or substitution took the first frequent errors (Suryoputro et al., 2023). The findings of this study have the same result as what the latter presented. Mis formation became the most frequent errors contributing to the investigation arise some possible notions.

For this study, mis formation became the first was due to the topic given to the cadets indicating past event (Adiansyah et al., 2023). The theme for this writing competition is "Telling crises in your life". The contestant must think about what kind of event, tragedy, or simply experience happened and undergone by them (Z. Wu & Juffs, 2022). The process of writing they did during the competition was reflected in creating and reminiscing the memory without much paying attention to the verb used in the whole text (Anaktototy, 2023). Thus, participants here made the most errors in verbs showing past tense (i.e. regular and irregular verbs). They kept writing using infinitives without the suffix -ed or changing into irregular ones (Ronzon et al., 2025). It can be seen that the participants know they need to use past tense but they keep forgetting or even neglecting (Ortín & Simonet, 2022).

Omission, addition, and mis ordering came afterward since learners often transfer grammatical structures from their native language (L1) to the target language (L2) (Ortín & Simonet, 2022). If the native language does not require

certain elements (e.g., articles, subject pronouns), learners might omit these elements in the target language and vice versa (Alzamil, 2023). In addition, the order of words between Indonesia and English is similar but different. It is the same as English in terms of Subject-Verb-Object sequence and it is different because Indonesian does not have an auxiliary to be (Suh, 2023). Thus, to be is mostly omitted in the text. This is not only happen in writing context but also happen in another productive skill, speaking (Zahid, 2023).

Once error patterns are identified, they further become focal points for instructional intervention (Susanto & Arifani, 2023). The cadets here are first semester cadets who finished their *Madatukar* program, a very first orientation program for freshman. Thus, this data-driven approach equips language teachers, instructors, or educators with precise error patterns and a variety of sample texts and sentences that can be utilized to create targeted teaching materials (Sundari & Febriyanti, 2021).

Furthermore, the ensuing discussion will be correlated with the factors contributing to errors. errors occur due to a variety of reasons, often linked to the process of language acquisition and the complexities of the target language (Maulana, 2021). The first source of error seen from the data above was interlingual reason. This happened in one case due to the difference in sentence rules between the native language of cadets and the target language i.e. English (Mbato, 2023). EFL/ESL learners found that it influences knowledge and understanding during the learning process (Marzuki et al., 2023). When students translate sentences from their native language (Indonesian) into a foreign language (English) literally one-by-one, or in translation what a so-called word-for-word translation (Eddraoui et al., 2023). Students first compose sentences in their native language and then translate each word directly (Freeman & Marian, 2022). This occurs because students assume that the sentence structure in their native language is identical to that in English (Amnuai, 2020).

The reason for error here involves the interference factor of the learner's native language or another language they know, rather than the target language being learned (Ma et al., 2024). The rule of native language mostly affects the learner's learning outcome where the errors might happen. The sentence They buy car black might be found in an Indonesian learner's text since it is a literal translation from *Mereka membeli mobil hitam*. The adjective order in English is different from what Indonesian grammar has. In Indonesian it is known as *diterangkan menerangkan (DM)* for adjective order while in English that adjective comes before what it modifies, i.e. noun.

Upon analyzing these errors, the researchers observed that certain errors cannot be attributed to transfer from the learner's first language (L1) (Imsa-ard, 2024). Instead, these errors stem from negative transfer within the target language itself, arising independently of the learner's native language. This findings are also in line with what stated by James that errors can be from interlingual and intralingual transfer (Rizwan, 2023).

Underlying causes of the identified errors can also be linked to individual differences among the participating cadets. Their educational backgrounds,

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prior exposure to English, and learning environments varied considerably, which directly influenced their grammatical competence during the competition. Several participants came from general secondary schools with limited emphasis on academic writing, while others had minimal exposure to intensive English instruction before entering the maritime institution. Such differences may have affected their mastery of tense consistency, article usage, and verb forms. In addition, the competitive setting potentially heightened emotional factors such as anxiety and time pressure, which can reduce attentional control and increase the likelihood of grammatical inaccuracies (Fan & Wang, 2024; Imsa-ard, 2024).

For students in non-English-speaking contexts such as Indonesia, English is typically introduced as a local-content or elective subject at the elementary level and becomes compulsory only in secondary education (Sundari & Febriyanti, 2021). As a result, the depth and continuity of grammatical instruction often depend on institutional quality and individual engagement. In the case of the cadets examined in this study, this uneven instructional foundation may explain variations in their ability to transform ideas into accurate linguistic forms during time-constrained writing tasks (Suramto & Gustiana, 2023).

In this study, where data were collected during a competitive writing event, both cognitive and emotional factors play a substantial role in shaping the types and frequency of errors produced by EFL/ESL learners, particularly grammatical and syntactic errors (Indrayan & Tripathi, 2022). Writing under competition conditions imposes a heightened cognitive load, as learners are required to generate ideas, organize content, and attend to linguistic accuracy simultaneously within a limited time frame. Such conditions have been widely reported to restrict learners' capacity for monitoring and revising their texts, resulting in increased surface-level errors and reduced overall textual accuracy (Carenys, 2025; Paul & Barari, 2022).

Time pressure in competitive contexts also intensifies affective responses, including anxiety, stress, and fear of underperformance. Learners tend to focus on meeting perceived standards of text length and content quality rather than engaging in reflective proofreading or structural refinement. Research in recent years has consistently shown that writing anxiety negatively correlates with writing quality, particularly in terms of grammatical accuracy and coherence (L. Wu & Halim, 2024). In high-stakes or evaluative settings, such as competitions, emotional regulation becomes an additional challenge that competes with cognitive resources needed for effective writing performance (Papi & Khajavy, 2021).

Writing, as one of the four fundamental language skills, involves complex and recursive cognitive processes. These include the ability to conceptualize ideas, structure logical arguments, select precise diction, apply accurate spelling conventions, and control grammatical forms appropriately (Li, 2023; Ma et al., 2024). Contemporary writing research emphasizes that effective writing requires the simultaneous integration of creative idea generation and systematic linguistic refinement, rather than a linear progression from planning to editing (Dong et al., 2023). This dual demand often poses significant challenges for

EFL/ESL learners, particularly in contexts where time and emotional pressure are salient.

Consequently, the development of writing proficiency is increasingly viewed as a gradual process that emerges through sustained practice, resilience, and repeated exposure to varied writing tasks. From this perspective, EFL/ESL learners can be conceptualized as individual producers of written texts whose outputs reflect not only linguistic competence but also their ability to manage cognitive load and affective constraints during text production (Sánchez & Sunesson, 2023; Xiong, 2022). In competition-based writing contexts, the resulting texts therefore represent a complex interaction between language knowledge, emotional regulation, and task conditions, rather than a mere reflection of learners' grammatical competence.

Overall, participants from different backgrounds and native languages exhibit distinct tendencies in making grammatical errors in their writing samples, leading to a wide variety of error types. However, an examination of various studies on error analysis among students in Asian countries such as Saudi Arabia, Thailand, China (Yang & Jianguo, 2021), Japan and Nepal (Paudel, 2022) reveals that the five most frequent grammatical errors are related to verb tenses, subject-verb agreement, pluralization, prepositions, and articles (Alzamil, 2023). Notably, verb-related grammatical errors are the most prevalent among Asian students across these studies (Z. Wu & Juffs, 2022). Consequently, verbs in English appear to be the most challenging grammatical aspect for Asian language learners (Trisanti et al., 2022).

CONCLUSION

This study investigated grammatical errors produced by maritime cadets during an English writing competition and identified four major categories: misformation (623 errors), omission (134 errors), addition (84 errors), and misordering (2 errors). The predominance of misformation indicates that the cadets' primary challenge lies in inaccurate rule application and overgeneralization rather than structural misplacement. The analysis further revealed that intralingual transfer was the dominant underlying cause, surpassing interlingual transfer. This finding suggests that incomplete internalization of grammatical rules plays a more critical role than first-language interference in time-constrained writing contexts. By examining grammatical performance in a competitive setting rather than a traditional classroom environment, this study offers a novel perspective on learners' spontaneous linguistic competence under pressure.

The results help explain discrepancies with previous classroom-based studies that emphasize interlingual influence, as the competitive and time-limited condition likely intensified cognitive load and reduced opportunities for monitoring and revision. Pedagogically, the findings highlight the need for EFL and ESP instructors in vocational institutions to integrate explicit grammar reinforcement, structured feedback, and timed writing practice to better prepare students for high-stakes communication tasks. Nevertheless, this study is limited by its relatively small sample and its focus on high-frequency grammatical forms. Future research should involve larger participant groups,

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comparative analyses between classroom and competition contexts, and investigation into the relationship between writing anxiety, cognitive load, and grammatical accuracy.

AUTHOR STATEMENTS

This study was conducted collaboratively by some authors. **Yozar Firdaus Amrullah** was responsible for conceptualizing the study, designing the research framework, collecting and analyzing the data, and drafting the initial manuscript. **Fatimah** contributed to the development of the research methodology, validated the data analysis procedures, and provided critical revisions to strengthen the theoretical and analytical sections of the paper. **Pratama Irwin Talenta, Rifatun Hasanah, Ulya Himawati, and Kurniawati Afifah Liliyana** assisted in data coding, literature review development, reference management, and overall manuscript editing. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript and agree to be accountable for the integrity and accuracy of the work.

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