



Error Analysis on The Students' Writing Descriptive Text at Grade XI SMA Negeri 4 Padangsidimpuan

Diah Annur Achzuhruhi Harahap¹, Shoufi Nisma Dewi², Rahmat Huda³, Arynayanti⁴, Farhan Afif Al Kindi⁵, Nasibah Awae⁶

¹²³⁴Universitas Muhammadiyah Tapanuli Selatan, Padangsidimpuan, Indonesia

⁵Sanggar Belajar Muhammadiyah Kepong, Malaysia

⁶Masjid Taluban School Sai Buri, Thailand

Article Info

Article history:

Received 8 April 2026

Revised 22 May 2026

Accepted 24 June 2026

Keywords

Descriptive Text

Grade XI Student

Padangsidimpuan

Parts of Speech

Writing



Abstract

This research aims to investigate the specific types and frequency of linguistic errors found in the descriptive writing of eleventh-grade students at SMA Negeri 4 Padangsidimpuan. Utilizing a Sequential Explanatory mixed-methods design, the study combined quantitative data mapping with qualitative in-depth analysis. The sample consisted of 33 students chosen via purposive sampling. Data collection involved a descriptive writing test and a Likert-scale questionnaire. Analysis revealed 284 total errors across five distinct categories: capitalization, spelling, punctuation, part of speech, and sentence structure. Capitalization errors were the most prevalent at 61.38%, followed by spelling (22.77%), comma errors (8.91%), and full stop errors (6.93%). While sentence structure errors were relatively infrequent (12.37%), the overall mean score from the questionnaire was 3.29, suggesting that students find using parts of speech moderately challenging. The study concludes that the primary hurdles for students are mechanical conventions rather than core grammatical rules. Consequently, the researcher suggests that English teachers should focus more on the revising and editing phases during the writing process to improve accuracy.

Corresponding Author: Dewi, shoufi.nisma@um-tapsel.ac.id

1. Introduction

The mastery of English writing stands as a cornerstone of productive competence for senior high school students, enabling them to convey complex ideas and information effectively. Writing is not merely a mechanical task but a complex process of transferring ideas, experiences, and feelings into a written form to communicate them clearly. In the academic sphere, writing skills are often the best predictor of success in coursework, as they require students to reason carefully, analyze closely, and recognize conflicting viewpoints. However, for many students, writing remains one of the most challenging activities compared to other language skills. This difficulty is intensified for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, as their native language background often heavily influences their writing, leading to a struggle with English vocabulary and grammatical rules that differ significantly from their mother tongue.

In the context of the Indonesian national curriculum, students are required to master various text types, with descriptive text serving as a foundational skill. Descriptive text aims to create a clear and vivid mental image for the reader by providing detailed information about physical features, qualities, or characteristics of a person, place, or object. To compose an effective description, students must demonstrate a command of accurate sentence structure and

strategically employ parts of speech, such as adjectives and present tense verbs, to make the imagery realistic and engaging. According to grammarians, the ability to differentiate the syntactic functions of nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs is non-negotiable for constructing coherent and logical sentences. Furthermore, writing mechanics—including spelling and punctuation play a vital role in ensuring clarity of meaning and preventing misinterpretation.

Despite the importance of these skills, a significant gap exists between educational goals and actual student achievement. Preliminary observations at SMA Negeri 4 Padangsidempuan revealed that eleventh-grade students face persistent challenges in descriptive writing, particularly regarding the misuse of parts of speech and punctuation. For instance, students frequently use adjectives instead of adverbs to modify verbs, such as writing “she writes neat” instead of “she writes neatly”. Such errors are not sporadic; they form a consistent pattern that undermines the clarity of the text. This gap signifies a fundamental deficiency in students' linguistic understanding, which can negatively affect their academic confidence and performance in more complex writing tasks.

To address these deficiencies, an error analysis (EA) approach is essential. Error analysis is designed to identify the systematic deviations in a learner's language, providing valuable evidence of their learning process. It is crucial to distinguish between "mistakes," which are random slips in performance by those who know the system, and "errors," which reveal a lack of competence or gaps in the learner's knowledge of the target language. By identifying these gaps, teachers can move beyond assumptions and gain a concrete understanding of the real difficulties faced by students, allowing for the development of more effective and targeted teaching strategies.

Previous studies have explored similar themes, yet often in isolation. For example, Sari (2020) focused on part-of-speech errors among tenth graders in Medan, while Safitri (2019) concentrated solely on mechanical errors like punctuation in Central Lampung. Other researchers, such as Idayani et al. (2020) and Anggraini (2021), have identified errors in tense and noun usage caused by first-language interference. However, few studies have examined both grammatical parts of speech and writing mechanics simultaneously within the specific context of eleventh-grade students at SMA Negeri 4 Padangsidempuan. Therefore, this research fills a critical gap by providing a comprehensive analysis of both linguistic aspects in an unresearched location.

The primary objectives of this study are to identify the types of Part of Speech errors and Punctuation errors found in descriptive texts written by Grade XI students of SMA Negeri 4 Padangsidempuan and to determine which of these errors are the most dominant in their writing.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Nature and Complexity of Descriptive Writing in EFL Contexts

Writing is recognized as one of the four fundamental pillars of language learning, standing alongside listening, speaking, and reading. It is a complex process of transferring internal ideas, feelings, and experiences into a structured written form to achieve effective communication. Scholars define this skill as the ability to express opinions and emotions to others through a written medium, serving as a productive and expressive tool for indirect communication. Within the academic sphere, writing proficiency is often viewed as a primary predictor of success, as it

requires the writer to reason carefully, analyze information closely, and recognize diverse viewpoints.

For English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students, particularly in senior high school, mastering this skill is essential for conveying complex information. However, the process is far from simple; it involves a rigorous cycle of prewriting, outlining, drafting, and revising/editing. During these stages, students must manage multiple linguistic elements simultaneously, including grammar, vocabulary choice, and paragraph organization. The difficulty is often compounded by the influence of the student's mother tongue, which can lead to structural interference when trying to follow English rules that differ significantly from their native language.

Descriptive writing, a foundational genre in the curriculum, focuses on creating a vivid mental image of a person, place, or object for the reader. The primary purpose is to help the audience visualize the subject in detail, almost as if seeing it in real life. This requires a specific command of generic structures, typically involving a general classification to identify the subject and a detailed description of its properties. Furthermore, descriptive texts rely heavily on particular language features, such as the strategic use of adjectives, sensory details, and the simple present tense. When these linguistic building blocks are flawed, the description becomes ambiguous, failing to reach its communicative goal.

2.2 Linguistic Foundations: Word Classes and Writing Mechanics

The structural integrity of any descriptive text depends on the accurate application of parts of speech and writing mechanics. Parts of speech serve as the functional units that govern grammatical meaning and sentence structure. Each word category—from the ubiquitous nouns that name entities to verbs that express actions or states of being—plays a distinct role. In a descriptive context, the ability to differentiate the syntactic functions of nouns, adjectives, and adverbs is non-negotiable. For example, adjectives name qualities and modify nouns to add detail, while adverbs limit or restrict the meaning of verbs and other modifiers to provide precision.

Beyond grammar, writing mechanics encompassing punctuation, spelling, and capitalization act as the essential signage of written discourse. Punctuation marks are not mere decorations; they structure the writing, determine intonation, and prevent misinterpretation by marking pauses and sentence boundaries. Key mechanical tools include: 1) The Full Stop: Signals the completion of a thought; 2) The Comma: Clarifies structure and prevents ambiguity by separating items or clauses; 3) Capitalization: Serves as a grammatical marker for sentence beginnings and proper names; 4) Spelling: Provides a standardized convention for symbolizing speech sounds in writing.

Despite their importance, students often find these mechanical aspects more challenging to master than core grammatical structures. Errors in mechanics, particularly in spelling and capitalization, frequently arise from a lack of attention during proofreading or the negative transfer of informal writing habits from digital communication. While a single spelling mistake might be a minor "slip," persistent issues with sentence structure or word classes indicate a deeper deficiency in linguistic understanding. This gap between knowing the rules and applying them effectively can severely limit a student's potential as a competent English user.

3. Method

This section outlines the methodological framework utilized to achieve the research objectives. In accordance with the sequential explanatory design, the study employed a Mixed Methods approach, which integrates both quantitative and qualitative research techniques within a single inquiry. This dual perspective was deemed most appropriate because it allowed the researcher to identify "what" errors occurred and their frequency through quantitative data, while simultaneously using qualitative data to explore "how" and "why" these errors manifested in the students' writing. The procedure was implemented in two distinct phases: a quantitative phase where data were gathered through a descriptive writing test and a closed-ended questionnaire, followed by a qualitative phase involving a more in-depth exploration of specific error patterns and their underlying causes. This methodological integration aims to generate a precise diagnosis of the linguistic difficulties faced by the students.

The research was conducted at SMA Negeri 4 Padangsidempuan, located on Jl. Sutan Sori Pada Mulia No.38, North Padangsidempuan. This site was selected because it is a prominent public school implementing the national English curriculum and provided a sufficient student population for a representative sample. The study took place during the second semester of the 2024/2025 academic year to ensure optimal data collection without overlapping with final exams. The research population consisted of all 332 Grade XI students at the institution. From this population, a sample of 33 students from class XI-8 was selected using a purposive sampling technique. This non-random technique was chosen based on the researcher's expert judgment that these specific participants possessed the learning experiences and cognitive development levels most relevant to the variables being studied.

Data collection involved several instruments to ensure a comprehensive dataset. The primary data source was a descriptive writing test where students were assigned to write a text on a specific topic, such as describing a person, place, or object. These written texts served as the raw material for error analysis and documentation. Additionally, a Likert-scale questionnaire was distributed directly to the respondents to measure their perceptions of difficulty regarding parts of speech. This questionnaire utilized five response options: strongly agree, agree, neither agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. Secondary data, including school background and facilities, were also collected to support the context of the study.

The technique of data analysis followed an interactive model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the quantitative phase, descriptive statistics were used to calculate frequencies and percentages for both the errors found in the writing tests and the responses from the questionnaires. The formula used to determine the frequency of a specific error type was:

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

where P: percentage, f: frequency of a specific error, and n: total number of errors identified.

In the qualitative phase, the researcher engaged in data reduction by selecting, simplifying, and transforming the raw data into essential themes directly related to writing skills. The condensed information was then presented through a data display, primarily utilizing narrative text and matrices to illustrate relationships between different error categories. Finally, initial conclusions were formulated and verified by revisiting the raw data and comparing findings with established linguistic theories and previous research results to ensure the validity and credibility of the study.

4. Results

The analysis focused on five core linguistic aspects: Capitalization, Spelling, Punctuation (specifically Full Stops and Commas), Part of Speech, and Sentence Structure. Out of the 33 students in the sample, 31 were present during the data collection phase, while three were absent. From the 31 student compositions analyzed, a total of 379 errors were identified.

4.1 Analysis of Writing Errors

The distribution of errors across the student population was varied, with specific individuals contributing significantly more to the total count than others. For instance, the student identified as NS (No. 25) showed the highest contribution, accounting for 10.00% of the total errors (41 errors), followed by student CP at 8.54% (31 errors). Conversely, some students demonstrated high proficiency, such as student AEJ, who contributed only 0.52% (2 errors). The majority of the students (24 out of 31) fell within an error contribution range of 1% to 7%.

The following table summarizes the frequency and percentage distribution of mechanical errors (punctuation and spelling):

Table 1. The frequency and percentage of punctuation

No	Type of Punctuation/Mechanical Error	Number of Errors	Percentage
1	Capitalization	186	61.38%
2	Spelling	69	22.77%
3	Comma	27	8.91%
4	Full Stop	21	6.93%
	Total	303	100%

In a separate analysis of grammatical foundations, Sentence Structure errors accounted for 46 identified instances, representing 12.37% of the specific grammatical error categories.

4.2 Perception of Difficulty (Questionnaire Analysis)

To complement the error analysis, the researcher analyzed 465 responses from a questionnaire distributed to 30 students. The goal was to determine if students' actual performance matched their self-perceived difficulties.

Table 2. The frequency of the questionnaire

Response Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	57	12.3%
Agree	156	33.5%
Neither Agree or Disagree	127	27.3%
Disagree	115	24.7%

Strongly Disagree	10	2.2%
Total	465	100%

The results showed that 45.8% of responses fell into the "Strongly Agree" or "Agree" categories regarding difficulty with Parts of Speech. The overall mean score was 3.29, placing the perceived difficulty slightly above the neutral midpoint. This suggests that students are aware of their linguistic weaknesses, particularly in grammar and word classes.

4.3 Synthesis of Findings

There is a notable gap between students' "passive knowledge" (the recognition that grammar is difficult) and their "procedural knowledge" (the ability to apply rules while writing). While students showed relative strength in core sentence formation, their writing is hampered by a lack of precision in mechanics specifically capitalization and spelling.

This hierarchy of errors differs slightly from previous research by Sari (2020), who found verbs and adjectives to be the primary obstacles; however, it confirms that writing mechanics remain a significant barrier for EFL students in North Sumatra. The findings underscore that student errors should be viewed not merely as failures but as "valuable evidence" of the learning process that can guide future pedagogical interventions.

5. Discussion

5.1 Capitalization Errors (61.38%)

Capitalization was unequivocally the most dominant error type. This high frequency suggests that students have not yet mastered the fundamental conventions of English writing mechanics. The most common patterns included a failure to capitalize the first letter of a sentence, neglecting proper nouns (e.g., "Cristiano Ronaldo" or "Portugal"), and failing to capitalize the first-person pronoun "I".

The dominance of this error is likely attributed to a lack of rigorous proofreading and a "negative transfer" from informal digital communication habits, such as text messaging, where formal rules are often ignored. As Yule (2017) notes, these markers are essential for signaling the beginning of thoughts and identifying specific entities.

5.2 Spelling Errors (22.77%)

Spelling ranked as the second most frequent error, indicating that students struggle to reproduce the correct orthographic forms of English words. The errors were categorized into simple typos (e.g., "rolk model" for "role model"), phonetic-based errors (e.g., "suced" for "succeed"), and issues with word compounding (e.g., "every time" instead of "every time"). These findings suggest limited exposure to English literature and a lack of habit in consulting dictionaries during the writing process.

5.3 Sentence Structure and Punctuation (12.37% and 15.84%)

Errors in sentence structure were relatively rare (12.37%), which is a positive indicator that most students understand the basic Subject + Verb + Object (S-V-O) framework. However, the qualitative analysis revealed that students struggle with combining sentences. Common

punctuation errors included omitting commas in a series and creating "comma splices" by joining independent clauses without proper conjunctions. This aligns with the findings of Safitri (2019), who noted that the omission of punctuation often stems from a lack of attention to formal rules rather than a lack of vocabulary.

6. Conclusion

Based on the comprehensive data analysis and the subsequent discussion regarding the writing performance of eleventh-grade students at SMA Negeri 4 Padangsidempuan, several critical conclusions are drawn. First, the research successfully identified five distinct categories of linguistic errors present in students' descriptive texts: capitalization, spelling, punctuation, part of speech, and sentence structure. Quantitative evidence indicates that the total volume of errors is significant, with 379 specific instances recorded across the sample. These errors represent a systematic deviation from standard English writing conventions, suggesting that students have not yet reached a level of automaticity in applying foundational writing rules.

The distribution of these errors reveals a clear hierarchy of difficulty. Capitalization is unequivocally the most dominant error type, accounting for 61.38% of the total errors in the mechanical category. Spelling errors followed as the second most frequent at 22.77%, while errors in full stops (6.93%) and sentence structure (12.37%) were identified as the least frequent. This hierarchy implies that the most significant barrier for students is not the core grammatical framework of English such as the Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) structure but rather the technical conventions of written discourse. The low percentage of sentence structure errors indicates that students possess the underlying competence to form complete thoughts, yet they struggle to present these thoughts within the standardized orthographic and mechanical requirements of the language.

Furthermore, the integration of performance data with perception data highlights a notable psychological dimension to these errors. The questionnaire results, yielding an overall mean score of 3.29, indicate that students perceive the use of parts of speech as moderately challenging. This self-awareness confirms that students are cognizant of their linguistic limitations, yet a gap remains between this recognition and their ability to execute correct forms during the writing process. Ultimately, the study concludes that students' primary struggles lie in the mechanical aspects of writing, specifically capitalization and spelling, which are often overlooked during the drafting phase due to a lack of rigorous editing habits.

References

- Abidah, M., & Sabur, A. (2020). The effect of think pair share (TPS) technique to improve students' writing skill on descriptive text at tenth grade of SMAN 2 Kab. Tangerang in academic year 2018/2019. *Foremost Journal*, 1(1), 36-42.
- Ary, D., Jacobs, L. C., Sorensen, C., & Walker, D. A. (2019). *Introduction to research in education* (10th ed.). Cengage Learning.
- Arikunto, S. (2017). *Prosedur penelitian suatu pendekatan praktik*. Rineka Cipta.

- Anggraini, S. (2021). An Analysis of Students' Errors in Using Parts of Speech on Descriptive Text Writing at The First Semester of The Tenth Grade of SMA Al-Azhar 3 Bandar Lampung [Unpublished undergraduate thesis]. UIN Raden Intan Lampung.
- Bhandari, P. (2021, July 15). Questionnaire: Definition, examples, design and types. Scribbr. <https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/questionnaire/>
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2020). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches (5th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2018). Designing and conducting mixed methods research (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Dewi, R. S., & Ayunisa, V. (2020). The Effect of Using Clustering Technique on Students' Achievement in Writing Descriptive Text. *English Teaching and Linguistics Journal (ETLi)*.
- Etikan, I., Musa, S. A., & Alkassim, R. S. (2016). Comparison of Convenience Sampling and Purposive Sampling. *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics*, 5(1), 1-4.
- Ellis, R. (2020). *Understanding second language acquisition* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Fajriansyah, Adrian (2019-11-25). "Andalan Baru Voli Putri Indonesia". Kompas.id. Diakses tanggal 2022-10-11.
- Gay, L. R., Mills, G. E., & Airasian, P. (2020). *Educational research: Competencies for analysis and applications* (12th ed.). Pearson.
- Huddleston, R., & Pullum, G. K. (2022). *A student's introduction to English grammar* (3rd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Huda, R., & Lestari, N. (2024). The Influence of The Whatsapp Application On Students' Ability to Write Procudure Texts. *JURNAL HATA PODA Учредителу: IAIN Padangsidimpuan*, 3(1), 127-140.
- Huda, R., & Sari, M. (2023). Error Analysis of Punctuation Used on The Students Writing Narrative Text at Grade X SMA Negeri 6 Padangsidimpuan. *LINGUISTIK: Jurnal Bahasa dan Sastra*, 8(4), 822-830.
- INDOSPORT.com (2023-04-26). "Keren! 2 Pevoli Cantik Indonesia Resmi Gabung Klub Korea Selatan, Siapa Saja?". Diakses tanggal 2023-05-11.
- Idayani, A., Syafrizal, S., & Saunir, S. (2020). An analysis of students' grammatical errors in writing descriptive text at grade X SMAN 10 Padang. *Jurnal JILP (Jurnal Ilmiah Langue and Parole)*, 3(2), 161–169. <https://doi.org/10.36057/jilp.v3i2.428>
- Jayanti, A. D. (2019). Students' writing ability on english descriptive text at grade viii in smpn 33 padang. *ENGLISH FRANCA: Academic Journal of English Language and Education*, 3(1), 72-94. *Journal of Institutional & Industrial Research*. 1 (1). 26-29. DOI: ISSN: 2456-1274.
- Kane, T. S. (2000). *The Oxford Essential Guide to Writing*. Oxford University Press.

- Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi. (2021). Modul Pembelajaran SMA Bahasa Inggris Kelas XI. Jakarta: Kemendikbudristek.
- Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi Republik Indonesia. (2021). Modul Pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris: Sekolah Menengah Pertama (SMP). Jakarta: Direktorat Jenderal Guru dan Tenaga Kependidikan.
- Pabundu Tika, M. (2020). Metodologi penelitian. Jakarta: Bumi Aksara.
- Rahmawati, L. (2022). The impact of mastering parts of speech on students' writing skill. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Linguistics*, 7(1), 45–55.
- Syahputri, D., & Masita, R. (2018). *English Learning Module: Descriptive Text*. Medan: Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara Press.
- Sari, N. (2020). An analysis of students' errors in using parts of speech in writing descriptive texts at the tenth grade of SMA Negeri 1 Medan [Undergraduate thesis, Universitas Negeri Medan].
- Safitri, Diah. (2019). An Error Analysis of Punctuation in Writing Descriptive Text at the Second Semester of the Tenth Grade of SMAN 1 Terusan Nunyai Central Lampung in the Academic Year 2018/2019. Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Intan Lampung, Lampung.
- Sugiyono. (2020). *Metode penelitian pendidikan: Pendekatan kuantitatif, kualitatif, dan R&D*. Bandung: Alfabeta.
- Telkom University. (2024). *Metode penelitian kualitatif, kuantitatif, dan mix method*. <https://it.telkomuniversity.ac.id/metode-penelitian-kualitatif-kuantitatif-dan-mix-method/>
- Ula, Elok Kharismatul. "Profil dan Biodata Megawati Hangestri Pertiwi Opposite Jakarta Pertamina Fastron di Proliga 2022 - Jombang Update - Halaman all". jombangupdate.pikiran-rakyat.com. Diakses tanggal 2022-10-11.
- Universitas Negeri Surabaya (Unesa). (2024). *Metodologi mixed method: Pengertian, jenis, contoh, dan sistematikanya*. <https://paud.fip.unesa.ac.id/post/metodologi-mixed-method-pengertian-jenis-contoh-dan-sistematikanya>.
- Yuliah, S., Widiastuti, A., & Meida, G. R. (2019). The grammatical and mechanical errors of students in essay writing *Jurnal Bahasa Inggris Terapan*, 5(2), 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.35313/jbit.v5i2.1763>
- Yule, G. (2017). *Explaining English grammar* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Zheng, C., & Park, T. (2021). Error Analysis – Types and Causes of Errors in English Writing among Chinese College Students. *Journal of Contemporary Educational Research*, 5(6), 1-6.