



**AN ANALYSIS OF GRAMMATICAL ERRORS IN ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAYS
USING GRAMMAR CHECK APP OF SECOND-SEMESTER STUDENTS IN
ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION PROGRAM AT TEACHING AND
TECHNOLOGY INSTITUTE OF LARANTUKA**

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ABSTRAK

Kesalahan tata bahasa masih menjadi kendala bagi mahasiswa dalam menulis esai argumentatif karena mereka harus mengembangkan gagasan sekaligus menerapkan aturan bahasa Inggris secara akurat. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis jenis, frekuensi, faktor, dan solusi terkait kesalahan tata bahasa mahasiswa semester dua. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain deskriptif kualitatif. Subjek penelitian terdiri atas 12 mahasiswa Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris Institut Keguruan dan Teknologi Larantuka. Data berupa esai argumentatif, catatan observasi, dan hasil wawancara dengan mahasiswa serta dosen. Aplikasi pemeriksa tata bahasa digunakan sebagai instrumen pendukung, sedangkan kesalahan ditentukan melalui pemeriksaan manual. Ditemukan 83 kesalahan dalam enam kategori, yaitu *Subject-Verb Agreement*, struktur kalimat, *Modal Verb*, *Verb Tense*, artikel, dan preposisi. Kesalahan *Subject-Verb Agreement* paling dominan dengan 49 kejadian (59,04%), diikuti struktur kalimat sebanyak 17 kejadian (20,48%). Faktor yang berkaitan dengan kesalahan meliputi penguasaan aturan yang belum memadai, generalisasi berlebihan, interferensi bahasa pertama, keterbatasan latihan menulis, dan beban kognitif. Latihan menulis berkelanjutan, pembelajaran tata bahasa terfokus, umpan balik korektif, revisi, dan penggunaan aplikasi pemeriksa tata bahasa secara bertanggung jawab diperlukan untuk mendukung peningkatan ketepatan tata bahasa mahasiswa.

Kata kunci: kesalahan tata bahasa, esai argumentatif, aplikasi pemeriksa tata bahasa

ABSTRACT

Grammatical errors remain a challenge for students writing argumentative essays because they must develop ideas while applying English grammatical rules accurately. This study aims to analyze the types, frequency, factors, and solutions related to grammatical errors among second-semester students. This study employed a descriptive qualitative design. The participants were 12 students of the English Language Education Program at the Teaching and Technology Institute of Larantuka. The data consisted of argumentative essays, observation field notes, and interviews with students and a lecturer. A grammar-checking application was used as a supporting instrument, while the final identification of errors was determined through manual analysis. The analysis identified 83 errors in six categories: *Subject-Verb Agreement*, sentence structure, *Modal Verb*, *Verb Tense*, articles, and prepositions. *Subject-Verb Agreement* was the most frequent category, with 49 occurrences (59.04%), followed by sentence structure with 17 occurrences (20.48%). The associated factors included incomplete mastery of grammatical rules, overgeneralization, first-language interference, limited writing practice, and cognitive load. Continuous writing practice, focused grammar instruction, corrective feedback, revision, and responsible use of grammar-checking applications are needed to support students' grammatical accuracy.

Keywords: grammatical errors, argumentative essays, grammar-checking applications



INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the essential skills in English language learning because it requires learners to organize ideas, select appropriate vocabulary, construct grammatically accurate sentences, and communicate meaning clearly. In higher education, these demands become more complex because students are expected to produce academic texts that demonstrate not only relevant ideas but also accuracy and coherence. Academic writing therefore requires a strong foundation in grammar and vocabulary, particularly for learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) who are still developing their linguistic competence (Imansyah, 2025; Lin & Morrison, 2021). Grammar plays an important role in this process because inaccurate grammatical forms can affect the clarity and comprehensibility of written messages (Putri, 2025).

Among various academic writing tasks, *argumentative essays* require students to present claims, provide supporting reasons or evidence, and connect ideas logically. This type of writing consequently requires students to control sentence structure, verb forms, articles, prepositions, connectors, and other grammatical elements simultaneously. Previous research has shown that university and tertiary-level EFL students continue to experience substantial difficulties in producing accurate written English, including problems with grammatical structures and the organization of ideas (Bulqiyah et al., 2021; Hamdani & Abid, 2025). Ananda (2024) also reported that EFL students encounter problems when writing *argumentative essays*, indicating that difficulties in argumentative writing remain relevant to investigate in higher education.

Grammatical problems are particularly important because they may appear repeatedly across different aspects of students' writing. Studies of EFL student writing have identified errors involving verb forms, sentence construction, articles, prepositions, and other grammatical components (Mubarak & Budiono, 2022; Ramendra, 2021; Suraprajit, 2021). Florianus and Syamsi (2021) further demonstrated that grammatical errors in academic writing can involve problems with inflectional forms, while Pasaribu (2022) highlighted the importance of mastery of English tenses in supporting students' academic writing. Similarly, Harahap (2023) found that students' ability to construct compound sentences using the simple past tense remains an area requiring attention. These findings indicate that grammatical accuracy is not a minor aspect of writing but an important component that needs to be diagnosed systematically.

The identification of grammatical errors can provide more specific information for writing instruction. Error analysis enables researchers and lecturers to identify recurring linguistic problems and determine which grammatical aspects require greater instructional attention. Recent studies have demonstrated that grammatical errors remain evident in the academic writing of EFL students, with different studies reporting different dominant categories depending on the learners, writing tasks, and instructional contexts (Azizah et al., 2025; Hanif et al., 2026). Research on students' argumentative writing has likewise shown that grammatical errors occur across several structural categories, confirming the need to examine students' actual written products rather than relying only on their perceived grammar knowledge. Such analysis can provide a concrete basis for designing more targeted writing instruction.

The development of digital writing tools has also provided new possibilities for identifying grammatical problems in students' writing. Applications such as Grammarly can provide automated feedback on aspects of written language and have been investigated as tools for supporting EFL writing assessment and revision (Dewi, 2023; Tambunan et al., 2022).



However, automated feedback should not automatically be treated as the final interpretation of students' errors because such applications may provide suggestions without fully considering the context and intended meaning of a sentence. Ummah and Bisriyah (2022) emphasized that EFL students may encounter inaccuracies in automated feedback, while Tambunan et al. (2022) showed the relevance of Grammarly for identifying linguistic problems while still requiring learners to engage with and interpret the feedback. Therefore, a *grammar-checking application* in the present study is positioned as a supporting instrument, while the final identification and classification of errors remain based on researcher analysis.

Although previous studies have examined grammatical errors in EFL writing, differences in learners, educational settings, writing tasks, and error categories leave room for further investigation. Existing research has examined university students' essays generally (Ramendra, 2021), specific linguistic problems (Florianus & Syamsi, 2021; Mubarak & Budiono, 2022), literature reviews (Azizah et al., 2025), and broader writing challenges (Hamdani & Abid, 2025), but limited attention has been given to the grammatical errors produced by second-semester students in argumentative essays at the Teaching and Technology Institute of Larantuka. In addition, Zhafira (2026) highlights the importance of lecturers' strategies in teaching writing, which reinforces the need for empirical information about the specific difficulties students experience before appropriate instructional strategies are developed. This contextual gap is important because early-semester students are at a formative stage in developing academic writing competence.

Therefore, the present study analyzes grammatical errors in *argumentative essays* written by second-semester students in the English Language Education Program at the Teaching and Technology Institute of Larantuka. The study focuses on seven grammatical categories: *Subject-Verb Agreement*, *Sentence Structure*, *Modal Verb*, *Verb Tense*, *Article*, *Preposition*, and *Logical Connector*. Through this analysis, the study aims to identify the types and frequency of grammatical errors found in students' writing and to determine the most dominant grammatical problems. The findings are expected to provide an empirical basis for lecturers in identifying students' specific grammatical needs and developing more focused writing instruction at the beginning of their academic study.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to analyze grammatical errors in students' argumentative essays. The qualitative approach was selected because the study focused on identifying, classifying, interpreting, and describing the grammatical errors found in students' written texts rather than testing a statistical hypothesis. The analysis focused on seven grammatical categories, namely *Subject-Verb Agreement*, *Sentence Structure*, *Modal Verb*, *Verb Tense*, *Article*, *Preposition*, and *Logical Connector*.

The participants were 12 second-semester students of the English Language Education Program at the Teaching and Technology Institute of Larantuka during the 2025/2026 academic year. The study was conducted from May 5 to June 10, 2026. The primary data consisted of argumentative essays written by the students, while supporting data were obtained through observation field notes, student interviews, and an interview with the lecturer. The essays were selected as the main source because they provided direct evidence of students' grammatical performance in academic writing.

Data were collected through document analysis, observation, and interviews. The students' argumentative essays were collected and examined to identify grammatical errors in



their actual written production. A *grammar-checking application* was used as a supporting instrument to help identify possible grammatical problems in the essays; however, its suggestions were not treated as the final classification of errors. Each identified error was subsequently checked manually by the researcher based on the intended meaning and grammatical context of the sentence. Observation was used to record relevant information during the writing and learning process, while interviews with students and the lecturer were conducted to obtain additional information about students' writing difficulties and the use of grammar-checking tools.

The data were analyzed qualitatively through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. First, the researcher collected and identified grammatical errors from each argumentative essay. Second, the errors were grouped according to the seven predetermined categories: *Subject-Verb Agreement*, *Sentence Structure*, *Modal Verb*, *Verb Tense*, *Article*, *Preposition*, and *Logical Connector*. Third, the researcher calculated the frequency and percentage of errors in each category to determine the distribution and dominant grammatical problems. The qualitative interpretation was then used to explain the patterns of errors by considering the sentence context and supporting information obtained from observations and interviews.

To ensure the credibility of the findings, the researcher compared information obtained from the students' essays, observation records, and interview data. The results generated by the *grammar-checking application* were also checked against the researcher's manual analysis to prevent automated suggestions from being treated as definitive evidence. This procedure allowed the study to maintain the argumentative essays as the primary evidence while using the other data sources as supporting information for interpreting the students' grammatical difficulties.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The analysis of the 12 argumentative essays produced by second-semester students identified 83 grammatical errors across seven predetermined categories. The errors were identified through the students' written texts and subsequently checked manually by the researcher. The *grammar-checking application* was used only as supporting evidence in identifying possible errors, while the final classification was determined by considering the grammatical form and context of each sentence. The distribution of the identified errors is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of Grammatical Errors in Students' Argumentative Essays

No.	Grammatical Error Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	<i>Subject-Verb Agreement</i>	49	59.04%
2	<i>Sentence Structure</i>	17	20.48%
3	<i>Modal Verb</i>	6	7.23%
4	<i>Verb Tense</i>	4	4.82%
5	<i>Article</i>	4	4.82%
6	<i>Preposition</i>	3	3.61%
7	<i>Logical Connector</i>	0	0.00%
Total		83	100%

Table 1 shows that *Subject-Verb Agreement* was the most frequently occurring grammatical error, with 49 cases or 59.04% of the total errors. *Sentence Structure* was the



second most frequent category, accounting for 17 errors or 20.48%. The remaining categories occurred considerably less frequently, namely *Modal Verb* with 6 errors (7.23%), *Verb Tense* and *Article* with 4 errors each (4.82%), and *Preposition* with 3 errors (3.61%). No error was identified in the *Logical Connector* category.

The distribution indicates that the students' grammatical difficulties were concentrated mainly in two areas: subject–verb agreement and sentence structure. Together, these two categories accounted for 66 of the 83 identified errors, representing 79.52% of all grammatical errors. This concentration provides a clearer picture of the students' most prominent grammatical difficulties and serves as the basis for the subsequent interpretation of the findings.

To examine the dominant error more closely, the identified errors were further considered according to their relative contribution to the total number of errors. The comparison among the seven categories is summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Frequency and Relative Contribution of Each Error Category

Error Category	Frequency	Contribution to Total Errors
<i>Subject–Verb Agreement</i>	49	59.04%
<i>Sentence Structure</i>	17	20.48%
<i>Modal Verb</i>	6	7.23%
<i>Verb Tense</i>	4	4.82%
<i>Article</i>	4	4.82%
<i>Preposition</i>	3	3.61%
<i>Logical Connector</i>	0	0.00%

Table 2 confirms that *Subject–Verb Agreement* was substantially more frequent than the other grammatical categories. Its 49 occurrences were more than twice the number of *Sentence Structure* errors and accounted for more than half of all errors found in the essays. In contrast, *Logical Connector* did not produce any identified error, suggesting that this grammatical aspect did not constitute a prominent difficulty in the analyzed essays.

The findings also show that grammatical errors were not evenly distributed across the categories. The relatively high occurrence of *Subject–Verb Agreement* indicates that students had greater difficulty maintaining agreement between subjects and verbs when constructing sentences. The considerable number of *Sentence Structure* errors further indicates that difficulties were not limited to individual grammatical forms but also involved the organization and construction of complete sentences.

The lower frequencies in *Modal Verb*, *Verb Tense*, *Article*, and *Preposition* indicate that these problems were present but less dominant in comparison with the first two categories. Meanwhile, the absence of errors in *Logical Connector* suggests that students were able to use connectors in the analyzed argumentative essays with comparatively fewer identifiable grammatical problems.

Overall, the results demonstrate that the principal grammatical problem in the students' argumentative essays was *Subject–Verb Agreement*, followed by *Sentence Structure*. Of the 83 errors identified, 49 occurred in *Subject–Verb Agreement* and 17 occurred in *Sentence Structure*. These findings establish the main empirical basis for the discussion of students' grammatical difficulties and their implications for writing instruction.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that grammatical errors remain a significant issue in the argumentative writing of the second-semester students. From 12 argumentative essays, 83



grammatical errors were identified across seven categories, with *Subject–Verb Agreement* accounting for 49 errors (59.04%) and *Sentence Structure* accounting for 17 errors (20.48%). Thus, 79.52% of all identified errors were concentrated in these two categories. This distribution indicates that the students' main difficulty was not evenly distributed across grammatical components but was particularly related to maintaining agreement between subjects and verbs and constructing grammatically complete sentences.

The dominance of *Subject–Verb Agreement* is consistent with previous error-analysis research showing that agreement remains a recurrent problem in EFL writing. Suraprajit (2021), for example, identified *Subject–Verb Agreement* as the most frequent error among the grammatical problems outside the main *Surface Strategy Taxonomy* categories in university students' English essays. This similarity suggests that agreement between subjects and verbs can remain problematic even when students are already engaged in university-level writing. However, the proportion found in the present study is considerably higher, indicating that this problem is particularly prominent among the second-semester students examined in the present context. The difference also demonstrates that the distribution of grammatical errors may vary according to students' educational level, writing task, and learning context.

The high frequency of *Subject–Verb Agreement* errors can be understood as an indication that students have not yet consistently applied basic grammatical rules when producing extended written texts. Agreement requires students to coordinate the subject, verb form, number, and tense within a sentence. In argumentative writing, this demand becomes more complex because students must simultaneously formulate claims, develop supporting ideas, and maintain grammatical accuracy. The finding therefore supports the view that grammatical competence constitutes an important foundation for academic writing (Imansyah, 2025; Putri, 2025). Rather than being an isolated grammatical problem, agreement errors can affect sentence accuracy and consequently interfere with the clarity of students' written expression.

The second most frequent category was *Sentence Structure*, with 17 errors (20.48%). This finding indicates that students' difficulties extended beyond individual grammatical forms to the construction and organization of sentences. Mubarok and Budiono (2022) likewise found several structural and grammatical problems in Indonesian EFL students' academic writing, including errors related to word order, auxiliary use, parallel structure, and redundancy. Their findings demonstrate that grammatical problems in student writing can involve multiple components of sentence construction rather than a single rule. The present study strengthens this observation by showing that *Sentence Structure* was the second dominant category after *Subject–Verb Agreement*.

The occurrence of *Sentence Structure* errors is particularly relevant to argumentative essays because the genre requires students to connect claims and supporting explanations in logically organized sentences. Students who have difficulty constructing complete and accurate sentences may have difficulty expressing relationships between ideas even when they understand the topic being discussed. This finding is consistent with Bulqiyah et al. (2021), who reported that tertiary students experience difficulties in essay writing, and with Hamdani and Abid (2025), who identified writing challenges among Indonesian EFL students. The present findings provide a more specific picture of these challenges by identifying sentence construction as one of the two most prominent grammatical problem areas.

The remaining errors occurred in *Modal Verb* (6 cases; 7.23%), *Verb Tense* (4 cases; 4.82%), *Article* (4 cases; 4.82%), and *Preposition* (3 cases; 3.61%). Although their frequencies



were lower, these categories remain relevant because they represent recurring grammatical components in academic writing. Suraprajit (2021) also found problems involving articles, prepositions, and tense in university students' essays, although the order and frequency differed from those found in the present study. This difference is important because it shows that error patterns cannot be assumed to be identical across EFL learners. The present study therefore contributes contextual evidence that, for these second-semester students, agreement and sentence construction require greater attention than the other grammatical categories examined.

The relatively low frequency of *Verb Tense* errors does not mean that tense mastery is unimportant. Pasaribu (2022) emphasizes the relationship between students' mastery of English tenses and their academic writing. Harahap (2023) likewise examined students' ability to construct compound sentences using the simple past tense, demonstrating that tense use remains an area of concern in English sentence production. In the present study, only four tense errors were identified. This relatively small number suggests that tense was not the dominant grammatical difficulty in the analyzed essays, but continued attention to tense accuracy remains necessary because tense contributes directly to the temporal clarity of written messages.

The occurrence of *Article* and *Preposition* errors also reflects grammatical difficulties commonly documented in EFL writing. Suraprajit's (2021) findings show that article and preposition errors can occur frequently in university-level English essays, while Mubarak and Budiono (2022) also identified article and preposition errors in Indonesian EFL students' academic writing. However, the lower frequencies of these categories in the present study indicate that they were not the central problems in the students' argumentative essays. This difference reinforces the importance of conducting context-specific error analysis rather than applying findings from other learner groups directly to the present students.

No error was identified in the *Logical Connector* category. This finding suggests that, within the essays analyzed, students were able to use logical connectors without producing errors that met the criteria established in the study. The absence of identified errors should not be interpreted as evidence that students have fully mastered discourse organization because the analysis focused specifically on grammatical errors. Nevertheless, the result provides a useful contrast with the high frequency of *Subject-Verb Agreement* and *Sentence Structure* errors and indicates that students' grammatical difficulties were concentrated in particular areas rather than occurring across every component examined.

The findings also have implications for the use of digital writing-support tools. The *grammar-checking application* was useful as a supporting instrument for identifying possible grammatical problems, but the final classification was determined manually by the researcher. This distinction is important because automated writing evaluation can provide useful feedback while still requiring users to interpret the accuracy and relevance of the suggestions. Dewi (2023) examined Grammarly as an automated writing evaluation tool from EFL students' perceptions, while Tambunan et al. (2022) investigated students' linguistic problems using Grammarly as automated writing evaluation feedback. Ummah and Bisriyah (2022) further highlighted that students may encounter inaccuracies in Grammarly Premium's feedback. These studies support the position that automated feedback can assist the writing process but should not replace contextual human analysis.

Overall, the findings indicate that the most pressing grammatical problems among the participants were *Subject-Verb Agreement* and *Sentence Structure*. The predominance of these two categories, which together represented 79.52% of all identified errors, suggests that writing instruction for these students should place stronger emphasis on fundamental sentence



construction and agreement before moving toward more complex aspects of academic writing. This interpretation is also relevant to the broader evidence that Indonesian EFL learners continue to experience grammatical difficulties in written production (Azizah et al., 2025; Hanif et al., 2026). Therefore, the findings provide a specific diagnostic basis for lecturers to design writing activities that target the grammatical problems most frequently demonstrated by students rather than treating all grammatical categories as equally problematic.

CONCLUSION

This study found 83 grammatical errors in the argumentative essays written by 12 second-semester students in the English Language Education Program at the Teaching and Technology Institute of Larantuka. The errors occurred in six of the seven categories analyzed, namely *Subject–Verb Agreement*, *Sentence Structure*, *Modal Verb*, *Verb Tense*, *Article*, and *Preposition*, while no error was identified in *Logical Connector*. *Subject–Verb Agreement* was the most dominant category, with 49 errors (59.04%), followed by *Sentence Structure* with 17 errors (20.48%). Together, these two categories accounted for 79.52% of all identified errors, indicating that students' primary grammatical difficulties were concentrated on subject–verb agreement and sentence construction. The findings provide a specific diagnostic picture of the grammatical problems that need greater attention in early academic writing instruction.

The study was limited by its small number of participants and its focus on second-semester students in a single English Language Education Program, so the findings should not be generalized to broader populations without considering differences in learner characteristics and educational contexts. In addition, the *grammar-checking application* was used only as a supporting instrument, with final error identification and classification determined through manual analysis. Future research could involve larger and more diverse groups of students, compare grammatical errors across different types of academic writing, and investigate instructional interventions specifically targeting *Subject–Verb Agreement* and *Sentence Structure*. Lecturers can also use the identified error patterns as a basis for developing focused grammar and academic writing activities while encouraging students to critically evaluate automated writing feedback rather than relying on it without contextual verification.

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