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## Sources of Students' Errors in EFL Writing in Indonesia

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### Abstract

*The purpose of this review paper is to compile studies related to the sources of errors made by Indonesian students in a writing skill, to summarize some prior findings in order to provide updated literature on error analysis, to identify difficulties that Indonesian students face in an EFL writing context, and to investigate the factors that influence writing success and failure. The results showed that three major factors contribute to students' errors in EFL writing in Indonesia: the influence of the first language on writing, large class sizes, and a lack of writing practice. This is reasonable, as studies have demonstrated that despite years spent in school learning English, a significant number of errors can still be found in writing products composed by university students. Therefore, the teacher can use several strategies, including implementing a specific learning strategy that affects the target language, reducing the number of students in the class so that they have enough time to practice writing based on the writing process, and providing better instruction in the structure and grammar sections. Furthermore, teachers should spend more time and effort outside of the classroom to help students receive feedback, particularly through conferencing.*

**Keywords:** EFL writing in Indonesia; error analysis; sources of students' errors; students' errors in EFL writing, writing skills

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**Citation in APA style:** Hapsari, W, E., Sudarman, S., Utami S. (2022). Sources of Students' Errors in EFL Writing in Indonesia. *JADEs Journal of Academia in English Educations*, Vol. 3 (2), 141-160

Received August 10<sup>th</sup>, 2022; November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2022; Accepted November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2022

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32505/jades.v3i2/4678>

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

It is widely accepted that writing is one of the four fundamental skills that English language learners must master. Not only does it assist learners in expressing themselves verbally, but it also serves as a benchmark for language proficiency (Tütüniş and Küçükali, 2014). Numerous studies, however, indicated that writing was the most difficult skill to compare to the others. Several of the most frequently cited reasons revealed that some of the sources of writing difficulty are its complex elements and the requirement for higher order thinking skills. Despite these difficulties, writing is frequently included as a required component of tests in both academic and professional fields. As a result, various research have been conducted to determine the best methods and techniques for teaching writing.

One way that a teacher can do to encourage students to write is by assigning various writing exercises. According to Wahyuni (2016), students' involvement is critical in developing learning experiences that benefit their writing skill performance. One form of personal involvement can be found in the writing exercises. By providing exercises, a teacher can create a space for students to practice and to be more productive. Unfortunately, most of the time, students receive more tasks in a form of product-based writing. Product-based writing or writing as a product usually focuses on a written-form analysis as a final product.

On the other hand, in doing the exercises students are demanded to focus on many different aspects of writing such as organization, mechanic, grammar, vocabulary, and many more. These issues have prompted numerous researchers to conduct research on error analysis, which entails analyzing errors made by English language learners, determining the source of errors, and providing solutions to English teachers. The studies of error analysis range from those conducted by

junior high school students to those conducted at the university level. This is reasonable, as studies have shown that even after years of time spent in school learning English, a significant number of errors can still be found in writing products composed by university students in Indonesia specifically.

This paper analyzes sources of errors made by Indonesia students in a writing skill and summarizes some prior findings in order to provide updated literature on error analysis and identifies difficulties that Indonesian students encounter in EFL writing context, as well as to investigate the factors that influence writing success and failure. As a result, it may provide English teachers with new insight into how to minimize errors in students' writing in the future.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 EFL Writing Skills**

In recent years, writing in English as a foreign language has gained in popularity, and many researchers have found evidence to support the hypothesis that the majority of students struggle with writing because it requires more complex thinking skills. According to Pincas, who was quoted in Asrifan (2015), the ability to write well is an essential component of effective communication, which cannot be divorced from the human experience.

Writing is a tool that can be used for both communicating with others and expressing oneself. "Writing skill is the best way to deliver messages to readers," claim Ali and Hasanah (2014, page 233), and "without writing, students may not be able to share their ideas apart from speaking as a natural way of communication." Writing is one of the skills that cannot be developed through natural means, according to H. Douglas Brown, who identified it as such (2007). It is considered to be the end

product of a process that involves thinking, drafting, and revising, all of which call for specialized abilities. Writing is a tool that, in addition to speaking naturally, helps people communicate. It also requires specific skills for people to be able to express themselves and share their ideas through writing. According to these definitions, writing is a tool that helps people communicate.

## **2.2. Elements in ELF Writing Skills**

In order to develop into a competent English writer, one must first acquire the necessary writing skills, each of which contains a number of essential components. According to Lipson and Wixson (2003), writing skills can be broken down into four categories. Composition is the first part of an element, and its name describes what it is. A learner is guided through the process of creating a piece of writing through what is known as a writing process. The process consists of a number of steps, including prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing the work.

The development of a larger vocabulary is the second part. In point of fact, having a large vocabulary is an essential component of good writing. Without it, a writer will be unable to convey an idea through their writing. On the other hand, vocabulary is a representation of the author's previous knowledge. If the reader is familiar with the subject matter, the writer will be able to convey messages or share ideas with the audience. As a consequence of this, it is highly likely that a writer will experience challenges when composing texts if he does not have adequate knowledge regarding a particular subject that he intends to write about.

Another essential aspect is grammatical correctness. The term "grammar" refers to a set of rules that are used to arrange words into meaningful units. The following component is called a usage, and it refers to the language that the author employs in order to attract readers.

Examples of usage include occasions, audiences, and goals. As a direct consequence of this, the writer's standards of language will shift depending on the demographics of the readership. The last step is the one involving the mechanic. It makes use of the appropriate capitalization and punctuation. In the writing process, it is essential because both will derive meaning from it. When people talk to one another, in contrast to when they listen to others, they can pause, stop, and use tone. It's possible that people will not be able to do that while they're writing. As a direct consequence of this, the mechanic operates in the same manner that writing does.

### **3. METHOD**

Several procedures were carried out in order to conduct this review paper. To begin, the researcher looked for papers with the keywords 'EFL writing in Indonesia,' 'Error analysis in writing,' 'causes of errors in EFL writing in Indonesia,' and 'interference of the first language in EFL writing.' Second, the papers that were discovered were sorted. Third, the researcher followed a similar procedure to the first step by consulting some books on writing instruction and principles. All of the full-text literature was downloaded and compiled into a computer file for easy retrieval. All of the papers were then filtered and screened to determine which ones were relevant and needed for this review paper. Finally, the literatures were reviewed in order to develop this study's rationale, theories, literatures, findings, and discussions.

### **4. RESULTS**

There is a strong tradition of writing research and teaching writing in the Indonesian EFL context. According to Fatimah and Masduqi (2017), there are three major themes in Indonesian EFL research writing: research

focusing on the writing process, research focusing on writing products, and research focusing on genre. To summarize, this study combines discussion of the writing process and products into one, then moves on to a genre-based approach.

Studies focusing on the writing process and products: Studies focusing on the writing process can be divided into two categories: those referring to writing pedagogy and those referring to the model of writing as process (Widiati and Cahyono, 2006). To begin with, writing pedagogy in an EFL setting as well as second language (L2) writing is widely used and when a teacher interacts with an L2 writer, L2 writing pedagogy is enacted – and some teachers are better prepared than others to work with L2 writers. In English, communicative competence includes knowledge of grammar and discourse. It also includes awareness of appropriate methods for establishing and maintaining social relationships with the audience, as well as strategic knowledge, such as writing processes knowledge. While first language (L1) writers are still working on improving their communication skills, they have a head start, (Matsuda and Hammill, 2014). On the other hand, writing process studies include those based on the writing as process model as well as those referring to writing pedagogy. The latter includes studies on the efficacy of various intervention strategies, such as conferencing, peer feedback, and collaborative work.

Hedgedock (2005) in Brown and Lee (2015) emphasized that writing process should include several phases such as multiple rough sketches, revisions, and formative feedback through conferencing to make sure it could engage the learners to develop their writing into a substantial writing. In Indonesia, however, most teachers employ "the traditional one-time writing task." Hapsari and Sukavatee, (2018). In addition,

Ariyanti (2016) defined it as a writing instruction that devotes a single meeting solely to writing abilities. In fact, teachers frequently assign students to write a text and grade them on it. As a result, it reduces the effectiveness of teaching instruction, particularly in writing, where the students, not the teachers, must practice. Furthermore, the teacher's role appears to be very dominant and takes up a lot of teacher-talking time. As with most language-teaching approaches, it is possible to go too far in emphasizing process to the point where the final product becomes secondary. After all, the product is the ultimate goal; it is the reason we go through the process of prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing. We risk drowning in a sea of revisions if we do not keep the end goal in mind. Process is not the goal; it is merely a means to an end (Brown and Lee, 2015).

Wang (2015) emphasized the significance of focusing on the process of writing, stating that understudies should constantly rework, change, and alter their writing to further develop it. Admittedly, those critical exercises are exceptionally difficult for teachers to perform, particularly in large classes, because the teacher should solely check and evaluate the students' work. Besides, this element implies that the teacher cannot hold a type of article meeting in regard to the notes composed by him, implying that the understudies require more of an opportunity to request clarification from the teacher in their writing.

When reduced to its most basic form, a process approach asks students to consider the steps involved in putting together a quality piece of work. When discussing the concept of first and final drafts with our students, we might ask them to indicate whether the activities listed here occur during the first or final stages, and then to arrange them in the most logical chronological order.

1. Examine the language used (grammar, vocabulary, linkers).
  2. Double-check your punctuation (and layout).
  3. Make sure your spelling is correct.
  4. Look for any instances of unnecessarily repeated words or information in your writing.
  5. Determine the information that should be included in each paragraph, as well as the order in which each paragraph and each paragraph should be included.
  6. Make a list of various ideas.
  7. Choose the best ideas for inclusion into the final product.
- Make an exact duplicate of the corrected version.
9. Create a rough draft of your writing.

Sadly, the writing process is more complex. Students rarely follow chronological order. Instead, they rewrite, edit, review, and so on. They may do this repeatedly. Perhaps this depicts the writing process as a 'wheel', with writers moving both around and across the spokes. Even after finishing the work, they may re-visit and re-plan stages they thought they had completed. In addition, these processes take a long time to complete. The various steps may necessitate discussion, research, language study, and a significant amount of interaction between students and teachers. As a result, many students find it difficult to express themselves creatively. In the end, they decided to focus on the product rather than the process because it takes a lot of time and energy to do it right. We also know that due to the time constraints imposed by the school, teaching writing in a classroom can be incredibly hard.

None of these processes, however, should preclude us from teaching our students how to write. In longer pieces of writing, such as essays, portfolios, and theses, the writing process is just as important as the final

product, and even in the writing exam or writing practice, students' ability to plan (quickly) and then read back through their work to make any necessary corrections is critical (Harmer, 2001).

Studies focusing on the genre-based approach: Genre represents the norms of various types of writing, including those seen in a discourse community. It can be seen in products such as advertisements, poetry, business letters, and so on. When teachers teach writing based on genre, they must also ensure that students are exposed to samples of the writing form in which they intend to write. If they want their students to write a newspaper article, the teacher should provide information, facts, and specific language that is frequently used in newspaper articles.

Gordon and Kana (2010) used an approach that highlighted three important features of genre writing in one study of their Japanese high school students' practice of writing application letters. First and foremost, writers must consider the context in which they are writing. Second, they must identify the audience for whom they are writing, and finally, they must examine how typically effective examples of genre writing are constructed. When they have finished this, they will be able to create their own writing within a genre.

According to the current national curriculum in Indonesia, writing instruction in Indonesia is centered on text genres such as narratives, descriptions, recounts, expositions, and argumentative texts (Hapsari and Sukavatee, 2018). Sukandi (2015) identified two main factors that teachers should keep in mind when teaching writing that focuses on genre, which are related to pedagogy and social issues. This is due to the fact that students in Indonesia come from all over the region. They are native speakers of their own regional mother tongue, which serves as their first language. This is a challenge that all Indonesian teachers must contend

with (Sukandi, 2015). Consequently, in this situation, the use of appropriate strategies and approaches in writing instruction is essential.

## 5. FINDINGS and DISCUSSION

### Indonesian Students' Sources of Errors in EFL Writing

#### The influence of the First Language

A large number of researchers conducted research in Indonesia to learn more about the writing environment. What they discovered was extremely eye-opening. Megaiab (2014) conducted a study to determine the writing abilities of Indonesian senior high school students in 2014. According to the findings of the study, students' ability to learn English may be influenced by their first language. Learning English as a foreign language is made more difficult for students by the distinct form and formula that does not appear in the mother tongue. As a result, it is unavoidable for students to make mistakes, particularly when it comes to language features such as grammar (e.g., spelling, preposition, tenses, etc.).

The students also have difficulty with punctuation and capitalization, which is another source of frustration. Megaiab discovers through her research that the problems that the students are experiencing are due to the fact that writing was not taught in an effective way by the teacher and was not learned to its full potential by the students due to a lack of time allotted for it rather than other aspects of English.

Ariyanti (2016) stated that the greatest challenge is derived from the disparity in cultural backgrounds between the students' mother tongue and English, which makes it possible to determine that the production of their writing does not 'sound' well in the appropriate culture of English. When Mukminin and Anshari (2015) investigated the experiences of students and teachers in English academic writing socialization at a

university teacher training program in Jambi, Indonesia, they discovered more specific obstacles. In their research, they discovered five types of problems that students and teachers face when writing in English academic writing and one of them is the participants face difficulties in arranging good sentences and paragraphs in English where the style is quite different from their mother tongue.

In line with Megaiab (2014) and Mukminin and colleagues (2015), Fauziati (2017) also conducted a study under the title “Native and Target Language Influence on the Students’ Interlanguage Production: A Case of Indonesia EFL Compositions”. This study focuses on one of the characteristics of interlanguages: permeability, which refers to an interlanguage's susceptibility to infiltration by first language and target language rules or forms. The findings indicated that Indonesian students’ interlanguage production was influenced by both their native language and the target language at both the lexical and syntactic levels, indicating that they were bilingual. The most significant native language influence was on vocabulary (i.e. Indonesian borrowings), and the most significant target language influence was on grammar (i.e. English borrowings) (i.e. verb tenses). When compared to the influence of the target language, the native language had a slightly lower frequency of occurrence. One of the most significant sources of influence was the fact that they possessed two language systems in their minds, which were activated regardless of their intention to use only one language. The influence of the native language was due to the high level of mastery of the native language and the limited knowledge of the target language in this case. The learning strategy employed had an impact on the target language's influence.

### Big Class Writing

In addition to the differences between mother tongue and English format, Ariyanti (2016) also identified when teachers have large groups of students to teach, a variety of issues arise, and the goal of teaching writing to students may be frustrated or completely defeated. It cannot be denied that the greater the number of students in a class, the more time the teacher will need to devote to teaching English, and particularly writing. In fact, even a single student will require a significant amount of time to complete a single piece of writing because it involves a complex process, as previously discussed, that includes drafting, editing, and revising.

Besides, the teacher himself must set aside an adequate amount of time to provide feedback to students, which can be difficult given the fact that a typical Indonesian classroom can hold anywhere from 30 to 40 students. Even if the teacher intends to spare some of his or her time to check students' work and conduct conferences at home, there will be an insufficient amount of time and energy to complete the work for a large number of students. The findings of Lin (2009) research revealed that the most difficult aspect for him was a large class writing assignment that resulted in the ability of the students' writing not improving significantly because it was extremely difficult to assess the writing of each individual student.

Consequently, Gultom (2016) suggested in his study that if we want to achieve better results, English language instruction in Indonesia must be improved. Although, he did not mention writing instruction specifically, but when we discuss about English instruction in general, the four skills are there and so is writing instruction. He stated that the government should allocate additional time for students to learn the

language. The class size should be reduced to ensure that each student has adequate time to practice and use the language.

#### Lack of Practice

According to Hasan & Marzuki (2017) in their research entitled “An Analysis of Student’s Ability in Writing at Riau University Pekanbaru – Indonesia” English skills, of course, take time to accomplish this because students' ability in the productive skills, particularly writing, is extremely limited. Despite the fact that they have been studying English since Junior High School, they are still unable to compose a coherent single paragraph. Some of this may be due to a lack of practice on your part. Furthermore, because the materials place a greater emphasis on reading, students have less opportunity to speak and write. Many students do, in fact, enroll in English courses at other institutions, but the courses place a greater emphasis on conversational skills than on writing. The students' writing performance does not significantly improve until they are seated at the university as a result of these circumstances.

As a result, regardless of the difficulties associated with writing instruction, teachers should devote sufficient time to it. Teachers are expected to be able to overcome these difficulties by implementing an effective method of instruction, both inside and outside the classroom, because writing is an act of practicing what has been learned through experience (Ariyanti, 2016). Their writing skills could be improved if they had more practice time and received better instruction (Hapsari & Sukavatee, 2018). Another study from Hartono & Maharani (2020) revealed that After grammar, vocabulary, and lack of writing practice, anxiety is cited as the most common cause. Teachers of writing should focus on grammar and vocabulary and give students plenty of opportunities to practice writing in order to help alleviate anxiety.

In line with Hartono & Maharani, Toba, Noor, & Sanu (2019) in their study mentioned some of the students encounter problems in writing aspects including content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics. Their reasons in experiencing these problems are not only limited knowledge of writing aspects and comparison and contrast essay itself, but also, they had own personal reasons; lack of writing practice, writing dislike, writing anxiety, negative writing perception, low writing motivation, insufficient time given in writing test, and also inadequate teaching writing process taught by their lecturers.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Among the causes of students' errors in EFL writing in Indonesia are three main factors: the influence of the first language on the writing, large class sizes, and lack of practice in writing. In the first place, one of the most significant sources of influence was the fact that they possessed two language systems in their minds, which were activated regardless of whether they had the intention of speaking only one language at the time. It was the native language that exerted its influence in this case, owing to the high level of mastery of the native language and the limited knowledge of the target language in this instance. For the second, a large class means that there are more students in the classroom, which means that students must spend more time practicing, particularly in the writing process. As previously discussed, a single student will require a significant amount of time to complete a single piece of writing because it involves a complex process that includes drafting, editing, and revising in addition to the other steps mentioned.

The teacher must also set aside sufficient time to provide feedback to students, which can be difficult given the fact that a typical Indonesian classroom can hold anywhere from 30 to 40 students. There will be insufficient time and energy to complete the work for a large number of

students, even if the teacher intends to set aside some of his or her own time to check students' assignments and hold conferences at their homes. At the end of the day, students clearly did not have enough time to practice writing due to a variety of factors, including time spent primarily on reading rather than writing practice.

In addition, there are numerous factors that contribute to the difficulty of teaching EFL writing in Indonesia. A few examples include those listed above. Rather than focusing solely on the influence of the first language in order to resolve these issues (which were initially related to it), the learning strategy that was implemented had an impact on the influence of the target language. Secondly, in the case of a large writing class with a large number of students, the class size should be reduced to ensure that each student has adequate time to practice and use the language they are learning in the classroom. A final point to make is that writers should concentrate on grammar and vocabulary, while providing students with ample opportunities to practice writing. As previously stated, this will help to alleviate anxiety by providing better instruction.

Furthermore, teachers should put in more effort and time outside of the classroom to assist students in receiving feedback, particularly through conferencing, which has been shown to be effective. To reduce the typical number of students in Indonesia, it is necessary to conduct an ongoing study to determine which strategies are most effective in eliminating the influence of the first language. The government must also be involved in order to reduce the typical number of students. Consequently, the teacher is able to concentrate on each stage of the writing process.

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