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A Study of Grammar and Cohesion Errors in English Writing among Eighth-Grade Students at MTs Miftahul Ulum Magersari

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Abstract— Writing in English is regarded as a crucial skill for secondary school students, as it is through writing that grammatical proficiency and coherence in text construction are demonstrated. However, many students still struggle with constructing accurate and cohesive texts. This study aims to analyze grammatical and cohesive errors in the English writing of eighth-grade students at MTs Miftahul Ulum Magersari. A qualitative descriptive method was applied, using students' writing samples as data. This research utilized the surface strategy taxonomy to classify and examine the types of errors present in students' written work. The findings indicated that the most common grammatical mistakes involved incorrect use of tenses, mismatches between subjects and verbs, and improper application of articles. Cohesion errors mostly include the misuse of conjunctions and reference words. These errors reflect students' insufficient mastery of grammatical structures and cohesive devices, thereby hindering the overall clarity and effectiveness of their writing. The findings emphasize the need for focused teaching on grammar and cohesion to improve writing skills. The findings provide pedagogical implications for educators, particularly in diagnosing common writing issues and formulating more effective instructional methods.

Keywords -- grammar, cohesion, writing, error analysis

Abstrak— Menulis dalam bahasa Inggris merupakan keterampilan penting bagi siswa sekolah menengah pertama karena mencerminkan pemahaman tata bahasa dan kohesi. Meskipun pembelajaran telah dilaksanakan, sejumlah siswa masih mengalami hambatan dalam menyusun teks berbahasa Inggris yang benar secara gramatikal dan memiliki keterkaitan antar kalimat yang baik. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengkaji berbagai kesalahan yang berkaitan dengan tata bahasa dan unsur kohesi dalam tulisan bahasa Inggris siswa kelas VIII di MTs Miftahul Ulum Magersari, dengan pendekatan deskriptif. Metode yang digunakan adalah deskriptif kualitatif dengan menganalisis tulisan siswa. Kesalahan diklasifikasikan menggunakan taksonomi strategi permukaan. Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa kesalahan gramatikal yang dominan meliputi ketidaktepatan dalam penggunaan waktu kerja (tenses), ketidaksesuaian antara subjek dan kata kerja, serta penggunaan artikel yang tidak sesuai. Sementara itu, kesalahan kohesi umumnya berupa penggunaan konjungsi dan kata rujuk yang tidak tepat. Hal ini menunjukkan bahwa siswa masih memiliki keterbatasan dalam menguasai struktur gramatikal dan perangkat kohesif yang memengaruhi kejelasan tulisan. Temuan ini menekankan pentingnya pengajaran yang terfokus pada aspek tata bahasa dan kohesi dalam menulis. Hasil penelitian ini diharapkan dapat menjadi sumber acuan yang bermanfaat bagi para guru dalam mengidentifikasi permasalahan umum yang dihadapi siswa serta dalam merancang strategi pembelajaran yang lebih efektif.

Kata Kunci - tata bahasa, kohesi, menulis, analisis kesalahan

INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization, English has become an essential medium of communication across nations, playing a significant role in various domains such as education, business, science, and technology. In Indonesia, the status of English as a foreign language has led to its integration into the national curriculum from an early age. This emphasis aims to equip students with the necessary language competencies to compete globally, particularly in written communication, which is a core academic skill.

Among the four language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—writing is often regarded as the most demanding. It is not merely a matter of putting words on paper but involves a complex cognitive process that includes idea generation, logical organization, syntactic accuracy, and cohesive structuring. Effective writing requires mastery of grammar and cohesion to ensure clarity, coherence, and the successful conveyance of meaning. According to Hyland (2003), writing is a recursive process that demands constant revision and critical thinking, while Brown (2001) notes that writing allows individuals to express a range of The ability to organize thoughts and ideas effectively in both formal and informal settings remains a key challenge for many learners.

Despite its significance, writing remains one of the most difficult skills for EFL students to master, especially at the secondary school level.. Errors related to grammar—such as verb tense, subject-verb agreement, and sentence structure—and cohesion—such as misuse of conjunctions, pronouns, and logical connectors—are frequently observed in student compositions. These errors not only disrupt the flow of ideas but also hinder the overall effectiveness of the text. As Ellis (2008) explains, such errors reflect a learner's interlanguage, revealing transitional linguistic features that emerge as learners move from their native language to the target language.

Error analysis has consistently proven effective for gaining insight into second language learning processes and pinpointing learners' specific challenges. By systematically examining students' written work, educators can identify common patterns of errors and their underlying causes, thereby designing more targeted instructional strategies. Past research has highlighted the necessity of addressing grammatical and cohesive shortcomings to improve students' writing competence. Nonetheless, there remains a pressing need for context-specific research, particularly within the Indonesian EFL classroom setting, where sociolinguistic and educational variables are likely to shape language learning outcomes.

This study focuses on eighth-grade students at MTs Miftahul Ulum Magersari, a junior high school where students are observed to struggle with English writing, particularly in terms of grammar and cohesion. Through an in-depth analysis of their writing errors, this research aims to uncover prevalent challenges, contribute to the existing body of knowledge in EFL error analysis, and provide practical insights for improving teaching practices. The findings are expected to not only enhance students' writing skills but also support teachers in developing more effective, data-driven pedagogical interventions tailored to learners' specific needs.

RESEARCH METHODS

A qualitative descriptive method was employed to examine grammatical and cohesion errors in the English compositions of eighth-grade students at MTs Miftahul Ulum Magersari. The qualitative approach was chosen to allow for a comprehensive and contextual examination of the students' writing skills, focusing particularly on their difficulties in using correct grammar and cohesive devices. Drawing on Ellis (2008), who highlighted the value of error analysis in second language learning, this study aimed to uncover consistent linguistic error patterns, particularly in verb usage tense, subject-verb agreement, word order, and the use of cohesive elements such as conjunctions, pronouns, and transitions.

The study was carried out at MTs Miftahul Ulum Magersari, situated in the Magersari area, during the last two weeks of February 2025. This school was selected due to its relevance to the research focus and the observed challenges faced by students in English writing. Participants included 11 eighth-grade students, and five students identified as high achievers in English. Their involvement ensured a balanced representation of perspectives from both learners and educators.

Data were collected using three main techniques: Writing exercises given to the 11 participants functioned as the main dataset to pinpoint specific issues related to grammar and cohesion. Observations conducted in the classroom enriched the contextual understanding by capturing students' immediate responses to writing tasks, focusing especially on how they managed grammar and cohesion.

The data analysis process involved multiple stages. Initially, student writing was examined to classify types of grammatical and cohesion errors. These errors were then grouped thematically to reveal dominant patterns. Interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis to extract key themes related to student challenges, teaching strategies, and perceptions of writing competence. The findings from each data source were triangulated to provide a comprehensive understanding of the nature and causes of writing errors, particularly those impacting clarity and coherence.

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, several validation strategies were employed. Triangulation was used to cross-verify information from different sources and data collection methods. Member checking was conducted by returning interview summaries to participants for confirmation and clarification. Peer debriefing sessions with academic peers helped to refine the interpretation and minimize researcher bias. Furthermore, an audit trail was maintained throughout the research process to document every step taken, ensuring transparency and accountability.

By combining diverse data sources and implementing meticulous validation steps, this research presents a comprehensive and detailed insight into the obstacles students encounter in developing English writing skills.

RESULT

This study aimed to analyze students' writing performance and observable behavior during a writing test conducted in English. The results are based on two sources of data: the assessment of students' written texts (N = 11) and direct observation during the writing process.

1. Writing Test Assessment

An evaluation of eleven writing samples revealed recurring issues in five major aspects of writing: grammar, cohesion, structure and organization, word choice, and neatness. The summary of findings across these areas is presented below:

a. Grammar

The majority of students showed consistent errors in tense usage, subject-verb agreement, article and pronoun usage, verb forms, and plural/singular distinctions. Most of the sentences contained grammatical errors, with average rubric scores falling between 1 and 2 on a 4-point scale

b. Cohesion

Students rarely used conjunctions or transitional devices effectively. The absence of cohesive ties made their writing appear fragmented. The connections within and between sentences were frequently ambiguous. Average scores for cohesion ranged from 1 to 2.

c. Structure and Organization

The students' written work frequently exhibited inadequately organized paragraphs and a limited range of syntactic structures. Students typically composed single blocks of text using mostly simple sentence structures. The organizational elements of the writing were generally rated between 1 and 2, indicating only average performance

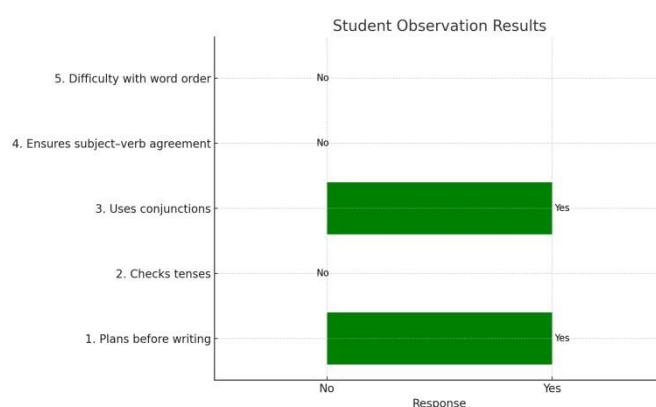
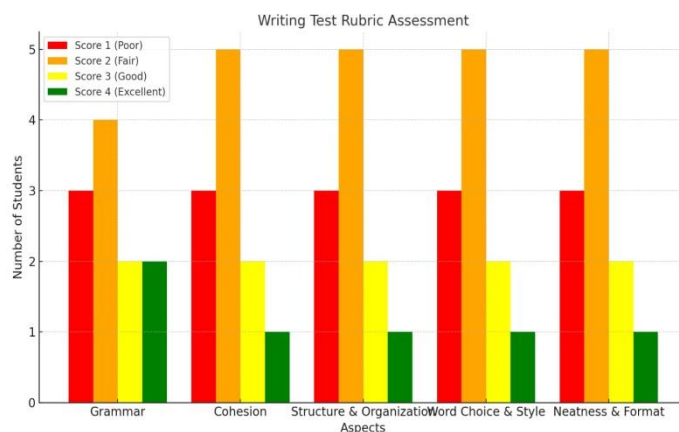
d. Word Choice and Style

Vocabulary use was limited and often imprecise. Many sentences were hard to comprehend due to imprecise or vague word choices. This area showed one of the lowest performance levels, with most students scoring 1 or 2.

e. Neatness and Format

Spelling errors were prevalent. Common formatting problems included misuse of punctuation, inconsistent use of capital letters, and absence of paragraph breaks. Scores in this aspect were predominantly 1.

The average rubric scores across various components are illustrated in the chart below:



> Note: The scoring scale used was 1 = Poor, 2 = Fair, 3 = Good, and 4 = Excellent.

2. Student Observation Findings

A checklist comprising five key indicators was systematically employed to observe and record students' engagement during the writing activities.. The results are summarized below:

The observation indicates that while students made efforts to plan their writing and use basic conjunctions, they showed a lack of attention to essential grammar components such as tense accuracy and subject-verb agreement. Interestingly, students appeared unaware of their struggles with word order, as indicated by the mismatch between observation and writing performance.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that the writing proficiency of eighth-grade students at MTs Miftahul Ulum remains at a foundational level, with various linguistic and structural challenges observed across the 11 writing samples analyzed. Frequently observed problems included tense errors, mismatches between subjects and verbs, restricted vocabulary, poorly organized ideas, and weak paragraph structure. These findings are consistent with the observation data, which showed that students did not consistently monitor their use of grammatical tenses or ensure proper subject-verb agreement during the writing process.

With regard to textual cohesion, many students demonstrated difficulties in employing appropriate transitional devices, resulting in fragmented and weakly integrated ideas. Nevertheless, the observation data also revealed emerging positive habits, such as initial planning before writing and the frequent use of basic connectors like *and* or *because*. These practices may serve as a foundation for future development.

The overall low ratings in vocabulary, clarity, and formatting suggest a lack of exposure to authentic English materials and minimal structured writing practice. Furthermore, the lack of sentence variety suggests that students rely heavily on simple sentence structures, possibly due to low confidence or unfamiliarity with more complex grammatical forms.

These findings emphasize the need for targeted instruction in grammar, vocabulary enrichment, and paragraph development. Structured writing activities—such as sentence transformation exercises, guided paragraph construction, and peer feedback sessions—can support learners in producing more coherent and grammatically accurate texts.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the writing competence of eighth-grade students at MTs Miftahul Ulum requires substantial improvement, particularly in grammatical accuracy, idea organization, lexical range, and text coherence. Although some students employed basic writing strategies, including pre-writing plans and elementary connectors, their usage remained below the standard conventions of academic English writing.

The results suggest that writing instruction should prioritize explicit grammar teaching, scaffolded writing tasks, and regular formative assessment using clear rubrics. Providing continuous feedback and integrating collaborative learning approaches could help students build confidence and improve their writing performance over time.

It is recommended that future research explore the effects of particular teaching methods on improving students' writing competencies.. Conducting a longitudinal study with pre- and post-intervention assessments may yield deeper An in-depth comprehension of students' writing progression may serve as a foundation for the development of more effective and pedagogically sound instructional strategies

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