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Vocabulary Error Analysis in EFL Writing of Junior High School Students

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ABSTRACT

Vocabulary mastery is a fundamental aspect of writing in English as a foreign language, as it enables learners to express ideas accurately and meaningfully. Limited vocabulary often leads to errors that reduce the clarity and quality of students' written texts. This study aims to analyze the types of vocabulary errors in junior high school students' English writing and identify the factors contributing to these errors. A descriptive qualitative approach with document analysis was employed, analyzing 20 written texts from students of SMP Negeri 4 Pringsewu. The findings reveal that vocabulary errors are prevalent and systematic, with word choice errors and lexical error chains being the most dominant. Other common errors include word form, collocation, and semantic errors, often caused by interlanguage development, limited depth of vocabulary knowledge, cognitive load, and insufficient integration of vocabulary instruction with writing practice. The study concludes that vocabulary errors in EFL writing are interconnected rather than isolated and significantly affect writing quality. For educational practice, it is recommended that teachers integrate contextualized vocabulary instruction into writing activities, emphasize collocations and semantic accuracy, and use writing tasks as diagnostic tools to improve students' lexical competence.

Keywords: Phonological aspects; English pronunciation; EFL learners;junior high school students; speaking skills.

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary mastery is a fundamental component of writing skills in English as a foreign language. Vocabulary enables writers to express ideas, thoughts, and experiences accurately and meaningfully (Chuane et al., 2022; Noviarini, 2017; Pratiwi & Fransiska, 2022). Without adequate vocabulary knowledge, the writing process tends to be constrained even when learners have already understood sentence structures (Allagui & Al Naqbi, 2024). In the context of EFL learning, vocabulary functions not only as a lexical element but also as a bridge between thought and written expression. Therefore, the quality of writing is largely determined by the ability to select and use words appropriately. Limited vocabulary mastery often has a direct impact on the low quality of students' written production (Allagui & Al Naqbi, 2024; Wu et al., 2021).

Writing is considered one of the most complex language skills in English language learning (Izzati, 2024; Noviarini, 2022, 2024; Prihatini, 2024). It requires the integration of vocabulary knowledge, grammatical accuracy, idea organization, and the ability to convey meaning coherently (Gustina Sari, 2023; Ning, 2024; Sotomayor, 2023). Unlike oral skills, errors in writing are clearly visible and remain permanently in written texts. This condition makes writing the most vulnerable skill to linguistic errors. In classroom practice, writing is frequently perceived as the most challenging skill to master. This challenge is further intensified when vocabulary instruction is not optimally integrated into writing activities (Goldman et al., 2024; Johnson et al., 2017).

At the junior high school level, many English written texts still contain various vocabulary errors. These errors commonly appear in the form of inappropriate word choice, incorrect word forms, and mismatches between meaning and context. In several schools in Pringsewu, Lampung, such phenomena are evident in simple writing tasks such as descriptive and narrative texts. Students are often able to construct sentences, yet the intended meaning is not accurately conveyed. This situation indicates a gap between vocabulary knowledge and the ability to use vocabulary functionally in writing.

General problems in writing are not only related to sentence structure but also to limited vocabulary mastery. Many beginner writers rely heavily on vocabulary that is directly translated from their first language. As a result, words may be grammatically acceptable but semantically inappropriate. This condition causes written texts to sound unnatural and difficult to understand. Moreover, limited vocabulary resources lead to repetitive and less varied writing. These issues demonstrate that vocabulary mastery plays a crucial role in determining the quality of writing.

Vocabulary errors in writing cannot be separated from the process of foreign language acquisition (Kamiya & Nakata, 2021; Pratiwi & Fransiska, 2022; Wu et al., 2021). In this process, making errors is a natural and inevitable phenomenon. However, errors that occur repeatedly and remain unanalyzed may hinder the development of writing ability. Therefore, language errors should be viewed as valuable sources of information for educators. Error analysis allows teachers to identify the most problematic areas in language learning. Consequently, errors should not be regarded as failures but as opportunities to improve instructional practices (Florianus & Syamsi, 2021; Huong et al., 2024).

The concept of error analysis serves as a relevant approach to examining such linguistic problems (Florianus & Syamsi, 2021; Huong et al., 2024; Mariappan et al., 2022; "Study of Errors and English Language Teaching: A Systematic Review," 2018). Error analysis aims to identify, classify, and explain the errors made by language learners. This approach provides insight into systematic patterns of errors (De Tommaso, 2020; Macías Borrego, 2024; Zhang et al., 2022). Through error analysis, the causes of errors can be traced, whether they stem from first language interference or limited mastery of the target language. In the context of writing, error analysis helps explain how vocabulary is used in written texts. It also offers empirical evidence for improving teaching strategies (Al-Hamzi et al., 2023; Florianus & Syamsi, 2021).

Vocabulary in writing skills is not merely related to the number of words known but also to the ability to use those words appropriately (Kilic, 2019; Yanagisawa & Webb, 2019). Effective vocabulary use includes accurate word choice, correct word forms, proper collocations, and semantic appropriateness (Fahnestock, 2021). Errors in any of these aspects may alter or obscure sentence meaning. In EFL writing, vocabulary errors tend to be more dominant than grammatical errors. This condition indicates that vocabulary instruction requires greater attention in writing instruction. Vocabulary should therefore be taught contextually and applied meaningfully (Baharuddin et al., 2022; Xhemaili & Maliqi, 2024).

Vocabulary errors in writing can be classified into several categories. Word form errors occur when writers use inappropriate word classes. Word choice errors appear when selected words do not match the intended context. Collocation errors result from the use of unnatural word combinations in English (Moqimipour & Shahrokhi, 2015; Yang & Wang, 2022). In addition, semantic errors frequently arise from direct translation from the first language. This classification is essential for understanding the characteristics of vocabulary errors systematically.

Previous studies have shown that vocabulary errors are a common issue in EFL writing. Several studies report that inappropriate word choice and semantic errors are the most frequently occurring types (KAZAZOĞLU, 2020; Khan, 2022). Other research indicates that limited active vocabulary is a major factor contributing to poor writing quality. Some studies also emphasize the significant role of first language interference in causing vocabulary errors (Zhai, 2016). However, most existing studies focus on general contexts without exploring specific local conditions. This gap highlights the need for more context-sensitive research.

In the local context of Pringsewu, Lampung, research on vocabulary error analysis in writing remains relatively limited. Yet, learning characteristics and students' linguistic backgrounds may influence the patterns of errors produced. Each educational context has its own dynamics and challenges. Therefore, research grounded in real classroom conditions is highly necessary. Vocabulary error analysis in this context is expected to provide an authentic depiction of writing problems. The findings may serve as a basis for more contextualized instructional improvement.

Based on the above considerations, conducting an analysis of vocabulary errors in English writing is highly urgent. This study focuses not only on identifying the types of vocabulary errors but also on determining the dominant error patterns. By understanding these patterns, educators

can design more effective vocabulary instruction. This research is also expected to contribute theoretically to the field of error analysis. Furthermore, the findings can be used as reflective material in writing instruction.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the types of vocabulary errors found in English writing and to identify the factors contributing to these errors. The contribution of this research lies in providing empirical data on vocabulary errors within the EFL learning context at the junior high school level. Practically, the findings are expected to serve as a reference for teachers in designing vocabulary instruction integrated with writing activities. Theoretically, this study enriches the discussion of error analysis in English language teaching. Thus, this research holds strong academic and pedagogical relevance.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach with a document analysis design to examine vocabulary errors in students' English writing. The research data consisted of 20 written texts produced by students of SMP Negeri 4 Pringsewu, which were obtained through an English writing task assigned by the teacher. The data were selected purposively by considering the completeness of text structure and the readability of the students' writing. This study was not intended to measure students' writing ability quantitatively, but rather to provide an in-depth description of the types and tendencies of vocabulary errors that appeared in the students' written texts.

The research procedure was conducted systematically, starting from data collection to the presentation of the analysis results. The overall research flow is illustrated in Figure 1, which depicts the sequential and structured stages of vocabulary error analysis applied in this study.

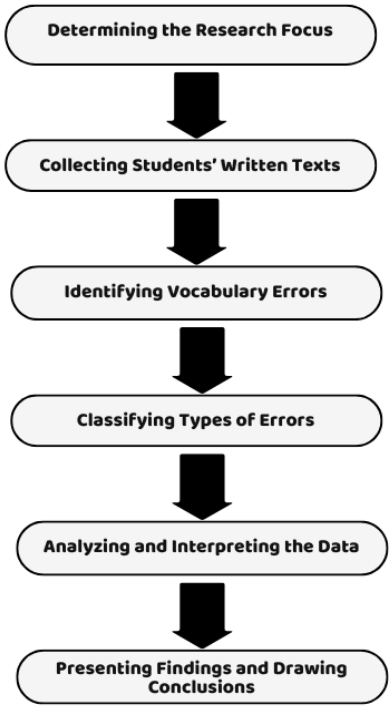


Figure 1. Research Procedure of Vocabulary Error Analysis

The data were collected through documentation techniques by gathering students' written texts that were completed independently. These texts were produced as part of regular English writing assignments, ensuring that the data reflected students' authentic language use without immediate teacher intervention. The collected data were then analyzed using a systematic error analysis procedure, which involved three main stages: identification, classification, and interpretation of errors. Vocabulary errors were categorized into four major types: word form errors, word choice errors, collocation errors, and semantic errors, based on both linguistic theory

and practical writing conventions. To ensure analytical consistency and reliability, a vocabulary error analysis rubric was employed as a guideline for identifying and categorizing errors in each student's text. This rubric provided clear criteria for distinguishing between different error types, reducing subjectivity in the analysis. Additionally, representative examples of errors were documented to illustrate patterns and tendencies, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of students' lexical challenges. By following these procedures, the study aimed to produce an accurate, detailed, and contextualized depiction of vocabulary errors in junior high school students' English writing.

Table 1. Vocabulary Error Analysis Rubric

Vocabulary Aspect	Error Indicator	Description
Word Form	Part-of-speech errors	The use of word forms that do not correspond to their grammatical function within a sentence
Word Choice	Inappropriate word selection	The use of words that are contextually inappropriate
Collocation	Non-standard collocation	The use of unnatural or uncommon word combinations in English
Semantic Error	Meaning deviation	Distortion of meaning caused by direct translation

The trustworthiness of the data was ensured through theoretical triangulation, by comparing the analysis results with established theories of language errors and findings from previous related studies. The analysis process was conducted repeatedly to ensure the accuracy of vocabulary error classification. The findings were then presented in the form of narrative descriptions, supported by representative examples of errors taken from the students' written texts. Through these procedures, the study is expected to provide an accurate and contextualized depiction of the characteristics of vocabulary errors in students' English writing.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Writing is a productive language skill that requires learners to integrate vocabulary knowledge, grammatical accuracy, and meaning construction simultaneously. In EFL contexts, writing often becomes the most challenging skill because learners must actively retrieve and apply lexical items appropriately within written discourse. Vocabulary plays a central role in shaping clarity, coherence, and accuracy in students' writing. Inadequate vocabulary control frequently results in lexical errors that distort meaning and reduce the overall quality of written texts. Therefore, examining vocabulary errors in students' writing provides valuable insights into their lexical competence and writing development.

Based on the qualitative analysis of 20 students' written texts, a wide range of vocabulary errors was identified. These errors were not isolated occurrences but appeared systematically across different students and writing tasks. The findings indicate that vocabulary errors significantly affected the effectiveness of students' written communication and reflected underlying issues in vocabulary acquisition and usage.

Types of Vocabulary Errors in Students' Writing

The analysis identified four major categories of vocabulary errors: word form errors, word choice errors, collocation errors, and semantic errors. However, each category often appeared in multiple forms within the same student text, sometimes occurring simultaneously, which indicates that vocabulary difficulties are interconnected rather than isolated. Such overlapping errors suggest that once a student makes an initial lexical mistake, it can trigger additional errors in related words or phrases within the same sentence or paragraph. Table 3 illustrates multiple vocabulary errors produced by individual informants, providing a realistic and detailed representation of the challenges faced by junior secondary learners in writing. The presence of

these errors highlights gaps not only in the students' vocabulary knowledge but also in their ability to apply words appropriately in context. Moreover, the patterns observed in the data can serve as a diagnostic tool for educators to identify specific areas where students struggle, enabling more targeted and effective vocabulary instruction. These findings also reinforce the notion that teaching vocabulary in isolation may not be sufficient; integration with meaningful writing practice is essential to address recurring and compound lexical errors.

Table 2. Types of Vocabulary Errors Found in Students' Writing

Informant	Error Type	Erroneous Expression	Correct Form
S2	Word Form	*I am very happy because study English*	*I am very happy because I study English*
	Word Choice	*English is very important lesson*	*English is a very important subject*
	Semantic Error	*I follow my teacher explanation*	*I follow my teacher's explanation*
S6	Word Form	*My mother work as teacher*	*My mother works as a teacher*
	Word Choice	*She is very discipline person*	*She is a very disciplined person*
	Collocation	*Give me many advices*	*Give me much advice*
S9	Word Choice	*My house is small but comfortable enough*	*My house is small but comfortable*
	Collocation	*Make homework every night*	*Do homework every night*
	Semantic Error	*I am boring when English class*	*I am bored during English class*

Dominant Vocabulary Error Patterns in Writing Texts

Beyond isolated errors, the data revealed recurring error chains, where one lexical error triggered another within the same sentence. Table 4 summarizes dominant error patterns found across multiple informants.

Table 3. Recurrent Vocabulary Error Patterns Across Texts

Error Pattern	Description	Informant Initials
Chained word form–word choice errors	Incorrect word form followed by inappropriate lexical choice	S1, S6, S11, S18
Literal translation sequences	Series of words translated directly from Indonesian	S2, S9, S14, S17
Repetitive basic vocabulary	Overuse of simple adjectives (*good, big, very*)	S3, S7, S10
Collocation clusters	Multiple unnatural combinations in one paragraph	S5, S8, S16

These findings suggest that vocabulary errors are structurally embedded in students' writing processes. Once an inappropriate lexical choice is made, subsequent word selections tend to follow the same flawed pattern.

Expanded Analysis of Vocabulary Error Characteristics

Word form errors were widespread and often involved confusion between verbs, nouns, and adjectives. Students frequently used base forms without considering grammatical function, indicating incomplete lexical knowledge rather than random mistakes.

Word choice errors were the most dominant and appeared in nearly all texts. Students selected words based on perceived similarity rather than contextual suitability, resulting in expressions that were grammatically acceptable but semantically inappropriate.

Collocation errors revealed limited exposure to natural English input. Students combined familiar words without awareness of conventional pairings, producing expressions that sounded unnatural despite being understandable.

Semantic errors frequently stemmed from direct translation strategies. These errors often distorted meaning and, in some cases, altered the intended message entirely, reducing communicative effectiveness.

Factors Contributing to Extensive Vocabulary Errors

The presence of multiple errors within individual texts indicates several underlying factors. Table 4 presents contributing factors supported by qualitative evidence.

Table 4. Factors Influencing Multiple Vocabulary Errors

Factor	Explanation	Evidence
Interlanguage development	Learners rely on evolving internal language systems	Systematic repeated errors
Limited depth of vocabulary knowledge	Words known only at surface level	Incorrect word forms and meanings
Writing under cognitive load	Simultaneous focus on grammar and content	Error chains within sentences
Vocabulary instruction not integrated with writing	Vocabulary taught separately	Lack of contextual accuracy

These factors suggest that vocabulary errors are a natural consequence of learners' developmental stage and instructional exposure.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that vocabulary errors in the writing of students at SMP Negeri 4 Pringsewu do not occur randomly but follow specific patterns that reflect the developmental stages of interlanguage. According to Ellis' theory, these errors are a natural part of the internalization process in language learning, where learners attempt to apply the target language system based on their own understanding (Khansir, 2012; Lüdeling & Hirschmann, 2015). The errors frequently appear repeatedly and systematically, suggesting that students are in the process of developing lexical control. This confirms that interlanguage should not be seen merely as mistakes but as indicators of progress in language learning. The data also show that the depth of vocabulary knowledge has a greater influence on writing quality than the size of the vocabulary. Therefore, teaching should focus on strengthening students' deep understanding of vocabulary.

One of the novel findings of this study is the phenomenon of lexical error chains, where a single vocabulary mistake triggers additional errors within the same sentence or paragraph. For instance, incorrect word forms are often followed by inappropriate word choices, forming a cascading pattern of errors. This phenomenon demonstrates that vocabulary errors in EFL writing are interconnected rather than isolated. This finding highlights the need for a holistic teaching approach, rather than merely correcting individual errors. Moreover, lexical error chains reflect the cognitive load students experience while writing, as they must simultaneously integrate grammar, vocabulary, and ideas. Therefore, teaching strategies that reduce cognitive load can help minimize these cascading errors.

The study also reveals that collocation errors and inappropriate word choices are the most dominant types of vocabulary errors. Students frequently combine familiar words without understanding the natural word pairings in English. This indicates their limited exposure to authentic and contextualized input in the target language. Semantic errors resulting from direct translation from Indonesian are also significant, often altering the intended meaning of sentences. These findings emphasize that vocabulary mastery involves more than knowing individual words; it also requires understanding their contextual usage and proper collocations. Accordingly, vocabulary instruction should be contextualized and integrated directly into writing practice.

Furthermore, the study shows that writing tasks serve as effective diagnostic tools for identifying students' lexical weaknesses. Error analysis allows teachers to systematically observe both individual and group error patterns. Consequently, teachers can adapt vocabulary instruction strategies to address students' real needs. The findings also demonstrate that vocabulary errors function as indicators of writing development rather than mere deficiencies. Integrating vocabulary instruction directly into writing exercises can enhance students' ability to select appropriate words and construct coherent sentences. Therefore, writing assessment should be regarded as a learning tool, not solely as a final evaluation.

Finally, this study offers significant pedagogical implications. Vocabulary teaching should be designed to reduce error chains, expand collocational knowledge, and address errors caused by literal translation. Teachers need to provide writing exercises that emphasize contextual word use and active vocabulary enrichment. Attention to students' cognitive load during writing can help minimize cascading errors. The findings also support the development of instructional materials based on students' actual errors, making learning more relevant and effective. In conclusion, this study underscores the importance of an integrative and practice-based approach to vocabulary teaching in order to improve the quality of EFL writing among junior high school students.

CONCLUSION

This study has revealed that vocabulary errors are prevalent and systematic in the English writing of junior high school students at SMP Negeri 4 Pringsewu. The analysis identified four major types of vocabulary errors—word form errors, word choice errors, collocation errors, and semantic errors—with word choice and chained lexical errors being the most dominant. The findings indicate that vocabulary mastery is closely linked to writing quality, and errors often reflect interlanguage development and cognitive challenges during writing. Moreover, the study highlights the phenomenon of lexical error chains, where one incorrect word triggers subsequent errors within the same sentence or paragraph, showing that vocabulary errors are interconnected rather than isolated. These insights suggest that vocabulary teaching should be contextualized and integrated with writing practice to enhance students' lexical competence and overall writing performance.

However, this study has several limitations. The research was conducted on a relatively small sample of 20 written texts from a single school, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, only descriptive qualitative methods were used, so the quantitative frequency or statistical significance of error types was not measured. For educational practice, it is recommended that teachers incorporate vocabulary instruction directly into writing activities, emphasize contextual and collocational learning, and use writing tasks as diagnostic tools to identify lexical weaknesses. For future research, scholars are encouraged to explore larger and more diverse samples, examine longitudinal development of vocabulary errors, and investigate the effectiveness of instructional interventions aimed at reducing chained lexical errors in EFL writing.

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