ERROR ANALYSIS OF THE ENGLISH WRITING
ASSIGNMENT OF VOCATIONAL SCHOOL STUDENTS

THESIS
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Sarjana Pendidikan

Maureen Decinta Nira Permata
112012042

ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION PROGRAM
FACULTY OF LANGUAGE AND ARTS
UNIVERSITAS KRISTEN SATYA WACANA
SALATIGA
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2016
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ERROR ANALYSIS OF THE ENGLISH WRITING ASSIGNMENT OF VOCATIONAL SCHOOL STUDENTS

Maureen Decinta Nira Permata

Abstract

Indonesian students from vocational schools need to learn two languages, which are English and Indonesian. Since English is a foreign language that they learn, it causes problems for them in learning the four skills in English including writing. This study aims to investigate the most common errors in essays written in English by 35 students in a selected public vocational school in Salatiga. For all of these students, Indonesia is their first language (L1). Using an error classification scheme and Microsoft Excel, 35 essays were analyzed and categorized into 17 types of errors. The results of the analysis show that four most common errors were mechanics, tenses, preposition, and subject-verb agreement. In composing these essays, the students were very much influenced by their L1 and developmental errors were also observed in their writing. This study helps both of students and teacher in order to avoid errors in writing sentences in English. It is also important to make the students aware of the differences in the structure of English their L1. Certain rules in Indonesian that do not work when they write in English need to be highlighted. Students need to understand the differences of these languages and make use of the unique features to produce good and acceptable sentences.

Keywords: ESL learners, grammatical errors, English essays, vocational school.

INTRODUCTION

English has become an international language and the most spoken languages in the world. Studying English is also important for students who live in Indonesia because Indonesia is one of the ten ASEAN countries which needs a common language that allows them to communicate across their borders.
Srijunpetch (2012, p.33) stated that ASEAN in the new name of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) and the member countries hope to form a “single market and production base” where the production factors can freely move anywhere anytime across the AEC member countries. In order to increase the competitiveness in the economic and technological sector, ten countries located in South-East Asia have established the Association for Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1976 (Department of Trade Negotiations, 2011). They consist of Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines, Brunei Darussalam, Vietnam, Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia.

ASEAN Economic Community has started since 2015. One of the main objectives of ASEAN is to develop an area for free trade and services among the ASEAN member countries in the name of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). Hence, in order to be ready in being a part of AEC, Indonesian vocational school students need to learn and to prepare their English proficiency because they are expected to be ready to work in ASEAN countries after graduating. In other words, Indonesian vocational school students who would like to work in another member of ASEAN country must have a qualification based on international standards, which are accepted by those AEC countries.

Ironically, the current Indonesian curriculum has changed. There has been reduction of time for students to learn English and it seems contradictory to the goal of being ready in facing AEC. Students only learn English for 90 minutes (2x45minutes for a meeting) in a week. It means, students will only have limited time to learn English. As a consequence, learners usually do not pay attention to
their language skills, especially in writing. The common condition is that learners easily produce appropriate spoken language, but after they were tested to do a writing assignment, they make noticeable errors.

According to Ellis (1996, p. 58), by doing a research on the types of errors and classifying the errors, the result might help the teachers to diagnose learners’ learning problems and to plot how to reduce errors that occur over time. Learners’ errors are very important to be known, because they are “insight into how far a learner has progressed in acquiring a language and showing how much more the learner needs to learn” (Ringbom, 1987, p.69). According to Corder (1974, p.487), when errors are analyzed systematically, it is possible for teachers to determine areas that need reinforcement and correct the error effectively. It means that error analysis is needed to know what factors that caused students to make the errors and help them to reduce the frequency of making the errors.

This study is beneficial for both learners and teachers. The benefit for the learners is they will know their problem in producing wrong sentences or the other errors. Furthermore, learners will learn to produce correct sentence and stop making mistakes. While for the teacher, when errors are analyzed systematically, the teachers will be able to understand what factors that make grammar difficult for the learners. Then, teachers can choose the appropriate way to reduce learners’ error and evaluate his or her teaching, whether he or she did an error too in teaching the material or not. Lastly, teachers can provide a context where fluent and accurate language use should be modeled by the learners. It means the teacher will be able to help the students to stop making mistakes.
Moreover, this study is also beneficial for ELE (English Language Education) students because they are prospective teachers. It means that they need to know students’ need in learning English. Through knowing error analysis study, they may know common mistakes that the students do so that they know which part that is needed to be taught.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Error Analysis

Error analysis is a type of approach to analyze a second or foreign language learners’ speech or written performance. Several researchers already discussed error analysis from different perspectives. Corder (1967, p.163) and Brown (2000) both highlighted that language learners’ errors are important to study because it shows the state of the learners’ knowledge. Corder (1967) stated that error analysis are not just something to be eradicated, but rather can be important in and of themselves. Corder (1967) noted that students’ errors should not be ignored because it will help students to develop their language features, such as applying rules of grammar when they have to produce a piece of writing. As was pointed by some researchers (Corder, 1967; Dai & Shu, 1994), error analysis is highly significant for second language acquisition in the following aspects. From Corder’s perspective (1981, p.257), teachers can understand students’ current level in learning. For researchers, they can understand how language is learned and structured. For students, they can utilize these errors as a learning device to improve their language proficiency. Based on Corder’s
perspective, this study would like to continue to examine more cases in EFL contexts.

**Types of Errors**

In the field of second language acquisition, different types of errors were defined. There are two major different types from the analysis of learners’ oral and written performance. First, it is called intralingual or developmental error. According to Richards (1971, p.14), these errors are produced by the learners which reflect not the structure of the mother tongue, but overgeneralizations based on partial exposure to the target language. Overgeneralization generally involves the creation of one deviant structure in place of two regular structures, for example, “He can sings”, “We are hope”, “it is occurs”. Second, according to Selinke (1974, p. 67), interlingual or transfer errors refer to the negative interference from the learner’s first language habits. For example, many EFL learners think in their first language and they used direct translation when they speak and write in L2. Since they have more than one language in hand, it brings more problems. ESL learners tend to switch those languages interactively, causing some confusion in the structure and meaning. Analysis and classification of the cause of confusion enable learners to have a clearer view of their problems and thus, able to produce better written texts.

Based on Ho’s perspective (1973), these errors may be caused by inadequate learning, difficulties inherent in the target language itself, faulty teaching, confused thinking, or lack of contrast of both languages. Brown (1994, p.225) cites research suggesting that the early stages of language learning are
characterized by a predominance of inter-lingual transfer, but once learners have begun to acquire parts of a new system, more and more intra-lingual transfer is manifested. Intra lingual errors are defined by Richards (1971) as those “which reflect the general characteristics of rule learning, such as faulty generalization, incomplete application of rules and failure to learn conditions for rule application, the learner attempting to build up hypothesis about English from his limited experience of it in the classroom or textbook” (p. 198). Richards (1971) also further defines intra-lingual errors as those errors that originate within the structure of English itself, as a result of misinterpretation of English grammatical rules.

Writing in Second Language

According to Ferris (2002) as cited in Sarfraz (2011, p. 29) writing is a highly complex task and writing in second language makes the task further complicated as it requires sufficient command over the second language to fulfill all the formalities; composing, developing logical ideas, which are essential for a written text to be comprehensible. While writing, a writer engages into the cognitive process of formulating ideas in L1 and then translating them into L2.

In the past, Silva (1993, p.670) argues that the focus of attention in L2 writing research has been mainly on the similarities between L1 and L2 writing processes despite the “salient and important differences” between them. Wang and Wen (2002, p.225) state that the important aspect that influences the result of L1 and L2 writing processes is the amount of language that learners had. If learners have more than one language, they can write with perfect grammar, but their ideas
are not coherent. Moreover, grammatical errors are not the only factor in determining coherence.

Based on Ferris’ perspective (2002) in the domain of L2 writing, one consistent characteristic which is fundamentally distinct from L1 writing processes, is whether L2 writers capable enough or not in writing through L2. As several studies in the early 80’s and 90’s have reported (Edelsky, 1982; Friedlander, 1990; and Jones and Tetroe, 1987) as cited in Darus at al. (2009, p.487) in the L2 the writers use their L1 to plan their writing in their writing outline, transfer their L1 knowledge to L2 writing contexts and develop ideas and produce text content and organization. In short, L2 writers always make use of their L1 first, while composing in the L2 before translating it to L2. This shows that L1 influences the L2 writer in their process of writing in L2 and the influences can be positive or negative.

**Previous Studies**

In most past researches in analyzing problems of writing in English, the researchers’ aims were to identify errors that occurred, analyze the errors to find out the cause, and find out possible solution to solve the problems. Lim (1990) as cited in Darus at.al (2009, p. 246) analyses grammatical errors made by Mandarin speaking students from second grade of a college in Kuala Lumpur. Fifty ESL compositions writing test were used as the main source of data. The researcher used free writing and guided writing tasks to compare the results. Similar to previous studies, the errors made were classified under eight grammatical categories namely tenses, articles, prepositions, spelling, pronouns, wrong choice
of words, singular and plural forms and agreement. Two major factors that contributed to the presence of errors in students’ written work were inter-lingual transfer and intra-lingual transfer.

Wang and Wen (2002, p.250) as cited in Puwaret (2000, p. 11) investigate on how ESL/EFL writers use their L1, which is Chinese when composing in their L2, that is English, and how such L1 use is affected by L2 proficiency and writing tasks. Sixteen Chinese EFL learners were asked to compose aloud on two tasks, narration, and argumentation. Analyses of their think-aloud protocols revealed that these student writers had both their L1 and L2 at their disposal when composing in their L2. They relied more on their L1 when they were managing their writing processes, generating and organizing ideas, but relied more on L2 when undertaking task-examining and text generating activities. Additionally, more L1 use was found in the narrative writing task than in the argumentative writing. Finally, the think-aloud protocols reflected that L1 use in individual activities varied. Thus, this study shows that L1 influences were very crucial in L2 writing.

Darus et al. (2009, p.476) made an attempt to investigate the types of errors made by 72 Form Four Malay students in their written work. The results of the study show that errors that the students committed were basically grammatical. The students also had a relatively weak vocabulary and they committed errors in applying sentence structure rules in English. According to this study, students have problems in acquiring grammatical rules in English generally.
From the previous studies, the most common problem that leads the students to make errors is the influence of their L1. In applying L2 grammatical rules, the role of L1 as their first step of thinking cannot be avoided. As the result, students will surely make error when writing in L2. This condition is similar to vocational school students that still make errors when writing from L1 to L2 because the role of L1 is highly demanded in their daily life.

THE STUDY

Research Question

This study will seek to answer what the most common types of grammatical error in the students’ writing are and what factors which cause the errors.

Types of Research

A mixture of qualitative and quantitative research methods will be used to conduct this study. Dörnyei et al. (2007) stated that qualitative is a research method where the data collection is described in details in order to explain the result more in depth. Based on Coakes and Steed (2001) the quantitative is a research method where usually takes \( n \geq 30 \) as the total subjects in order to get normal distribution of data. In this study, descriptive statistical analysis is used in order to indicate the classifications of phenomena and describe the data collection through analyzing it statistically by using software and presented in numbers.
Subject of the Study (Participants)

This study was conducted using convenience sampling because there is no inclusion criteria identified prior to selection of subjects means. All subjects were invited to participate. This sampling is a technique where the researcher chooses or uses the participants based on their availability. In other words, the participants are willing to participate in this study and easy to access.

There were 35 second graders of vocational school students who participated in this study. All of them should have learnt the rules of applying grammar in a sentence that are already given during their school time. In this study, the participants are required to write a piece of paragraph or essay based on the topic that was given by the teacher.

Context of the Study

This study was conducted in a classroom of a vocational school in Salatiga, Central Java by the end of an English class.

Instrument of the Research

The instruments of this study were students’ work which is a piece of writing or short essay with certain topic which had already been decided by the teacher. Students’ writing was combined with TOEIC writing test. TOEIC writing part was used to be the standard of students’ work because it covers what the researcher needs to know from the students.

Hence, TOEIC writing part was used to assess students’ writing skill. The main reason of using TOEIC is because it has been the global standard for
measuring English-language skills. Through TOEIC writing test, it was easier for the researcher to diagnose learners’ error in writing.

In this study, there are two appendixes (Appendix A and Appendix B) which presents a sample of TOEIC writing test and the interview questions used to gain more information about causes of errors. The researcher only takes one part of TOEIC writing test which is an opinion essay (see Appendix A). The assessing criteria of opinion essay in TOEIC writing test are grammar, vocabulary used, organization, and the supported reason or examples related to the situation that had been given. Moreover, the second instrument is interview questions (see Appendix B).

**Data Collection Procedures**

The procedural analysis of Ellis (1994) of Error Analysis is followed in the study. The procedure has the following steps:

2. Identification of errors: Actual errors.
3. Description of errors: categorization of errors.
4. Evaluation of errors.

To collect the data, participants were administrated a writing assignment that involved essay writing. They were required to write an opinion essay based on the topic given by the teacher in 30 minutes. The time given is based on the TOEIC standard time to write an opinion essay. The essay ranged one page in length (around 100-150 words). After the result of writing was collected, the
researcher analyzed it by trying to find the most common error that the students did and categorize each error based on the framework.

In order to collect further information about the factors that made the students make errors in writing, interview sessions were held with three students who was positioned in top three of students who made most common error. The results of the interview were used to evaluate errors. The interview sessions were held one day after the test in order to investigate further the factors that made them make errors in their writing. An interview session were done in Indonesian then has been translated into English.

Data Analysis

In order to identify the errors that the students made in their English essay, an error classification scheme developed by Darus et al. (2007) was adapted in this study. It consists of 17 types of errors as follows: tenses, articles, subject verb agreement, other agreement errors, infinitive, gerunds, pronouns, possessive and attributive structures, word order, incomplete structures, negative constructions, lexical categories (preposition), other lexical categories, mechanics, word choice, word form, and verb to be. Those types of errors will be the categorization of the errors.

After the researcher got the interview data, the analysis of interview data started by writing the transcription and classifying the factors that caused the students produce errors in L2 writing overtime.
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings on errors of the writing assignment of the vocational school students and the factors which cause them continue making some errors in writing.

The data in this section has been arranged in four categories to describe four most common errors in writing which are mechanics, tense, preposition, and subject verb agreement and two categories to describe factors which cause the students continue make errors in writing. The factors are students’ different background knowledge and students’ lack of motivation in learning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Short Annotation</th>
<th>Long Annotation</th>
<th>Total No. of errors</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
<th>Mean n=35</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Articles</td>
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<td>5.9</td>
<td>1.34</td>
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<td>AgSv</td>
<td>Subject verb agreement</td>
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<td>11.5</td>
<td>2.62</td>
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<tr>
<td>Agot</td>
<td>Other agreement errors</td>
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<td>8.6</td>
<td>1.97</td>
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<td>Infinitive</td>
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<td>1.4</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Possessive and Atributive structures</td>
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<td>Others Lexical Errors</td>
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<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.2</td>
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<td>1.2</td>
<td>0.28</td>
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<td>VTB</td>
<td>Verb to be error</td>
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<td>5.6</td>
<td>1.28</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>801</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*note: n means the number of participations
Short annotation is the short of the long annotation used in Microsoft Excel during analysis process. Long annotation is the 17 categories of the grammatical errors. The results of the mean values show that four most common errors are mechanics (3.42), tense (3.1), preposition (3), and subject verb agreement (2.62).

It is necessary to point out that the total number of errors for each category of grammatical errors may not necessarily indicate the difficulty level of the categories for the students. It is not quite appropriate to assume that lower number of errors signify a less difficult point for the students studying English. Rather, the fewer number of errors may simply mean that the errors in a particular category occur in a lesser number of times compared to other categories. It is also possible that students avoided from using certain grammatical constructions, which resulted in fewer errors of some categories.

Samples of Most Common Errors and Explanation

In this section, samples of students’ sentence errors are displayed and the errors identified in each sentence are shown accordingly. The examples of sentences only show the errors in the area specified. Other errors in the sentences are not taken into consideration.

Errors in Mechanics

They do not, but… (incorrect use of comma)

My friend has never *meat* his classmates before. (meet)

She does not like his *attude* very much. (attitude)
He works as a PoliceMan. (capitalization)

I am studying in SMK Salatiga. (studying)

This major category makes up 15% of the total number of errors, which is the largest category of errors in the classification scheme. There were a lot of spelling, punctuation and capitalization errors in this study. The spelling errors were mainly due to phonetics perception and carelessness. The students spell out the words by referring to the sound of the words. A lot of words in English have the same sound but with different meanings and different spelling such as ‘huge’ with ‘hug’, ‘gun’ with ‘gone’ and ‘bread’ with ‘breath.’ Students’ carelessness also causes them to make spelling mistakes such as ‘I am studing in SMK Salatiga.’

Besides that, the errors in punctuation also add up to the total number of errors in mechanics. It comprised mainly of incorrect use of comma, omission of comma, wrong substitution for periods and the absence of the period at the end of a sentence. Commas were unnecessarily inserted in between words in a sentence and at the end of a sentence producing the following errors:

a. I will always try my best to get higher score, I hope my family will be proud of me.

b. My brother is so diligent, because he study at university.

c. Last is, my stepmother, named Sutinah.

It is also common to find omission (denoted by *) of commas around appositional phrases and in lists of items or names. For example,

a. Although my father is very overprotective * but he loves me.
b. There are my father, mother, youngest sister and me.

Other errors in punctuations were wrong substitution of periods and the absence of period at the middle of a sentence. The following sentence is an example:

- I like to play football, except tennis.

Errors in punctuation could be the result of carelessness on the part of the students. Capitalization also constitutes a significant problem in the students’ writings. Many of the errors in capitalization involved proper nouns that are not capitalized and common nouns being capitalized. For example:

a. My father works as a PoliceMan. (common noun capitalized)
b. I live In Salatiga City. (common noun capitalized)

This could be due to L2 overused as there is capitalization in Indonesian writings. Hence, vocational students encounter new rules of capitalization in writing in English which generate another problem for the students. However, errors in capitalization may also be a result of students’ carelessness since in Indonesia some of common nouns are capitalized depending on the context of the sentence.

**Errors in Tenses**

We study English today. (are studying)

I studied in SMK Salatiga. (am studying)

I introduce my English teacher. (will introduce)

Every day, we discussing the lesson together. (discuss)
Compilation and categorization of errors in this study show that errors in tenses account for 13.5% of the total number of errors, which is 108 errors. Tense is the second highest total number of errors in the study after mechanics of writing. Since the topic of the essay was My Daily Life in School, it obliged the students to compose mostly in simple present tense and simple continuous tense to refer to something which is still happening now. Therefore, the students made more errors in some usage of the tenses.

The result is also not surprising since English notion of tense is somewhat confusing to the L2 learners who regard time as a separate entity by itself. In English, there is indication of time with present, past, future and continuous tense but in Indonesian language, a verb itself does not indicate time. The moods and tenses are indicated by the addition of auxiliary verbs and particles. English verbs change according to aspect of time. However, in the Indonesian language, the same form of verb can be used for present, past, future and continuous tense. It has no inflection with regard to time. For example in these sentences:

a. I eat a bowl of noodle.
   Saya makan semangkuk bakmi.

b. I will eat a bowl of noodle.
   Saya akan makan semangkuk bakmi.

c. I ate fried rice.
   Saya telah makan nasi goreng.

d. I am eating fried rice.
   Saya sedang makan nasi goreng.

The verb ‘makan’ in the sentences did not indicate time. The same verb was used in every sentence for present, past, future or continuous setting. The
time was shown separately by auxiliary verbs and particles such as ‘akan’ for future tense, ‘telah’ for past tense and ‘sedang’ for continuous tense.

Thus, this makes it difficult for the students to understand the idea of tense usage in English and they created errors such as:

a. Every morning, we praying together. (pray)

b. I studied in SMK Salatiga. (am studying)

c. Now, my mother worked in a bank. (works)

For sentence a, the student used present continuous tense for simple present tense. As in sentences b and c, the students used simple past tense when composing the sentences instead of the more appropriate present tense. When students describe about their routines in daily life, they suppose to use present tense.

There are also effects of translation from the students’ L1. The students tend to make sentences from Indonesian language and translate it into English. This is because Indonesian is their L1 and the medium of instruction in school since their primary school. There is also translation from Indonesian to English because those two language is used when the teacher explain many subjects in class. For examples:

- How if you get lower grade? (What if)

Many Indonesian normally said “How if...” rather than “What if...” because they directly translate question words from Indonesia that is “Bagaimana kalau...” In fact, English common question word to express it is “What if...”
In short, the differences between the verb system of L1 and English tense make it difficult for students to grasp the English notion of tense. Because Indonesian does not need any changes of verbs according to time aspect, students tend to omit the inflection of the English verb. This is correct in Indonesian, but it is not acceptable in English.

Errors in Preposition

I am thinking on my friend. (of)

I have in 34 classmates. (unnecessary in)

She lives on Salatiga. (in)

He is waiting * his result on Mathematic test. (omission for)

I study on school from 7.00 a.m. until 4 p.m. (at)

Most of the prepositional errors included omissions, additions and wrong selections. The 105 prepositional errors account for 13% of the total number of errors in the corpus. The cause of prepositional errors is interference from students’ L1 which is Indonesian. Some of the Indonesian prepositions are similar in meanings and functions with the English prepositions. Sometimes, a single Indonesian preposition was translated into various English prepositions. For instance, Indonesian preposition ‘di’ can refer to English prepositions ‘in’, ‘at’ and ‘on’ as in the following examples:

a. She lives in Salatiga.
   Dia tinggal di Salatiga.

b. Dina works at the hospital.
   Dina bekerja di rumah sakit.

c. They put the cup on the table.
   Dia letakkan cangkir itu di atas meja.
Therefore, students were incapable of choosing the correct prepositions when more than one English preposition corresponds to a single Indonesian preposition and created errors like:

a. She works at Semarang. (in)

b. He always thinking on his ex-girlfriend every day. (of)

c. We go to school with his motorcycle every morning. (by)

Omission of prepositions could be caused either by uncertainty in the selection of prepositions or by L1 interference. When students were not sure of which prepositions to use or could not find relevant substitution of English preposition to the preposition in L1 they tend to omit the preposition. Sometimes unnecessary addition of prepositions could be due to overgeneralizations. For example, ‘I have in 34 classmates,’

*Subject-Verb Agreement Errors*

I goes to school by bus. (go)

There is six subjects in one day. (are)

My family have five members. (has)

She don’t like us to study in a dirty classroom. (doesn’t)

If I has problem in exercise, she will teach me. (have)

Errors in subject-verb agreement make up 11.5% of the total number of errors in the present study. Subject-verb agreement errors pose problems for the Indonesian vocational school students for a number of reasons. The students were having difficulties in distinguishing the verb ‘is’ or ‘was’ with ‘are’ or ‘were’. They were also confused with some nouns such as ‘people’ and ‘homework’,
whether it is a singular or plural noun. Certainly, the absence of agreement between subjects and verbs in L1 also causes the students to commit errors in this category. In Indonesian, the verb ‘pergi’ do not change according to the subjects as shown in the following sentences:

a. I go to school.
   Saya pergi ke sekolah.

b. She goes to school.
   Dia pergi ke sekolah.

c. They go to school.
   Mereka pergi ke sekolah.

The following sentences are some examples of this confusion in subject-verb agreement:

a. I goes to school by bus. (go)

b. My family have five members. (has)

c. There is six subjects in one day. (are)

**Other Factors which Cause Errors in Writing**

*Students’ different background knowledge*

The first category of other factors which cause errors in writing is students’ different background knowledge of English. In Vocational school, students need to learn English as well. But then, for vocational school students, the focus is not to learn the language itself but to increase their professional skill. It means that English is not the main subject of the school and they do not have much time to learn it. All the students in vocational school came from different junior high school. That is also become a problem because those students who have
bilingual class in their junior high school had already learnt English. Therefore, their English competences will be totally different.

This condition leads the vocational school students who have not much time to learn English find it difficult to understand English and the four skill of it. In the interview, students A, B, and C said,

“I feel so bad when I made errors in writing English sentences. I hope that I had much time to learn English, so that I could improve my English.” (Student A)

“Since we came from different junior high school, I find myself take longer time to learn English compared with my friends who were graduated from favorite junior high school.” (Student B)

“The only thing that becomes a problem for me is when I was in junior high school, my English teacher used to talk in Indonesian more than English. So, I think I cannot learn English very well because my teacher rarely teaches me to use it.” (Student C)

To deal with this condition, students A, B, and C have the same perception. They said that English teacher and learning experience in junior high school play big role in having good English competence. Also, three of the students said that teachers’ attention in helping them learn English and avoid making errors in writing is needed. Those who often make errors in writing actually need more attention and need to raise their voice up so that the teaching and learning process will be effective in order to decrease the number of errors in writing English sentences.

Furthermore, different background knowledge does not only happened because students come from different junior high school but also their way of
learning English is different. A student who successfully writes less error than the others mentioned,

“I try my best to learn English even though I rarely use it to talk to people in my house. But then, I have my own way to have fun learning. I love listening to English song and watching TV program which used English. I do it regularly in order to gain more English vocabulary. Also, I write all the new vocabulary and try to arrange them into sentence to practice. Thank to internet because it seems like it is a bridge for me to learn English.” (Students B)

Student B shows her awareness toward English. As the consequences, students who do not want to gain much information outside English class from school will have less chance to understand English compared with those who have fun learning way and know how to make themselves richer in English vocabulary.

*Students’ lack of motivation*

The second category of other factors which cause errors in writing sentence in English is student lack of motivation. Not all students have motivation in learning English. Motivation itself can come from themselves as students who want to get more knowledge or from the outside like teachers, parents, friends, internet, or other kind of learning sources. It was the most important part in learning process because students can learn well if they get interested in the subject they were learning. Students who have less learning motivation will not be able to have much English vocabulary, knowledge about grammar, and the other English skill that is needed to know. Once students were not interested in English, they will not be willing to know more about it. In the interview, students A, B, and C said,
“It’s too bad that sometimes I do not want to learn English anymore because it is difficult. I do not really like when I have to memorize many difficult vocabulary which are totally different to Indonesian.” (Student A)

“I think it does not matter whether I learn English or not. In fact, in my daily life, I never use it to speak. Also, people surround me never use English to communicate. So, I think it is okay not to master English very well.” (Student C)

In student A and student C case, they said that they do not have learning motivation because English is difficult and they rarely use it in their daily life, so that it can lead them to get lower grade than the others. Students will find it easy to understand and implement new knowledge from the subject in school if they are willing to learn it.

In contrast with the statement above, student B mentioned,

“I have difficulties in learning grammar because sometimes it is confusing. Sadly, I also do not have much time to learn it in school. My teacher sometimes also does not provide clear and easy explanation to be followed. That’s why I feel my level of English somehow is stuck.” (Student B)

In student B case, lack of learning motivation comes from outside which means other sources of learning that is the teacher and the time allocation of the subject. Therefore, English teacher should provide clear explanation and give some ideas why students need to learn English in order to make them aware and grasp their attention so that they can learn successfully and make less error in writing English sentences.

**CONCLUSION**

This study shows that the four most common errors made by the vocational school students are mechanics of writing, tenses, prepositions, and
subject-verb agreement. In teaching writing, teachers need to be aware that students have difficulties in these areas of the English grammar. These errors are caused by interference of L1 and inadequate understanding of grammatical rules of English. Based on Richards (1971, p.14) and Selinker (1974, p. 67) these factors are elements categorized under inter-lingual and intra-lingual or developmental errors. Because of the interference of the L1, students tend to refer to their L1 whenever they face difficulties when they write. They also encounter problems due to their exposure to Indonesian as it is a language that is used in many subjects. Thus, the students will construct sentences with errors because of the differences of grammatical rules of all the languages: their L1 and English. Intra-language errors refer to the application of incorrect strategies while acquiring English. Students have problems with English grammatical rules and also confusion with the rules in their L1. This proves that L1 plays a considerable role in causing students to make errors when they write in English.

The other factors which also play big role for students in producing errors are students’ different background knowledge and lack of learning motivation. Students A and B, as the participant, they share different information that is needed in order to gain the factors which caused students to produce many errors in writing sentences in English. Regarding the discussion in the previous section, it can be concluded that both of teachers and students need to be more aware and increase their motivation to learn (for students) and motivation to teach through providing much information and providing clear explanation (for teachers) in order to reach successful teaching and learning process. Therefore, in order to be
qualified in facing AEC (Asean Economic Community), the mastery of English is needed by every element of people especially students who will enter occupational world. Through English, students will surely be ready to enter Asean Economic Community because they already hold the key to communicate with people from other countries which might offer big chance for them to be selected as the qualified people for AEC.

In general, the findings of the study show that the Indonesian vocational school students were very much influenced by their L1 in their process of learning English, which were evidently illustrated in their writings. Therefore, the students need to understand the differences of both languages and make use of the unique features of the languages to produce good and acceptable sentences. Teachers need to emphasize on how the concepts are handled in English and their L1. It is important to make the students aware of the differences in the structure of these languages. Teachers should also highlight certain rules in L1 and that are not appropriate to be used when they write in English. This is to ensure that the students apply correct strategies while writing in English and hence, decrease the occurrence of errors.

This study is limited to the written work of 35 essays of vocational school students who are studying in one public vocational school. The written essays collected are from a specific topic only. Therefore, the study will not be able to give conclusive evidence regarding other students from other proficiency levels in vocational schools in Salatiga.
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REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

Below is the example of the direction of opinion essay in TOEIC writing test.

**Directions:**
Read the question below. You have 30 minutes to plan, write, and revise your essay. Typically, an effective response will contain a minimum of 300 words.

There are many ways to find a job: newspaper advertisements, Internet jobs search websites, and personal recommendations. What do you think is the best way to find a job? Give reasons or examples to support your opinion.
APPENDIX B

Below are the interview questions that were given to gain information about factors that made students make errors in writing.

- **English Version:**
  1- How many times a week do you write in class?
  2- What do errors in writing mean to you?
  3- Does your teacher help you when you make an error?
  4- According to you, is mastery of grammatical rules needed before writing an essay?
  5- What do you think about writing in English?
  6- Which errors do you make the most?
  7- What do you feel when you make errors in writing English sentences?

- **Indonesian Version (which are used to interview participants):**
  1- Dalam satu minggu berapa kali Anda menulis dalam Bahasa Inggris?
  2- Menurut Anda, apakah arti dari kesalahan tata bahasa dalam tugas menulis?
  3- Apakah guru Anda pernah membantu Anda untuk membetulkan kesalahan penulisan dalam Bahasa Inggris?
  4- Menurut Anda, apakah penguasaan tata bahasa dalam Bahasa Inggris diperlukan sebelum Anda mengerjakan tugas esai?
  5- Bagaimana pendapat Anda mengenai kesalahan penulisan dalam Bahasa Inggris?
6- Kesalahan apa yang sering anda lakukan saat menulis essai dalam Bahasa Inggris?

7- Apa yang Anda rasakan saat Anda menyadari telah melakukan kesalahan saat menulis dalam Bahasa Inggris?