

International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research
 Vol. 25, No. 4, pp. 883-915, April 2026
<https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.25.4.40>
 Received Jan 28, 2026; Revised Mar 13, 2026; Accepted Mar 20, 2026

Writing Errors in English as a Second Language (ESL) Essays: Evidence from English Major Students at a Philippine State University

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Abstract. Although error analysis has been widely explored in ESL writing, limited studies have simultaneously examined both the types of writing errors and their underlying causes among English major university students in the Philippine context. Understanding these dimensions is essential for developing context-responsive pedagogical interventions in higher education. Hence, this study aimed to analyze the types and frequency of errors in the English essays of first-year English major students and to identify the factors contributing to these errors. Employing a descriptive research design, 99 student essays from a Philippine state university were analyzed using Sridhar's (1980) framework for error analysis. Errors were identified, described, and categorized based on Ferris's (2005) classification of morphological, lexical, syntactic, and mechanical errors. Contributing factors were also explored through a researcher-made causal factor checklist. Findings revealed that syntactic errors (37.25%) were the most prevalent, followed by morphological (29.75%), lexical (21.75%), and mechanical errors (11.25%). The most frequent specific errors included word choice (18.58%), sentence pattern (16.82%), run-ons (11.93%), subject-verb agreement (9.17%), and fragments (8.50%). Additional errors involved verb form, noun endings, articles and determiners, capitalization, spelling, pronoun usage, informal expressions, and tense consistency. The primary contributing factors identified were limited knowledge of English structures, insufficient reading exposure, lack of motivation, inadequate instructional supervision, delayed feedback, and limited time for writing tasks. The findings highlight persistent structural and grammatical challenges among English major students and underscore the need for targeted instructional strategies and structured writing support. Based on the results, a second language writing guide can be proposed to address recurrent error patterns. Future research may further examine the distinction between learner errors and features of Philippine English to refine pedagogical and analytical approaches.

Citation:
 Masagnay, J. M. A.
 (2026). Writing Errors in
 English as a Second
 Language (ESL) Essays:
 Evidence from English
 Major Students at a
 Philippine State
 University.
*International Journal of
 Learning, Teaching and
 Educational Research*,
 25(4), 883–915.
<https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.25.4.40>

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Keywords: error analysis; errors; essays; factors; English majors

1. Introduction

In the learning of English as a Second Language (ESL), learners are expected to develop competence in four macro skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Among these, listening and reading are generally categorized as receptive skills, while speaking and writing are considered productive skills because they require learners to generate and articulate language output (Brown, 2007; Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Of these productive skills, writing is often regarded as one of the most cognitively demanding for second language learners. It requires simultaneous coordination of multiple processes, including idea generation, lexical selection, grammatical encoding, coherence building, and overall text organization (Ferris, 2005; Hyland, 2019).

Unlike speaking, which allows for real-time clarification and interactional support, writing demands sustained cognitive effort and conscious control over linguistic and rhetorical conventions, making it particularly challenging for ESL learners. Writing development involves intricate cognitive, linguistic, and metacognitive processes as learners must orchestrate lexical and syntactic resources to express meaning effectively in text form. Studies in second language writing consistently show that factors such as task complexity, reasoning demands, and linguistic complexity interact to shape learners' written performance, often making writing a particularly challenging skill to acquire (Manchón et al., 2023; Johnson et al., 2025). Writing in an L2 intensifies these challenges because learners must draw on their evolving linguistic resources to produce clear, coherent, and accurate texts in addition to managing higher-order organizational and rhetorical conventions in writing tasks.

Contemporary perspectives in second language acquisition argue that errors are a natural and necessary part of the learning process. Rather than being mere deficiencies, errors reflect learners' developing interlanguage and provide valuable insights into how a second language is learned. For instance, Corder (1967) underscores the pedagogical and theoretical significance of learner errors when he emphasizes that errors are meaningful in three ways: they inform teachers about learners' current stage of development, provide researchers with evidence of language learning processes, and serve learners as a mechanism through which learning occurs. Complementing this view, Brown (2007) explains that errors are a natural outcome of cognitive processing in language learning and should therefore be examined systematically to inform instruction and remediation. These perspectives reposition errors from being obstacles to learning to being essential resources for understanding and improving ESL writing instruction.

With focus on writing errors, the present study adopts an integrated theoretical framework combining Ferris's (2005) pedagogically oriented error categorization and Sridhar's (1980) procedural model of error analysis. Ferris's framework enables systematic classification of treatable and untreatable errors in academic writing, while Sridhar's model provides a structured methodological approach to

identifying, describing, and explaining learner errors. By integrating these frameworks, the present study moves beyond descriptive error identification toward a more explanatory and pedagogically grounded analysis.

In line with these theoretical positions, a substantial body of international research has examined writing errors in ESL and EFL contexts. Findings consistently reveal that learners across proficiency levels and educational settings commit persistent errors in grammar, syntax, lexis, and mechanics (Dinh, 2023; Gayo & Widodo, 2018; Matiso, 2023; Sharma, 2025). More importantly, these studies highlight the pedagogical value of error analysis in informing instructional strategies, feedback practices, and targeted interventions (Apuhin et al., 2023; Bataineh & Sabiri, 2025; Matiso, 2023). Rather than viewing errors solely as deficiencies to be eliminated, scholars emphasize understanding recurring error patterns as a means of improving writing instruction and supporting learners' ongoing language development (Ferris, 2005; Escuadra, 2024).

Within the Philippine context, similar patterns have been documented. Research indicates that Filipino ESL learners experience persistent writing difficulties despite extensive exposure to English as a medium of instruction (Labicane & Oliva, 2022; Munder, 2024). Studies conducted across basic and higher education reveal that learners frequently commit errors in verb tense, subject-verb agreement, sentence structure, word choice, punctuation, and capitalization (Dejon et al., 2024; Escuadra, 2024; Uka et al., 2023). Notably, research has shown that even advanced learners, including English majors and pre-service teachers, continue to exhibit substantial writing errors, suggesting that such difficulties are not merely associated with low proficiency but are embedded in the learning process and instructional context (Comeo, 2025; Igsi et al., 2025).

In addition, the Philippine linguistic landscape is characterized by a complex multilingual ecology in which English coexists with numerous local languages and the evolving variety of Philippine English (Gonzalez, 1997; Bautista, 2000). Within this context, English functions not only as a second language but also as an institutional and academic language shaped by localized linguistic norms. Such conditions complicate the distinction between learner errors, interlanguage features, and acceptable localized forms of English, particularly in written academic discourse (Kachru et al., 2009; Selinker, 1972). Examining the writing of English major students—whose written output is expected to approximate standardized academic conventions—thus allows for a more nuanced analysis of writing errors and their pedagogical implications. This focus enables researchers and educators to differentiate between developmental errors arising from second language acquisition and systematic features associated with Philippine English, thereby supporting more context-sensitive and theoretically grounded approaches to ESL writing instruction.

Despite the growing number of error analysis studies conducted in the Philippines, several gaps are evident. Many studies focus primarily on identifying and classifying errors, with limited attention given to examining how such errors function as essential components of learning or how they can be harnessed

pedagogically. Moreover, relatively few studies concentrate specifically on English major students at the tertiary level or employ established frameworks such as Ferris's (2005) classification of errors and Sridhar's (1980) procedural steps in error analysis. There is also limited research that translates error analysis findings into structured, context-sensitive instructional resources.

While writing errors have been widely documented among general ESL learners, relatively little attention has been given to first-year English major students as they begin their formal specialization in English studies. Although they are still in the early stage of their university training, these students enter a program designed to prepare them for advanced linguistic, literary, and pedagogical work. Examining their writing at this foundational stage is critical because it establishes a baseline of their linguistic competence upon entry into the specialization. Identifying persistent error patterns early in the program provides valuable insights into how well prior instruction has prepared them and allows teacher education programs to design timely, targeted interventions. Since many of these students will eventually become English educators and language professionals, strengthening their writing proficiency from the outset carries long-term pedagogical and institutional significance.

In response to these gaps, the present study examines the writing errors found in the English essays of first-year English major students at a Philippine state university. Anchored on Ferris's (2005) error categories and guided by Sridhar's (1980) error analysis procedures, the study sought to identify common writing errors and explore the factors contributing to their occurrence. More specifically, this study seeks to answer the following questions: 1) What are the types and frequency of writing errors committed by first-year English major students in their essays? and 2) What factors contribute to these errors? By framing writing errors as essential to learning rather than merely as deficiencies, this study aimed to contribute to a more meaningful understanding of error analysis and its role in improving ESL writing instruction in Philippine higher education.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Writing Errors in ESL and EFL Contexts

Writing in English as a second or foreign language is widely recognized as one of the most demanding skills for language learners. Unlike speaking, writing requires conscious control of grammatical rules, vocabulary selection, sentence structure, and mechanics, making it particularly vulnerable to errors. Studies conducted across diverse ESL and EFL contexts consistently report that learners' written texts are characterized by persistent grammatical, syntactic, lexical, and mechanical errors, even after years of formal instruction (Matiso, 2023; Sharma, 2025).

International research demonstrates that writing errors are not confined to a specific educational level or linguistic background. Studies from Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, China, Japan, Nepal, Oman, and other contexts reveal that university, secondary, and even advanced learners continue to struggle with applying English rules accurately in extended writing tasks such as essays,

academic papers, and professional correspondence (Dinh, 2023; Fortuna, 2025; Gayo & Widodo, 2018; Gazioglu & Aydin, 2024). These findings suggest that writing errors are a natural and persistent feature of second language development rather than isolated learning failures.

While these international studies mentioned establish that writing errors persist across ESL and EFL contexts, they often treat learner populations as homogeneous. The specific case of first-year English major students in Philippine public universities is underexplored. Given that these students are expected to demonstrate relatively advanced language competence, examining how writing errors persist at this level becomes particularly important. A focused investigation in this context is therefore necessary to determine whether global error patterns are replicated locally or manifest in distinct ways.

2.2 Types and Patterns of Writing Errors

A substantial body of literature has employed error analysis frameworks to classify and interpret learners' writing errors. Frameworks used include Corder's Error Analysis and Ferris's error categories to identify recurring patterns. Across international studies, the most commonly reported error types include omission, addition, misformation, and misordering, indicating learners' difficulty in internalizing and applying English grammatical rules (Irawansyah, 2024; Seddik, 2023; Zakkaria et al., 2025).

At the grammatical and syntactic levels, errors related to verb tense, verb form, subject-verb agreement, articles, prepositions, pronouns, and sentence structure are consistently identified as the most prevalent (Husna & Isna, 2024; Isma et al., 2023; Sharma, 2025). Sentence-level issues such as run-on sentences, fragments, faulty clause construction, and word order problems further undermine textual clarity and coherence (Dinh, 2023; Sutakote et al., 2025). Lexical errors, particularly inappropriate word choice, incorrect collocations, and misuse of word forms, are also commonly reported, especially in academic and argumentative writing tasks (Ali et al., 2023; Lee et al., 2025).

Mechanical errors—spelling, punctuation, and capitalization—are a major concern in many ESL and EFL contexts. Studies involving learners whose first languages differ orthographically from English show a high frequency of such errors, often attributed to limited exposure to written English and insufficient practice in editing and revision (Bataneh & Sabiri, 2025; Chuanpipatpong, 2025; Gilbang et al., 2024). Although these previous studies cited classify writing errors using various taxonomies, there is limited application of a unified framework, such as Ferris's (2005) categorization, to first-year English majors in Philippine public universities. Without a systematic classification grounded in a widely recognized model, comparisons across studies are difficult, and conclusions about dominant error categories in this population are tentative. This gap calls for a structured and context-specific analysis.

2.3 Writing Errors in the Philippine Context

Studies conducted in the Philippine context reflect patterns similar to those found internationally, confirming that Filipino ESL learners experience persistent

writing difficulties across linguistic levels. Research spanning elementary, secondary, and tertiary education indicates that errors in grammar, syntax, and mechanics are prevalent despite English being widely used as a medium of instruction (Labicane & Oliva, 2022; Munder, 2024).

Several Philippine studies highlight the dominance of mechanical errors, particularly punctuation, capitalization, and spelling. Apuhin et al. (2023) reported that punctuation errors—especially comma misuse—were highly frequent among English language majors, with omission emerging as the most dominant error type. Likewise, Uka et al. (2023) found that mechanical errors constituted nearly half of the total errors in senior high school students' academic essays. Similar findings were reported among elementary and secondary learners, suggesting that weaknesses in mechanics persist across educational levels (Dejon et al., 2024; Munder, 2024).

At the grammatical and syntactic levels, Philippine-based research consistently identifies verb-related errors, sentence structure problems, and subject-verb agreement as major challenges. Studies involving English majors, pre-service teachers, and discipline-based learners reveal frequent errors in verb tense, verb form, sentence construction, and word choice (Comeo, 2025; Igsi et al., 2025). Research conducted among secondary school learners further confirms the prevalence of omission, addition, misformation, and misordering errors, which affect students' ability to write clear and coherent texts (Escuadra, 2024; Matusalem et al., 2025).

Notably, even advanced learners, such as English majors and pre-service teachers, commit a substantial number of writing errors. For instance, Comeo (2025) found that grammatical errors—particularly in verb form, verb tense, and subject-verb agreement—were dominant in the technical writing outputs of English pre-service teachers. These findings challenge assumptions that higher proficiency or specialization in English automatically results in error-free writing. Local studies cited in this subsection confirm that Filipino learners continue to experience writing difficulties across educational levels. However, much of this research either combines different learner groups or focuses on general tertiary populations. Insufficient attention is given to first-year English major students as a distinct cohort. Considering that their academic specialization is English and they will become future English teachers, a closer examination of their writing performance at the earliest or first level in the university may yield insights that differ from those observed among non-specialist learners.

2.4 Sources and Causes of Writing Errors

Across both international and Philippine studies, writing errors are attributed to multiple interacting factors. Linguistically, intralingual transfer—such as overgeneralization and incomplete application of English rules—has been identified as a major source of errors (Bi et al., 2024). Interlingual interference from learners' first languages also contributes to errors in sentence structure, verb usage, articles, and mechanics, particularly in multilingual contexts (Gayo & Widodo, 2018; Labicane & Oliva, 2022).

Beyond linguistic factors, several studies point to instructional and affective influences. Limited writing practice, insufficient or delayed feedback, lack of explicit grammar instruction, over-reliance on digital tools, time constraints, and low motivation have been shown to exacerbate writing difficulties (Ali et al., 2023; Chuanpipatpong, 2025; Matiso, 2023). In the Philippine context, additional factors such as limited exposure to structured academic writing and uneven implementation of writing-focused interventions have been identified (Matusalem et al., 2025; Munder, 2024).

Recent research highlights the significant role of effective, motivational, and socio-contextual factors in ESL writing development. Studies show that learners' writing self-efficacy and motivation are closely linked to their grammatical accuracy, writing fluency, and revision practices. For example, Adiyono et al. (2025) found that external support and self-regulation reduce academic procrastination, fostering more consistent writing habits. Khairuddin et al. (2025) demonstrated that higher writing self-efficacy predicts better engagement in writing tasks among university students in Malaysia.

Talha et al. (2025) observed that teacher feedback and peer support positively influence students' motivation and reduce recurrent grammatical errors in Indonesia. Tsao (2021) reported that students with stronger self-regulatory strategies and intrinsic motivation showed fewer lexical and syntactic errors in L2 essays. Anggraeni et al. (2025) emphasized that socio-contextual support, including school-based writing programs and structured practice, enhances students' overall writing performance. These studies collectively underscore that writing errors are influenced not only by linguistic competence but also by learners' motivation, self-efficacy, and the availability of supportive learning environments.

These studies mentioned in this subsection consistently identify linguistic, instructional, and effective-motivational factors as contributing to writing errors. However, these factors are often discussed broadly rather than examined in relation to specific error patterns within a defined learner group. For first-year English majors in Philippine public universities, it remains unclear how learners' motivation, self-efficacy, and access to socio-contextual support – such as teacher guidance, peer feedback, and structured writing opportunities – interact with observable writing errors. Addressing this gap would allow for a more nuanced understanding of how these effective and contextual variables influence error production and learning outcomes, while also highlighting practical strategies for improving students' writing skills during their remaining years in the teacher education program.

2.5 Pedagogical Value of Writing Errors

Both international and local literature increasingly emphasize that writing errors should not be viewed solely as deficiencies but as valuable indicators of learners' interlanguage development. Error analysis enables teachers to diagnose learners' strengths and weaknesses and to design instruction that is responsive to actual learner needs (Escuadra, 2024; Matiso, 2023). Studies recommend explicit

grammar instruction, corrective feedback, peer- and self-correction, consciousness-raising activities, and targeted intervention programs to address recurring error patterns (Apuhin et al., 2023; Bataineh & Sabiri, 2025; Comeo, 2025). Mayasari and Sari (2024) recommend the use of lecture and provide additional explanations and examples as well as expose students to more writing exercises so that these students would be able to understand the concept in the application of subject-verb agreement. Mustaq et al. (2024) also emphasize that individual instructional interventions must be conducted so that errors will further enhance English writing proficiency in ESL classrooms.

Recent research also highlights the evolving role of technology in writing instruction. While digital tools and generative AI can support organization and coherence, scholars caution that guided and pedagogically sound use is necessary to ensure that learners develop autonomy rather than dependence (Chuanpipatpong, 2025). Although many studies mentioned here highlight the pedagogical value of error analysis, few translate their findings into targeted instructional guidance grounded in a systematic analysis of a clearly defined learner population. For first-year English major students in Philippine public universities, research-based recommendations are limited. A study that integrates structured error classification with contextual interpretation may therefore contribute more directly to curriculum development and writing support initiatives. Since they are still in their first year, the results will inform the teachers of the current performance of the students to help them look for strategies to address these needs.

2.6 Critical Evaluation of Previous Studies

Despite the valuable contributions of previous research on ESL writing errors, several methodological and contextual limitations emerge. Many studies primarily report error frequencies without thoroughly examining the underlying causes or contextual influences affecting learner performance (Ferris, 2005; Sridhar, 1980). Differences in error classification frameworks, such as varying distinctions between lexical, morphological, and syntactic errors, complicate cross-study comparisons and may lead to inconsistent or contradictory findings (Ferris, 2005; Sridhar, 1980). Some research also aggregates data across diverse learner populations, potentially obscuring patterns specific to English major students (Labicane & Oliva, 2022; Munder, 2024).

While prior studies identify contributing factors, including poor reading habits, lack of motivation, insufficient teacher feedback, and limited knowledge of English structures, these factors are often discussed separately from specific error patterns and rarely analyzed in an integrated manner (Labicane & Oliva, 2022; Munder, 2024). In the Philippine context, empirical studies on advanced learners, particularly first-year English majors, are scarce, highlighting a gap in understanding the unique challenges faced by this group (Labicane & Oliva, 2022). Collectively, these limitations point to the need for a comprehensive study that not only categorizes writing errors but also systematically investigates their causes and pedagogical implications, thereby informing context-specific instructional strategies and materials – a focus central to the present research.

2.7 Conceptual and Theoretical Gaps in Error Analysis Research

While this existing research cited has successfully documented recurring grammatical, lexical, and mechanical errors across ESL and EFL contexts, several conceptual limitations are evident. First, many of these studies adopt error classification as an endpoint rather than as a starting point for deeper explanatory analysis. Although frequency counts provide useful descriptive insights, they rarely illuminate the underlying cognitive, instructional, or socio-contextual mechanisms that generate these errors. As a result, error analysis research is often taxonomic rather than explanatory.

Second, the investigation of causal factors is frequently fragmented. Linguistic explanations such as interlingual and intralingual transfer are commonly cited; however, these explanations are often inferred rather than empirically examined. Similarly, affective and instructional factors are discussed in isolation from specific error categories, limiting our understanding of how particular variables may influence distinct types of errors such as comparing lexical versus syntactic. Third, although many studies emphasize the pedagogical value of error analysis, few systematically translate empirical findings into structured instructional frameworks or curriculum-based interventions. Recommendations are often general such as “increase grammar instruction” or “provide feedback” without linking specific error patterns to targeted pedagogical strategies. This disconnect suggests that the pedagogical implications of error analysis are under-theorized rather than fully operationalized in instructional practice.

These limitations indicate a need for a more integrated framework that connects (1) systematic error classification, (2) multidimensional causal analysis, and (3) context-sensitive pedagogical interpretation within a clearly defined learner population.

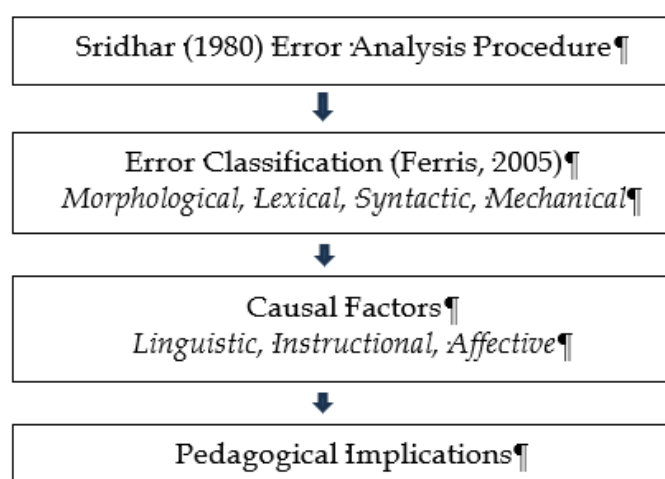


Figure 1: Conceptual framework of the study

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework of the study. The framework integrates Ferris’s (2005) error classification model and Sridhar’s (1980) error analysis procedures as the theoretical foundations guiding the identification and

analysis of writing errors. The study examines the types of writing errors produced by first-year English major students and the causal factors based on related studies which contribute to these errors. The interaction of these variables provides the basis for deriving pedagogical implications for ESL writing instruction and language education.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a descriptive quantitative research design grounded in the principles of error analysis to systematically examine the writing errors committed by first-year English major students in their essays. The descriptive quantitative approach was selected because the study sought to identify, classify, quantify, and interpret naturally occurring linguistic errors without manipulating instructional variables or imposing experimental treatments. The primary objective was to generate an empirical profile of the types, frequency, and distribution of writing errors across morphological, lexical, syntactic, and mechanical categories as well as the underlying factors for committing such errors gathered quantitatively through a checklist.

3.2 Participants of the Study

The participants of the study were all first year Bachelor of Secondary Education (BSEd) major in English students enrolled in four external campuses only of one of the state universities in Iloilo, Philippines. There is only one section of BSED-English in each of these four campuses giving a total of 99 students. Purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants who had already completed several English and writing-related courses, making them suitable subjects for an in-depth analysis of academic writing errors. Although they were in their first year of university study and had only begun their formal specialization in English, they had completed foundational general education English courses in senior high school prior to entering the program. At the time of data collection, they were enrolled in a language and writing-related course such as Purposive Communication, as part of the teacher education curriculum.

Hence, focusing on first-year English majors is intentional. As students who have chosen to specialize in English and who are preparing for advanced linguistic, literary, and pedagogical training, their writing performance at this stage provides an important baseline of their linguistic competence upon entry into the program. Examining their errors early in their specialization allows the institution to identify persistent weaknesses that may not have been fully addressed in prior schooling and to design timely, targeted instructional interventions. Given that these students are future English educators and language professionals, strengthening their writing proficiency from the outset carries significant pedagogical and institutional value.

3.3 Corpus of the Study

The corpus of the study consisted of narrative essays written by the participants. Each student was required to write a 300-word narrative essay within a 60-minute time frame. The essay prompt asked students to write about their most

memorable or significant experience on campus, a topic chosen to encourage authentic language use while minimizing content-related constraints. Although the participants were first-year students, data collection was conducted during the latter part of the semester, at which point they had already spent several months at the university. By this time, students had participated in academic activities, campus events, classroom interactions, and institutional engagements, allowing them to reflect meaningfully on their experiences. The prompt “most memorable experience on campus” was therefore considered appropriate for eliciting authentic narrative writing while remaining accessible to all participants. The collected essays served as the primary data source for identifying and analyzing writing errors. Since 99 students participated, the total number of essays analyzed was also 99.

3.4 Research Instrument

To identify the factors contributing to students’ writing errors, a Causal Factor Checklist developed by the researcher was administered after the essay-writing task. The instrument consisted of 10 items, each representing a potential factor influencing students’ writing performance, including linguistic, instructional, affective, and environmental variables.

The items were formulated based on themes consistently reported in previous ESL error analysis studies, such as limited grammatical knowledge, lack of motivation, insufficient feedback, inadequate writing practice, and limited exposure to English materials (specifically Labicane & Oliva, 2022; Matiso, 2023; Munder, 2024; Tuparan & Caturay, 2024). In other words, the items were derived from a review of related literature and aligned with recurring factors identified in previous empirical studies on ESL writing errors. The checklist employed a dichotomous response format (Yes/No). Students were instructed to mark “Yes” if they believed the factor contributed to the errors they committed in their essays or “No” if not. The use of a dichotomous format allowed for straightforward computation of frequency counts and ranking of the most commonly perceived causes.

Further, the checklist underwent content validation by two language education experts who examined the alignment of the items with established findings in ESL writing research. Minor revisions were made to improve clarity and precision of wording prior to administration. In addition, although the researcher served as the instructor of the participants in one of the campuses under study, several ethical safeguards were observed to minimize potential bias and ensure voluntary participation. For example, students were informed that participation in the study was voluntary and that their responses would not affect their course grades. The essay task was treated as a regular class requirement, but only anonymized copies were used for research purposes. Identifying information was removed prior to analysis to ensure confidentiality. Furthermore, the checklist responses were collected after the writing task and encoded without reference to students’ academic standing. These measures were implemented to reduce power-related influence and interpretation bias in data collection and analysis.

3.5 Data Gathering and Analysis

The data was analyzed using established error analysis procedures and descriptive statistical techniques. Students' essays were first examined to identify linguistic deviations from standard academic English conventions. Identified errors were classified according to Ferris's (2005) categories—morphological, lexical, syntactic, and mechanical—following Sridhar's (1980) procedural steps of error analysis. After classification, frequency counts and percentage distributions were computed to determine the prevalence of each error type. Error categories were then ranked based on their frequency to identify areas of greatest difficulty among the participants. Descriptive statistical computations were performed using Microsoft Excel, which facilitated accurate tabulation, percentage calculation, and ranking of error categories. In quantifying writing errors, each error was counted per occurrence rather than per error type per essay. This means that repeated instances of the same error within a single essay were recorded separately.

For example, if a student used *“educate”* instead of *“education”* five times, all five instances were counted as five lexical errors. This approach was adopted to capture the actual density and distribution of errors in students' written output and to reflect the extent to which specific error patterns recurred within individual compositions. Counting errors per occurrence provides a more accurate representation of the frequency and persistence of particular linguistic difficulties across the corpus. To ensure coding consistency, an intra-rater reliability procedure was conducted. A subset of the essays, which is 25% of the total number of essays analyzed, was randomly selected and re-coded by the researcher after a two-week interval. The results of the initial coding and the second coding were compared to assess consistency in error identification and classification. Any discrepancies were reviewed and resolved to maintain classification stability. This process enhanced the internal reliability and credibility of the error analysis.

Regarding the factors, the Causal Factor Checklist was administered after the essay writing task. This sequencing was intentional to prevent the checklist items from influencing students' writing performance. By completing the essay first, participants were able to produce authentic written output without being primed to focus on specific difficulties. The checklist was then distributed immediately after the writing activity to capture students' self-reported perceptions of factors that may have contributed to their errors while the experience was still recent. The students indicated whether each factor applied to them (Yes/No format). Responses were said, and frequency counts were computed for each item. The factors were then ranked according to the number of endorsements, from highest to lowest frequency. Thus, “ranking” refers to ordering the checklist items based on how many students selected each factor as contributing to their writing errors. This procedure allowed the researcher to identify the most commonly perceived causes of writing difficulties among the participants.

As mentioned, the study followed Sridhar's (1980) six-step framework for error analysis, supplemented by Ferris's (2005) error categorization model and Corder's explanatory procedures as shown in the following:

Table 1: Classification of writing errors based on Ferris (2005)

Major Category	Scope (Global/Local)	Subcategories
Morphological Errors	Global / Local	Verb Tense; Verb Form; Subject-Verb Agreement; Articles/Determiners; Noun Endings (Plural/Possessive)
Lexical Errors	Local	Word Choice; Word Form; Informal Usage; Idiom Error; Pronoun Error; Preposition
Syntactic Errors	Global	Sentence Structure; Run-ons; Fragments
Mechanical Errors	Local	Punctuation; Spelling; Capitalization

Sridhar's (1980) six-step framework for error analysis includes the following:

Step 1: Collection of Data

The essay writing task was administered during the participants' regular class schedule. The researcher, who also served as the course instructor, provided uniform instructions and ensured that all students completed the task under similar conditions. Upon completion, the essays were collected and prepared for analysis.

Step 2: Identification of Errors

All errors committed in the essays were carefully examined. Errors were underlined or highlighted, and each identified error was transcribed onto a separate record sheet along with its corresponding correct form. This step ensured accuracy and consistency in error documentation.

Step 3: Classification of Errors

The identified errors were classified using Ferris's (2005) error classification model, which categorizes errors into major linguistic domains such as mechanical, lexical, morphological, and structural errors, along with their respective subcategories. This framework enabled a systematic and pedagogically relevant organization of error types.

Step 4: Determination of Frequency and Percentage Distribution

After classification, the frequency and percentage distribution of each error type and subtype were computed. This quantitative procedure allowed for comparison across error categories and helped determine which errors were most prevalent in students' writing.

Step 5: Identification of Areas of Difficulty

To determine the learners' areas of difficulty in the target language, error types were ranked according to their frequency. Ranking served as the primary statistical tool for identifying the most problematic aspects of English writing among the participants.

Step 6: Therapy and Identification of Error Causes

Based on the results of the error analysis, a second language writing guide will be proposed as a proposed intervention to address the most frequent and problematic errors identified in the study.

In addition, a research-made checklist was administered to identify the factors that contribute to students' writing errors. This procedure was anchored on Corder's explanatory stage of error analysis, which emphasizes the importance of explaining why errors occur. Responses from the checklist were tallied and ranked to determine the most prevalent factors influencing students' writing performance.

4. Results and Findings

4.1 Common Writing Errors

This subsection presents the types and distribution of writing errors identified in the essays of first-year English major students. A total of 1200 errors were recorded across the 99 essays analyzed, indicating that writing errors are prevalent even among students who have chosen to specialize in English. The results show that syntactic errors constitute the largest proportion of errors, followed by morphological, lexical, and mechanical errors. Among the individual error types, word choice, sentence structure, run-on sentences, fragments, and subject-verb agreement emerged as the most frequently occurring problems. These findings provide an overview of the dominant linguistic difficulties encountered by the participants and serve as the basis for the detailed discussion that follows.

Now, as shown in Table 2, 99 first-year English major students committed a grand total of 1200 errors in their 300 - word English essays. Syntactic category got the highest percentage with 37.7%, followed by morphological category with 29%, then lexical category with 21.75%, and lastly mechanical category with 11.76%,. This means that the student would commit errors on their sentence structures and most often they construct run-on sentences and fragments in their essays. Specifically, by considering all categories, word choice got the highest percentage among the errors identified in the essays. Word choice as an error means that students choose words not appropriate to the context of the sentence or they choose terms (even phrases) that would change the meaning of the sentence or the idea of the entire paragraph.

Due to errors in word choice, it led students to further commit errors on sentence structure. It means that students do not follow correct sentence patterns, or they construct unparallel sentences in their essays. This also means that there are also instances that students would miss words to complete the thought of the sentences or they include unnecessary words in their sentences which made the readers to hardly understand the meaning of the sentence or of the whole paragraph. In other instances, students also construct sentences with dangling modifiers, misplaced modifiers, and weak pronoun reference which affect the structure of the sentences. Another common error committed by students are run-on constructions, errors on subject-verb agreement, and fragment. Run-on

happens when two complete sentences are separated by a comma or are not separated at all. The first sentence “runs on” into the second. Subject- verb agreement errors means that the verb does not agree with the subject in terms of number or the students do not follow the rules of subject – verb agreement. A sentence fragment is a group of words that does not express a complete thought. Since it is a part of a sentence, it must not be allowed to stand by itself but should be kept in the sentence of which it is a part.

Table 2: Categories of errors in English essays committed by first-year English major students

Types of Errors	Campus A	Campus B	Campus C	Campus D	Total	Percentage	Rank
I.							
Morphological	7	10	9	9	35	2.92%	11
Verb Tense	29	26	21	24	100	8.33%	6
Verb Form	42	22	25	21	110	9.17%	4
Subject-verb Agreement	20	8	7	7	42	3.50%	10
Articles/ Determiners Noun Endings (plural/ possessive)	32	11	14	13	70	5.83%	7
Sub Total	130	77	76	74	357	29.75%	2
II. Lexical							
Word Choice	86	40	59	38	223	18.58%	1
Word Form	14	1	4	5	24	2%	13
Informal	2	3	1	2	8	0.67%	14
Usage Pronoun Error	2	1	1	2	6	0.50%	15
Sub Total	104	45	65	47	261	21.75%	3
III. Syntactic							
Sentence	83	40	38	42	203	16.92%	2
Structure	45	32	30	35	142	11.83%	3
Run-on Fragment	37	18	27	20	102	8.50%	5
Sub Total	165	90	95	97	447	37.25%	1
IV.							
Mechanical	12	15	7	10	44	3.67%	9
Punctuation	8	4	9	5	26	2.17%	12
Spelling Capitalization	7	20	26	12	65	5.42%	8
Sub Total	27	39	42	27	135	11.25%	4
Grand Total	426	251	278	245	1200		

To further illustrate the distribution of writing errors across major categories, Figure 2 presents the percentage distribution of syntactic, morphological, lexical, and mechanical errors. As shown in the figure, syntactic errors constitute the largest proportion (37.25%), followed by morphological errors (29.75%), lexical errors (21.75%), and mechanical errors (11.25%).

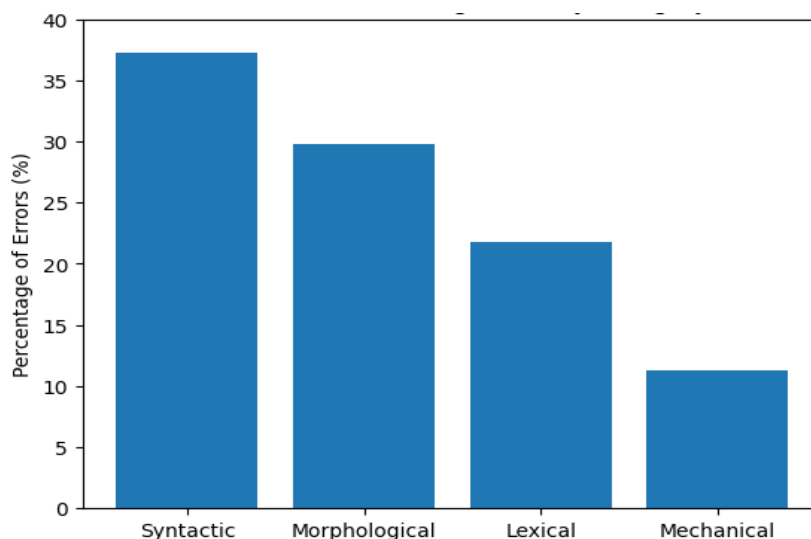


Figure 2: Distribution of writing errors by category

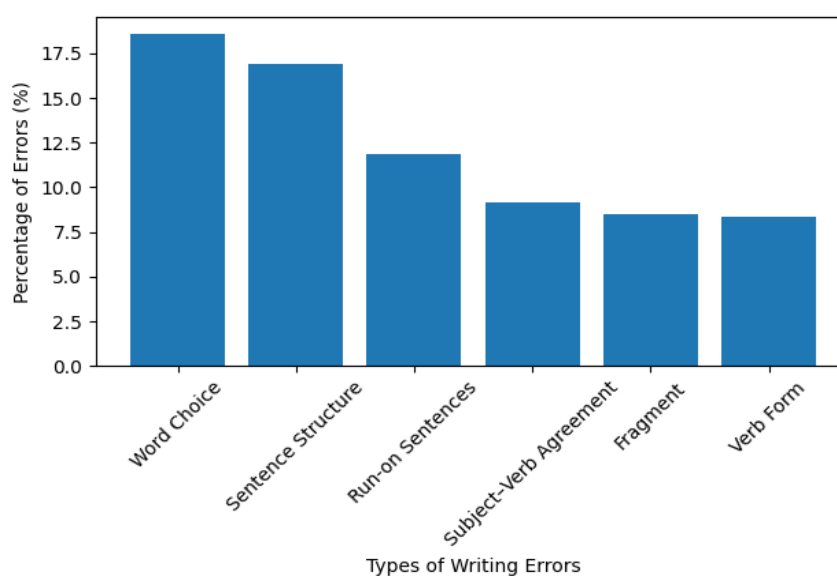


Figure 3: Most frequent individual writing errors

Figure 3 presents the percentage distribution of the most frequent individual writing errors found in the students' essays. Word choice errors accounted for the largest proportion (18.58%), followed by sentence structure errors (16.92%) and run-on sentences (11.83%). Other common errors included subject-verb agreement (9.17%), fragments (8.50%), and verb form errors (8.33%). These results indicate that difficulties in sentence construction and lexical selection constitute the most prominent challenges in students' ESL writing.

For example, the student committed an error on word choice because he used "they are some teachers" instead of "there are some teachers" and "they are some professional" instead of "there are some professionals." An error was also observed in the spelling and plural form of the word "professional." A certain student has also written a run-on sentence in the first paragraph of his essay. "A education they begin

in our home“run-ons with several other sentences such as *“next is from the school”* *“they are some teachers to motivate their children or the students they teach education a standard education...”* One can eliminate this error by separating the two sentences by using a period as punctuation or by using a semi colon or comma with coordinating conjunction. The student does not also follow the correct sentence pattern in writing English sentences. In the sentence *“For me, Education is the most important things in our life, because education is bring you in your dream...”* has a wrong sentence pattern because the word *“brings”* should follow after the word *“education”* and not *“is bring”* to follow the pattern S (subject) - V (verb) - DO (direct object) to make the sentence correct. Error in capitalization was also noticed because letter *“e”* in the word *“education”* should be in lower case.

Additional examples include the sentence structure of the sentence *“If you want to have a good job, you have striven hard in your education in order for you succeed in life.”* is not correct because the student fails to insert *“to”* between the words *“have”* and *“strive”* and between words *“you”* and *“succeed.”* In the sentence *“My parents work hard in order for me to go to school,”* the student committed an error on subject-verb agreement because the verb *“works”* should be in plural form because the subject *“parents”* is plural. Similarly, *“Education become...”* should be *“Education becomes...”* to make the verb agrees with the subject. A student also writes a fragment sentence such as in the construction *“Not just my dream, but also for my family who supported me in everything that I do’s dreams”* does not express a complete thought. Within this fragment sentence, other errors could be noticed such as errors on noun endings (possessive). *“For my family”* should be *“for my family’s dream”* to make the two phrases parallel and *“that I do’s”* should be *“that I do”* because verb has no possessive form, only noun and pronouns (possessive case).

Aside from these top five common errors, the researcher also noticed other errors in the essays such as errors on verb form, noun endings, capitalization, articles/determiners, verb tense, spelling, word form, informal usage, and pronoun error. Error on verb form means that students form their verbs incorrectly such *“could considered for”* instead of *“could consider”*, *“I give”* instead of *“I have given”*, *“will brought”* instead of *“will bring”* and *“had undergo”* instead of *“had undergone.”* Next, error in noun endings means that students form the plural of nouns or possessives incorrectly; they pluralize the noun although it is not anymore necessary; they use singular noun instead of plural form; or they are confused between the plural nouns and possessives. *“All profession”* instead of *“all professions”*, *“different job’s”* instead of *“different jobs”*, *“one of our biggest problems”* instead of *“one of the biggest problems”* are examples of this error.

Also, errors on capitalization were noticed such as in the word *“Education,”* students capitalized it though it is not the beginning of the sentence. There are also errors found in the use of articles/ and determiners. This means that students are confused when to use *“the”* or *“an,”* or they would include articles although they are already unnecessary or they would omit article in the instances that these articles should be inserted. Examples of this kind of error are *“a invisible”* instead of *“an invisible”*, *“with a game”*, instead of *“with games,”* and *“our needs as a human being”* instead of *“our needs as human beings.”* Errors on punctuation were also

noted especially on the use of commas between clauses. Errors on verb tense were also noticed in the essays such as *"when I became teacher in the future"* instead of *"when I become teacher in the future."* Words with wrong spelling were also noticed in the essays such as *"recieve"* instead of *"receive"*, *"acheive"* instead of *"achieve,"* *"bigin"* instead of *"begin"*, *"imposible"* instead of *"impossible,"* and *"diffinition"* instead of *"definition."* There are also errors on word form as observed in the essays of the students. This means students formed the word incorrectly such as *"theirsself"* instead of *"themselves"*, *"meaningfull"* instead of *"meaningful"*, and *"now a day's"* instead of *"nowadays."*

Examples of informal usage were also found in their essays such as *"kid"* instead of *"child/children"* and *"gonna"* instead of *"is going"* are examples of informal language. Pronoun error was the least error committed by the students. This kind of error occurred when students used a pronoun which does not agree with the antecedent, for example, *"Education is very important to one's life to know the world his/her living in."* The correct pronoun to be used should have been *"he/she" plus "is living"* because it serves as the subject of the sentence/ clause.

4.2 Factors Contributing to Errors

This subsection examines the factors that contribute to the writing errors identified in the essays. Based on the responses collected through the causal factor checklist, students attributed their errors to a combination of linguistic, instructional, and affective factors. The most frequently reported factors include lack of knowledge in the structure of English, poor reading habits, lack of motivation and interest in using the language, limited supervision during writing activities, and delayed teacher feedback. These results provide insight into the conditions that may influence students' writing performance and help explain why certain types of errors persist despite students' specialization in English.

As shown in Table 3, the most frequent factors why students committed errors in their essays are the following: *lack of knowledge in the structure of English as a subject, poor reading habits, lack of motivation and interest in the use of the language, lack of supervision of the teachers, teachers' failure in providing immediate feedback for learners' writing compositions.* This means that students do not have enough knowledge of the structure of the language which is also apparent in their essays as most of the common errors were on word choice, sentence pattern, run-on and fragment sentences and subject-verb agreement. They lack knowledge because they had poor reading habits and lack of motivation in the use of the language. They also had a hard time expressing their thoughts and ideas in English because of these factors. The students also reported that they lack supervision from teachers and teachers' delay in providing feedback to the students' compositions.

Aside from these top five factors, other factors also had closer frequencies with these five factors which caused students to commit errors. The results in Table 3 show that *"limited period of time provided by the teachers for writing activities"* was in sixth place, followed by other factors which include *"own carelessness"*, *"less exposures to English through newspapers, magazines, movies, TV programs, and the like"*, *"uninteresting topics"*, and *"insufficient writing activities or exercises in class"* were in 7th, 8th, 9th, and 10th places, respectively. In addition, based on the interview

conducted by the two representatives from each campus, they reported that they committed errors in their essays because of lack of ideas and knowledge of rules of the language, not listening to teacher's instructions, and time factor. These results only mean that time is important for the students during writing activities so that they will have enough time to think about ideas to include in their compositions and to proofread their work. Also, other reason why they hardly generated ideas for their composition was that the topics were uninteresting and they had lesser exposures to English materials such as magazines, newspaper, movies, and the like. Insufficient writing activities which can allow them to practice their writing skills was also one of the factors.

Table 3: Common factors why first-year English major students committed errors in their English essays

Factors of Committing Errors	Frequency	Rank
Lack of knowledge in the structure of English as a subject.	93	1
Poor reading habits	90	2
Lack of motivation and interest in the use of the language	88	3
Lack of supervision of the teachers	80	4
Teachers' failure in providing immediate feedback for learners' writing compositions	75	5
Limited period of time provided by the teachers for writing activities.	73	6
Own carelessness	72	7
Less exposures to English through newspapers, magazines, movies, TV programs, etc.	69	8
Uninteresting topics	58	9
Insufficient writing activities or exercises in class	54	10

To further illustrate the distribution of perceived factors contributing to writing errors, Figure 4 presents the frequency of responses for each factor. The results indicate that lack of knowledge in the structure of English (93) was the most frequently reported factor, followed by poor reading habits (90) and lack of motivation and interest in using the language (88). Instructional factors such as lack of teacher supervision (80) and delayed feedback (75) were also commonly identified.



Figure 4: Factors contributing to writing errors among first-year English major students

5. Discussion

This section discusses the findings of the study in relation to the two research questions and situates them within existing literature on ESL writing and error analysis. Specifically, it interprets the types and distribution of writing errors identified in the essays of first-year English major students and examines the factors that contribute to the occurrence of these errors. By integrating the analysis of error patterns with students reported causal factors, the discussion moves beyond simple description toward a more comprehensive explanation of learners' writing difficulties.

With regard to common errors and distribution of these writing errors, a closer examination of the data shows that the 99 essays analyzed contained a total of 1200 errors, which corresponds to an average of approximately 12 errors per essay. Considering that each composition consisted of about 300 words, this represents roughly one error for every 25 words of text. This relatively high error density suggests that even English major students at the beginning of their specialization continue to experience considerable difficulty in producing grammatically accurate written discourse. Similar patterns of frequent grammatical and structural errors have been reported in previous studies

involving ESL learners and university students (Dinh, 2023; Matiso, 2023; Sharma, 2025). However, the present study extends beyond many earlier investigations by simultaneously examining both the types of writing errors and the factors contributing to their occurrence within a clearly defined group of first-year English major students in a Philippine state university. By combining systematic error classification with an analysis of reported causal factors, the study provides a more comprehensive understanding of how linguistic difficulties interact with instructional and contextual conditions influencing students' writing performance.

As observed, the predominance of syntactic errors among the participants suggests that constructing grammatically complete and structurally coherent sentences are a significant challenge for ESL learners, even among English major students. Writing in a second language requires learners to simultaneously manage multiple linguistic processes, including lexical retrieval, grammatical encoding, and syntactic organization, which increases cognitive load during text production (Manchón et al., 2023). Sentence-level errors such as run-on constructions, fragments, and incorrect sentence patterns therefore reflect learners' difficulty in coordinating these linguistic components while generating ideas in real time. From a second language acquisition perspective, such errors may also indicate the developmental nature of learners' interlanguage systems, where incomplete mastery of syntactic rules leads to overgeneralization or omission of structural elements (Selinker, 1972).

In addition, the learning context may contribute to these patterns. Limited opportunities for sustained writing practice and explicit instruction in sentence construction can result in insufficient reinforcement of syntactic structures, causing students to rely on partially internalized grammatical rules when composing essays. Furthermore, possible influence from the learners' first language may also play a role. Filipino and other Philippine languages often exhibit flexible sentence structures and do not strictly follow the same syntactic patterns found in English, which may lead to difficulties in maintaining standard English sentence order and clause structure. Similar findings have been reported in previous studies where syntactic errors were identified as the most dominant category in ESL learners' writing (Dinh, 2023; Sharma, 2025), reinforcing the view that sentence-level difficulties are a persistent challenge even among university-level learners.

The results align strongly with a substantial body of international and local literature which consistently reports that grammatical and syntactic difficulties dominate ESL and EFL learners' writing. Internationally, Matiso (2023) emphasized that grammatical incompetence, particularly in sentence construction and verb usage, significantly weakens learners' academic writing, and underscored the importance of error analysis and explicit grammar instruction – an approach likewise adopted in the present study. Similarly, Gayo and Widodo (2018) reported that Indonesian learners' most frequent errors occurred at the morphological and syntactic levels, particularly in verb tense, subject-verb agreement, articles, and noun phrases, which directly parallels the dominant error

categories identified among the English major students in this study. Comparable findings were observed in Vietnam, where Dinh (2023) revealed that fragment sentences, wrong verb forms, and subject-verb agreement were among the most serious grammatical problems, reinforcing the present finding that syntactic errors—specifically sentence fragments, run-ons, and sentence structure errors—constituted the largest proportion of errors.

Studies across diverse EFL contexts further corroborate these results. Sharma (2025) identified verb tense, subject-verb agreement, word choice, fragments, and run-on sentences as the most frequent errors in Nepalese university students' essays, which closely mirrors the top five errors in the present study. Likewise, Husna and Isna (2024), Gazioglu and Aydin (2024), and Zakkaria et al. (2025) all reported that misformation errors—particularly in verb tense and verb form—were dominant, suggesting persistent difficulties in English morphology regardless of educational level.

Studies conducted in Thailand (Chuanpipatpong, 2025; Sutakote et al., 2025) and China (Bi et al., 2024) also revealed that sentence-level errors such as fragments, run-ons, and omissions, along with mechanical errors in punctuation and capitalization, were prevalent—patterns likewise evident in the present study's syntactic and mechanical categories. In Middle Eastern contexts, Bataineh and Sabiri (2025), Fortuna (2025), and Seddik (2023) similarly documented high frequencies of errors in spelling, verb tense, subject-verb agreement, and sentence structure, attributing these difficulties to both interlingual and intralingual interference, limited practice, and delayed feedback, which were likewise identified as major factors in the present investigation.

Within the Philippine context, the findings are consistent with, yet extend beyond, previous studies. Labicane and Oliva (2022), Munder (2024), and Comeo (2025) reported that grammatical errors, particularly in verb usage, subject-verb agreement, capitalization, punctuation, and word choice, are pervasive even among college students and pre-service English teachers. Studies conducted at the secondary and elementary levels in the Philippines (Dejon et al., 2024; Escuadra, 2024; Uka et al., 2023) likewise revealed persistent difficulties in grammar and mechanics, indicating that such errors persist across educational levels and are not fully resolved even at the tertiary level. Moreover, Apuhin et al. (2023) and Matusalem et al. (2025) highlighted the dominance of punctuation, sentence structure, and omission errors among English majors and ESL learners, further validating the present study's results.

Despite the breadth of existing research, the present study addresses several gaps. Many international studies focus on high school learners, foundation-level students, or general EFL populations, while several Philippine studies concentrate on non-English majors or isolated error types such as punctuation or verb tense. In contrast, the present study specifically examines first-year English major students in a Philippine state university, a population expected to demonstrate higher linguistic competence, yet still exhibiting substantial syntactic, morphological, lexical, and mechanical errors. Furthermore, unlike many earlier

studies that focus solely on error frequency, the present research integrates error classification, frequency ranking, and causal analysis, combining quantitative error analysis with checklist data to explain why these errors persist. By grounding the analysis in established frameworks and using the findings as the basis for developing a second language writing guide, the study responds directly to calls in both international (Lee et al., 2025; Matiso, 2023; Mayarsari & Sari, 2025) and local (Comeo, 2025) literature for pedagogically responsive, context-specific interventions. Thus, the present study not only confirms existing findings but also fills a critical gap by providing comprehensive, instructionally relevant evidence on the writing difficulties of English majors in the Philippine higher education context.

With regard to the factors contributing to errors, these factors identified in this study align strongly with findings from both international and Philippine-based error analysis research, reinforcing the explanatory value of error analysis in ESL writing contexts. The most prominent factor – lack of knowledge in the structure of English – has consistently been reported in previous studies as a primary cause of grammatical, syntactic, and lexical errors. Studies conducted in diverse EFL and ESL contexts have shown that limited grammatical competence results in frequent errors in verb tense, subject-verb agreement, sentence structure, and word choice (Gayo & Widodo, 2018; Husna & Isna, 2024; Isma et al., 2023; Sharma, 2025). Similarly, Philippine studies have attributed writing errors among secondary and tertiary learners to inadequate mastery of English grammatical rules and limited formal exposure to structured writing instruction (Comeo, 2025; Labicane & Oliva, 2022).

Poor reading habits and limited exposure to English materials, which ranked among the top contributing factors in this study, corroborate findings from earlier research emphasizing the role of input in second language development. International studies suggest that insufficient exposure to authentic English texts restricts learners' vocabulary development, syntactic awareness, and familiarity with conventional sentence patterns, thereby increasing the likelihood of errors in word choice, cohesion, and sentence construction (Dinh, 2023; Lee et al., 2025; Matiso, 2023). Comparable results were reported in Philippine contexts, where limited engagement with English reading materials and weak reading culture were found to negatively affect learners' writing accuracy and fluency (Munder, 2024; Uka et al., 2023).

The lack of motivation and interest in using English, as reported by the respondents, echoes findings from several studies which identify affective factors as significant contributors to writing errors. Studies conducted among ESL and EFL learners indicate that low motivation and negative attitudes toward writing reduce learners' willingness to practice, revise, and self-monitor their written output, leading to persistent grammatical and mechanical errors (Aaqil et al., 2022; Bi et al., 2024; Chuanpipatpong, 2025). This pattern is similarly observed in Philippine studies where students' reluctance to engage in writing tasks and limited confidence in English contribute to repeated errors across writing tasks (Escuadra, 2024; Igsi et al., 2025).

Teacher-related factors—particularly lack of supervision and delayed or insufficient corrective feedback—also align with earlier research emphasizing the critical role of instructional support in reducing writing errors. International studies have consistently shown that timely and explicit corrective feedback, combined with guided practice, significantly improves learners' grammatical accuracy and sentence construction (Bataineh & Sabiri, 2025; Matiso, 2023; Sutakote et al., 2025). Philippine-based research similarly highlights that inadequate feedback and limited teacher monitoring contribute to students' continued difficulty in addressing errors in punctuation, verb forms, and sentence structure (Apuhin et al., 2023; Comeo, 2025).

Other factors identified in this study, such as time constraints during writing tasks, carelessness, uninteresting topics, and insufficient writing activities, further support findings from previous studies which suggest that task design, time pressure, and lack of meaningful practice influence the frequency and persistence of writing errors. Studies indicate that limited writing time reduces opportunities for planning and proofreading, while unengaging topics and infrequent writing tasks restrict learners' ability to develop and refine their writing skills (Ali et al., 2023; Sharma, 2025; Torres & Mayo, 2025). These observations are consistent with earlier Philippine studies which report that insufficient writing practice and poorly scaffolded tasks contribute to persistent grammatical and mechanical errors among students (Dejon et al., 2024; Labicane & Oliva, 2022).

Moreover, the results on factors imply that the factors identified in this study should not be interpreted merely as students' personal explanations for their errors but as indicators of broader instructional and affective conditions shaping ESL writing development. For instance, the high frequency of responses identifying lack of knowledge in the structure of English and poor reading habits suggests that many students enter the university with incomplete mastery of grammatical and lexical structures. Similar observations have been reported in Philippine studies where students' writing errors were associated with insufficient grammatical competence and limited exposure to structured language practice (Labicane & Oliva, 2022; Munder, 2024).

In addition, the prominence of lack of motivation and interest in the use of the language highlights the role of affective and self-regulatory factors in writing performance. A study suggests that learners' motivation and capacity for self-regulation influence their engagement with writing tasks and their willingness to revise and improve their work. For example, Adiyono et al. (2025) demonstrate that external academic support and students' self-regulatory skills can reduce negative learning behaviors such as academic procrastination, thereby fostering more consistent academic engagement. When such motivational and self-regulatory supports are limited, learners may develop irregular writing habits and reduced persistence in revising their work, which may contribute to recurring linguistic errors.

Furthermore, the identification of lack of teacher supervision and delayed feedback points to important pedagogical concerns. Previous studies emphasize that timely and explicit feedback is crucial in helping learners recognize and correct recurring writing errors (Apuhin et al., 2023; Matiso, 2023). Together, these findings suggest that students' reported factors reflect not only individual learning difficulties but also broader instructional and motivational conditions within the language learning environment. Similar interpretations have been noted in studies involving English majors and pre-service teachers where persistent writing difficulties were linked to both linguistic preparation and instructional support mechanisms (Comeo, 2025).

Taken together, the present findings on factors extend existing literature by confirming that writing errors among English major university students are not solely linguistic in nature but are shaped by a complex interaction of cognitive, affective, instructional, and environmental factors. By examining these factors within the context of English majors—who are expected to demonstrate higher levels of writing competence—this study addresses gaps in prior research that have largely focused on basic education learners or non-English majors, particularly within the Philippine setting. Combining discussions from both findings, another important consideration is the possibility that some forms identified as writing errors may reflect features of learners' developing interlanguage or the influence of localized English usage in the Philippine context.

In multilingual environments such as the Philippines, English coexists with numerous local languages and has developed recognizable linguistic characteristics often described as Philippine English (Bautista, 2000; Gonzalez, 1997). When examined together with the results of errors analysis, where syntactic and lexical errors emerged as the most dominant categories, *vis-vis* the findings on factors, where students reported limited knowledge of English structures and reduced exposure to formal writing practices, some recurring forms may represent transitional patterns shaped by both language learning processes and sociolinguistic context. From a second language acquisition perspective, such patterns may reflect features of learners' evolving interlanguage systems rather than purely random errors (Selinker, 1972). Recognizing this distinction is particularly important in interpreting error analysis results in the Philippine ESL setting, as certain deviations may simultaneously signal areas requiring instructional support while also reflecting the interaction between standard academic English and localized language practices.

Beyond the development of a second language writing guide, the findings of this study also have broader implications for teacher education curricula, language policy, and instructional materials design. The prevalence of syntactic and lexical errors among first-year English major students suggests the need to strengthen explicit grammar instruction and sustained academic writing practice within teacher education programs. Previous studies have similarly emphasized that systematic writing instruction and timely corrective feedback are essential in helping learners recognize and reduce recurring grammatical and structural errors (Apuhin et al., 2023; Matiso, 2023). Since the participants are future English

teachers, improving their linguistic competence at the early stages of their specialization is particularly important, as persistent writing difficulties have also been observed among English majors and pre-service teachers in other studies (Comeo, 2025). These findings therefore highlight the need for more structured writing-focused interventions, including guided writing activities, feedback-oriented pedagogy, and instructional materials that directly address the most frequent error patterns identified in this study. In this way, error analysis can function not only as a diagnostic tool for identifying learners' linguistic difficulties but also as a basis for developing more responsive language instruction and support mechanisms within teacher education programs.

The findings of this study also contribute to the theoretical and pedagogical understanding of error analysis in ESL writing. Consistent with the perspectives of Corder and later developments in error analysis research, the results demonstrate that learner errors provide valuable insights into the developmental stages of second language acquisition rather than merely representing deficiencies in learning (Ferris, 2005; Sridhar, 1980). The predominance of syntactic and lexical errors among first-year English major students supports the view that even learners specializing in English continue to rely on evolving interlanguage systems when producing extended written discourse (Selinker, 1972).

At the same time, the findings extend previous studies by showing that persistent writing errors among advanced or specialized learners are shaped not only by linguistic development but also by instructional and contextual factors such as feedback practices, exposure to English materials, and writing opportunities (Matiso, 2023). From a pedagogical perspective, these results reinforce Ferris's (2005) argument that systematic error analysis can guide teachers in identifying treatable error categories and designing targeted instructional interventions. Thus, the study strengthens the role of error analysis as both a theoretical lens for understanding second language development and a practical tool for improving ESL writing instruction, particularly within teacher education contexts.

Overall, the findings of this study address the research gaps identified earlier by providing a more integrated understanding of ESL writing errors among first-year English major students in the Philippine context. While previous studies have largely focused on identifying and classifying errors, this study extends existing literature by simultaneously examining the types of errors and the factors contributing to their occurrence using established frameworks in error analysis (Ferris, 2005; Sridhar, 1980). By focusing specifically on first-year English majors, the study also provides insights into the baseline writing competence of students at the beginning of their specialization, an area that has received limited attention in previous Philippine-based research (Labicane & Oliva, 2022; Munder, 2024).

Moreover, by linking linguistic patterns with instructional and contextual factors, the discussion highlights how error analysis can move beyond simple description toward a more explanatory and pedagogically meaningful interpretation of students' writing development. In doing so, the study contributes to a clearer understanding of how ESL writing difficulties emerge and how they may be

addressed through more responsive instructional practices in teacher education programs.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Summary of Key Findings

This study examined the writing errors committed by first-year English major students and the factors contributing to these errors within a Philippine ESL context. The analysis of 99 narrative essays revealed a total of 1 200 errors, with syntactic errors emerging as the dominant category, followed by morphological, lexical, and mechanical errors. Among individual error types, word choice, sentence structure, run-on sentences, fragments, and subject-verb agreement was the most frequent. These findings suggest that even students who have chosen to specialize in English encounter persistent difficulties in constructing grammatically accurate and structurally coherent written texts.

In addition to identifying error patterns, the study also examined factors that students perceived as contributing to these errors. The most frequently reported factors included lack of knowledge of the structure of English, poor reading habits, lack of motivation in using the language, limited supervision during writing activities, and delayed or insufficient teacher feedback. Taken together, the findings indicate that writing errors among English major students are shaped not only by linguistic competence but also by instructional practices and learning conditions that influence students' writing development.

6.2 Implications for Pedagogy and Teacher Education

The findings of this study have several implications for writing instruction and teacher education programs. The dominance of syntactic and lexical errors indicates the need for stronger instructional focus on sentence construction, clause relationships, and academic vocabulary development. Teacher education curricula may benefit from integrating structured writing activities that emphasize sentence-level accuracy and controlled writing practice, particularly during the early stages of students' specialization.

In addition, the factors identified by the participants highlight the importance of regular feedback and guided writing practice in improving students' writing competence. Writing instruction may therefore incorporate systematic feedback strategies, peer-review activities, and targeted exercises that address the most frequent error categories identified in this study. Institutions may also consider developing instructional materials and writing support programs—such as focused grammar workshops or writing laboratories—that directly address common error patterns among English major students. Since the participants are future English teachers, strengthening their writing proficiency during the early stages of their training is essential for ensuring that they can model accurate language use in their future classrooms.

6.3 Limitations of the Study

Despite the insights generated by this study, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study involved participants from four campuses of a single state university in the Philippines, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other institutional or regional contexts. Second, the writing data were limited to a single narrative essay task, which may not fully represent students' writing performance across other genres such as academic, argumentative, or research-based writing. Third, the identification of contributing factors relied on a researcher-developed checklist based on students' self-reports, which may be influenced by subjective perceptions or response bias. Finally, the researcher also served as the instructor of the participants, which may introduce potential bias despite the ethical safeguards implemented during data collection and analysis. These limitations suggest that the findings should be interpreted as indicative of patterns within the specific context studied rather than as universally generalizable conclusions.

6.4 Suggestions for Future Research

Future research may extend the present study in several directions. Longitudinal studies could examine how the writing competence of English major students develops throughout their teacher education program and whether error patterns change as these students progress through advanced language courses. Experimental research could also investigate the effectiveness of targeted instructional interventions—such as structured grammar workshops, guided writing activities, or technology-assisted writing tools—in addressing the most frequent error types identified in this study.

In addition, further research could explore writing errors across different academic genres to determine whether similar patterns occur in argumentative, expository, or research-based writing tasks. Finally, given the multilingual context of the Philippines, future studies may examine whether some recurring forms identified as errors represent developmental interlanguage patterns or features associated with the evolving variations of Philippine English, thereby contributing to a more nuanced interpretation of ESL writing in local contexts.

Conflict of Interest

The author states that there is no conflict of interest concerning the publication of this paper.

7. Acknowledgments

This paper was funded by the West Visayas State University - University Research and Development Center. The author also wishes to acknowledge the use of ChatGPT in the writing of this paper. This tool was used to help improve the language and grammar in the paper. Also, the author analyzed each related study and only asked the assistance of the said tool in identifying the salient points such as research limitations, methodology, and key findings relevant to the study. Specifically, it was used by the author to assist him in identifying key words and related ideas to help him in establishing the interrelatedness among previous

studies which led to the establishment of the research gaps. The paper is an accurate representation of the authors' work and intellectual contributions.

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Appendix 1

Draft of the Proposed Second Language Writing Guide

Lesson 1 - CHOOSING WORDS WISELY

a. Objectives

- Identify and explain some common errors in the use of words or terms in the English language
- Use appropriate words in writing sentences and paragraphs

b. Activities

- Students fill in the blanks with correct word or term
- Paragraph/Composition writing which students will use the given words

Lesson 2- STRUCTURING SENTENCES CORRECTLY

a. Objectives

- Identify the sentence pattern in English
- Write sentences using correct sentence pattern of English language

b. Activities

- The students label the parts of sentence with the correct sentence pattern
- The students write sentences using the given sentence patterns

Lesson 3 - AVOIDING RUN-ON SENTENCES

a. Objectives

- Distinguish run-on sentences from complete sentence
- Revise run-on sentences into complete sentences

b. Activities

- The students identify whether the examples are categorized as run-on or complete sentences
- The students write complete sentences out of the provided run-on sentences

Lesson 4 - GETTING RID OF FRAGMENTS

a. Objectives

- Distinguish fragments from complete sentences
- Convert fragments into complete sentences

b. Activities

- The students identify whether the examples are categorized as fragments or complete sentences
- The students write complete sentences out of the provided fragments

Lesson 5 - MAKING VERBS AGREE WITH THE SUBJECTS

a. Objectives

- Identify and rationalize the errors in subject - verb agreement found in sentences, paragraphs, and compositions
- Write sentences, paragraphs, and compositions using correct subject - verb - agreement

b. Activities

- Identifying Errors - Students identify the part of the sentence which contains an error in Subject - Verb Agreement. Then students need to explain/rationalize the error identified

- Paragraph/Composition Writing – Students write a narrative and descriptive paragraphs. Then, students will check each other’s work by identifying errors on subject-verb agreement

Lesson 6 - FORMING VERBS AND NOUN ENDINGS

a. Objectives

- Write the correct form of verbs (past, base form, future, progressive, perfect)
- Differentiate the form of plural noun nouns from that of possessive nouns

b. Activities

- Students fill in the blanks with the correct tense of the verb
- Students write the correct form of plural nouns and possessive forms of nouns

Lesson 7 - MASTERING CAPITALIZATION AND PUNCTUATION RULES

a. Objective

- Use capitalization and punctuation rules correctly

b. Activities

- Students insert the correct punctuation marks in each sentence
- Students write a paragraph about a certain topic. Then, they exchange their works and edit each other’s work in terms of the use of punctuation marks and capitalization rules.

Lesson 8 - USING ARTICLES /DETERMINERS APPROPRIATELY

a. Objective

- Use articles and determiner appropriately in sentences, paragraphs, and other compositions

b. Activities

- Students fill in the blanks with the correct articles/determiner
- Students edit the article in terms of the use of articles and determiners.

Lesson 9 - LEARNING THE TENSES OF VERBS

a. Objectives

- Use correct tenses of the verb in writing sentences, paragraphs, and other compositions

b. Activities

- Students fill in the blanks with the correct tense of the verb
- Students write essays employing correct tenses of the verb

Lesson 10 - SPELLING THE WORDS PERFECTLY

Objective

- Spell out words correctly

b. Activities

- Students select words with incorrect spelling
- Spelling Bee