English Education &
Applied Linguistics
Journal

Students' Errors in Using the Simple Present Tense among Seventh-Grade Students

Tita Aracelya Rakyanratri[1], Christiana Evy Tri Widyahening[1], Ayu Istiana Sari[1]

English Education Program,
Slamet Riyadi University,
Surakarta, Indonesia

Email:
titaaracelyar14@gmail.com

Article History
Submitted May 23rd, 2026
Revised June 27th, 2026
Published August 30th, 2026

Abstract.
Grammar plays an important role in English learning because it enables learners to construct accurate and meaningful sentences. However, many junior high school students still experience difficulties in applying grammatical rules, particularly in using the Simple Present Tense. Previous studies have examined students' errors in using the Simple Present Tense, but differences in students' error patterns across learning contexts suggest the need for further investigation of specific groups of learners and the possible causes of their errors. This study aimed to identify the types of errors, determine the dominant error type, and examine the possible causes of errors made by seventh-grade students in using the Simple Present Tense. This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach involving 30 students of Class VII B at SMP Negeri 7 Surakarta. Data were collected through two written tests, interviews, and documentation. The students produced four types of grammatical errors, with 468 errors identified in total. Misformation was the most dominant error type with 254 occurrences (54.3%), followed by addition with 136 occurrences (29.1%), omission with 54 occurrences (11.5%), and misordering with 24 occurrences (5.1%). The errors were mainly associated with intralingual transfer and context of learning. **Conclusion**: The findings demonstrate that students still experienced difficulties in applying Simple Present Tense rules, particularly in selecting appropriate verb forms. These findings indicate that focused grammar instruction and adequate practice are needed to improve students' grammatical accuracy.

Keywords: *Error analysis; grammatical errors; simple present tense; surface strategy taxonomy*

INTRODUCTION

Language functions as a primary means of human interaction, allowing people to communicate ideas, convey feelings, and build relationships with others. In the context of globalization, English has become an important international language that is widely used in various fields, including education, technology, and business. In Indonesia, English is taught as a foreign language to develop students' ability to communicate and use English in different situations (Renandya, Hamied, & Joko, 2018). English learning focuses on developing four major language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing, supported by essential language components such as grammar and vocabulary (Gonçalves, Sarmento, Pereira, & Ati, 2018). Among these skills, writing is often considered a challenging skill because it requires learners to organize their thoughts and express them through well-structured written forms (Bora, 2023). Since sentences represent the fundamental elements of written communication, students need adequate grammatical knowledge to produce clear and meaningful sentences (Demirezen, 2019).

Grammar is an essential component of English learning because it enables learners to construct meaningful and grammatically accurate sentences. One grammatical aspect that frequently challenges foreign language learners is the use of English tenses. Understanding tense forms is essential because verb changes indicate the relationship between an action and its time of occurrence (Sari, 2019). For Indonesian EFL learners, mastering English tense patterns can be difficult because Indonesian does not use verb inflections or morphological changes to indicate time (Iman, 2020). This difference may create difficulties when learners are required to apply grammatical changes in English that do not occur in the same way in their first language.

Among the various tense forms introduced in secondary education, the Simple Present Tense is considered a fundamental grammatical structure because it is commonly used to describe habitual activities, general facts, and states in everyday communication (Azar, 2002; Rohana & Harahap, 2022). However, despite its importance in the junior high school curriculum, many learners still encounter difficulties in producing accurate Simple Present Tense sentences, particularly in applying subject–verb agreement and selecting appropriate auxiliary verbs (Azar, 2002). Such difficulties are important to investigate among junior high school students because the Simple Present Tense represents one of the basic grammatical structures that learners need to master for producing accurate English sentences.

Several previous studies have investigated students' errors in using the Simple Present Tense. Hasyim, Tahang, & Dimara (2023) examined students' errors in constructing negative and interrogative sentences in the Simple Present Tense and found four types of errors based on the Surface Strategy Taxonomy, with omission as the dominant type. Similarly, Mukarromah & Suryanto (2022) analyzed students' errors in using the Simple Present Tense in descriptive writing and reported omission as the most frequent error, with intralingual transfer identified as the main source of errors. Meanwhile, Rohana & Harahap (2022) investigated seventh-grade students' errors in learning the Simple Present Tense and found misformation to be the dominant error type. In a related study of the Simple Past Tense, Skriptura, Widyahening, and Sari (2023) found misformation as the dominant error in students' narrative writing, with difficulties in using appropriate verb forms, limited writing practice, and Bahasa Indonesia influence contributing to the errors. These findings indicate that students continue to experience difficulties in applying English tense rules, while the dominant error types may vary according to the tense, learning tasks, educational context, and learner characteristics. Therefore, further investigation is needed to examine students' Simple Present Tense errors and the possible factors contributing to them in a specific school context.

Accordingly, this study investigates the grammatical errors made by seventh-grade students of SMP Negeri 7 Surakarta in using the Simple Present Tense. Specifically, the study aims to identify the types of errors, determine the dominant error type, and examine the possible factors contributing to students' errors. The findings are expected to provide a clearer understanding of students' grammatical difficulties and offer pedagogical insights for EFL teachers in developing more focused grammar instruction and providing sufficient opportunities for students to practice the Simple Present Tense.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Error and Error Analysis

Error is a systematic deviation from the rules of the target language that reflects learners' developing knowledge and incomplete mastery of the language system (Corder, 1981; James, 2013). Unlike errors, mistakes are temporary performance problems that may occur because of carelessness or limited attention and can often be self-corrected (Brown, 1994; Ellis, 1994). In language learning, errors provide important information about learners' development and difficulties in acquiring the target language. Error Analysis is therefore used to identify, classify, and interpret learners' errors and their possible causes (Ellis, 1994; James, 2013). Through Error Analysis, researchers can examine recurring patterns in learner language and provide information that may support more effective language instruction.

Types of Error

Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982) classify learner errors into four types based on the Surface Strategy Taxonomy: omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. Omission occurs when a required linguistic element is left out, whereas addition occurs when an unnecessary element is included. Misformation refers to the use of an incorrect form in place of the required form, while misordering occurs when linguistic elements are placed incorrectly within a sentence. These four categories are relevant to the present study because they provide a systematic framework for identifying how students modify Simple Present Tense structures in their written production.

Sources of Students' Errors

Brown (1994) identifies several possible sources of learners' errors, including interlingual transfer, intralingual transfer, context of learning, and communicative strategies. Interlingual transfer results from the influence of learners' first language, while intralingual transfer is associated with overgeneralization, incomplete rule application, or misunderstanding of the target language. Context of learning includes influences from classroom instruction, teaching materials, and opportunities for practice, whereas communicative strategies refer to learners' attempts to communicate when their linguistic knowledge is limited. These categories provide a basis for interpreting the possible factors contributing to students' Simple Present Tense errors in the present study.

Simple Present Tense

The Simple Present Tense is commonly used to express habitual activities, general facts, and states that are considered true or regular (Azar, 2002). For Indonesian learners of English, the tense can be challenging because English requires grammatical changes in verb forms, particularly for third-person singular subjects, whereas Indonesian does not mark tense through verb inflection in the same way (Iman, 2020). The Simple Present Tense also requires learners to distinguish between verbal and nominal sentence patterns and to use auxiliary verbs appropriately in negative and interrogative sentences. Therefore, mastery of its grammatical patterns is important for producing accurate English sentences.

Previous Studies and Research Gap

Previous studies have shown that students' errors in using English tenses vary across learning contexts and task types. Mukarromah and Suryanto (2022) and Hasyim et al. (2023) reported omission as the dominant error, whereas Rohana and Harahap (2022) found misformation to be the most frequent type among seventh-grade students. Similarly, Skriptura et al. (2023) found misinformation to be the most frequent error in students' use of the Simple Past Tense in narrative texts. These differences indicate that students' grammatical error patterns may be influenced by the characteristics of the learners, learning tasks, and instructional contexts. Previous studies have also examined the possible sources of grammatical errors through written data and interview-based investigations (Lestari, 2023; Putri, 2023). However, limited attention has been given to the combination of written error analysis and interview data in examining Simple Present Tense errors among seventh-grade students in a specific Indonesian junior high school context. Therefore, the present study focuses on seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 7 Surakarta by identifying their error types, determining the dominant error type, and examining possible factors contributing to their errors.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Context

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design to identify, classify, and interpret students' grammatical errors in using the Simple Present Tense. The qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study focused not only on identifying error patterns in students' written responses but also on examining possible factors contributing to those errors through interview data. The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 7 Surakarta during the second semester of the 2025/2026 academic year.

Data Sources and Participants

The primary data were obtained from students' written test responses and semi-structured interviews, while documentation was used as supporting data. The participants were 30 seventh-grade students of Class VII B at SMP Negeri 7 Surakarta. The class was selected because preliminary observation indicated that students experienced difficulties in applying basic sentence structures and Simple Present Tense rules. In addition, interviews were conducted with three representative students and the English teacher to obtain information about students' learning difficulties and possible factors contributing to their grammatical errors.

Data Collection

The data consisted of students' written test responses, semi-structured interview data, and supporting documentation. Two written tests were administered in separate sessions to examine students' ability to construct Simple Present Tense sentences. The test items were adapted from Azar (2002) and included affirmative, negative, and interrogative sentence construction, fill-in-the-blank items, and jumbled-word tasks. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with three students and the English teacher to obtain further information about students' difficulties, learning experiences, and possible factors underlying their errors. Documentation included students' answer sheets and relevant instructional materials, which were used to support the analysis of the test and interview data.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using the interactive model of data analysis proposed by Miles, Huberman, & Saldana (2014), which involves data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, with data collection occurring throughout the process. First, the researcher collected and organized students' written responses, interview data, and documentation. Second, the students' written responses were examined to identify grammatical errors and classify them according to Dulay et al.'s (1982) Surface Strategy Taxonomy: omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. The interview data were examined to identify possible factors contributing to the errors based on the categories discussed in the literature review. Third, the identified errors were displayed in tables according to their types and frequencies. The frequency of each error type was then converted into percentages using Corder's (1981) formula:

$$P = \frac{N1}{\sum N} X\ 100\%$$

where P represents the percentage of a particular error type, N_1 represents the frequency of a particular error type, and $\sum N$ represents the total number of identified errors. Finally, the quantitative distribution of errors and qualitative information from the interviews were compared and interpreted to determine the dominant error type and possible factors contributing to students' errors.

Data Validity

The credibility of the data was established through method and theory triangulation. Method triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from written tests, interviews, and documentation. Theory triangulation was applied by interpreting the data using Corder's Error Analysis framework and Dulay et al.'s (1982) Surface Strategy Taxonomy. The comparison of these sources and theoretical perspectives was used to strengthen the credibility of the findings.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings and discussion of students' grammatical errors in using the Simple Present Tense. The findings are based on data collected from written tests administered to 30 seventh-grade students of Class VII B at SMP Negeri 7 Surakarta during the 2025/2026 academic year. The identified errors were classified according to Dulay et al.'s Surface Strategy Taxonomy into four categories: *omission, addition, misformation, and*

misordering. The discussion focuses on the frequency of each error type, the dominant error category, and the possible causes of the errors based on the analysis of students' written work and interview data.

Types of Errors Produced by Students in Using the Simple Present Tense

The first test required students to construct affirmative, negative, and interrogative sentences using the Simple Present Tense. The distribution of errors is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of Error Types in the First Test

Types of Errors	Frequency	Percentage
Misformation	189	59.2%
Addition	86	27.0%
Omission	39	12.2%
Misordering	5	1.6%
Total	319	100%

As shown in Table 1, students produced 319 errors in the first test. Misformation was the most frequent error, with 189 occurrences (59.2%), followed by addition with 86 occurrences (27.0%), omission with 39 occurrences (12.2%), and misordering with 5 occurrences (1.6%). Misformation mainly involved incorrect verb forms and auxiliary verbs. For example, a student wrote *"The boys does not play soccer in the field every afternoon"* instead of *"The boys do not play soccer in the field every afternoon."* This indicates difficulty in applying subject–verb agreement when using auxiliary verbs. Addition errors commonly involved unnecessary *-s/-es*, as in *"Does Jose studies for a test at the library?"* instead of *"Does Jose study for a test at the library?"* Omission errors involved missing grammatical elements, such as the auxiliary verb in *"The children draw some pictures at school?"* instead of *"Do the children draw some pictures at school?"* Meanwhile, misordering errors involved the incorrect arrangement of sentence elements, such as *"Rani wear doesn't a blue dress"* instead of *"Rani doesn't wear a blue dress."*

The second test consisted of fill-in-the-blank, jumbled-word, and sentence-construction tasks. The distribution of errors is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Distribution of Error Types in the Second Test

Types of Errors	Frequency	Percentage
Misformation	65	43.6%
Addition	50	33.6%
Omission	15	10.1%
Misordering	19	12.7%
Total	149	100%

The second test resulted in 149 errors. Misformation remained the most frequent category, with 65 occurrences (43.6%), followed by addition with 50 occurrences (33.6%), misordering with 19 occurrences (12.7%), and omission with 15 occurrences (10.1%). Misformation mainly involved inappropriate verb forms, such as *"I usually studyes for two hours every night"* instead of *"I usually study for two hours every night."* Addition errors frequently involved unnecessary *-s/-es*, as in *"The students leaves from school at 3 p.m."* instead of *"The students leave from school at 3 p.m."* Omission errors included the absence of required verb forms or grammatical markers, while misordering errors were particularly related to the arrangement of sentence elements in the jumbled-word tasks. The occurrence of misordering in the second test suggests that sentence arrangement presented an additional difficulty for some students.

The distribution of the four error categories across the two tests shows that students encountered difficulties in applying Simple Present Tense structures, particularly in using

appropriate verb forms, auxiliary verbs, and subject–verb agreement. These findings provide the basis for examining the overall distribution of errors and identifying the dominant error type in the following section.

Dominant Error Type

The overall distribution of errors from the two tests is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Overall Distribution of Error Types in the Two Tests

Types of Errors	Frequency	Percentage
Misformation	254	54.3%
Addition	136	29.1%
Omission	54	11.5%
Misordering	24	5.1%
Total	468	100%

Table 3 shows that misformation was the dominant error type, accounting for 254 occurrences (54.3%) of the total 468 errors. Addition was the second most frequent category, with 136 errors (29.1%), followed by omission with 54 errors (11.5%) and misordering with 24 errors (5.1%). The dominance of misformation indicates that students experienced greater difficulty in selecting and applying appropriate grammatical forms than in omitting, adding, or rearranging sentence elements.

The misformation errors were mainly related to verb forms, subject–verb agreement, and auxiliary verbs. For example, students produced forms such as *"I usually studies"* instead of *"I usually study"* and *"The cat don't sleep"* instead of *"The cat doesn't sleep."* These errors suggest that students had some understanding of Simple Present Tense rules but were not yet able to apply them consistently. According to Dulay et al. (1982), misformation occurs when learners use an incorrect form in place of the required form. Therefore, the high occurrence of misformation may indicate that students were still developing their understanding of how grammatical rules interact within Simple Present Tense structures.

This finding is consistent with Rohana and Harahap (2022), who found misformation to be the dominant error among seventh-grade students learning the Simple Present Tense. Similarly, Skriptura et al. (2023) reported misinformation as the most frequent error in students' use of the Simple Past Tense in narrative texts. Although Sola Skriptura's study focused on a different tense and writing task, the finding similarly indicates students' difficulties in applying appropriate grammatical forms. However, the present finding differs from Hasyim et al. (2023) and Mukarromah and Suryanto (2022), who reported omission as the dominant error. These differences may be related to variations in the tense being learned, participants, learning contexts, and test tasks. Thus, the findings provide further evidence that students' error patterns may vary across different learning environments.

Possible Causes of Students' Errors

The findings were derived from the analysis of students' responses to the two written tests and interview data collected from the English teacher and selected students. The analysis of students' test responses revealed patterns of grammatical errors, while the interview data provided further information about the possible factors underlying those errors. Based on these data, two possible factors contributing to students' errors were identified: intralingual transfer and context of learning.

Intralingual Transfer

The findings indicated that students' errors were mainly related to intralingual transfer, particularly the overgeneralization of grammatical rules. Students frequently produced errors involving verb forms, subject–verb agreement, and auxiliary verbs. For example, students wrote *"I usually studies"* instead of *"I usually study"* and *"Does Disha wrote a letter to her friend?"* instead of *"Does Disha write a letter to her friend?"* These errors indicate that students

had partially understood the rules of the Simple Present Tense but applied them inconsistently across different sentence structures.

This finding is in line with Mukarromah & Suryanto (2022), who identified intralingual transfer as an important source of students' Simple Present Tense errors. The findings suggest that students had acquired some grammatical rules but had not yet fully understood the conditions under which those rules should be applied.

Context of Learning

The interview findings also indicated that the learning context contributed to students' grammatical difficulties. The teacher explained that some students had limited opportunities to practice English outside the classroom and that students' concentration and motivation varied during lessons. Limited practice may have reduced students' opportunities to reinforce their understanding of Simple Present Tense structures. In addition, the teacher explained that homework was rarely assigned, which further limited opportunities for independent grammar practice.

These findings suggest that students' grammatical errors were influenced not only by their incomplete understanding of English grammar but also by the learning conditions in which they developed their grammatical knowledge. This finding is consistent with Lestari (2023), who reported that students' grammar difficulties could be associated with learning experiences and other contextual factors. Therefore, providing students with sufficient and consistent opportunities to practice grammatical structures may help reduce the recurrence of Simple Present Tense errors.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that misformation was the dominant error type, while students' errors were mainly associated with intralingual transfer and context of learning. The combination of written test results and interview data provides a more comprehensive understanding of students' grammatical difficulties than examining error frequencies alone. These findings suggest that English teachers should provide explicit instruction on verb forms, subject–verb agreement, and auxiliary verbs, accompanied by sufficient opportunities for repeated and contextualized practice.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the grammatical errors produced by seventh-grade students of SMP Negeri 7 Surakarta in using the Simple Present Tense. Based on the analysis of students' written tests and interview data, it can be concluded that students produced four types of errors based on Dulay et al.'s (1982) Surface Strategy Taxonomy, namely misformation, addition, omission, and misordering. Among these error types, misformation was identified as the dominant category, accounting for 54.3% of the total errors, followed by addition (29.1%), omission (11.5%), and misordering (5.1%). The findings indicate that students mainly experienced difficulties in applying grammatical forms, particularly verb inflections, subject–verb agreement, and auxiliary verb usage in Simple Present Tense sentences. Furthermore, the errors were associated with intralingual transfer, particularly the overgeneralization of grammatical rules, and context of learning factors, such as limited practice opportunities and classroom learning conditions. These findings suggest that although students had acquired some understanding of Simple Present Tense rules, continuous practice and reinforcement are still needed to improve their grammatical accuracy.

REFERENCES

Azar, B. S. (2002). *Understanding and using English grammar* (3rd ed.). Pearson Education.

Bora, P. (2023). Importance of writing skill to develop students' communication skill. *Journal for Research Scholars and Professionals of English Language Teaching*, *7*(35). https://doi.org/10.54850/jrspelt.7.35.009

Brown, H. D. (1994). *Principles of language learning and teaching*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall Regents.

Corder, S. P. (1981). *Error Analysis and Interlanguage*. Oxford University Press.

Demirezen, M. (2019). Identification of sentence types for writing skill in teacher education. *Dil ve Dilbilimi Çalışmaları Dergisi*, *15*(1), 98–110. https://doi.org/10.17263/jlls.547629
Dulay, H., Burt, M., & Krashen, S. (1982). *Language two*. Oxford University Press.
Ellis, R. (1994). *The Study of Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford University Press.
Gonçalves, A. dos S., Sarmento, J. A., Pereira, S., & Ati, A. B. (2018). Error analysis of writing skill of using simple present tense. *ISCE : Journal of Innovative Studies on Character and Education*, *2*(2), 281–294.
Hasyim, R., Tahang, H., & Dimara, O. D. (2023). Students' error analysis in constructing negative and interrogative sentence in simple present tense. *JLE: Journal of Literate of English Education Study Program, 4*(1), 57–60. https://doi.org/10.47435/jle.v4i01.1331
Iman, T. R. (2020). The interference of Indonesian on English second language writing. *JOLLT Journal of Languages and Language Teaching*, *8*(2), 170-182
James, C. (2013). *Errors in Language Learning and Use: Exploring Error Analysis*. Routledge.
Lestari, P. I. (2023). Exploring students' attribution: Why did students fail in their online basic grammar class? *Journal of English and Education (JEE)*, *9*(1), 22–32. https://doi.org/10.20885/jee.v9i1.28046
Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook*. SAGE Publications.
Mukarromah, M., & Suryanto, B. T. (2022). Error analysis on students' writing in using simple present tense in descriptive text. *International Journal of English Education and Linguistics (IJoEEL)*, *3*(2), 73–83. https://doi.org/10.33650/ijoeel.v3i2.3119
Putri, C. D. M. (2023). Error analysis in written production: Grammatical errors and their sources in Indonesian learners of English. *Paramasastra*, *10*(1), 57–68. https://doi.org/10.26740/paramasastra.v10n1.p57-68
Renandya, W. A., Hamied, F. A., & Nurkamto, J. (2018). English language proficiency in Indonesia: Issues and prospects. *Journal of Asia TEFL, 15*(3), 618–629. https://doi.org/10.18823/asiatefl.2018.15.3.4.618
Rohana, S., & Harahap, Y. S. (2022). An error analysis in learning the simple present tense by the 7th grade students of SMP Swasta Al Washliyah 27 Medan. *Cybernetics: Journal Educational Research and Social Studies*, 13–26. https://doi.org/10.51178/cjerss.v3i1.361
Sari, E. R. N. (2019). An error analysis in writing the sentence of simple past tense on English subject. *English Education:Journal of English Teaching and Research*, *4*(1), 39–44. https://doi.org/10.29407/jetar.v4i1.12725
Skriptura, N. S., Widyahening, C. E. T., & Sari, A. I. (2023). A An analysis of error in narrative text for the 11th grade students. *English Research Journal: Journal of Education, Language, Literature, Arts and Culture, 6*(1). doi:10.33061/erj.v6i1.54855