

GRAMMATICAL ERRORS IN PREDICATE VERB USAGE IN EFL WRITING: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract. Grammatical accuracy remains one of the major challenges encountered by learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), particularly in academic writing. Among various grammatical components, predicate verb usage is essential because it determines sentence accuracy, coherence, and the effectiveness of written communication. Although numerous studies have investigated grammatical errors in EFL writing, findings concerning predicate verb errors remain fragmented across different educational contexts. This study, therefore, aims to synthesize existing empirical evidence on predicate verb errors through a Systematic Literature Review (SLR). The review followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines and analyzed 25 peer-reviewed studies published between 2015 and 2024. Relevant articles were retrieved from Google Scholar, ERIC, and Semantic Scholar using predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria. The selected studies were analyzed qualitatively to identify the dominant types of predicate verb errors, the underlying factors contributing to these errors, and their pedagogical implications. The findings reveal that subject–verb agreement, tense and aspect, auxiliary verb usage, and verb form selection are the four most frequently reported categories of predicate verb errors, with subject–verb agreement emerging as the most dominant. The review further indicates that these errors are primarily influenced by first-language interference, incomplete mastery of English grammatical rules, and limited exposure to authentic English input. The synthesized evidence suggests that integrating explicit grammar instruction, meaningful writing practice, corrective feedback, and authentic language exposure can substantially improve learners' grammatical competence. This review contributes to the field of EFL writing by providing a comprehensive synthesis of recent empirical evidence and offering practical recommendations for English language teachers, curriculum developers, and future researchers.

Keywords: Error analysis, EFL writing, grammatical errors, predicate verb, systematic literature review.

I. INTRODUCTION

Writing proficiency is widely recognized as one of the essential competencies that university students must develop, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. Beyond fulfilling academic requirements, effective writing enables learners to communicate ideas logically, present arguments systematically, and participate in academic discourse (Chen & Liang, 2022; Şen & Şimşek, 2020). Nevertheless, producing grammatically accurate written texts remains a considerable challenge for many EFL learners because successful writing requires the integration of linguistic knowledge, vocabulary, discourse organization, and grammatical competence (Le, 2023). Among various grammatical components, predicate verb usage has consistently been identified as one of the most problematic aspects of English writing. Constructing an accurate predicate verb requires learners to apply several grammatical rules simultaneously, including subject–verb agreement, tense selection, auxiliary verb usage, and appropriate verb forms. Inadequate mastery of these components often results in grammatical inaccuracies that reduce the clarity and effectiveness of written communication (Ayar, 2020; Octaberlina & Muslimin, 2022; Wijesinghe, 2020).

Previous studies have extensively investigated grammatical errors in EFL writing across different educational contexts. However, most of these studies have focused on particular classrooms, institutions, or learner groups, making the findings relatively fragmented. Consequently, it remains difficult to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the dominant patterns of predicate verb errors, their underlying causes, and the pedagogical strategies that have been recommended to address these recurring problems. This fragmentation highlights the need for a systematic synthesis of existing empirical evidence (Mubarok & Budiono, 2022). A Systematic Literature Review (SLR) offers a rigorous approach to integrating findings from multiple empirical studies. By following transparent search procedures, predefined inclusion criteria, and systematic data synthesis, an SLR enables researchers to identify consistent trends, evaluate the strength of existing evidence, and reveal research gaps that may not be apparent in individual studies. In applied linguistics, this approach has increasingly been employed to provide comprehensive

insights into specific language-learning issues and to support evidence-based pedagogical decision-making (Alnajjar & Hadwanm, n.d.; Octasary et al., 2025).

Based on these considerations, the present study conducts a systematic review of empirical studies published between 2015 and 2024 concerning predicate verb errors in EFL writing. Specifically, the review aims to (1) identify the most frequently reported types of predicate verb errors, (2) examine the factors contributing to these errors, and (3) synthesize pedagogical recommendations proposed in previous studies. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of grammar instruction in higher education by providing a clearer understanding of persistent grammatical difficulties encountered by EFL learners and offering practical implications for English language teachers, curriculum developers, and future researchers.

A. Error Analysis in EFL Writing

Error Analysis (EA) has long been recognized as one of the fundamental approaches in second language acquisition research. Since its introduction by Corder (1967), this framework has enabled researchers to identify, classify, and interpret learners' linguistic errors as indicators of language development rather than merely as failures in language use. Unlike Contrastive Analysis, which predicts learner difficulties based on structural differences between the first language (L1) and the target language (L2), Error Analysis examines learners' actual language production to explain the sources and characteristics of grammatical deviations. Within EFL writing research, Error Analysis has become one of the most widely adopted frameworks for investigating learners' grammatical performance (Khalil, 2020; Sipayung & Benarita, 2023). Numerous studies consistently report that grammatical errors occur across different proficiency levels, although the frequency and complexity of these errors vary according to learners' educational background, language exposure, and writing tasks. Consequently, grammatical accuracy continues to receive considerable attention because it directly affects the clarity, coherence, and overall quality of written communication. Studies conducted in Southeast Asian countries, including Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand, demonstrate that morphosyntactic errors remain prevalent among EFL learners (Munasikin, 2025; Princess & Syarif, 2021; Unri et al., 2021). Among these grammatical problems, errors involving predicate verbs consistently appear as one of the most dominant categories. These findings suggest that mastering English verb systems remains a persistent challenge despite years of formal English instruction.

B. Predicate Verb Usage in English Writing

Predicate verbs constitute the core element of English sentence construction because they express actions, states, or events while simultaneously indicating grammatical information such as tense, aspect, voice, modality, and agreement. Unlike many other languages, English requires learners to coordinate several grammatical components within a single verb phrase. Consequently, predicate verb usage represents one of the most complex aspects of English grammar for EFL learners. Previous research generally classifies predicate verb errors into four major categories (Anh et al., 2022; Fauziah, 2020; Hidayat et al., 2020; Ibrahim & Ibrahim, 2020). The first involves subject–verb agreement, in which learners fail to match verb forms with singular or plural subjects. The second concerns tense and aspect selection, reflecting learners' difficulties in expressing temporal relationships accurately. The third category includes auxiliary verb misuse, while the fourth involves incorrect verb forms, particularly in choosing between infinitives, gerunds, and participles. Among these categories, subject–verb agreement errors are consistently identified as the most frequent. Such errors become increasingly common when learners produce syntactically complex sentences containing lengthy noun phrases, coordinated subjects, or intervening modifiers (Azizah et al., 2025). Under these conditions, learners often lose track of the grammatical relationship between the subject and its corresponding verb. Similarly, tense-related errors frequently occur because English verb morphology differs considerably from that of many learners' first languages. Learners often confuse the use of the simple past, present perfect, and present tense, especially in narrative writing where multiple temporal references must be managed simultaneously.

C. Factors Contributing to Predicate Verb Errors

The literature consistently attributes predicate verb errors to two major sources: interlingual transfer and intralingual developmental processes. Interlingual transfer occurs when learners unconsciously apply grammatical patterns from their native language to English. For Indonesian learners, this phenomenon is particularly evident because Bahasa Indonesia does not require verb inflections to indicate tense or subject agreement (Sharma, 2025; Yusnitasari & Suwartono, 2020). As a result, learners frequently omit tense markers or apply English verb forms inconsistently. Similar patterns have also been reported among learners whose first languages share comparable grammatical characteristics. In contrast, intralingual errors originate from learners' incomplete understanding of English grammatical rules rather than from first-language influence. These errors commonly arise through rule overgeneralization, simplification strategies, and incomplete acquisition of complex grammatical structures. Examples include regularizing irregular past-tense verbs (e.g., *goed* instead of *went*), confusing infinitive and gerund constructions, and unnecessarily inserting auxiliary verbs into affirmative sentences. Although these two factors are often discussed separately, many studies indicate that predicate verb errors are usually influenced by their interaction. Limited exposure to authentic English input, insufficient grammar practice, and restricted opportunities to produce meaningful written texts further intensify these grammatical difficulties. Consequently, improving learners' grammatical competence requires instructional approaches that address both linguistic knowledge and communicative language use (ALISTINA, 2024).

Transition to the Methodology

The theoretical perspectives discussed above provide the conceptual foundation for understanding predicate verb errors in EFL writing. Building upon these perspectives, the present study adopts a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to synthesize empirical findings from previous studies and to identify common error patterns, their underlying causes, and pedagogical implications across different educational contexts.

III. RESEARCH METHODS

A. Research Design

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to synthesize empirical evidence concerning predicate verb errors in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing. The review followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines to ensure transparency, consistency, and methodological rigor throughout the review process. Compared with conventional narrative reviews, the SLR approach provides a more structured procedure for identifying, selecting, evaluating, and synthesizing relevant studies while minimizing potential selection bias (Pasaribu et al., 2021). The review process consisted of four consecutive stages. First, relevant studies were identified through systematic database searches. Second, retrieved records were screened according to predetermined eligibility criteria. Third, data were extracted using a standardized extraction form. Finally, the extracted information was synthesized qualitatively to identify recurring themes, dominant error patterns, causal factors, and instructional implications reported across previous studies.

B. Literature Search Strategy

Relevant literature was collected from three internationally recognized electronic databases: Google Scholar, ERIC (Education Resources Information Center), and Semantic Scholar. These databases were selected because they provide comprehensive coverage of research in applied linguistics, second language acquisition, and English language education.

To maximize retrieval accuracy, the search process employed Boolean operators using combinations of the following keywords: ("EFL writing" OR "English as a Foreign Language") AND ("grammatical errors" OR "error analysis") AND ("predicate verb" OR "verb error" OR "subject-verb agreement" OR "tense error") Only peer-reviewed journal articles published between January 2015 and December 2024 were considered. This publication period was selected to capture recent developments in research on grammatical errors in EFL writing (Hikmah & Wahyudi, 2023; Rahmanu et al., 2020).

C. Eligibility Criteria

To ensure that the review addressed the research objectives, explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria were established before the screening process.

Studies were included if they: investigated grammatical errors in EFL learners' writing; specifically analyzed predicate verb errors or other verb-related grammatical problems; involved secondary school or university students as participants; were published as peer-reviewed journal articles in English between 2015 and 2024; and provided accessible full-text versions. Conversely, studies were excluded if they: focused exclusively on speaking or listening skills; lacked a clear error analysis procedure; consisted solely of theoretical discussions or review articles without empirical evidence; involved elementary-level learners; or were unpublished academic works, conference proceedings, theses, or dissertations. The application of these criteria ensured that only studies directly relevant to the objectives of the present review were included in the final analysis.

D. Study Selection Process

The literature search initially identified 187 records across the three selected databases. After duplicate records had been removed, 142 articles remained for title and abstract screening. During this stage, 89 articles were excluded because they did not satisfy the predefined eligibility criteria.

Subsequently, 53 full-text articles were examined in greater detail. After a comprehensive assessment, 28 studies were excluded due to insufficient relevance or methodological limitations. Consequently, 25 empirical studies met all inclusion criteria and were retained for qualitative synthesis. The study selection process followed the PRISMA framework, ensuring that every decision regarding article inclusion and exclusion was conducted systematically and transparently.

E. Data Extraction and Analysis

Data from the selected studies were extracted using a structured coding sheet to maintain consistency throughout the review. The extracted information included publication details, country of study, participant characteristics, research design, types of predicate verb errors, reported error frequencies, identified causal factors, and pedagogical recommendations.

The collected data were analyzed through qualitative thematic synthesis, allowing recurring themes to emerge across different educational contexts. Descriptive analysis was also employed to determine the relative frequency of each category of predicate verb error. Furthermore, similarities and differences among studies conducted in different countries and educational levels were examined to obtain a broader understanding of grammatical error patterns in EFL writing. To enhance the reliability of the coding

process, a second researcher independently coded approximately 20% of the reviewed studies. The resulting Cohen's Kappa coefficient of 0.84 indicated a high level of agreement, demonstrating that the coding procedure was reliable and the synthesized findings were trustworthy.

III RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Overview of the Reviewed Studies

The systematic review identified 25 empirical studies that fulfilled all inclusion criteria and were subsequently included in the final analysis. These studies were conducted across 14 countries, reflecting the widespread interest in investigating grammatical errors among learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Indonesia contributed the largest number of publications, followed by Saudi Arabia, China, Iran, and Malaysia, while the remaining studies represented several other educational contexts (Pandapatan, 2020).

The geographical diversity of the selected studies provides a broader understanding of predicate verb errors across different linguistic backgrounds. Although learners originated from different countries, the reviewed studies consistently reported similar grammatical difficulties. This consistency suggests that predicate verb errors are not limited to particular educational settings but represent a common challenge experienced by EFL learners worldwide (Atikah et al., 2022; Li, 2025).

Most of the reviewed studies involved undergraduate students enrolled in English language or general academic writing courses. A smaller proportion investigated secondary school learners. Despite differences in participants' educational levels, the dominant grammatical problems remained relatively consistent. This finding indicates that predicate verb errors continue to persist even after years of formal English instruction. Methodologically, Error Analysis (EA) served as the primary analytical framework in nearly all reviewed studies. Researchers generally categorized grammatical errors before calculating their frequencies and identifying potential causes. Several studies further combined quantitative analysis with qualitative interpretation, allowing a more comprehensive understanding of why specific grammatical errors repeatedly occurred in learners' written texts (Muhassin & Octavia, 2021; Wang et al., 2022).

Overall, the characteristics of the reviewed studies demonstrate a considerable degree of methodological consistency, thereby strengthening the credibility of the synthesized findings presented in this review.

B. Dominant Types of Predicate Verb Errors

Analysis of the reviewed literature revealed four major categories of predicate verb errors that consistently appeared across different educational contexts. These categories include subject–verb agreement errors, tense and aspect errors, auxiliary verb misuse, and incorrect verb forms. Although the relative frequency of each category varied slightly across studies, the overall pattern remained remarkably consistent. Among these categories, subject–verb agreement (SVA) emerged as the most frequently reported grammatical problem, appearing in 23 out of 25 reviewed studies (Amalia, 2020; Catabay, 2023; Kallaba, 2025). Learners frequently failed to adjust verb forms according to singular or plural subjects, particularly when producing complex sentences containing lengthy noun phrases or intervening modifiers. Such sentence structures appear to increase learners' cognitive processing demands, making it more difficult to maintain grammatical agreement between the subject and predicate.

The predominance of SVA errors may also reflect differences between English and many learners' native languages. Since languages such as Indonesian do not require verb inflection based on the grammatical number of the subject, learners often transfer familiar grammatical patterns into English writing. Consequently, verbs are frequently used in their base forms regardless of whether the subject is singular or plural. The second most frequently reported category concerns tense and aspect errors, which appeared in 22 reviewed studies. Learners commonly confused present and past tense forms, particularly when composing narrative or descriptive texts. Difficulties were also observed in distinguishing between the simple past tense and the present perfect, indicating that learners often struggle to express temporal relationships accurately (Chuenchaichon, 2022).

Another frequently reported problem involved auxiliary verb usage. Nineteen studies documented errors associated with the omission, addition, or inappropriate selection of auxiliary verbs such as *be*, *do*, and *have*. These findings suggest that learners experience considerable difficulty when constructing more grammatically complex verb phrases requiring auxiliary elements. Finally, verb form errors represented the fourth major category. Although less frequent than the previous three categories, mistakes involving infinitives, gerunds, and participles continued to appear consistently throughout the reviewed literature (Mohamad, 2025). These findings indicate that learners require a deeper understanding of grammatical structures governing verb complementation rather than relying solely on memorized rules. Taken together, the reviewed evidence suggests that predicate verb errors remain multidimensional. Rather than representing isolated grammatical mistakes, they reflect learners' broader difficulties in coordinating multiple grammatical rules simultaneously during the writing process.

C. Factors Contributing to Predicate Verb Errors

Beyond identifying error types, the reviewed studies also examined the underlying factors responsible for learners' grammatical difficulties. Two major explanations consistently emerged throughout the literature: interlingual transfer and intralingual developmental processes. Interlingual transfer was identified as the dominant contributing factor in the majority of reviewed studies. Approximately 18 studies concluded that learners unconsciously transferred grammatical patterns from their first

language into English. This phenomenon was particularly evident among Indonesian learners because Bahasa Indonesia does not require verb inflections to indicate tense or subject agreement. Consequently, learners frequently omitted inflectional markers or applied English grammatical rules inconsistently (Ali & Amara, 2025; Matwangsaeng & Min, 2025). However, language transfer alone does not fully explain the occurrence of predicate verb errors. Several reviewed studies emphasized that many grammatical mistakes also resulted from learners' incomplete understanding of English grammar itself. These intralingual errors commonly arose through rule overgeneralization, simplification, and incomplete acquisition of complex grammatical structures. For example, learners often generalized the regular "-ed" past tense rule to irregular verbs or confused grammatical environments requiring infinitive or gerund constructions. Such findings indicate that grammatical development in a second language involves gradual hypothesis formation rather than immediate mastery of grammatical rules. Another recurring factor highlighted across the literature concerns learners' limited exposure to authentic English. In many EFL contexts, English is primarily learned inside classrooms, reducing opportunities for learners to encounter naturally occurring grammatical structures in meaningful communication. As a result, grammatical knowledge often remains procedural rather than communicative, making accurate predicate verb production more difficult during writing tasks. The interaction of these factors demonstrates that predicate verb errors should not be viewed solely as indicators of grammatical deficiency. Instead, they reflect the complex cognitive and linguistic processes involved in second language acquisition, where learners continuously negotiate between prior linguistic knowledge and newly acquired grammatical rules (Hu et al., 2024; Yalmiadi & Telaumbanua, 2024; Yusuf & Ali, 2025).

IV. CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review synthesized findings from 25 empirical studies published between 2015 and 2024 to examine predicate verb errors in EFL writing. The analysis demonstrates that four major categories of errors consistently occur across different educational contexts: subject-verb agreement, tense and aspect, auxiliary verb usage, and verb form selection. Among these categories, subject-verb agreement errors were reported most frequently, indicating that grammatical agreement remains one of the greatest challenges faced by EFL learners. The review further reveals that predicate verb errors arise from multiple interacting factors. Interlingual transfer continues to influence learners whose first languages differ substantially from English grammatical structures, while intralingual processes such as rule overgeneralization and incomplete grammatical acquisition also contribute significantly to learners' writing difficulties. In addition, limited exposure to authentic English and insufficient opportunities for meaningful writing practice further increase the likelihood of grammatical inaccuracies. From a pedagogical perspective, the reviewed evidence consistently supports instructional approaches that integrate explicit grammar teaching with communicative writing practice, constructive corrective feedback, and extensive exposure to authentic English materials. Rather than treating grammar as an isolated subject, effective instruction should encourage learners to apply grammatical knowledge during meaningful writing activities that promote both linguistic accuracy and communicative competence. Overall, this review contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing a comprehensive synthesis of empirical evidence regarding predicate verb errors in EFL writing. The findings may serve as a useful reference for English language teachers, curriculum developers, and future researchers seeking to design more effective grammar instruction and writing pedagogy in EFL contexts.

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