

# **CHAPTER I**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background of the Study**

At the end of the term of their study, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners at the tertiary level in Indonesia are usually required to write a thesis since it is a part of the requirements to obtain their undergraduate academic degree. It is a research report that is undoubtedly a sufficient piece of academic writing they must accomplish in their course.

In addition, to meet a need for shifting identity to a scholar, a student-teacher might also have an ideal motive to ascertain a novelty which can either be an advancement of existing ideas or generating new concepts and theories. Gay & Mills (2018) reveal that the reasons for conducting research may not be likely unvarying for everybody. They identify that the motives for an inquiry project conducted by a student-teacher might be merely for a degree requirement or for a more advanced target of generating educational theory and practice. Similarly, Best & Kahn (2006) present that “the academic research project is usually necessary for partial fulfillment of the requirements of a graduate course or for an advanced degree. The initial motivation may not be the desire to engage in research but the practical need of meeting a requirement”. In short, accomplishing the first motive for a degree requirement through academic inquiry will likely also allow the student-teachers to meet the second motive for advanced knowledge to culminate in the final product.

For the student-teachers themselves, a well-done final project in their major provides evidence of their competence (McMillan & Weyers, 2007). It is built from choosing an essential topic to the end of a research report. As novice researchers, their competencies have been examined through a series of activities that they need to go beyond. The routes which start from determining a topic, constructing the research background, reviewing the literature, selecting an appropriate research design, and presenting and analyzing the findings, demand much brain process and logical thinking.

Proficient researchers acknowledge that finding out the supporting facts and the answers to a research problem require not only sufficient time and energy but also a sustainable application of logical thinking during the research process (Best & Kahn, 2006). Experiencing them with logical thinking has been done by picking a research topic. Pursuing a firm subject of research is usually preceded by at least one of the three common ways, namely through experience, theory testing, and replication of previous research (Lodico et al., 2010). To gravitate toward one of the three reasons for their research topic, the student-teachers usually initiate to consult the expert due to their inexperience. In addition to that, they are advised to read a lot more articles to be familiar with the existing theory, to make sure how far the availability of similar topics, to examine whether there is any contradiction in the idea, to know what theory needs to be confirmed and to identify what practice to be improved as well (Latief, 2015).

Furthermore, concerning the progress of the inevitability of research's contribution, the student-teachers need to read more books and synthesize more

articles to recognize a research gap. Meeting the gap in the research process is the potential for novelty. Ary et al (2014) ensure that obtaining worthwhile ideas is facilitated through education research. All these practices contribute much to advance their knowledge and skill and build their credibility, showing their worthy intellectual capital.

Both the two motives for a degree requirement and the advancement of knowledge are relatively significant, so it is much essential for the student-teachers who will produce such an extended text to have adequate writing skills for dealing with the academic purpose. Saville-Troike (2012, p. 127) reveals that “writing is the most important productive activity for L2 learners to develop if they will use the language for academic purposes”. It is not an easy task for them due to a lack of experience with academic writing in a second language (L2). The challenge is also confirmed by Murphy et al. (2014), who view that acquiring academic writing skills, on the one hand, is significant for facilitating thesis completion. On the other hand, it is stressful since there is a significant gap between the expectation and the training student-teachers receive during a series of the writing course. Sing et al. (2017) even emphasize that L2 writing turns into a complicated task due to less exposure to the language as well as its infrequently used. Having a hard time writing in L2 is also expressed by Napitupulu (2017), who views EFL learners with limited exposure to English will get difficulties in text-making. Moreover, Lin & Morrison (2021) state that for most writers, particularly ESL and EFL learners, English academic writing is an arduous task.

Due to the student-teachers language limitations, it is considered a demanding process and requires critical thinking for both emerging an authorial voice and exhibiting audience need. Concerning the boundaries of L2 writers, Johnson (2005) reveals that low language proficiency and lack of familiarity with conventions and genres in the L2 contribute to more constraints and effortful text production. Though they have completed a series of writing courses, writing in an academic setting is not effortless for the student-teachers whose first language is other than English. Communicating thoughts in L2 writing often negotiates with its extended structure, which confirms the language conventions of academic written discourse. Therefore, expressing ideas without using their first language (L1) entails both a well-mastered linguistic competence .in the target language and qualified cognitive skills.

Since a thesis is a noteworthy academic written product that will possibly be accessed, read, and cited by others, it ought to meet the written academic register that encloses its qualities as a sharply informative goal, impersonal style, and unpresentable narrative features. These qualities exhibit classy language use and grammatical complexity (Maamuujav et al., 2021). Producing a refined sentence structure requires high grammatical competence. The sentences have to be comprehensible and free of grammatical deviances. Meeting these demands in their theses is a strenuous mission.

Student-teachers face grammar as their first challenge. Hyland (2003) states that the main problems faced by L2 learners in writing are lack of ability to convey grammatical expressions and appropriate vocabulary which turn them not to have a polished written product. Fengji (2016) viewed that - for L2 learners - the grammar

of English becomes a big problem in writing. Similarly, Boonyarattanasoontorn (2017) found that grammar was rated by Thai EFL learners as the most problematic in L2 writing. The same echo is confirmed by Nkongho & Mbaionorm (2021); they state that massive errors in grammar and incomprehensible expressions found in students' writing reflect the grammatical issues they experience with. Hence, expressing ideas in written foreign language is even more complex process as consequence of extensive grammatical requirements of academic writing. Therefore, to gain successful access to the L2 grammar and lexis, they must be able to place words and syntactic structures appropriately for delivering reasonable messages which attend to orthography and conventions; reexamining and revising on the linguistic preferences must also be performed as they go along (Johnson, 2005).

Having acceptable sentences without strange-sounding and grossly equivalent in terms of meaning requires knowledge about the order of elements in a sentence (Gass & Selinker, 2008). They are much essential for producing an infinite set of a sentence. Knowing grammar will help someone produce a nice sound of sentences. It will not only demonstrate one's language competence but also show his/her careful eye for details. Without the right grammar, the content of the writing may potentially turn out to be vague (Yusuf & Jumriana, 2015) and be a little difficult to understand what it means for both readers and writers (Wulandari, 2014). Correspondingly, Ferris (2011) identifies that written lexical, morphological, and syntactical accuracy is crucial since the preciseness of the language used will both contribute to the comprehensive messages received by the readers and perform the writer's sufficient

literacy. In brief, producing an academic written product should access L2 forms and functions as completely as possible.

Obviously, having the entire rules of L2 writing is challenging. Managing many sorts of constraints and thoughts in L2 writing show that it is not an uncomplicated activity. Due to the complexity, L2 learners experience erroneous forms which occur in either oral or written language. Making errors is an unavoidable component that they struggle with in acquiring a new language. Vanpatten & Benati (2015, p. 3) define errors as “the deviations of learners’ output from L2 normative language”. The errors will sound strange to L2-qualified speakers, so they sometimes fail to grasp the intended messages. Raimes (1983) clarifies that it is potential for students to commit errors in writing. Particularly, when an extended written academic text is constructed in a foreign language, errors are commonly identified because of learners’ limited L2 knowledge. Moreover, Sugeng (2016) discloses that grammatical errors are not isolated cases since they are relatively common in students’ written products. Having error-free or keeping them away is less likely to do in a foreign language used (Hasyim, 2002) as a consequence of the interaction between the first and foreign language in the learners’ language repertoire (Gass & Selinker, 2008). As a result of the learners’ inadequate familiarity with L2 grammar, they might likely produce sentences based on either their literal translation of L1 knowledge or incorrect L2 rules in which both of them may elicit erroneous forms.

Instead of viewing errors as getting merely wrong, Gass & Selinker (2008) affirm that they are essential to be noticed as learners’ effort to construct a regularity in the language they intend to acquire. Making errors should not be regarded as a

result of deficient learning; they are a part of learning (Nurlela et al., 2021) that performs learners' current L2 knowledge. The significance of errors is also impressed by Erdogan (2005) who mentions that they are the results of reasoning mentally in codifying the input from L2 exposures. They are essential as a signal of what forms learners have and have not acquired yet, so the problems can be addressed. In the end, the errors committed by L2 learners through teachers' cautious analysis become the source of feedback systems in L2 instruction (Al-khresheh, 2016).

Written grammatical errors are often categorized as grammar, usage, or mechanics errors and sometimes include a subset of spelling errors (Leacock et al., 2010). They may refer to an error in structuring words into sentences and choosing appropriate words. In addition, illustrating an example of incorrect, eccentric, or contentious usage, such as improper modifier or inappropriate tense, is regarded as a grammatical error. Shabani & Ibrahim (2021) reveal that common grammatical issues in L2 performance are the improper use of tenses, active-passive forms, and modifiers; inaccurate use of vocabulary; and improper use of word order. Several studies showed that the frequent errors committed by EFL learners in writing dealt with tenses, prepositions, and word order, such as the findings reported by Al-khasawneh (2014). He found that the writing errors committed by the students were about the use of articles, prepositions, subject-verb agreements, word order, spelling, and fragments. Tasci & Atacthat (2018) reported the other study with similar findings. They affirmed that preposition errors were the most common grammatical errors among Turkish learners of English; others are performed through the use of the verb, article, word class, and pronoun. Moreover, Tlonaen (2020) mentioned that the

errors committed by the students in their academic writing were noun-noun groups, verb-verb groups, prepositions, and sentence structure. A particular study on grammatical errors at the morpho-syntactic level was conducted by Wijesinghe (2020). This study's results showed that most errors are related to the predicates and argument structure relations, movement in embedded “Wh” questions, pronoun reference, clausal complementation, and adjacency violations.

In the English as Second Language (ESL) context, L2 learners are also reported to make errors in writing. Though they get much exposure –it is taught since the age of six at school and used as a medium of instruction for some institutions, Shabani & Ibrahim (2021) state that they have less awareness to precisely apply the correct grammar rules. Two of the studies are reflected here. The first is a study on syntactical errors in ESL writing, which result in a tense, pronoun-antecedent agreement, and faulty parallelism as the predominant errors derived by students of Cagayan State University, Philippine (Talosa & Maguddayao, 2018). The second study was conducted by Singh et al. (2017), who figured out that the most common type of grammatical errors made by Malay students at the tertiary level was subject-verb agreement, and the other one was errors in constructing complex sentence – failure to include essential and nonessential clauses.

Like the other types of academic writing in the EFL context, a thesis is not also error-free grammatically. Six numbers of undergraduate research reports are presented here. Firstly, the common grammatical errors Sugeng (2016) found in the student’s undergraduate theses were that rank as follows: verb groups, finite verbs, subject-verb concords, predicates, concords of nouns, concords of numbers, clauses,



passive voice, and word choices. Secondly, similar grammatical errors were also identified in the undergraduate students' thesis proposals which were reflected by Chandra (2017). These errors were about the use of passive voice, subject-verb agreement, and tense verb. Specifically, the next research report was made by Yusuf & Jumriana (2015), who studied the errors at the syntactical level. They reported that the errors committed by undergraduate students were in terms of noun phrases, verbs, verb construction, and transformation. Then, the grammatical errors of the entire theses chapters were investigated by Niati & Eripuddin (2019), whose findings were about errors in tenses, prepositions, and punctuation. The result section of a research report is the other interesting part of a thesis where the student-researchers also struggle with grammatical issues. Tambunan et al. (2020) revealed the errors in this result segment. The results showed that the student-teachers were still struggling to use verb-form issues, nouns, and tenses; word form remained the most dominant issue of errors. Lastly, it was a study on grammatical errors in undergraduate thesis abstracts conducted by Dinamika (2021). The errors focused on in this study were on the Subject-verb agreement (SVA). She revealed that the results were 51 SVA errors, of which one error was on using number agreement and 50 errors on using the tense agreement. Briefly stated, grammatical deviations remain in almost every part of the student-teacher reports.

Such worrying conditions were also experienced by the writer during some of her opportunities as one of the board examiners of the student-teachers thesis defense at her institution - the English Education Study Program of one Islamic University in Jambi. The unconventional language forms and functions on the drafts startled her

sight. The deviances are varied regarding language items such as missing articles, unprecise prepositions, misused pronouns, misplaced adjectives/adverbs, verb forms, and tenses at both phrase and clause levels. Though the English Education Program students at this institution have undergone a series of both writing courses – basic writing, genre-based writing, and academic writing – and three terms grammar course, ironically, grammatical errors are still abundant in their research reports. Once the writer confirmed the issues to one of the examinees, the student-teacher admitted committing errors due to her unconcern and less competence to meet the correct rules.

The paragraph below contains some erroneous forms. It is an example of the data from this study that is taken from the result part/findings segment of a thesis written by one of the English Education Study Program undergraduate students. The author's name is intentionally not stated.

“In this research, the subject has been take the English teachers. Because here the researcher was analyze the teachers' strategies in teaching speaking English on online learning class. The research subject are two peoples, they are teachers at SMP N ...”.

The paragraph above consists of three parts; the first is a simple sentence; the second is a dependent clause – it requires an independent clause to be a correct complex sentence; the third is considered a comma splice or run-on because the two simple sentences are only separated by a comma. Therefore, a semicolon is suggested to replace the comma for better construction. Every part contains grammatical

deviations. These are common errors committed by many EFL learners in Indonesia. By reading this paragraph carefully, it is identified that the sentences are possibly constructed through both the incomplete knowledge of the L2 and the literal translation of the author's L1 form. A likely detailed description is like the following.

**Table 1.1 The Example of Erroneous Forms**

<u>Data</u>	<u>Likely description of erroneous forms</u>
The subject has been take the English teachers	Inappropriate tense
Because here the researcher was analyze the teachers' strategies in teaching speaking English on online learning class	Incomplete clause Overgeneralization in use of finite verbs
The research subject are two peoples, they are teachers at SMP N ...	Comma splice Omission of plural form of the subject Overgeneralization in use of plural form of noun 'people'

Such above deviances reflect serious grammatical issues in undergraduate students' research reports. Hence, an error analysis must be conducted to comprehensively describe the error issues as the sample of learner language (Ellis, 1997). These are essential for remediation; the occurrence and frequency of error are crucial for implementing pedagogical intervention (Gass & Selinker, 2008). To sum up, the undergraduate theses' drawbacks of the grammatical items are significant as they reflect the true L2 learners' status on what forms and functions have and have not been acquired in L2 writing.

Even though there has been a significant amount of research done on grammatical errors, this subject remains pertinent. By continuing to study grammatical errors, researchers, educators, and linguists can gain valuable insights into language acquisition, language variation, language teaching, and language

processing. These insights contribute to the development of more effective pedagogical practices, improved language assessment tools, and a deeper understanding of how language works.

Some contributions are detailed here. First, languages are constantly changing and evolving. It permits a more in-depth examination of how language variation affects the occurrence of particular errors. Second, studying grammatical errors provides valuable insights into the process of language acquisition, including the challenges and patterns of error development that learners face. The third one is for pedagogical implication; understanding grammatical errors has direct effects on how languages are taught and how they are taught that helps teachers to figure out the most frequent errors students make, create focused ways to teach, and come up with effective ways to deal with these errors in the classroom. Fourth, studying grammatical errors contributes to our understanding of how language develops in both native and non-native speakers. By examining the developmental trajectories of grammatical accuracy, researchers gain insights into the stages and patterns of language development. Fifth, grammatical errors provide data for linguists to test and refine linguistic theories. Analyzing the nature and distribution of errors helps researchers refine their understanding of the underlying grammatical structures and rules. Sixth, the study of grammatical errors contributes to facilitating the development of language evaluation and assessment instruments. Understanding prevalent errors enables the development of valid and reliable language proficiency assessments and the identification of areas for improvement.

## **1.2 Research Questions**

Grammatical errors are commonly found in undergraduate students' written products, including theses. The underlying issues behind the errors are L1 negative transfer and incorrect L2 forms. This study is conducted to recognize to what extent such errors occur in undergraduate theses. The problems are broken into four research questions as follows:

- (1) What types of grammatical errors are committed by the student-teachers in their theses?
- (2) How do the grammatical errors take place in the student-teachers' theses?
- (3) What are the sources of the grammatical errors committed by the student-teachers in their theses?
- (4) Why do the grammatical errors occur in the student-teachers' theses?
- (5) What student-teachers language status can be reflected from the error issues?
- (6) What do grammatical errors' findings inform pedagogical practice for academic writing?
- (7) How do grammatical errors' findings contribute to the language curriculum?

## **1.3 Objective of the Study**

The objectives of the study are presented like the followings.

- (1) To find the types of grammatical errors committed by the student-teachers in their theses.

- (2) To ascertain the process of grammatical errors take place in the student-teachers' theses.
- (3) To recognize sources of the grammatical errors committed by the student-teachers in their theses
- (4) To look for the student-teachers' reasons for committing errors in their theses
- (5) To reflect the status of learner language based on the error issues.
- (6) To inform pedagogical practice for academic writing based on the findings of grammatical errors committed by the student-teachers.
- (7) To convey the ways of grammatical errors' findings contribute to the language curriculum

#### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

The significance of the study can be viewed in two types: practical and theoretical. The former is about the potential application of the findings to educational practice, and the last relates to the study's implication to advancing knowledge.

Intentionally, this study is carried out to accumulate evidence on several characteristics of undergraduate students' grammatical errors in each part of their theses. Although numerous similar studies have resulted in plenty of important information, this study is significant since it investigates the errors from the entire chapters of the theses, which are likely to get more specific equal information. Hence, the information becomes another reference. The next practical contribution is that the

grammar remediation on each particular part of a thesis is discussed by considering the common errors.

Theoretically, the descriptions of what forms are and are not acquired yet are notable for both Second Language Acquisition (SLA) context and the Writing course. SLA discipline can extend the data about positioning learner language; the Writing course can be revisited for updating the syllabus. The instructional materials and the selected techniques for teaching academic writing are required to share an adequate space for form-focused discussion by accommodating inter and intra-lingual knowledge.

### **1.5 Scope of the Study**

Prior to data collection, the scope of the study is defined at the outset of the research endeavor. Author uses it to establish the boundaries and limitations within which the study will be conducted. In conjunction with the study's scope, the term 'limitations' is frequently used to characterize the constraints of any parameters that are considered and to specify which parameters have not been considered at all.

This study is document analysis which scrutinize 25 student-teacher' theses of English Study Program at an Islamic Higher Education in Jambi. These theses have been examined on the theses defenses in the second term (even semester) of the academic year 2020-2021. Then, the analysis, findings, and conclusions of the study are based on four steps of error analysis proposed by Ellis (1997).

## 1.6 Definition of Key Terms

To be familiar with the main terminologies used in this study, they are defined like the followings.

1. **Errors.** They are defined as “any deviation from a selected norm of writing performance, no matter what the cause of the deviation might be” (Dulay et al., 1982, p. 139).
2. **Grammar.** Besides, it is a symbol, the grammar of a language takes place as a convention that demonstrates the connection between forms and meaning (Trousdale & Gisborne, 2008) and distinguishes accurate to faulty expressions (Young, 1984). The word 'grammar' has various meanings, but the most common meanings of grammar include both syntax and that aspect of morphology (the internal structure of words) that deals with inflections (Quirk et al., 1985).
3. **Grammatical error.** A grammatical error is a case of improper, unconventional, or controversial usage, such as a misplaced modifier or an incorrect verb tense.
4. **Student-teachers.** They refer to undergraduate students whose majors are in English education.
5. **Theses.** They refer to research reports written by undergraduate students for fulfilling one of the requirements for taking an undergraduate degree.
6. **First Language (L1).** It is a formal language used by the student-teachers in their academic life. In this case, it is Bahasa Indonesia.



7. **L2.** It refers to a foreign language used by the student-teachers in their academic life. In this case, it is English.
8. **A proto-syllabus.** It is an initial or preliminary version of a syllabus. The proto-syllabus outlines the general framework and key elements of the course, which can then be further developed and refined through consultation, feedback, and alignment with institutional guidelines
9. **Thesis Writing Course.** It refers to a specialized academic course designed to provide students with the knowledge, skills, and guidance necessary to successfully plan, research, and write a thesis.

### **1.7 Organization of the Dissertation**

This research report will compile five chapters for holistic reporting of this study. The current chapter highlighted the general background, the motives for conducting the study, the overview of similar problems from some current reports of related studies, and the practical and theoretical contributions of the study.

The second chapter will elaborate on an insightful literature review for grounding this study. The typical learners' language is first discussed, and having concepts of error analysis is significant since it is a core of this study. Next, prescriptive grammar, which tells its users how to use the language elegantly, discusses the significance of grammar in academic writing. The errors found in academic writing have received substantial attention from many researchers in the views of both inter and intra-lingual knowledge.

Chapter three will present the description of errors analysis procedures proposed by Ellis (1997), which will be employed in the twenty-five selected theses. The corpora will be gathered by identifying errors. Next, all the errors will be described and classified into grammatical categories. After categorizing them, a task is to explain why they occur, whether they are systematic (a kind of rule constructed) or predictable (as others also did). The last step is error evaluation. It is a space where an error is considered severe (global error) or only a single constituent in the sentence (local error). This evaluation will determine what type of pedagogical intervention to be addressed.

Chapter four deals with the description of all errors found. They are going to be presented into types and its frequency of occurrences. While doing the classification, the author also notices other issues arise. It also covers how the errors take place, and the source of the error issues. The overall views error categories are going to be shown on the table. Once all the data have been presented, the discussion will occur by confirming the theories and actual research results. The last part of this chapter is to infer the results of the whole discussion and gain insight into its contributions to academic writing practice.

Chapter five is about to have a comprehensive conclusion. It will briefly include the type of errors, reasons, and sources of errors. The empirical and theoretical implication is also stated here. It is likewise a space to reveal the contributions, recommendations of this study, and highlight of the limitations of this study and directions for future research.