

An Analysis of Essay Writing Errors and their Sources among Third-Year English-Major Students at Thu Dau Mot University

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ABSTRACT: Essay writing is one of the most challenging skills for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, and writing errors continue to affect students' written communication. This study aimed to identify the most frequent essay writing errors committed by third-year English-major students at Thu Dau Mot University and to explore the possible sources of these errors. A descriptive error analysis design was employed, combining quantitative and qualitative procedures. Thirty essays written by third-year English-major students were collected and analyzed. The identified errors were classified into grammatical, lexical, and syntactic categories, and their frequencies and percentages were calculated. The findings revealed that grammatical errors were the most frequent category, particularly errors involving prepositions, plurality, articles, verb tenses, concord, and word order. Lexical errors mainly involved word choice and word form, whereas syntactic errors included punctuation, spelling, and capitalization. Among all error types, preposition errors occurred most frequently. The findings further suggest that the identified errors may be associated with mother-tongue interference, literal translation, insufficient grammatical knowledge, and incomplete understanding of English writing conventions. The study contributes to the understanding of EFL learners' writing difficulties and provides pedagogical implications for improving writing instruction and writing accuracy among English-major students.

KEYWORDS: error analysis, essay writing, writing errors, English-major students, EFL learners

1. INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the basic language skills that non-native English speakers need to have when they learn English. However, Richards, J. and Renandya, W. (2002) stated, "There is no doubt that writing is the most difficult skill for L2 learners to master". According to Richards, J. and Renandya, W. (2002), writing involves numerous considerations and choices to be made regarding higher-level skills, such as content, structure and organization, and lower-level skills, such as punctuation, choice of appropriate vocabulary items and grammatical structures. Although previous researches have been conducted in many places around the world and identified many common errors in essay writing as well as their sources by Sarfraz, S. (2011) at the university of Pakistan; Na Phuket, P. R., and Othman, N. (2015) at the University of Malaysia; Khatter, S. (2019) at Majmaah University; Waelateh, B., Boonsuk, Y., Ambele, E. A., and Jeharsae, F. (2019) at the University of Southern Thailand and Nikolenko, O., Rebenko, M., and Doronina, N. (2021) at University of Ukraine, they have not been really effective in practice. It is clear that students still frequently make errors and repeat them during their essay writing process.

Based on the background presented above, the research questions can be formulated as follows:

1. What are the most frequent types of errors committed by third-year English-major students at Thu Dau Mot University in essay writing?
2. What are the possible sources of the most frequent essay writing errors identified in students' essays?

Although previous studies have investigated essay writing errors in various EFL contexts, limited research has examined the error patterns of English-major students at Thu Dau Mot University. Therefore, the present study contributes local empirical evidence regarding the most common essay writing errors and their possible sources among Vietnamese EFL learners.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Theoretical framework

2.1.1. Definition of error

In the linguistics field, many language experts have defined many definitions of error.

Norrish (1987) describes errors as "a systematic deviation when learner has not learnt something and consistently gets its wrong".

Cunningworth (1987) also adds another definition "errors are systematic deviations from the norms of the language being learned".

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2.1.2. Errors versus mistakes

It is important to distinguish between the terms “mistakes” and “errors” before analyzing errors.

Corder (1967) explained that an error is “a noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of a native speaker reflects the competence of the learner”, whereas he defined a mistake as “a performance error that is either random guess or a slip, in that it is a failure to utilize a known system correctly”.

In agreement with Corder’s view, James (1998) revealed that a mistake can be self-corrected, but an error cannot. Hourani (2008) added that errors are “systematic”, which means they are likely to happen regularly; in contrast, mistakes are considered “inconsistent deviation.” In *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching* (4th ed.), Brown (2000) noted that a mistake is considered a performance error in that the learner knows the system but fails to use it.

2.1.3. Definition of error analysis

Several researchers have already studied error analysis from different viewpoints. James (2001) reported that error analysis is “the study of linguistic ignorance, the investigation of what people do not know and how they attempt to cope with their ignorance.” For Richards, J., and Schmidt, R. (2002), as cited in Seitova (2016), error analysis compares “learner English” with English (L2) itself and judges how learners are “ignorant.” According to Mourssi, A. M. (2013) and Brown (2000), error analysis can be viewed as a process through which researchers observe, analyze, and classify learner errors to elicit some information about the system operating within the learner.

2.1.4. Sources of errors

It's essential to identify the sources of errors in order to analyze students' errors.

Brown (2000) cites two major sources: Interlingua and intralingua.

According to Aloba (2015), sources of error include the learners, teaching materials or methods, difficulties inherent in the language, interference from L1 and L2, and use of L2 in the community.

2.2. Previous studies

In recent years, there have been a lot of studies on error analysis conducted to identify the most frequent essay writing errors committed by groups of EFL students and their sources.

2.2.1. Common errors in essay writing

2.2.1.1. Grammatical errors

The appropriate use of prepositions is one of the most difficult tasks for learners. In agreement with the views of Na Phuket, P. R., and Othman, N. (2015), Khatter, S. (2019); Waelateh, B., Boonsuk, Y., Ambele, E. A. and Jeharsae, F. (2019) and Nikolenko, O., Rebenko, M., and Doronina, N. (2021) investigated that there were many errors in using the appropriate preposition. Khatter, S. (2019) and Na Phuket, P. R. and Othman, N. (2015) revealed that prepositions could be omitted, added, and substituted.

Plurality error was considered as error that students have, according to Sarfraz, S. (2011); Khatter, S. (2019) and Nikolenko, O., Rebenko, M., and Doronina, N. (2021). Clearly, Khatter, S. (2019) illustrated that with singular and plural markers, students erroneously omitted the plural morpheme "s" even in the presence of plural quantifiers. In contrast, they added the plural morpheme "s" to some unnecessary English words.

Nikolenko, O., Rebenko, M., and Doronina, N. (2021); Na Phuket, P. R., and Othman, N. (2015) and Sarfraz, S. (2011) strongly supported Khatter, S. (2019), who indicated that articles were also an erroneous aspect of the learners' essays.

Verb tense error were found to be a common problem in students' essays, according to Na Phuket, P. R., and Othman, N. (2015); Khatter, S. (2019) and Nikolenko, O., Rebenko, M., and Doronina, N. (2021). Na Phuket, P. R., and Othman, N. (2015) and Khatter, S. (2019), all pointed out that students used a tense that did not exactly indicate the time of an action. In particular, they used present tenses instead of past tenses.

In recent studies, Sarfraz, S. (2011); Na Phuket, P. R., and Othman, N. (2015); Khatter, S. (2019); Waelateh, B., Boonsuk, Y., Ambele, E. A., and Jeharsae, F. (2019) and Nikolenko, O., Rebenko, M., and Doronina, N. (2021) determined the grammatical error related to the lack of concord between subject and verb in students' essays. Khatter, S. (2019) stated that students deleted the (-s) 3rd person singular pronoun marker or added it unnecessarily. In addition, they used the present simple marker or added it unnecessarily.

In agreement with Sarfraz, S. (2011), Khatter, S. (2019); Nikolenko, O., Rebenko, M., and Doronina, N. (2021) revealed that faulty word order was one of the errors that the learners committed. Khatter, S. (2019) said that these errors included a noun and its adjective(s), adjective position, and adverbs describing verbs.

2.2.1.2. Lexical errors

Inaccurate word choice was one of the errors highlighted by Na Phuket, P. R., and Othman, N. (2015); Khatter, S. (2019); Nikolenko, O., Rebenko, M., and Doronina, N. (2021). More particularly, Na Phuket, P. R., and Othman, N. (2015) and Khatter, S. (2019) all explored that many sentences included either inappropriate or inaccurate vocabulary choices that deviated the meaning of the written text from the writer's original intention.

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A study by Khatter, S. (2019) contended that students also made errors in the use of the correct word form. He indicated that word form error included confusion of adjectives and adverbs, nouns and adjectives and -ed and -ing adjectives. Na Phuket, P. R., and Othman, N. (2015); Waelateh, B., Boonsuk, Y., Ambele, E. A., and Jeharsae, F. (2019) and Nikolenko, O., Rebenko, M., and Doronina, N. (2021) added that the incorrect verb form was also a case.

2.2.1.3. Syntactic errors

Sarfraz, S. (2011); Na Phuket, P. R., and Othman, N. (2015); Khatter, S. (2019); Waelateh, B., Boonsuk, Y., Ambele, E. A., and Jeharsae, F. (2019) and Nikolenko, O., Rebenko, M., and Doronina, N. (2021) argued that students had problems with the proper use of punctuation marks. Khatter, S. (2019) found out that students failed to use punctuation marks properly and omitted the bound morpheme ('s) as a possessive marker.

Na Phuket, P. R., and Othman, N. (2015); Khatter, S. (2019); Waelateh, B., Boonsuk, Y., Ambele, E. A., and Jeharsae, F. (2019); Nikolenko, O., Rebenko, M., and Doronina, N. (2021), as cited in Sarfraz, S. (2011), revealed that spelling error was the next main essay writing errors that occurred in the students' essays. Students added or omitted a space in a single word, inserted an extra letter into specific words, or lacked or substituted a letter in specific words, as demonstrated by Na Phuket, P. R., and Othman, N. (2015) and Khatter, S. (2019).

Sarfraz, S. (2011); Na Phuket, P. R., and Othman, N. (2015); Nikolenko, O., Rebenko, M., and Doronina, N. (2021) all proposed that there were capitalization error.

2.2.2. Sources of errors in essay writing

2.2.2.1. Sources of grammatical errors

As shown by Sarfraz, S. (2011), preposition error was caused by a lack of knowledge and confusion regarding prepositions. Khatter, S. (2019), as cited in Sarfraz, S. (2011), suggested that one of the factors that created errors in using the appropriate preposition was the literal translation from L1 to L2. It is possible to conclude from Na Phuket, P. R., and Othman, N. (2015) and Nikolenko, O., Rebenko, M., and Doronina, N. (2021) that interference of the native language L1 or mother tongue transfer was a significant factor that contributed to preposition error.

The dictionary contained no plural words, which was a factor that contributed to plurality error, according to Sarfraz, S. (2011). Khatter, S. (2019) indicated that intralingual was another factor. The plural "s" morpheme tended not to be pronounced by Arabic speakers. In the research of Khatter, S. (2019), the wrong usage of articles was caused by the influence of their first language. According to Na Phuket, P. R., and Othman, N. (2015) and Khatter, S. (2019), it can be concluded that the native language interference resulted in verb tense error. Based on the most recent studies of Khatter, S. (2019); Nikolenko, O., Rebenko, M., and Doronina, N. (2021) identified that faulty word order was caused by the influence of their mother tongue rules.

2.2.2.2. Sources of lexical errors

Waelateh, B., Boonsuk, Y., Ambele, E. A., and Jeharsae, F. (2019) and Nikolenko, O., Rebenko, M., and Doronina, N. (2021) all came to the same conclusion that word choice error could be attributed to the influence of the mother tongue.

2.2.2.3. Sources of syntactic errors

According to Sarfraz, S. (2011), although students were aware of their otherwise limited knowledge of rules of the target language, the negative effect of using reduced-spelled words in message service (SMS) and online chat technologies was a likely cause of spelling error. Khatter, S. (2019) said that spelling error resulted from learners' carelessness about memorizing words. Aside from that, they could be caused by a variety of irregularities in L2 spelling. As said by Nikolenko, O., Rebenko, M., and Doronina, N. (2021), capitalization error was produced by misleading teachers' examples or ignorance of the capitalization problem.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a descriptive error analysis design combining quantitative and qualitative procedures. Quantitative analysis was used to calculate the frequencies and percentages of different error types identified in students' essays, whereas qualitative analysis was employed to examine representative examples and explore the possible sources of the identified errors. Error analysis was selected because it provides a systematic approach to identifying, classifying, describing, and interpreting language errors produced by learners in written texts.

3.2. Population and Sampling

The participants in this study were third-year English-major students at Thu Dau Mot University. These students had studied English for several years prior to entering university and had completed a number of grammar and academic writing courses. A corpus of 30 English essays written by third-year English-major students was selected using convenience sampling. The essays were chosen because they were readily accessible to the researcher and represented authentic samples of students' academic writing. The selected essays were collected from writing assignments completed as part of students' coursework and reflected their actual language use in an EFL learning context.

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3.4. Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was conducted in four stages. First, thirty English essays written by third-year English-major students were collected from writing assignments. Second, the essays were carefully examined to identify language errors. Third, the identified errors were classified into grammatical, lexical, and syntactic categories based on the error analysis framework adopted in the study. Finally, the frequencies and percentages of each error type were calculated, and representative examples were selected for detailed analysis and discussion. To enhance the reliability of the analysis, the identified errors were reviewed multiple times before being assigned to a particular category. The interpretation of possible error sources was based on recurring error patterns observed in the essays and supported by relevant findings reported in previous studies.

3.5. Data analysis

After common essay writing errors encountered by third-year English-major students at Thu Dau Mot University are reported, they were divided into different types and the percentages of errors were estimated. These errors were described using illustrative examples. They were corrected and explained in detail. Finally, possible factors contributing to the recurrence of these errors were identified and interpreted based on recurring error patterns and previous literature.

4. RESULTS

This chapter presents the analysis results of common essay writing errors and the sources of these errors encountered by third-year English-major students at Thu Dau Mot University.

4.1. Common errors in essay writing

The findings of common essay writing errors encountered by third-year English-major students at Thu Dau Mot University are categorized into 3 error types.

4.1.1. Grammatical errors

Table 1. Analysis of grammatical errors produced by third-year English-major students at Thu Dau Mot University

Errors	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Preposition	43	27.92%
Plurality	37	24.03%
Article	28	18.18%
Verb tense	27	17.53%
Concord	16	10.39%
Word order	3	1.95%
Total	154	100%

As can be seen in Table 1, the most frequent grammatical error was related to prepositions, as it occurred 43 times, or 27.92%, in the students' essays. The plurality error accounted for 24.03% of the total. It was interesting to note that errors related to the article and verb tense were repeated similar numbers of times, at 18.18% and 17.53%, respectively. The data suggested that the recurrence of the rest of the errors was significantly different. While the proportion of concord error was 10.39%, word order error was the least common grammatical error, occurring three times and making up 1.95% of the total.

Table 2. Examples of preposition error made by third-year English-major students at Thu Dau Mot University

Error identification	Error correction
1. There are plenty causes and solutions for the concern.	1. There are plenty of causes and solutions for the concern.
2. As we know, nowadays our environment is facing with a lot of risks.	2. As we know, nowadays our environment is facing a lot of risks.
3. It is situated on the north of Vietnam.	3. It is situated in the north of Vietnam.
4. The best part of the day is at the evening.	4. The best part of the day is in the evening.

Based on table 2, participants made errors in the use of prepositions. In some cases, a preposition is always between two nouns, but Example 1 removed the preposition between the nouns "plenty" and "causes", making a preposition omission. On the other hand, in some cases that require no preposition, student's added prepositions, such as in front of the verb "face" in Example 2, which did not require the preposition, but the preposition "with" was added. In Example 3, before the noun phrase "the north of Vietnam", using a preposition was appropriate, but "on" was completely wrong, it should be "in". In the rest of the example, the phrase "in the evening" was very familiar, but the student still made an error. He/she used "at" instead of "in", which is completely inappropriate.

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Table 3. Examples of plurality error made by third-year English-major students at Thu Dau Mot University

Error identification	Error correction
5. ... they can feel some relief from their pain which gives them a positive spirit to get over that emotions.	5. ... they can feel some relief from their pain which gives them a positive spirit to get over those emotions.
6. ... but one things I sure remember is that it was so exhilarating.	6. ... but one thing I sure remember is that it was so exhilarating.
7. In short, global warming is the most dangerous threat to our lifes .	7. In short, global warming is the most dangerous threat to our lives .

The sentences in Table 3 are typical examples of plurality error that are often found in students' essays. Students omitted plural markers in the presence of plural quantifiers. The demonstrative pronoun before the plural noun "emotions" was "that", as in Example 5, which created an error because the demonstrative pronoun "that" is used to refer to a singular noun. It should be "those". Conversely, students added plural markers to some unnecessary cases. In English, after "one" is a singular noun, but the student in Example 6 committed a serious error when they added the plural morpheme "s" to the noun "thing", which came after "one". Moreover, students also made another plurality error. Except for adding the plural morpheme "s" to the singular nouns, singular nouns that want to in plural form are required to change some letters. Therefore, in the case of Example 7, although the possessive adjective "our" was followed by a plural noun, students used the plural of "life" as "lifes", which should be changed to "lives" instead.

Table 4. Examples of article error made by third-year English-major students at Thu Dau Mot University

Error identification	Error correction
8. ... global warming, which affects all living things on the Earth.	8. ... global warming, which affects all living things on Earth.
9. It can be very stressful for well-known person at a very young age.	9. It can be very stressful for a well-known person at a very young age.
10. Everyone must have the childhood memory.	10. Everyone must have a childhood memory.

Specifically in Example 8, there is no need to use any article with the proper noun "Earth", including "the". On the contrary, students omitted articles that were required in sentences. For example, "well-known person" in Example 9 is a singular countable noun and not specific, Example 9 did not use any article before "well-known person", causing the error. To make the sentence correct, students should add the article "a" in front of "well-known person". They further misused articles. The noun phrase "childhood memory" in Example 10 is singular countable and not specific, but the student used the article "the". That is wrong; the student should use the article "a".

Table 5. Examples of verb tense error made by third-year English-major students at Thu Dau Mot University

Error identification	Error correction
11. ... my childhood is very peaceful.	11. ... my childhood was very peaceful.
12. I spend most of my childhood with my family.	12. I spent most of my childhood with my family.

It is explicitly stated that students repeated verb tense error. They used verb tenses that did not match the time of the action. Example 11 and Example 12 were past events about "my childhood". The verb tense should have been simple past tense, but in Example 11, simple present tense "is" was used, which is completely incorrect. Similarly, the student in Example 12 also made a verb tense error because the verb "spend" was used in the simple present tense while the sentence was showing an action in the past.

Table 6. Examples of concord error made by third-year English-major students at Thu Dau Mot University

Error identification	Error correction
13. And the weather and place is very peaceful and comfortable.	13. And the weather and place are very peaceful and comfortable.
14. In conclusion, being famous at a very young age have many drawbacks, but...	14. In conclusion, being famous at a very young age has many drawbacks, but...

The lack of concord between subject and verb is one of the most common errors. Students did not have subject-verb agreement when they used the verb "is" for plural subjects, otherwise, they used the verb to be "are" for singular subjects. The subject in Example 13 ("the weather and place") was plural, but the students used the verb "is". Besides, for the present simple, they also deleted the (-s) 3rd person singular pronoun marker or added it unnecessarily. In example 14, although the singular subject was "being famous at a very young age", they did not use the verb "has" but the infinitive verb "have".

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Table 7. An example of word order error made by third-year English-major students at Thu Dau Mot University

Error identification	Error correction
15. <u>All of first</u> , the increasing world population is placing pressure on natural resources.	15. <u>First of all</u> , the increasing world population is placing pressure on natural resources.

Last, there were errors related to word order, which means incorrect word positions of word groups in sentences. Specifically, errors included the wrong adjective position, noun position, adverb position, etc. in word groups. One of the participants wrote "All of first" in Example 15, while it should be "First of all".

4.1.2. Lexical errors

Table 8. Analysis of lexical errors produced by third-year English-major students at Thu Dau Mot University

Errors	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Word choice	18	60%
Word form	12	40%
Total	30	100%

Turning to the lexical errors, the numbers and the percentages are shown in Table 8. It is clear that only two errors were identified. While word form error was reported to account for just under half of the total proportion, 40%, word choice was found to account for the majority, making up 60% of the total.

Table 9. An example of word choice error made by third-year English-major students at Thu Dau Mot University

Error identification	Error correction
16. In addition, gas emissions from factories and exhaust fumes from means of transport also <u>lead</u> to global warming.	16. In addition, gas emissions from factories and exhaust fumes from means of transport also <u>contribute</u> to global warming.

Students' essays contained many wrong word choices. They deviated from the written text's meaning and the writer's original intention. Example 16 is a prime example. The student listed the causes of global warming in the previous sentences and in this sentence; the student added two other causes: "gas emissions from factories and exhaust fumes from means of transport". However, the student made an error in the meaning of the sentence because "lead" meant that "gas emissions from factories and exhaust fumes from means of transport" caused global warming without including the previous causes. Therefore, it should be changed to "contribute" to match the student's intention.

Table 10. Examples of word form error made by third-year English-major students at Thu Dau Mot University

Error identification	Error correction
17. In general, the people are friendly, <u>honesty</u> and lovely.	17. In general, the people are friendly, <u>honest</u> and lovely.
18. It's good for us to <u>spending</u> time outdoors.	18. It's good for us to <u>spend</u> time outdoors.

The participants' errors in using word form can be seen in the students' essays. They confused adjectives and adverbs, nouns and adjectives and -ed and -ing adjectives. Example 17 is a typical one, they used the noun "honesty" while this sentence was listing people's personality traits and the word "honesty" was between the adjective "friendly" and the adjective "lovely". Thus, in this case, the student should use the adjective "honest". In addition, the students also got the wrong verb form. As in Example 18, the verb after "to" is an infinitive, but the student used a gerund, which was completely wrong.

4.1.3. Syntactic errors

Table 11. Analysis of syntactic errors produced by third-year English-major students at Thu Dau Mot University

Errors	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Punctuation mark	36	52.17%
Spelling	24	34.78%
Capitalization	9	13.04%
Total	69	100%

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As presented in Table 11, the numbers and the percentages of syntactic errors are completely different. While half of the syntactic error repetitions (52.17%) were found to be related to punctuation marks, error related to capitalization was repeated only nine times, accounting for 13.04%. Spelling error, on the other hand, was found to account for 34.78% of all syntactic errors.

Table 12. Examples of punctuation mark error made by third-year English-major students at Thu Dau Mot University

Error identification	Error correction
19. As the youngest member of my family I usually feed the dog, sweep the house, water the plants and lay the table.	19. As the youngest member of my family, I usually feed the dog, sweep the house, water the plants and lay the table.
20. Individuals and businesses find them printed on the board, at each of their workplaces or at each school gate and posted in every office.	20. Individuals and businesses find them printed on the board at each of their workplaces or at each school gate and posted in every office.
21. As I can recall, I would play card games or hide and seek with my classmates in our break time after lunch, instead of taking a nap, I often found ways to get out of the classroom and have fun with my friends.	21. As I can recall, I would play card games or hide and seek with my classmates in our break time after lunch. Instead of taking a nap, I often found ways to get out of the classroom and have fun with my friends.
22. However, <u>its</u> necessary to have parents by the side to guide the mind and guide the religion to stand firm.	22. However, <u>it's</u> necessary to have parents by the side to guide the mind and guide the religion to stand firm.

Examples in Table 12 are some of the instances where students made punctuation mark error in their essays. There are many cases where students did not put punctuation marks where needed. Normally, to break up ideas or clauses in a complex sentence, people often use commas. However, between the two clauses of the sentence in Example 19, the student did not use a comma to separate the two clauses. On the other hand, students inserted punctuation marks that were not required. As can be seen in Example 20, "on the board at each of their workplaces" referred to the detailed location, so no comma was needed. In addition, students also confused commas and full stops in sentences. Example 21 shows that there were two separate sentences, so a full stop was needed to separate them, but the student used a comma, which was incorrect punctuation. In addition, some students omitted the bound morpheme ('s) as a possessive marker, as in Example 22.

Table 13. Examples of spelling error made by third-year English-major students at Thu Dau Mot University

Error identification	Error correction
23. To sum up, <u>every one</u> should protect the environment and animals ...	23. To sum up, <u>everyone</u> should protect the environment and animals ...
24. <u>Somepeople</u> content that doing exercise can help them lose weight, ...	24. <u>Some people</u> content that doing exercise can help them lose weight, ...
25. I was <u>verry</u> happy to know that I got 10 points in Physics.	25. I was <u>very</u> happy to know that I got 10 points in Physics.
26. Perhaps it is resulting in the melting of ice in <u>Antartica</u> and raising the sea levels rapidly.	26. Perhaps it is resulting in the melting of ice in <u>Antarctica</u> and raising the sea levels rapidly.
27. The greenhouse effect is a phenomenon where gases such as <u>cacbon</u> dioxide trap heat from the sun.	27. The greenhouse effect is a phenomenon where gases such as <u>carbon</u> dioxide trap heat from the sun.

As it is presented in Table 13, there are errors related to spelling. It can be seen that space was inappropriately inserted into a single word, which created the word "every one" in Example 23. In contrast, the students omitted space in a single word unnecessarily, which created the word "Somepeople" in Example 24. The spelling error also occurred when inserting an extra letter into a word. In example 25, the letter "r" was inserted to create the new word "verry", a spelling error. Meanwhile, in some cases, they lacked a letter in a specific word. Typically, in Example 26, the letter "c" was omitted from the right word "Antarctica" to create the wrong word "Antartica". In addition, students also substituted a letter in a specific word, such as substituting the wrong letter "c" for the right letter "r" (Example 27: "cacbon-carbon").

Table 14. Examples of capitalization error made by third-year English-major students at Thu Dau Mot University

Error identification	Error correction
28. <u>it</u> hurts them both mentally and physically.	28. <u>It</u> hurts them both mentally and physically.
29. Finally, <u>Locals</u> and visitors alike are drawn to bike-sharing because of its low cost.	29. Finally, <u>locals</u> and visitors alike are drawn to bike-sharing because of its low cost.

Capitalization error is the next writing error that occurred in the students' essays. First, students did not begin the sentence with a capital letter and did not use a capital letter after a full stop. In Example 28, the word "it" must begin with a capital letter because it

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was written after a full stop and began the sentence. Second, students capitalized unnecessary words. They capitalized the word "Locals" in example 29 even though it didn't begin a sentence and wasn't a proper noun.

4.2. Sources of errors in essay writing

To understand the reasons for the above essay writing errors, the findings about factors contributing to their recurrence are also shown.

4.2.1. Sources of grammatical errors

The researcher considered three causes of preposition error. First, the students made this error because of native language interference. Vietnamese does not use prepositions, so they are affected by the system of their native language. Secondly, it could happen because students translated literally from their native language to English. Obviously, when Example 2 in Table 2 is translated from English to Vietnamese, it is correct in meaning, but in English, the preposition "with" after "face" is completely wrong in preposition usage. Next, some of them made this error due to lack of knowledge and confusion regarding prepositions. They knew the position of prepositions in a sentence, but they did not understand how to use them and confused prepositions with each other, so they inevitably made preposition error.

It came as no surprise that many sentences written by third-year English-major students at Thu Dau Mot University contained plurality error. The English dictionary doesn't contain plural words that contribute to errors. In addition, students were influenced by their native language, Vietnamese. In English, if singular nouns want to be plural, they must either insert the plural morpheme "s" or change the letters such as "that-those", "thing-things" and "life-lives" in the error correction of Example 5, Example 6 and Example 7 in Table 3. However, in Vietnamese, when singular nouns want to be plural, they remain the same and quantifiers are added in front of them to modify them. Another reason is that students didn't fully understand the distinction of English. Example 5 of Table 3 showed students' wrong use of demonstrative pronouns. Each demonstrative pronoun is used differently, "that" is used to refer to singular nouns and "those" is used to refer to plural nouns, but students did not understand clearly, leading to these errors. Students also made article error because they applied article rules incompletely and ignored the article rule restrictions, as shown in Examples 8, 9, and 10 in Table 4. It is clear that despite having studied numerous grammars and writing courses, they still did not understand, were unable to apply article rules in their essays and made error regarding articles.

From Example 11 and Example 12 in Table 5, it could be noticed that there are two factors that lead to verb tense error. The first factor is native language interference. English has a lot of tenses that are clearly distinguished according to the time of speaking and the time of the action and corresponding to each tense, the verb is changed appropriately.

4.2.2. Sources of lexical errors

Students' word choice error appeared to be caused by their mother tongue. In the Vietnamese sense, "contribute" and "lead" in Example 16 in Table 9 mean cause global warming, but in English, each word is used in a different sense.

A factor that contributed to word form error was identified in Table 10. Learners did not apply the word form rules. As a result, they confused word form, as demonstrated in Example 17, or used the incorrect word form, as shown in Example 18.

4.2.3. Sources of syntactic errors

There are many causes that contributed to the repetition of the punctuation mark error. Students used incorrect punctuation marks due to lack of knowledge of punctuation mark rules, as shown in Examples 19, 20, and 21 in Table 12. What is more, mother tongue transfer also causes this error. Because the English-major students are native Vietnamese, they combine Vietnamese and English in using punctuation marks in their English essays. Vietnamese has some characteristics of punctuation marks unlike English, such as the fact that there is no morpheme ('s) to represent a possessive marker like in English, for example, "it's" in example 22 in Table 12, so the students often omitted them. Besides, English spelling has many irregularities, which was difficult for students to write spelling correctly. Typically, in Example 23 in Table 13, "every" and "one" are two separate words that had no meaning in the sentence, and if there is no space, "everyone" will a word with a specific meaning in the sentence. Even though they have been studying English for many years, they still repeated spelling error because they applied the spelling rules incorrectly. They did not know when to not insert spaces like "everyone" in Example 23 and when to insert spaces as in "Some people" in Example 24 in Table 13.

5. DISCUSSION

My initial prediction was that at Thu Dau Mot University, third-year English major students would commit errors and repeat them in their essays. In line with the original hypothesis, many common errors made by third-year English majors were found, such as preposition error, plurality error, punctuation mark error, and article error, verb tense error, spelling error, word choice error, concord error, word form error, capitalization error and word order error. Among them, preposition error was the most common, repeated 43 times, corresponding to 17% of the total and the least common was word order error, recorded 3 times, accounting for 1.19%.

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After researching and comparing this research with the previous one done by Sarfraz, S. (2011), the findings are almost the same. Students still made errors in their essays such as in spelling, word choice, punctuation marks, word order, articles, capitalization, concord and prepositions. In particular, the influence of L1 has always been the leading cause of errors.

In this research, the results suggested that the most common error was preposition error and the least common error was word order error. On the other hand, a research paper done by Na Phuket, P. R., and Othman, N. (2015) found that translated word from Thai was considered the most common error and adjective error was the least of the total number of errors detected. Most of the errors found in this paper are similar to those found by Khatter, S. (2019), a few years ago. However, there were errors found in that study, such as translated words from Arabic and conjunctions, which were not detected in this study. The research results of Waelateh, B., Boonsuk, Y., Ambele, E. A., & Jeharsae, F. (2019) found many errors and spelling error was found the most times. The result of my research was error related to prepositions. Similar to other studies, both studies were the result of the influence of L1.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1. SUMMARY OF THE MAIN FINDINGS

This study has identified the main types of errors made by third-year English-major students at Thu Dau Mot University in their written essay work. Based on the discussion of the findings and the examples given, it is possible to conclude that students in this study committed eleven common errors related to prepositions, plurality, punctuation marks, articles, verb tense, spelling, word choice, concord, word form, capitalization and word order. The findings suggest that these errors may be associated with factors such as carelessness about memorizing, having many irregularities, applying the rules incorrectly, lack of knowledge, literal translation from the native language to English and not being presented by teachers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to avoid the repetition of students' errors, teachers should teach and review necessary knowledge and common essay writing errors. They should help students develop effective writing strategies and techniques that enhance their English writing skills. Teachers should also regularly give students reading assignments about different topics to help them gain more knowledge and data for their essay writing. Besides, teachers' immediate feedback on students' writing performance is essential. Moreover, schools should also create more conditions for students to improve and develop their English writing skills by opening more courses related to grammar and writing.

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