CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF MORPHOSYNTACTIC ERRORS AND METHODOLOGICAL RIGOR IN AN UNDERGRADUATE THESIS WRITING

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Abstract
This research offers a detailed critical analysis of an undergraduate thesis writing entitled "Teaching and Learning Descriptive Text by Using Cooperative Learning Method," submitted to an English Education department. The analysis conducts on two interconnected levels. First, it systematically identifies, categorizes, and corrects prevalent morphosyntactic errors within the thesis manuscript, examining their implications for academic clarity, credibility, and scholarly communication in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. Error categories include subject-verb agreement, article usage, prepositional errors, verb tense consistency, plurality, and sentence structure issues. Second, the article provides a substantive evaluation of the thesis's research design, methodological execution, analytical depth, and contribution to the existing body of knowledge on Cooperative Learning (CL) in EFL writing instruction. While acknowledging the study's novel process-oriented focus on CL implementation, the analysis reveals significant constraints, including an extremely limited data collection period, superficial application of qualitative analysis frameworks, and weaknesses in research instrument design. The synthesis concludes that the thesis's potential contributions are substantially hindered by these linguistic and methodological shortcomings. Based on this dual critique, the research presents targeted recommendations for enhancing academic writing proficiency among EFL thesis writers and proposes more robust methodological designs for future qualitative inquiry into classroom-based pedagogical processes.
Keywords: **EFL, Error Analysis, Morphosyntax, Undergraduate thesis.**

Introduction

Developing writing abilities in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting remains a complex and long-standing issue in modern education, a challenge that sits at the very nexus of academic achievement, professional advancement, and intercultural

communication in our irrevocably globalized landscape. Writing, distinguished from its receptive counterparts (reading and listening) as a profoundly demanding productive skill, requires far more than the simple transcription of ideas. It is a complex, recursive, and often arduous cognitive act that demands the simultaneous orchestration of higher-order and lower-order processes. Learners must engage in cognitive and metacognitive strategizing for idea generation, logical organization, rhetorical structuring, and nuanced audience awareness, all while exercising a high degree of linguistic control and accuracy over the target language's intricate grammatical, lexical, and orthographic systems (Hyland, 2019; Meckling & Jensen, 1976) ;(Manchón, 2020). This task is exponentially magnified for learners whose first languages (L1) are typologically and syntactically distant from English. For students from such backgrounds, including the vast majority of Indonesian learners, mastering the precise morphosyntactic rules of English—the complex interface between word formation (morphology) and sentence structure (syntax)—presents a formidable barrier that often persists through years of instruction.

The specific struggles have been recorded and discussed in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) literature. Common struggles that plague intermediate to advanced EFL writers include, but are not limited to: consistent subject-verb agreement across complex noun phrases; the notoriously elusive and context-dependent deployment of articles (a, an, the); the idiomatic and often arbitrary-seeming usage of prepositions; maintaining tense and aspect consistency throughout a narrative or argument; and the construction of coherent, sophisticated complex sentences using appropriate subordination and coordination (Ellis, 2015; Ferris, 2011). While such errors may not always completely obscure the writer's intended meaning—a phenomenon often described as "local" rather than "global" error—their cumulative effect is pernicious. They significantly impede text readability, place an undue cognitive burden on the reader, undermine the writer's authority and credibility, and ultimately detract from the professional and academic quality of the work (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012). In high-stakes academic documents, such as undergraduate theses or published research, these surface-level issues can inadvertently cast doubt on the underlying rigor of the intellectual content, a risk no scholar can afford.

It is within this context of pedagogical urgency that educators and researchers have tirelessly sought, developed, and evaluated innovative instructional approaches to scaffold and enhance EFL writing proficiency. Among the myriad methodologies that have gained traction, Cooperative Learning (CL) has emerged as a particularly prominent, theoretically robust, and widely researched paradigm. It is crucial to distinguish CL from mere casual group work. Cooperative Learning is a deliberately structured pedagogical philosophy and set of techniques built upon five foundational principles: positive interdependence (the success of the individual is inextricably linked to the success of the group); individual accountability (each member is responsible for their contribution and learning); promotive face-to-face (or digitally mediated) interaction; explicit teaching and practice of interpersonal and small-group social skills; and group processing (reflection on the collaborative process to improve effectiveness) (Belmekki & Baghzou, 2022; Johnson & Johnson, 2018).

When applied to the domain of L2 writing, CL strategies transform the traditionally solitary and anxiety-inducing act of composing into a socially mediated, dialogic process. Techniques such as Think-Pair-Share(Lyman, 1981), structured Peer Response, and authentic Collaborative Writing tasks are theorized to create a supportive, low-anxiety zone of proximal development. Within this space, learners can verbally brainstorm to generate and refine ideas, negotiate meaning and wording, provide and receive

scaffolded feedback, and collectively solve linguistic problems (Dobao, 2012; Zheng et al., 2025). This process is believed to alleviate writing apprehension, deepen content development, and, critically, foster metalinguistic awareness as students articulate and defend their grammatical and lexical choices. A substantial body of empirical studies has generally affirmed the positive impact of well-implemented CL on various dimensions of writing, including improved fluency, syntactic complexity, and grammatical accuracy, alongside significant benefits for affective domains like motivation, self-efficacy, and engagement with writing(Caicedo Triviño, 2016; Slavin, 2022).

The undergraduate thesis that forms the focal point of this critique, entitled "Teaching and Learning Descriptive Text by Using Cooperative Learning Method" by Pendayani
inserts itself into this vibrant scholarly conversation. Conducted within an Indonesian senior high school context, the study investigates the practical application of the Think-Pair-Share (TPS) technique for teaching descriptive text writing. Its stated objective is notably distinct from much of the quantitative, outcome-oriented research: it aims not to quantitatively measure learning gains or statistically prove effectiveness through pre-test/post-test designs, but rather to provide a rich, qualitative description of the process of implementing CL. This process-oriented focus represents a potentially valuable, albeit challenging, shift in perspective. It promises a lens into the lived classroom dynamics, the teacher's instructional moves, and the students' real-time experiences, challenges, and interactions during the CL activity—elements often obscured in studies that prioritize only the final written product(Sabarun, 2011).

This research undertakes a comprehensive and novel dual-layered critical analysis of Pendayani's thesis. The first layer involves a meticulous, systematic Morphosyntactic Error Analysis (EA) of the thesis text itself. Error Analysis, as a cornerstone methodology in SLA research, is not merely proofreading; it is a rigorous scholarly procedure involving the identification, classification, description, and explanation of learners' systematic linguistic deviations(James, 2013). Applying this analytical lens to an advanced academic text—a thesis produced by a prospective English teacher—serves a profound purpose. It illuminates the precise nature of grammatical challenges that persist, like linguistic fossils, into the advanced stages of EFL learning, even among those preparing to become language educators. This micro-analysis yields concrete, actionable data with direct implications for EFL writing pedagogy at the tertiary level, for thesis supervision practices, and for the writer's own professional development. The error taxonomy employed will be grounded in established frameworks from L2 writing and SLA research, categorizing errors by their linguistic domain (e.g., article usage, tense, preposition, sentence structure) and hypothesizing their potential sources (interlingual transfer from Bahasa Indonesia, intralingual overgeneralization, etc.).

The second, complementary layer of analysis is a substantive critique of the thesis's research content and methodological execution. This macro-analysis evaluates the intellectual architecture of the study. It assesses the clarity and coherence of its conceptual foundation, its methodological rigor, the depth of its data analysis, and the significance of its contribution to the field. Key questions guide this critique: How effectively does the study define its key constructs (Cooperative Learning, Think-Pair-Share, process description)? Is the chosen qualitative descriptive design appropriately aligned with the research aim? How were data (likely from observations and interviews) collected, managed, and analyzed? Is the analysis merely thematic reporting or does it achieve interpretive depth? Finally, how are the conclusions positioned within the wider

scholarly conversation on CL? The purported novelty of its process focus is carefully weighed against the fidelity and transparency of its methodological execution.

By integrating this fine-grained linguistic dissection with a broader research methodology critique, this article aspires to provide a truly holistic evaluation—one that serves multiple, critical purposes for the EFL academic community. First, it starkly highlights the non-negotiable importance of linguistic accuracy and clarity in scholarly communication. A thesis about teaching English is, in its own right, a performative act of English usage; its credibility is fundamentally intertwined with its textual precision. Second, it underscores the equally critical need for methodological robustness, transparency, and analytical depth in educational research, even—and perhaps especially—at the undergraduate level, where foundational habits of scholarly inquiry are formed. Third, moving beyond mere criticism, the analysis aims to generate constructive, evidence-based recommendations. These recommendations target multiple stakeholders: students (on academic writing and research design), supervisors (on guiding both linguistic expression and methodological planning), and researchers (on designing process-oriented studies that are both rich and rigorous).

Ultimately, this dual-layered analysis operates on a core, unifying contention: that in the realm of EFL educational research, credibility and scholarly impact are dually contingent. They depend inseparably on the clarity, coherence, and correctness of the research presentation and on the validity, depth, and rigor of the research inquiry itself. One cannot sustainably compensate for deficiencies in the other. A methodologically sound study obscured by pervasive grammatical errors loses its authority and reach. Conversely, a perfectly worded thesis built on a flawed or superficial investigation contributes little to knowledge. Through this integrated critique of Pendayani's work, this article seeks to model a comprehensive standard for evaluating and, by extension, improving the quality of both the written product and the research process in future inquiries into Cooperative Learning and beyond, thereby strengthening the very foundation of EFL scholarship.

Methods

This study employs a descriptive, qualitative research design centered on document analysis (Bowen, 2009) to critically evaluate an undergraduate thesis as both a textual and scholarly artifact. The primary method involves a systematic examination of the thesis document to identify linguistic patterns and assess methodological rigor. Guided by established frameworks from Error Analysis and qualitative research evaluation, the analysis is conducted in two interconnected phases: a morphosyntactic error analysis and a methodological critique. These phases, each with distinct procedures for data collection and examination, work synergistically to provide a comprehensive assessment, as illustrated in Figure 1.

A dual-layered critical design is adopted, comprising:

1. Linguistic Layer: Morphosyntactic Error Analysis (EA) to examine grammatical and syntactic accuracy.
2. Methodological Layer: Critical evaluation of research design, execution, and scholarly rigor.

This integrated design allows for a holistic assessment of both the form and content of the thesis, aligning with the premise that academic credibility depends on both linguistic precision and methodological soundness.

Research Procedure

The research procedure is outlined in the flowchart below (Figure 1), followed by a detailed explanation of each step.
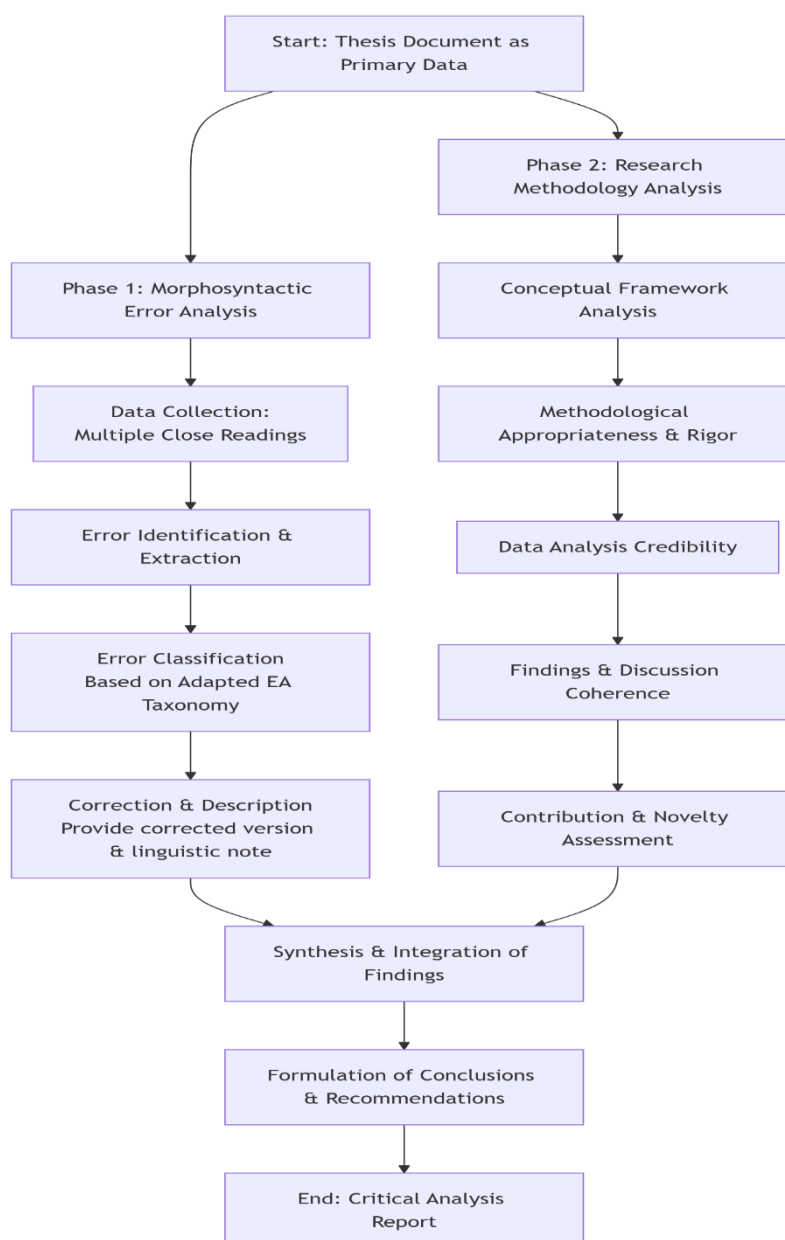

Figure 1. Research Procedure Flowchart

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted entirely through textual immersion in the thesis document. The researcher performed multiple close readings to ensure comprehensive familiarity with the content, language, and structural organization. This process aligns with the qualitative document analysis approach, which emphasizes repeated engagement with the text to ensure reliability and depth of understanding (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Data Analysis

Data analysis was executed sequentially but interactively across the two phases:

1. **Phase 1: Morphosyntactic Error Analysis**

a) **Error Identification & Classification:** Errors were systematically identified and categorized using an adapted taxonomy from Ellis (2015), Ferris (2011), and James (2013). Categories included subject-verb agreement, article usage, prepositional errors, verb tense/form, plurality, and sentence structure.

b) **Correction & Description:** Each identified error was corrected, and a brief linguistic description was provided to explain its nature (e.g., interlingual transfer, intralingual overgeneralization). This step is central to EA, which moves beyond mere proofreading to understand the source and pattern of errors (James, 2013).

2. **Phase 2: Research Content and Methodology Analysis**

This phase applied established criteria for evaluating qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Tisdell et al., 2025). The analysis focused on:

a) **Conceptual Framework:** Clarity of research questions, objectives, and theoretical grounding.

b) **Methodological Rigor:** Appropriateness of design, sampling, data collection methods (observation, interview, questionnaire), and issues of duration and triangulation.

c) **Data Analysis Credibility:** Depth in applying the cited analytical framework (Miles et al., 2014), including data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing.

d) **Coherence and Contribution:** Logical flow from findings to discussion and conclusions, and the study's novelty relative to existing literature.

The findings from both phases were then synthesized to provide an integrated critique, where linguistic weaknesses informed assessments of report credibility, and methodological limitations contextualized the content of the thesis. This integrative approach ensures a scientifically grounded and comprehensive evaluation, as recommended in critical review methodologies.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

A systematic review identified a recurrent pattern of errors across multiple categories, as exemplified in Table 1. The frequency suggests these are not merely typographical oversights but indicative of areas of grammatical instability.

Table 1. Categorized Morphosyntactic Errors with Corrections and Analysis

Category	Example from Thesis (Incorrect)	Corrected Version	Linguistic Analysis
C1: S-V Agreement	"The mass of data **have** to be organized..."	"The mass of data **has** to be organized..."	Error in number agreement. "Mass" is a singular collective noun requiring a singular verb.
	"The teacher **guide** them to write well..."	"The teacher **guides** them to write well..."	Omission of third-person singular present

Category	Example from Thesis (Incorrect)	Corrected Version	Linguistic Analysis
			tense '-s' morpheme.
C2: Article Usage	"...to become good composition."	"...to become **a** good composition."	Omission of indefinite article 'a' before a singular countable noun ("composition").
	"The teacher is the ones who responsible..."	"The teacher is the **one** who **is** responsible..."	1. Definite article 'the' incorrectly paired with plural pronoun 'ones'. 2. Omission of copula 'is' in relative clause.
C3: Preposition	"They are confused **on** what to write."	"They are confused **about** what to write."	Incorrect prepositional collocation. 'Confused about' is standard.
	"...stuck **in** making arrangement."	"...stuck **while** making **an** arrangement."	1. Preposition 'in' is less idiomatic than 'while' for this action. 2. Omission of article (see C2).
C4: Verb Tense/Form	"The students **are usually getting** stuck..."	"The students **usually get** stuck..."	Overuse of present continuous for a habitual action.

Category	Example from Thesis (Incorrect)	Corrected Version	Linguistic Analysis
			Simple present is appropriate.
	"The researcher **will collected** the data..."	"The researcher **collected** the data..."	Modal 'will' incorrectly combined with past tense verb form.
C5: Plurality	"...responsible for the **teammate** learning..."	"...responsible for their **teammates'** learning..."	Singular 'teammate' used where plural possessive 'teammates'' is required by context.
C7: Sentence Structure	"Writing is a person's ability to express ideas, ideas by using a good and correct set of written languages."	"Writing is the ability to express ideas using correct and well-structured written language."	Redundancy ("ideas, ideas"), awkward phrasing ("set of written languages"), and wordiness.
	"The students are usually getting stuck in making arrangement, they are confuse how..." (Run-on)	"The students usually get stuck when making an arrangement. They are confused about how..."	Two independent clauses incorrectly joined by a comma (comma splice). Corrected by creating two sentences.

Discussion

The prevalence of errors in **article usage (C2)** and **subject-verb agreement (C1)** aligns with documented challenges for Indonesian EFL learners, whose L1 lacks a grammatical article system and verb inflection for agreement (Haegeman & Guéron, 1998). These are not superficial mistakes but reflect fundamental differences in grammatical conceptualization between languages. The **sentence structure errors (C7)**, including redundancy and run-ons, point to challenges in academic register and syntactic complexity management. Cumulatively, these errors create a perception of carelessness and undermine the author's ethos as a proficient user and future teacher of English. They distract the reader from the research content and necessitate extra

interpretive effort, contravening principles of effective academic communication(Hyland, 2019). This finding underscores the critical need for advanced, discipline-specific writing support for EFL undergraduates, moving beyond general English instruction to focus on the genres and accuracy demands of academic research writing(Bitchener & Ferris, 2012).

Critical Analysis of Research Design and Execution
Strengths and Stated Novelty
The thesis's choice of a qualitative descriptive design is conceptually appropriate for its aim of describing a process. The attempt at methodological triangulation using observation, interviews, and questionnaires is commendable in principle, as it allows for cross-verification of data(Flick, 2022). Its core *novelty*, shifting focus from learning outcomes to the implementation process, addresses a genuine gap in the CL literature and holds promise for informing teacher practice.

Methodological Limitations and Their Consequences
However, significant limitations severely constrain the realization of this novelty and the trustworthiness of its findings:

a. **Critically Limited Data Collection Period:** Conducting the entire study over **a single 45-minute class meeting** is the most profound flaw. A process, by definition, unfolds over time. Observing one session cannot capture the evolution of group dynamics, teacher scaffolding adjustments, or student skill development. It offers a snapshot, not a process description, severely threatening the **credibility** and **transferability** of the findings (Tisdell et al., 2025). This design decision renders the study more of a "pilot observation" than a complete qualitative inquiry.

b. **Superficial Application of Analytical Framework:** While the author references the established (Miles et al., 2014) model, its application is perfunctory. The "data display" section primarily lists raw questionnaire responses (e.g., "Yes: 15 students, No: 5 students") without meaningful synthesis, visualization, or integration with observational and interview data. There is little evidence of the cyclical process of **data condensation**, **pattern identification**, or **conclusion drawing/verification** that the model advocates. This results in findings that remain largely at a descriptive surface level.

c. **Instrument Design Issues:** The use of a binary **Yes/No questionnaire** to gauge student perceptions is a missed opportunity. It fails to capture the richness, intensity, or nuance of student experiences. A mixed-methods instrument (e.g., a Likert-scale survey with open-ended follow-ups) would have generated more meaningful data about challenges and perceptions(Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2009).

d. **Internal Contradiction and Interpretive Overreach:** A stark contradiction exists between the **conclusion** that "the process... was quite good" and the **findings** describing a noisy classroom where students lacked vocabulary and motivation, and the teacher struggled with management and time. The discussion section does not adequately reconcile this. This suggests a tendency to force a positive conclusion, perhaps due to confirmatory bias, rather than letting the complex, perhaps messy, data speak for itself—a key principle in qualitative research (Tracy, 2024).

e.

Comparison with Robust Process-Oriented Studies
When contrasted with rigorous qualitative studies on classroom interaction, the thesis's shortcomings become clearer. For instance, (Storch, 2013) longitudinal case studies on pair dynamics in L2 writing meticulously analyze language-related episodes over multiple sessions, tracing development. (Prior, 2015) ethnography of a multilingual writing classroom uses sustained engagement, rich field notes, and multimodal data to build a deep, contextualized understanding of process. Pendayani's (2021) study, while sharing a similar process interest, lacks the temporal depth, analytical rigor, and data richness of such models. Consequently, its contribution remains suggestive rather than substantiated.

Valuable Insights Despite Limitations

Despite these flaws, the thesis inadvertently highlights authentic, well-documented challenges in implementing CL in EFL settings: the prerequisite of **classroom management skills**, the impact of students' **underlying linguistic deficiencies** (vocabulary, grammar), and the role of **affective factors** (anxiety, confidence). These findings, consistent with the wider literature (Slavin, 2022; Zheng et al., 2025), are valuable as a reminder that CL's success is not automatic but contingent on these mediating factors.

Conclusion

This study provided a dual-layered critical analysis of an undergraduate EFL thesis by examining its morphosyntactic accuracy and its methodological rigor. The findings confirm that the scholarly credibility of the thesis is constrained by weaknesses in both linguistic form and research execution, supporting the central claim that effective academic research in EFL contexts depends on the integration of these two dimensions.

From a linguistic perspective, recurrent errors in subject–verb agreement, article usage, verb tense, prepositions, plurality, and sentence structure were identified. These errors reflect persistent interlingual and intralingual challenges commonly experienced by Indonesian EFL learners, even at the advanced academic level. Their cumulative effect reduces clarity, readability, and academic authority, emphasizing the need for discipline-specific academic writing instruction and closer supervision during thesis writing.

Methodologically, although the thesis adopts a qualitative descriptive design that aligns with its process-oriented aim, significant limitations undermine its contribution. These include an extremely limited data collection period, superficial application of a qualitative analysis framework, weak research instruments, and inconsistencies between findings and conclusions. Consequently, the study provides only a partial depiction of the Cooperative Learning process rather than a comprehensive process analysis.

Overall, this article highlights the necessity of strengthening both linguistic competence and methodological rigor in undergraduate EFL research. Enhanced writing support, rigorous research training, and sustained supervisory guidance are essential to improve the quality and impact of future EFL academic studies.

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