

Inflectional Verb Errors in Narrative Texts Produced by Eighth-Grade Students at Junior High School in Sidoarjo

Adinda Eka Kurnia

Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Sidoarjo

Jl. Lingkar Timur KM 5,5 Rangkah Kidul, Kec. Sidoarjo, Kabupaten Sidoarjo, Jawa Timur 61234

adindaekakurnia20@gmail.com

Ruri Fadhilah Kurniati

Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Sidoarjo

Jl. Lingkar Timur KM 5,5 Rangkah Kidul, Kec. Sidoarjo, Kabupaten Sidoarjo, Jawa Timur 61234

Ana Christanti

Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Sidoarjo

Jl. Lingkar Timur KM 5,5 Rangkah Kidul, Kec. Sidoarjo, Kabupaten Sidoarjo, Jawa Timur 61234

Masyitah Noviyanti

Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Sidoarjo

Jl. Lingkar Timur KM 5,5 Rangkah Kidul, Kec. Sidoarjo, Kabupaten Sidoarjo, Jawa Timur 61234

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Abstract

This research attempts to determine the types of inflectional verb errors found in narrative texts written by Grade 8-1 students at a junior high school in Sidoarjo, and to identify the most dominant error type. A qualitative research approach using document analysis was employed in this study. The data consisted of 22 narrative texts produced by students and were analyzed based on the Surface Strategy Taxonomy proposed by Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982). The analysis focused on four categories of errors: omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. The findings revealed 47 inflectional verb errors, consisting of 14 omission errors (29.79%), 11 addition errors (23.40%), and 22 misformation errors (46.81%), while no misordering errors were identified. Misformation was found to be the most dominant error type, showing that students had greater challenges in implementing correct past tense verb forms, especially irregular verbs, than in constructing sentence structures. These findings suggest that students possess basic knowledge of English grammar but still face challenges in applying inflectional verb forms accurately in narrative writing. Therefore, teachers need to provide more focused practice on verb inflections, particularly irregular past tense forms, to improve students' difficulties in English language learning contexts.

Keywords: *Error Analysis; Inflectional Verb; Narrative Text*

1. Introduction

For learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), mastering written expression often proves to be exceptionally challenging because it involves the integration of grammar, vocabulary, organization, and meaning simultaneously. Unlike speaking, writing demands greater linguistic accuracy since grammatical errors remain permanently visible in written texts and may reduce comprehensibility (Andrian, 2020; Simanjuntak, 2019, both as cited in Dewanto, 2025). Consequently, grammatical competence has become one of the strongest predictors of writing quality, particularly in genres that require specific language features, such as narrative texts. Furthermore, Fareed et al. (2016) elaborate that writing helps students communicate their knowledge through language production in their brains.



One grammatical area that deserves particular attention is the use of English verb inflections. From a morphological perspective, inflectional morphemes express grammatical information without creating a new lexical item, and English uses several inflectional forms to mark grammatical categories such as tense, aspect, number, possession, and comparison (Fromkin et al., 2018; Yule, 2005). Research on inflectional morphology has demonstrated that EFL learners may produce errors involving omission, addition, misformation, and misordering of inflectional forms. Manihuruk (2022), for example, identified these four types of errors in the recount writing of English students, demonstrating that difficulties with inflectional morphology can be observed in learners' actual written production.

The problem of verb inflection becomes particularly relevant in narrative writing because the narrative genre commonly presents events that occurred in the past. Fanny et al. (2022) explain that the simple past tense is one of the important language features of English narrative texts and found that EFL learners produced errors in their use of the simple past tense when writing narratives. Similarly, Sianipar (2018) specifically investigated the use of the simple past tense in narrative texts written by eighth-grade students and reported errors in students' use of past-tense forms. These findings indicate that narrative writing provides a meaningful context for examining learners' ability to apply verbal forms because students must simultaneously construct a sequence of events and maintain appropriate grammatical marking of past time. Therefore, examining verb inflection in narrative texts can provide a more specific description of the morphological difficulties that may occur when learners use English to construct past-event narratives.

The selection of eighth-grade students as the focus of this study is also supported by findings from previous research. Eighth-grade learners have been investigated in several studies concerning the use of English past-tense forms. Sianipar (2018), for instance, examined 26 eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 3 Balige and investigated their errors in writing simple-past narrative texts. Other studies of eighth-grade learners have examined simple past-tense errors in recount writing, indicating that difficulties with past-tense forms remain relevant at the junior high school level. More importantly, recent research by Hutabarat, Dhillon, and Purba (2026) specifically examined inflectional morphemes in the English recount writing of 30 eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Pematangsiantar. These findings establish eighth-grade students as a relevant educational context for examining learners' developing ability to apply English inflectional forms in written production.

Previous studies have provided important evidence about what has already been investigated. At the level of grammatical accuracy, research involving eighth-grade students has largely examined errors in the simple past tense, particularly in recount writing. At the morphological level, Manihuruk (2022) examined inflectional morpheme errors in the recount texts of third-semester English students and classified the errors into omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. Meanwhile, research on narrative writing has demonstrated the occurrence of simple past-tense errors, including among eighth-grade students (Fanny et al., 2022; Sianipar, 2018). Taken together, these studies show that previous researchers have approached the issue from several perspectives: general grammatical accuracy, simple past-tense use, and inflectional morphology.

Previous studies have also examined these areas in different combinations of learner level, text genre, and analytical focus. Therefore, further context-specific investigation is needed to examine how verbal inflection errors are manifested when eighth-grade students produce narrative texts. Such an investigation is important because the occurrence of errors may be influenced by the linguistic demands of the particular text being produced. To address this gap, the present study investigates inflectional verb errors in narrative texts written by eighth-grade students at a junior high school in Sidoarjo. In the present study, the analysis is specifically limited to inflectional verb forms occurring in students' narrative texts. The study does not examine grammatical errors at the broader sentence or syntactic level. This limitation is intended to maintain a clear morphological focus, particularly on how students form and use English verbs to express grammar in narrative writing. The study adopts Dulay, Burt, and Krashen's (1982) Surface Strategy Taxonomy, which classifies errors into four categories: omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. This framework is particularly appropriate for the present study because it allows the researcher to examine not only whether errors occur but also how students' intended verbal forms are altered in their written production.

These findings are expected to contribute theoretically to the existing literature on morphological error analysis in EFL contexts while offering practical implications for English teachers in designing more effective grammar instruction emphasizing regular and irregular verb inflections within narrative writing activities. Therefore, this research addresses the following research questions: (1) What types of inflectional verb errors are produced by eighth-grade students of SMP Islam Sidoarjo in their narrative texts? and (2) What is the most frequent type of error found in verb inflection?

2. Literature Review

Inflectional Verb

Among English inflectional morphemes, verb inflections are particularly important because they indicate tense and aspect. Yule (2005) explains that English contains eight inflectional morphemes, four of which are attached to verbs: *-s* (third-person singular), *-ed* (past form), *-en* (past participle), and *-ing* (present participle). These grammatical markers enable speakers and writers to communicate temporal relationships accurately while maintaining the lexical meaning of

verbs. Consequently, mastery of verb inflections becomes one of the fundamental indicators of grammatical competence among EFL learners.

Within narrative writing, the simple past tense serves as the principal grammatical feature because narratives recount completed events. Azar and Hagen (2017) state that the simple past tense expresses actions that began and ended in the past, requiring verbs to appear in their appropriate past forms. Regular verbs generally form the past tense by attaching the suffix *-ed*, whereas irregular verbs undergo unpredictable morphological changes, such as *go-went*, *see-saw*, and *buy-bought*. Since irregular verbs cannot be generated through a single rule, they often present greater learning challenges than regular verbs. Consequently, successful narrative writing requires learners to distinguish accurately between regular and irregular verb inflections while maintaining tense consistency throughout the text.

Error Analysis and Surface Strategy Taxonomy

Error Analysis has become one of the most influential approaches for investigating learners' language development because it reveals systematic patterns of grammatical difficulties during second-language acquisition. Ellis (1997) distinguishes errors from mistakes by explaining that mistakes are temporary performance failures that learners can usually recognize and self-correct, whereas errors reflect incomplete linguistic knowledge and therefore occur consistently in learners' production. Accordingly, analyzing learners' errors enables researchers to identify areas of grammatical competence that require further instructional attention.

Among several error classification models, the Surface Strategy Taxonomy proposed by Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982) remains one of the most widely applied frameworks for investigating grammatical errors in EFL writing. Rather than focusing solely on linguistic categories, this taxonomy classifies errors according to how learners modify the surface structure of sentences. It consists of four categories: omission, addition, misformation, and misordering.

Types of Error

Omission

Refers to the absence of grammatical structures that ought to be included in a sentence. In the context of inflectional verbs, omission typically occurs when learners fail to attach obligatory past-tense markers, producing forms such as *walk* instead of *walked*. Such errors indicate that learners understand the lexical meaning of verbs but have not consistently applied grammatical morphology.

Addition

Occurs when learners insert unneeded words into sentences that would otherwise be fine. Common examples include attaching the past-tense suffix to irregular verbs (*blowed*, *fighted*) or combining auxiliary verbs with past-tense forms (*did not took*). These errors generally reflect overgeneralization, in which learners extend grammatical rules beyond their appropriate contexts.

Misformation

Refers to replacing the required grammatical form with an incorrect alternative. Instead of omitting or adding grammatical markers, learners substitute inappropriate forms, such as *run* for *ran*, *see* for *saw*, or *come* for *came*. Previous studies consistently report that misformation is particularly frequent among EFL learners because irregular verb transformations cannot be predicted through general grammatical rules and therefore require memorization and repeated exposure.

Misordering

Refers to errors that occur when learners place a grammatical element in an incorrect position within a sentence.

3. Method

This study employed a qualitative document analysis design to investigate inflectional verb errors in the narrative texts written by eighth-grade students at a junior high school in Sidoarjo. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the purpose of the study is to identify, classify, and describe the forms of inflectional verb errors that occurred in students' written production. The primary data in this study were students' narrative texts. Therefore, document analysis enabled the researcher to examine the linguistic forms contained in the students' written texts and to identify the differences between the forms produced by the learners and the expected forms in English. The use of qualitative document analysis was also appropriate because the analysis required close examination of individual words and their contexts within sentences rather than relying solely on numerical measurements.

The qualitative data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which consists of data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. This framework was selected because it provides a systematic procedure for organizing and interpreting qualitative data obtained from documentary sources. Thus, Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's framework functioned as the methodological framework

for managing and analyzing the qualitative data, while the classification of errors was conducted using a specific error-analysis taxonomy.

The target population of this study consisted of 37 students enrolled in Grade 8-1 at a junior high school in Sidoarjo. Consequently, their narrative writing provided an appropriate source of data for examining the use of inflectional verb forms in a meaningful written context. Data were collected through students' narrative writing. All 37 students in the class were given the opportunity to produce a narrative text based on the writing activity conducted during the data collection period. Of the 37 students, 22 submitted narrative texts that were available for analysis, whereas 15 students did not complete or submit the assigned narrative writing task. Therefore, the final dataset consisted of 22 narrative texts produced by 22 students. The difference between the population size ($N = 37$) and the final number of documents analyzed resulted from students' non-submission of the writing task.

To classify the inflectional verb errors identified in the students' narrative texts, this study adopted the Surface Strategy Taxonomy proposed by Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982). The taxonomy was selected because it provides a systematic framework for describing learner errors according to how the learners' produced forms differ from the forms expected in the target language. The taxonomy allows the researcher to determine the observable form of the deviation and classify it into four categories: omission, addition, misformation, and misordering.

The selection of Dulay, Burt, and Krashen's (1982) taxonomy was theoretically relevant to the present study because the research focused on errors observable in students' written language production. The Surface Strategy Taxonomy therefore provides an appropriate descriptive for examining how students' verb forms deviate from the expected target forms. Its emphasis on the surface characteristics of learners' production is particularly useful for a document-based study because the researcher analyzes the forms that are explicitly visible in the written texts.

4. Findings and Discussion

The results indicate a total of 14 omission errors, 11 addition errors, and 22 misformation errors. No instances of misordering were found. In total, 47 inflectional verb errors were identified, indicating that students still encountered difficulties in applying English verb inflections when writing narrative texts. The identified errors were distributed across the students' texts with varying frequencies. Some students produced only one or two inflectional verb errors, whereas others demonstrated repeated inaccuracies throughout their narratives. In several texts, identical error patterns occurred more than once, indicating that the students consistently applied incorrect grammatical forms rather than making isolated mistakes. This repetition suggests that many errors reflected systematic deficiencies in students' understanding of English verb inflections instead of accidental slips during writing.

The analysis further revealed that the identified errors were limited to three categories of the Surface Strategy Taxonomy, namely omission, addition, and misformation. No instances of misordering were found in the analyzed texts. This result demonstrates that students commonly maintained appropriate sentence structure while experiencing greater difficulty selecting and inflecting verbs correctly to express completed actions in narrative contexts.

To provide a clearer illustration of the identified error patterns, examples of each error category are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1
Examples of Inflectional Verb Errors

No	Examples of Errors	Types of Error	Correct Form
1	A peacock <i>walk</i> around the forest every day.	Omission	A peacock <i>walked</i> around the forest every day.
2	He could not <i>reached</i> the grapes because they were high.	Addition	He could not <i>reach</i> the grapes because they were high.
3	He <i>sees</i> a crane near the lake	Misformation	He <i>saw</i> a crane near the lake

As shown in Table 1, the three examples of identified error categories reflect different aspects of learners' grammatical development. Omission errors indicate that learners failed to supply obligatory grammatical elements, addition errors show the unnecessary insertion of grammatical markers, while misformation errors show that learners selected inappropriate verb forms.

Omission errors mainly occurred when students failed to attach the past tense suffix *-ed* to regular verbs or omitted the infinitive marker *to* after verbs such as *want*. Examples include *live - lived*, *look - looked*, and *follow - followed*. The errors indicate that students may have understood the context of past events but experienced difficulties in selecting or producing the appropriate inflectional form of the verb. In particular, the omission of required inflectional markers suggests that some students did not consistently apply the grammatical rules needed to form past-tense verbs.

Addition errors represented another pattern of overgeneralization. Most occurred when students combined auxiliary verbs with inflected main verbs, as in *did not took* or *could not reached*. Others involved attaching the regular past tense suffix *-ed* to irregular verbs, producing forms such as *losted*, *blowed*, and *fighted*. These errors suggest that students had already recognized the necessity of marking past events but had not yet mastered the grammatical conditions governing verb inflection. Instead, they extended one familiar rule, the addition of *-ed*, to contexts where it was not

appropriate. According to Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982), such overgeneralization is a natural characteristic of second-language development because learners actively construct grammatical hypotheses before acquiring complete proficiency in the target language. This result highlights a classic instance of overgeneralization, where learners mistakenly apply a single, familiar grammatical rule to all contexts, ignoring necessary exceptions. For instance, as learners are taught that regular verbs indicate past events through the attachment of *-ed*, they often assume this rule is universal and apply it to irregular verbs as well. A similar pattern emerged with auxiliary verbs; students frequently kept the past tense form even after using *did*, failing to revert the main verb to its base form as required.

Among all categories, misformation was the most dominant. Students frequently selected incorrect verb forms, particularly when using irregular verbs. Errors such as *run* instead of *ran*, *see* instead of *saw*, *find* instead of *found*, and *come* instead of *came* indicate that learners experienced greater difficulty retrieving irregular past tense forms than applying regular suffixes. Unlike regular verbs, irregular verbs cannot be generated through a productive grammatical rule and therefore require lexical knowledge and repeated exposure. Consequently, when students were uncertain, they tended to retain the base form or substitute a present tense form.

The analysis identified no misordering errors among the inflectional verb errors found in the students' narrative texts, resulting in a frequency of 0%. This finding should be interpreted in accordance with the specific scope of the present study. Although misordering is recognized as one of the possible manifestations of learner language, the present research was specifically limited to errors involving English inflectional verbs, particularly the use and formation of simple past-tense verbs in students' narrative writing. Therefore, the analysis did not examine word-order errors across all grammatical or syntactic elements in the students' texts. Misordering was considered only when the ordering of a target inflectional verb construction itself constituted an error within the defined analytical criteria. Consequently, possible problems involving the arrangement of subjects, objects, adverbials, conjunctions, or other sentence constituents were outside the scope of this study.

To better understand how these errors are distributed, a frequency analysis was carried out. The most common error was found by calculating the total count and percentage of each category with the formula below:

$$P = F/N \times 100\%$$

In this formula, P represents the percentage value, F indicates the occurrence count for each error, and N corresponds to the aggregate number of errors identified. These calculated percentages are presented in the following table:

Table 2
Percentage of Inflectional Verb Errors

No	Types of Error	Frequency	Percentage
1	Omission	14	29.79%
2	Addition	11	23.40%
3	Misformation	22	46.81%
4	Misordering	0	0%
Total		47	100%

Source: (adapted from Novryanty, 2018)

Table 2 shows that misformation is the most common type of inflectional verb error, representing 46.81% of all identified errors. Omission and addition accounted for 29.79% and 23.40%, respectively, while no misordering errors were found. The absence of misordering indicates that the students were generally able to construct English sentences correctly. However, they continued to face challenges in selecting appropriate inflectional verb forms, especially irregular verbs in the simple past tense.

Theoretically, these findings reinforce the perspective of Fromkin, Rodman, and Hyams (2017), who argue that inflectional morphemes are vital to grammatical competence, as they encode tense without shifting a word's lexical meaning. While the students in this study clearly understood the need to signal past tense, they often struggled to choose the correct inflectional forms, especially for irregular verbs.

This study reveals that eighth-grade students at a junior high school in Sidoarjo still faced difficulties in using English inflectional verbs correctly when writing narrative texts. The analysis revealed three types of errors: omission, addition, and misformation, while no misordering errors were identified. These results indicate that students' main problems were not related to arranging sentences but rather to forming verbs correctly. Since narrative texts mainly use the simple past tense, these errors show that some students had not fully understood English verb inflections, especially the differences between regular and irregular verbs.

Among the identified errors, misformation was found to be the most frequent type. This suggests that most students were aware that past-tense verbs were needed, but they often used incorrect verb forms. This finding is in line with Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982), who explained that misformation happens when learners replace accurate grammatical structure with an erroneous one. The frequent use of incorrect past forms, especially the application of base

verbs rather than irregular past forms, shows that students still had difficulties in applying English morphological rules. Fromkin, Rodman, and Hyams (2017) also stated that irregular verbs are more difficult for language learners because they cannot be created by applying regular patterns and must be learned separately.

This finding is consistent with the work of Nahak et al. (2024), who similarly found that misinformation dominates students' narrative writing. This is further supported by Arismawati et al. (2025), who highlighted the common struggle students face with irregular verb forms. In contrast, this finding differs from Putri et al. (2024), who found omission to be more common. This difference is likely due to the diverse backgrounds, instructional practices, and developmental stages of the participants involved. Because learners' interlanguage evolves differently based on their specific environment, error patterns will naturally vary.

This study contributes to the fields of English morphology and error analysis by presenting evidence of difficulties with inflectional verbs among Indonesian junior high school students. While previous studies focused on general grammatical errors, this research specifically examined errors related to verb inflections in narrative texts. The findings highlight the need for more focused grammar instruction on morphological aspects, especially the use of regular and irregular past-tense verbs. Providing students with more opportunities to read and practice narrative texts, along with explicit explanations and corrective feedback, may help them develop a better understanding and accuracy in using English inflectional verbs.

Based on the findings, teachers are recommended to provide more focused instruction on the formation and use of past-tense verbs. Because misinformation was the most frequent error, teachers should give particular attention to students' ability to select the correct past form of both regular and irregular verbs. Classroom activities can include identifying incorrect verb forms, correcting sentences, completing short narratives, and writing simple stories using target verbs. Teachers should also provide corrective feedback that clearly shows the incorrect form, the correct form, and the reason for the correction. In addition, students should be given opportunities to revise their writing after receiving feedback. Repeated practice, feedback, and revision can help students recognize their common errors and gradually use appropriate verb forms more accurately. These strategies can make grammar instruction more closely connected to students' actual writing difficulties.

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that Grade 8-1 students at a junior high school in Sidoarjo still faced challenges in using English inflectional verbs correctly in their narrative writing. Based on Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982) Surface Strategy Taxonomy, three types of errors were found: omission, addition, and misinformation, while no misordering errors appeared in the students' texts. Among these errors, misinformation was the most frequently found, followed by omission and addition. This result shows that students' main difficulties were related to choosing and forming the correct verb forms, especially when applying regular and irregular verbs in the simple past tense.

The errors found in this study indicate that students had not fully understood the rules of English verb inflection. Certain students continued to face challenges regarding past tense application, potentially driven by the structural disparities between Indonesian and English verb systems, limited knowledge of irregular verbs, and the tendency to apply grammatical rules too broadly. Therefore, grammar instruction should provide more attention to verb inflections through meaningful practice, examples from contextual texts, and continuous feedback to help students use past-tense verbs more accurately.

This study provides insight into the difficulties experienced by EFL learners in mastering English verb inflections, particularly in narrative writing. Although this research was conducted in a specific educational setting with a limited number of participants, the findings may serve as a reference for understanding common morphological problems among junior high school students. Further research involving a wider range of participants and different learning contexts is suggested to gain a deeper understanding of factors affecting students' mastery of English verb inflections.

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