

English Grammatical Errors in Thai EFL Students' Paragraph Writing: An Analysis of Error Types, Causes, and Pedagogical Recommendations

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ABSTRACT

Grammatical accuracy remains a persistent challenge for Thai students learning English as a foreign language (EFL), particularly in written production. This study aimed to (1) examine the types and frequency of grammatical errors in English paragraph writing produced by 62 Grade 12 Thai EFL students at a public secondary school in Chonburi, Thailand, and (2) explore the underlying causes of these errors from learners' perspectives. Using an error analysis framework, a total of 1,016 grammatical errors were identified and classified into 14 categories. The most frequent errors involved article usage (22.44%), verb tense (12.99%), subject-verb agreement (12.60%), singular/plural noun forms (8.66%), and prepositions (7.87%). To investigate the causes of these errors, focus group discussions revealed four key factors: linguistic differences between Thai and English, overgeneralization of grammatical rules, reliance on direct translation, and limited exposure to grammar in authentic contexts. Based on these findings, the study recommends the use of contrastive analysis activities, targeted corrective feedback, and contextualized grammar instruction to enhance grammatical accuracy in secondary-level EFL writing. The results contribute pedagogical insights for teachers, curriculum designers, and teacher education programs in Thailand.

Keywords: Grammatical Errors, Thai EFL Students, Paragraph Writing, Error Analysis, Second Language Acquisition

Introduction

English language has become a pivotal vehicle in the era of globalization, functioning as a key mediator for global interaction in fields including education, business, and technology. In Thailand, where English functions as a foreign language, English language proficiency plays a crucial role in enabling students to pursue higher education and improve their career prospects. Among the core language competencies, writing is widely regarded as a fundamental skill for academic and professional success (Laksanasut, 2025). Acquiring competence in English grammar is especially significant to the formulation of organized paragraphs because grammatical accuracy helps facilitate increased clarity and cohesiveness (Darasawang & Watson Todd, 2020). However, many Thai secondary-level EFL students face challenges with the utilization of appropriate grammatical rules, and this negatively affects both the quality of their texts and their general linguistic ability.

Despite the major focus placed upon the acquisition of the English language within Thailand, Thai EFL students still face issues with grammatical accuracy within their paragraph writing. Common mistakes include the lack of the use of articles, the incorrect use of verb tenses, subject-verb agreement disparities, and incorrect prepositional placement. Most of these issues typically arise from the differences existing between Thai and English languages, grammatical rule overgeneralization, and the lack of adequate exposure to natural linguistic environments (Bucol & Sangkawong, 2025). Furthermore, reliance upon direct Thai-to-English translation contributes to syntactic errors, thus making it harder for the students to construct grammatically accurate sentences. The persisting problems point towards the need for a detailed analysis of students' grammatical errors to design precise interventions targeting the improvement of their writing proficiency.

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Despite several studies having touched on the English writing ability of Thai EFL students, very few have zoomed in on grammatical errors in paragraph writing at the secondary education level. Most of the existing studies have mainly concentrated on either overall writing difficulty or university-level students, thus creating an unsettled section in relation to the grammatical difficulties faced by students at the secondary level (Noite, 2025). It is vital to unearth the particular grammatical error categories and causes faced by these students to develop efficient pedagogical solutions and bolster curriculum structures. The current research attempts to close this established gap through the organized examination of widespread grammatical errors in paragraph writing and their causality. A recent study pinpointed the ongoing issues faced by Thai EFL students with the acquisition of English grammar. Manok and Thienpermpool (2021) identified lexical errors within paragraph writing by first-year university students as most common, including the errors of confusion between parts of speech, omitted words, and incorrect preposition usage. Kampookaew (2020), too, found the most common errors for university students were related to nouns, omitted article usage, subject-verb agreement errors, and incorrect classification of word type. Sonthirak et al. (2020), within a corresponding study, identified the most common grammatical and structural errors within the writing of paragraphs by undergraduate English major students as verb form errors, word misuse, and prefix errors. The studies identify the need to investigate grammatical issues within writing at the secondary level and determine the most appropriate pedagogical interventions for the acquisition of writing proficiency.

Despite extensive research on grammatical errors in Thai EFL contexts, most existing studies have focused predominantly on tertiary-level learners and have relied largely on quantitative classifications of error types. As a result, limited attention has been given to secondary-level students, whose interlanguage systems are still developing and may be more responsive to pedagogical intervention. Furthermore, many previous studies have examined error frequencies without systematically exploring learners' own perceptions of why such errors occur. This study addresses these gaps by focusing on secondary-level EFL learners and by integrating quantitative error analysis with qualitative focus group discussions. By examining both error patterns and learner-perceived causes, the study provides a more comprehensive understanding of grammatical difficulties at an earlier stage of language development and offers pedagogically relevant insights for secondary English instruction.

Literature review

Recent studies have provided deeper insights into the persistent grammatical challenges faced by Thai EFL students in writing, particularly in the context of secondary education. Researchers have noted that errors such as article omissions, verb tense inconsistencies, subject-verb agreement issues, and preposition misuse are not isolated phenomena; rather, they reflect underlying linguistic interference from the students' first language and limitations in instructional practices.

Kim (2024) reported that the direct transfer of grammatical structures from Thai into English has led to a high frequency of errors, especially regarding the use of articles and verb tenses. In Thai, where articles and tense markers are not required, students often struggle to internalize their usage in English. Noite (2025) extended this discussion by demonstrating that, despite recent curriculum reforms, Thai students continue to exhibit similar error patterns. These studies suggest that linguistic interference remains a critical factor affecting grammatical accuracy, as students frequently rely on their native language patterns when writing in English.

The application of traditional frameworks such as Error Analysis and Interlanguage Theory has been reexamined in the context of modern classroom environments. Sabrina et al. (2025) observed that overgeneralization of English grammatical rules leads students to apply rules in inappropriate contexts—for instance, adding articles unnecessarily or mispluralizing nouns. Their study emphasizes that without clear instruction on exceptions and rule limitations, students remain prone to error. In contrast, Lang et al. (2024) highlighted that context-based instruction and corrective feedback can substantially reduce these error rates. Their quasi-experimental study demonstrated that when students engage with authentic language input—through both reading and guided writing practice—the incidence of grammatical errors diminishes significantly.

Furthermore, Bucol and Sangkawong (2025) argued that integrating contrastive analysis into language instruction helps students become more aware of the structural differences between Thai and English. By explicitly comparing the two languages, teachers can help learners understand why certain grammatical features appear in English but not in Thai. This method has been shown to improve students' grasp of grammatical nuances and to mitigate the negative effects of linguistic interference.

Recent institutional reports, such as those from Angsilapittayakom School (2024) and The Office of the Secondary Education Service Area Chonburi – Rayong (2024), further support the need for innovative instructional strategies. These reports recommend longitudinal studies and cross-regional research to capture the evolving nature of EFL writing proficiency. They also call for enhanced teacher training programs that focus on modern pedagogical techniques, including task-based learning and extensive corrective feedback.

Overall, the literature published since 2022 underscores that while traditional errors persist, modern teaching practices and contextualized learning environments show promise in addressing these issues. The convergence of recent empirical studies suggests that a multifaceted approach—combining contrastive analysis, authentic language exposure, and ongoing formative assessment—is essential for reducing grammatical errors in Thai EFL writing.

Research Objectives

- 1 To investigate the English grammatical errors in paragraph writing among Thai EFL secondary-level students.
2. To explore the root causes behind grammatical errors in the construction of paragraphs by Thai EFL secondary students.

Research Questions

1. What are the most common grammatical mistakes found within English paragraph writing by Thai secondary EFL students?
2. What are the causes of grammatical errors in paragraph writing among Thai EFL students at the secondary level?

Research framework

The first aim of the current study was the exploration of two major aspects: the varieties of grammatical errors found within the paragraphs written by Thai EFL students and the causes behind the errors. Theoretical backings for this study were the theories of Error Analysis and Interlanguage.

1. Grammatical Errors (Dependent Variables): The study recognized errors according to the Error Analysis Model put forth by James (1998) and Norrish (1987), which categorized these errors into 14 different categories: articles, tenses, conjunctions, prepositions, auxiliaries, word forms, singular/plural nouns, pronouns, word order, subject-verb agreement, infinitives, relative clauses, word choices, and the use of "there + be."
2. Causes of Errors (Independent Variables): The study identified a number of causes behind the occurrence of errors as found during the Focus group discussion (FGD): (1) Linguistic Disparities: The inherent structural differences between English and Thai, illustrated by the lack of articles and the non-inflection of verb tense for Thai, resulted in common mistakes; (2) Overgeneralization: The tendency towards the unselective use of English grammatical rules, including the use of inappropriate ones, caused incorrect usage of articles and pluralization among others; (3) Literal Translation: The process of word-for-word translation from Thai into English oftentimes resulted in incorrect word sequence and misuse of prepositions; and (4) Lack of Exposure to Contextualized Grammar: The opportunity for actual interaction or contextual practice with English grammar was not provided, resulting in difficulties towards the actual usage of grammatical principles when writing.

3. Theoretical Background: The study is based upon the core principles of the theory of Error Analysis (Corder, 1967) and Interlanguage Theory (Selinker, 1972). Error Analysis deals with the identification, classification, and study of the errors made by the students when using the target language. Interlanguage Theory assumes that the students pass through certain transitional stages between the target and their mother language and thus make errors influenced by the two languages.

4. Theoretical Framework: Error Analysis and Interlanguage Theory: This study is grounded in Error Analysis (Corder, 1967; James, 1998) and Interlanguage Theory (Selinker, 1972), which together provide the conceptual lens for examining learner language. Error Analysis enables the systematic identification and classification of grammatical errors, allowing researchers to determine patterns that reflect learners' developing linguistic systems rather than random mistakes. Interlanguage Theory further explains these errors as evidence of a transitional linguistic system influenced by both the learner's first language and the target language.

While previous Thai EFL studies have often applied error analysis descriptively, they have seldom connected error patterns to learners' cognitive and experiential explanations of those errors. By integrating FGD into the research design, the present study extends these theoretical frameworks by examining how linguistic interference, overgeneralization, and limited contextual exposure shape students' interlanguage development. Thus, the selected theories not only inform the classification of errors but also guide the interpretation of their underlying causes.

Research methodology

Research Design

This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design to address the research objectives comprehensively. Quantitative data were first collected through error analysis of student writing samples to identify patterns and frequencies of grammatical errors. Subsequently, qualitative data were gathered through FGDs to explore the underlying causes of these errors from students' perspectives. This design was appropriate because grammatical error patterns alone cannot fully explain why learners continue to make such errors; qualitative insights are necessary to interpret learners' linguistic reasoning, learning experiences, and contextual constraints. The study procedures are explained as follows.

Population and Sample

The population consisted of 426 EFL secondary-level students enrolled in the first semester of the academic year 2024 at a public secondary school in Chonburi, Thailand (Angsilapittayakom School, 2024; The Office of the Secondary Education Service Area Chonburi - Rayong, 2024).

The research sample consisted of 62 Grade 12 students who are English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students and were selected through a multi-stage sampling technique (Phomjui, 2020) to ensure both representativeness and freedom from bias in the selection of the sample. The sampling process consisted of multiple steps: First, Simple Random Sampling was applied in selecting the grade level relevant to the study, resulting in the selection of students from Grade 12. Then, Cluster Random Sampling was applied, where classrooms served as the units of selection. Two out of four available classrooms were randomly selected, yielding a final sample of 62 students. All the participants in the study were native Thai speakers who had studied the English language for at least 10 years. At the time of data collection, these students were enrolled in an elective course called English for Tourism Industry, which aims to develop students' abilities to communicate effectively in English on tourism-related topics, both in verbal and non-verbal communication.

Research Instruments

1. The Student Writing Samples consisted of the English paragraph-writing tasks done by 62 Grade 12 EFL students from a public secondary school in Chonburi, Thailand, during the first semester of the 2024 academic year. These writing samples were derived from the students' final exam, specifically from Part 2: Writing Section (200–250 words), which aimed to assess their writing ability. In this section, students were instructed to write a paragraph-length essay on a tourist spot in Chonburi Province. The instructions asked students to describe the location of the chosen tourist spot, explain

its importance or appeal, provide recommendations for planning a visit, describe the route to take from their school to the site, and justify their selection of the tourist spot. The researcher chose to analyze the Writing Section because it focused on vocabulary use in English paragraph writing. Additionally, the students submitted their writings as part of the exam without prior revision, correction, or feedback from instructors. The practice ensured the samples reflected the students' true vocabulary selection and use, making them suitable for error analysis. While the researcher had previously examined the students' grammatical errors, that investigation largely concentrated on grammatical concerns and did not systematically classify the types of errors. As such, this study aimed to conduct a fuller lexical error analysis, systematically classifying specific vocabulary-related errors to gain a clearer and more detailed picture of students' writing challenges. Before data collection began, informed consent was obtained from both the students and the school administration to use the writing samples for research. The writing samples were selected as the primary data source because they provide direct evidence of students' grammatical competence in extended written discourse, allowing for systematic identification of grammatical errors related to sentence structure, verb forms, agreement, and function words. All ethical standards relating to student privacy and confidentiality were strictly adhered to.

2. A Systematic Error Log Sheet was used to record the different grammatical mistakes found in the English paragraph writing done by each student. The log was modeled after the Error Analysis Framework developed by James (1998) and Norrish (1987), who divided grammatical errors into fourteen different categories: (1) Articles, (2) Tenses, (3) Conjunctions, (4) Prepositions, (5) Auxiliaries, (6) Word Forms, (7) Singular and Plural Nouns, (8) Pronouns, (9) Word Order, (10) Subject-Verb Agreement, (11) Infinitives, (12) Relative Clauses, (13) Word Choices, and (14) Use of "There + Be." The log allowed the recording of frequencies within the categories, thus establishing a quantitative image of the errors made by the students' written work. The Error Log Sheet was used to study 62 English paragraph-writing samples from Grade 12 EFL students who attended a government high school located in Chonburi, Thailand, during the first semester of the academic year 2024. Through the computation of the frequency and percentage for each type of mistake, the log provided valuable information about the frequency and patterns of grammatical, structural, spelling, and punctuation mistakes found within the written work done by the students.

3. A FGD was used to explore the root causes for grammatical errors made while writing paragraphs by Thai EFL secondary students. FGDs were selected instead of individual interviews because they allow participants to interact, compare experiences, and collectively construct meanings related to their writing difficulties. This interactional context is particularly valuable for exploring shared learning experiences, classroom practices, and common grammatical challenges among students. The FGD was based on a sequence of five open-ended questions, which were established through a critical review of the literature, empirical findings, and conceptual frameworks. To ensure the questions were clear and pertinent, the study relied on the advice of experts and edited the wording where appropriate. The refined questions were piloted with a group of non-participant students with the aim of pinpointing necessary changes before their usage within the primary study. A purposive sampling approach was used for the selection of 20 students from the total sample with the goal of obtaining qualitative data. The discussion occurred within the span of four sessions with each session involving five participants and thus providing an interactive platform where each student could voice their opinions. The purpose of the FGD was to get insights from the students about the difficulties faced by them while writing English paragraphs, their educational backgrounds, and the probable reasons behind their grammatical errors. The qualitative data collected provided valuable information related to the sources of the errors, thus complementing the findings gained through the written assignments.

Data collection

The data collection process was conducted in two phases: analysis of student writing samples and a FGD. Writing samples were obtained from 62 Grade 12 EFL students from a public secondary school in Chonburi, Thailand, during the first semester of the 2024 academic year. The writing samples, which were derived from the writing component of the final exam, were analyzed using the Error Analysis Framework suggested by James (1998) and Norrish (1987) in order to categorize grammatical errors into 14 categories. Errors were recorded in an Error Log Sheet to determine their

frequency and distribution. To complement the investigation of the underlying reasons for such errors, an FGD was carried out with 20 students who were chosen purposively. Four sessions, each comprising five participants, probed the students' views on grammatical difficulties through the administration of structured open-ended questions. A conclusion-oriented data analysis approach was used to determine notable patterns and contributing factors. This systematic approach allowed for an in-depth understanding of the grammatical difficulties faced by Thai EFL students.

Data analysis

1. Analysis of Student Sample Writings Data: The sample writings of sixty-two students consisting of about 12,834 words were examined through the perspective of the Error Analysis Framework formulated by James (1998) and Norrish (1987) with the intention of analyzing grammatical errors. The essays were first thoroughly analyzed through word-by-word and sentence-by-sentence scrutiny. The errors were identified and systematically registered in the Error Log Sheet with different categories of grammatical mistakes usually found in writing paragraphs and their respective frequencies. The categorization process was done following the frameworks outlined by James (1998) and Norrish (1987). The findings were synthesized through the juxtaposition of the frequency of each grammatical error type found within the writings of the students. The prevalence of each type was measured as a percentage value, and the errors were ranked based on their frequency level of occurrence from most common to least common. The findings were expressed through percentages, frequencies, and rankings and thus explained the prevalence of grammatical mistakes within the student sample writings.

2. Analysis of FGD Data: The researcher used a conclusion-led approach for analyzing the qualitative data gathered through the FGDs. The first step within the data analysis process was Data Reduction, where the raw data were reduced into critical summaries. Then the findings were expressed by the researcher with the aid of highlighting the chief data elements related to the study identified during the FGD. Finally, the researcher made Conclusion and Verification where minor findings were synthesized into a complete summary and verified these findings as the authoritative results of the study (Klangphahol, 2020).

Results

This section fully reported the findings from the analysis of grammatical errors in English, as found in the paragraph writing of Thai EFL students. It also reported on the findings from FGDs with the students, covering each of the two research questions posed at the beginning of this research.

Research question 1: What are the most common grammatical mistakes found within English paragraph writing by Thai secondary EFL students?

English grammatical errors made by 62 Thai EFL secondary students who joined this study were categorized into 14 categories. The most frequent category was errors concerning the use of articles, with a total of 228 errors, representing 22.44% of the total errors found (see Table 1). The second most common category was errors related to verb tenses, with 132 instances (12.99%), closely followed by errors related to subject-verb agreement, totaling 128 errors (12.60%). In addition, singular and plural errors were also common, totaling 88 errors (8.66%), ranking as the fourth most frequent category. Moreover, errors involving prepositions and word order were equally frequent, each totaling 80 errors (7.87%).

Errors involving conjunctions were 52 occurrences (5.12%), while auxiliary verb errors were not very frequent with 44 occurrences (4.33%). Word form errors (40 occurrences, 3.94%) were also very notable as were relative clause errors (36 occurrences, 3.54%) and errors involving pronouns (36 occurrences, 3.54%). Furthermore, infinitive errors were reported with 32 occurrences (3.15%), while word choice errors (24 occurrences, 2.36%) and "there + be" misuse (16 occurrences, 1.57%) were the least frequent. Overall, 1,016 grammatical errors were found occurring within students'

writing paragraphs and highlighting the need for instructional interventions with focus towards tackling these ongoing issues.

Table 1 *Types, Percentages, and Ranks of Errors in Paragraph Writing of Thai EFL secondary-level students*

Types of Grammatical Errors	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
Articles	228	22.44	1
Tenses	132	12.99	2
Subject-Verb Agreements	128	12.60	3
Singular and Plural Nouns	88	8.66	4
Prepositions	80	7.87	5
Word Order	80	7.87	6
Conjunctions	52	5.12	7
Auxiliaries	44	4.33	8
Word Forms	40	3.94	9
Relative Clauses	36	3.54	10
Pronouns	36	3.54	11
Infinitives	32	3.15	12
Word Choices	24	2.36	13
The Use of There + Be	16	1.57	14
Total	1016	100	14

The following were the five most common grammatical errors found within the writings of students: article omission, incorrect verb tense, subject-verb agreement errors, singular and plural noun errors, and preposition misuse.

1. Article Omission:

".....Bangsaen Beach is famous tourist attraction in Chonburi....."

The first sentence demonstrated the absence of the article "a" before "famous tourist attraction." This type of error is quite common among Thai students, as the Thai language does not use articles like English. Similarly, the absence of "the" before "beach" in the second sentence below showed difficulty in distinguishing between the correct contexts of using definite and indefinite articles.

2. Incorrect Verb Tense:

".....I went to Angsila subdistrict last weekend and stay at the hotel near beach....."

This second example also demonstrated inconsistency in the use of verb tense. The verb "stay" must be translated into the past tense verb "stayed" to be consistent with the temporal adverb "last weekend." Thai verbs are not modified with respect to tense; therefore, students often get confused when incorporating the past tense markers into their English writing.

3. Subject-Verb Agreement:

".....The Angsila Old Market have many wooden houses....."

The third sentence had the incorrect subject-verb agreement. As "The Angsila Old Market" is a singular noun, the verb must also be "has" instead of "have." The verb does not change regardless of the singular or plural nature of the subject in Thai language, a feature which most English students find confusing as there is no need for the verb to change here.

4. Singular and Plural Noun Usage:

".....There are many beautiful temple in Chonburi, but Wat Angsila is the most famous....."

The above statement demonstrated inconsistency with the use of singular and plural nouns. The word "temple" should be used in the plural context ("temples") for agreement with the quantity word "many." There is no clear distinction between singular and plural nouns within the Thai grammatical

structure as used in English since plural markers are used very seldom in informal communication and writing. Thai English foreign language students therefore often misuse singular nouns where two or more items are involved. The misuse was most common within written essays by students and demonstrated difficulties within the acquisition of English pluralization rules.

5. Preposition Misuse:

".....I went to Angsila Fishing Village last weekend and swam in the sea on the morning....."

The original sentence contains a preposition usage mistake. Precisely, the phrase "on the morning" needs to be adjusted to "in the morning" because English prepositions follow conventional collocations different from Thai. Thai prepositions function differently within the Thai language and are either omitted or used with markers based upon context. The variation results very often in mistakes made by Thai students who try to use English prepositions based directly upon their mother language. Since prepositions are not always directly equivalent within Thai usage, students face the challenge of properly selecting the correct ones within their writing.

The errors identified showed that students largely rely on direct translation from Thai, which leads to structural inaccuracy. The findings aligned with the distribution of errors in the study, where the most common errors in the paragraph writing of the students involved omissions of articles, wrong verb tenses, subject-verb agreement, errors associated with singular and plural nouns, and incorrect use of prepositions.

Research question 2: What are the causes of grammatical errors in paragraph writing among Thai EFL students at the secondary level?

The findings drawn from the FGD regarding the causes of grammatical errors in Thai EFL students' writing paragraphs revealed some salient features. Below are the summary and discussion drawn from the FGD results:

1. Linguistic Differences between Thai and English

Across all four FGDs, students consistently identified structural differences between Thai and English as a major source of grammatical errors in their paragraph writing. In each group, the discussion began with students noting that Thai does not require articles or verb tense inflections, which led several participants to agree that they often omit these forms when writing in English. As students shared their experiences, others built on these comments by explaining that they were unsure when articles such as a or the were required, even if they were aware of the grammatical rules.

In Group 2, for example, one student pointed out that articles do not exist in Thai, prompting multiple peers to express similar difficulties. Another participant added that verb tense errors frequently occurred because Thai verbs do not change according to time, a view that was met with agreement from other group members. This collective discussion suggests that article omission and verb tense inconsistency are not isolated individual errors, but shared challenges shaped by first-language interference.

The convergence of views across the focus groups indicates that linguistic differences between Thai and English strongly influence students' interlanguage development, particularly in relation to grammatical features that are absent in their first language.

2. Overgeneralization of English Grammar Rules

Across all FGDs, students collectively reported that overgeneralization of English grammatical rules contributed significantly to errors in their paragraph writing. In each group, students explained that once they learned a grammatical rule, they tended to apply it broadly without being aware of exceptions or contextual constraints. This issue frequently arose during discussions about article usage and pluralization, with several participants acknowledging that they assumed consistent rule application would lead to correct sentences.

In Group 1, one student remarked that adding the before nouns made sentences feel “more complete,” which prompted other participants to agree and share similar strategies they used while writing. As the discussion progressed, students reflected on how teachers’ feedback often pointed out that such usage was incorrect, yet they remained uncertain about when the rule should or should not be applied. Another student added that plural markers were often attached automatically, leading to errors such as irregular plural forms. This comment was met with agreement from other group members, who described experiencing similar confusion.

The interaction among participants indicates that these errors stem not from a lack of grammatical knowledge, but from an incomplete understanding of rule limitations. The shared nature of these experiences across groups suggests that overgeneralization reflects a common developmental feature of students’ interlanguage, where partial rule acquisition leads to systematic but inappropriate grammatical application.

3. Reliance on Direct Translation

Reliance on direct word-for-word translation from Thai to English emerged as another prominent theme across the FGDs. In all groups, students described beginning the writing process by formulating sentences in Thai and then translating them into English, often without considering differences in sentence structure or grammatical requirements between the two languages. When one student raised this point, others readily agreed, noting that this strategy felt natural and efficient, particularly during timed writing tasks.

In Group 3, a student explained that prepositions were often omitted or incorrectly used because they were not required in the original Thai sentence. This observation led other participants to confirm that they frequently wrote sentences that “sounded correct” to them but were later marked as incorrect by teachers. As the discussion continued, students collectively recognized that literal translation often resulted in unnatural sentence structures, especially in expressions of movement, time, and location.

The group interactions reveal that direct translation is not merely an individual habit but a shared coping strategy adopted by students when they lack confidence in constructing English sentences independently. This co-constructed understanding highlights how first-language reliance shapes grammatical errors, particularly in areas where Thai and English differ syntactically.

4. Limited Exposure to English Grammar in Context

Students across all focus groups consistently emphasized that limited exposure to English grammar in meaningful contexts contributed to their persistent grammatical errors. During the discussions, participants frequently contrasted learning grammar rules in isolation with the difficulty of applying those rules during actual writing tasks. When one student mentioned memorizing grammar rules without opportunities to use them, several others expressed agreement and shared similar classroom experiences.

In Group 4, students discussed how grammar instruction was often focused on completing exercises or preparing for examinations rather than practicing grammar through reading, writing, or communicative activities. One participant commented that although they could recall rules during tests, they struggled to apply them when composing paragraphs. Other students responded by agreeing and adding that limited exposure to English outside the classroom, such as reading books or watching English media, further reduced their confidence in using grammar naturally.

The convergence of views across the focus groups suggests that insufficient contextualized practice prevents students from fully internalizing grammatical structures. This shared perception underscores the importance of providing learners with more opportunities to encounter and apply grammar in authentic communicative contexts, thereby supporting more effective interlanguage development.

Grammatical errors in paragraph writing among Thai EFL secondary-level students can be linked to a number of key factors. First, linguistic interference from the Thai language, which lacks articles and inflection of verb tenses, has led to omissions and incorrect usage of grammatical forms in English. Second, students often overgeneralized English grammatical rules, incorrectly applying them to different contexts, such as inserting "the" before every noun or incorrectly marking plural nouns. Third, reliance on direct translation from Thai to English has created sentence structure and preposition errors. Finally, a lack of exposure to English grammar in contextual structures has prevented students from fully internalizing grammatical rules, making it difficult for them to apply the rules during writing activities. These factors highlight the need for greater grammar instruction, corrective feedback, and greater exposure to English in authentic contexts.

Discussion

The aims of this study were to explore common grammatical errors in paragraph writing among Thai secondary EFL students and to investigate the root causes leading to such errors. The following is a discussion of the findings.

The high overall level of organizational climate indicates that administrators and teachers in schools under the Secondary Educational Service Area Office Chonburi-Rayong generally experience positive working environments characterized by trust, support, and effective communication. In particular, warmth and support emerged as the highest-rated dimension, suggesting that interpersonal relationships and professional support are central features of school life. This finding aligns with contemporary educational leadership research, which emphasizes that supportive leadership and positive social interactions contribute to teachers' well-being, job satisfaction, and professional commitment (Kanchanawongpaisan et al., 2026; Nguyen et al., 2026). A climate that promotes psychological safety enables teachers to perform their duties confidently and engage more actively in professional learning activities.

1. Grammatical Errors in Thai EFL Students' Writing

Findings derived from the current study are consistent with the results of recent studies concerning grammatical errors in English writing made by Thai EFL students. Manok & Thienpermpool (2021) investigated lexical errors and found common issues including parts-of-speech confusion, omissions, and misuse of prepositions among first-year university students. The misuse of prepositions emerged as one of the most common mistakes made under this context, reflecting a common challenge faced by Thai students in acquiring this particular dimension of English grammatical structure. Kampookaew (2020) found the deletion of articles, subject-verb agreement errors, and word-related errors were common issues among Thai university students, reflecting the findings outlined here. Specifically, deletion of the article and subject-verb agreement errors were two common mistakes made by Thai secondary-level students. This finding reflects the ongoing prevalence of such mistakes across different educational phases within Thailand. Along the same lines, Sonthirak et al. (2020) explored grammatical mistakes made when writing paragraphs and found verb

form errors, inappropriate word selection, and prefix errors were made by undergraduate students. The current study also found mistakes made with verb tense were a common problem, thus reflecting the fact that tense-related errors are a common barrier for Thai EFL students. The findings support the need for further examination into the continuing grammatical issues associated with Thai EFL students and the need to resolve these issues across different educational phases. The recurrent nature of the mistakes found within the current study as well as the mistakes found within the writing of university students also indicates the possibility that such issues may not be adequately addressed within previous educational phases.

2. Causes of Grammatical Errors

The study also outlined several main causes of grammatical errors, which align with current academic discussion in the field of second language acquisition. One particularly significant cause that was found was linguistic interference, specifically the lack of certain grammatical components in Thai, including articles and verb tense inflections. This finding supports the claims presented by Manok and Thienpermpool (2021), who explained that the lack of certain features unique to the English language within the Thai linguistic structure results in common errors, such as the omission and incorrect use of articles. In the present study, students' difficulties with the correct use of verb tenses were explained by the lack of tense inflections in their mother tongue, a phenomenon also investigated by Sabrina et al. (2025), who concluded that EFL students whose mother tongue does not mark tense struggle with this grammatical feature in English. Another substantial source of error found in this research was overgeneralization of grammatical rules in English. According to Kampookaew (2020), Thai EFL students have the tendency to overapply English grammatical rules, especially those related to the use of articles and plural forms. This tendency for grammatical overextension, demonstrated in this research through the unnecessary addition of articles and pluralization mistakes such as "childs" instead of "children," is consistent with Corder's (1967) findings on overgeneralization in language acquisition. The study also demonstrated that reliance on direct translation from Thai to English was a major source of grammatical errors, especially in the use of prepositions. The results reported by Kim (2024) are consistent with the results of the current study, where it was found that direct translation tended to produce structural and preposition errors. The students participating in the current study admitted adopting a word-for-word approach to translating from Thai into English with the consequence of producing structural errors and misuse of prepositions. The errors are a testament to the clear structural differences between Thai and English, since the use of prepositions varies extremely between the two languages. Students further attributed their grammatical errors to a lack of exposure to English grammar in contextualized environments. This claim is supported by Hutchins et al. (2024), who pointed out the pivotal nature of context-based acquisition towards the maintenance of grammatical rules. Lack of interaction with authentic English environments either through reading practice or actual conversation hindered students' ability to internalize grammatical principles and apply them effectively.

The persistence of grammatical errors despite long-term exposure to English instruction raises critical questions about the effectiveness of prevailing grammar teaching practices in Thailand. While students are often taught grammatical rules explicitly, limited opportunities to apply these rules in meaningful contexts may hinder interlanguage development and contribute to fossilisation. From an interlanguage perspective, the findings suggest that students' grammatical systems stabilise around incomplete or inaccurate forms when corrective feedback is infrequent or non-specific. This underscores the need to reconsider how grammar is taught, assessed, and reinforced across secondary education.

This study contributes to the existing literature by shifting the analytical focus from error classification alone to an integrated examination of error patterns and learner-perceived causes at the secondary level. By foregrounding students' voices through FGDs, the study provides insight into how instructional practices, linguistic transfer, and limited contextual exposure jointly shape grammatical development. These findings extend previous Thai EFL research and offer pedagogically actionable knowledge for early intervention before errors become fossilised at higher educational levels.

Conclusion

This study has revealed that grammatical errors in paragraph writing among Thai secondary EFL students predominantly manifest as article omissions, verb tense inconsistencies, subject-verb agreement issues, and incorrect preposition usage. The quantitative analysis underscored the high frequency of these errors, while the qualitative insights illuminated the main underlying factors—including linguistic interference, overgeneralization of English rules, reliance on direct translation, and limited contextual exposure.

The findings underscore the need for targeted instructional strategies. Enhanced corrective feedback, the incorporation of contrastive analysis, and context-based teaching methods emerge as promising approaches to mitigate these errors and improve overall writing proficiency. Moreover, the study highlights the importance of future research employing longitudinal and multi-regional methodologies to better capture the dynamic nature of EFL writing development and to refine pedagogical interventions further.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Applying Research Findings

1. Teachers are encouraged to implement contrastive analysis activities that explicitly compare Thai and English grammatical structures. For example, short sentence-comparison tasks can be used to highlight the absence of articles and tense inflections in Thai and their obligatory use in English. Corrective feedback should be timely and focused, combining direct written feedback on recurrent grammatical errors with brief oral explanations during writing revision activities.

2. At the institutional level, teacher education programs should incorporate training on interlanguage development and error-informed instruction, enabling teachers to diagnose persistent grammatical patterns and respond with targeted pedagogical strategies. Curriculum designers may also consider integrating contextualized grammar tasks into secondary English syllabi to reduce the gap between rule knowledge and actual language use.

Recommendations for Future Research

1. Expand the Study into Further Regions: The implications of this study can be further extended through subsequent studies into the areas of grammatical errors with EFL students in other parts of Thailand or other countries where English is a foreign language. This would enable a deeper understanding of the common grammatical mistakes found within EFL environments.

2. Longitudinal Studies of the Development of Error: Longitudinal studies tracking the development of grammatical errors through time would yield valuable insights into the change in grammatical ability in students and reveal the most successful strategies for improvement.

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