

PROFILE OF INDONESIAN SPELLING ERRORS IN UNDERGRADUATE THESES AT MUHAMMADIYAH UNIVERSITY OF MAKASSAR

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ABSTRACT

The quality of an undergraduate thesis is determined not only by methodological rigor and the strength of its argumentation but also by the accuracy of academic written language. Spelling and mechanical errors, such as punctuation, capitalization, and the writing of prepositions, can reduce readability, blur meaning, and affect readers' perceptions of the professionalism of scholarly work. This study maps the pattern of spelling errors in undergraduate theses written by students of Muhammadiyah University of Makassar in 2024. It employed a quantitative descriptive design using documentation techniques. The data consisted of the frequency of spelling errors recorded from 49 theses. Each thesis was examined, and each error was classified into three categories: punctuation, capitalization, and prepositions. The findings were tabulated per thesis and analyzed by using total frequencies, percentages, and descriptive statistics (mean, minimum, maximum, and standard deviation). Because the original recap contained inconsistencies in the total column, the number of errors per thesis was recalculated by summing the three categories to ensure consistency. The study identified 654 spelling errors in total. Punctuation errors were the most dominant (243 errors; 37.16%), followed by capitalization errors (220; 33.64%) and preposition errors (191; 29.20%). The pattern indicates that mechanical errors remain common in thesis drafting and editing, partly because of limited mastery of spelling conventions and insufficient proofreading. The study recommends strengthening academic editing instruction through rubrics that include mechanical indicators, pre-defense spelling checklists, focused written feedback on dominant error categories, and staged revision practice from sentence level to chapter level so that thesis writing becomes more accurate, consistent, and ready for academic review.

Keywords: error analysis; spelling; PUEBI; thesis writing

ABSTRAK

Kualitas skripsi sarjana tidak hanya ditentukan oleh ketelitian metodologis dan kekuatan argumentasinya, tetapi juga oleh ketepatan bahasa tulis akademis. Kesalahan ejaan dan mekanis, seperti tanda baca, kapitalisasi, dan penulisan preposisi, dapat mengurangi keterbacaan, mengaburkan makna, dan memengaruhi persepsi pembaca tentang profesionalisme karya ilmiah. Studi ini memetakan pola kesalahan ejaan dalam skripsi sarjana yang ditulis oleh mahasiswa Universitas Muhammadiyah Makassar pada tahun 2024. Studi ini menggunakan desain deskriptif kuantitatif dengan teknik dokumentasi. Data terdiri dari frekuensi kesalahan ejaan yang dicatat dari 49 skripsi. Setiap skripsi diperiksa, dan setiap kesalahan diklasifikasikan ke dalam tiga kategori: tanda baca, kapitalisasi, dan preposisi. Temuan ditabulasi per skripsi dan dianalisis menggunakan frekuensi total, persentase, serta statistik deskriptif (rata-rata, minimum, maksimum, dan standar deviasi). Karena rekap asli mengandung inkonsistensi pada kolom total, jumlah kesalahan per skripsi dihitung ulang dengan menjumlahkan ketiga kategori untuk memastikan konsistensi. Studi ini mengidentifikasi total 654 kesalahan ejaan. Kesalahan tanda baca adalah yang paling dominan (243 kesalahan; 37,16%), diikuti oleh kesalahan kapitalisasi (220; 33,64%) dan kesalahan preposisi (191; 29,20%). Pola ini menunjukkan bahwa kesalahan mekanis masih umum terjadi dalam penyusunan dan penyuntingan skripsi, sebagian karena penguasaan konvensi ejaan yang terbatas dan kurangnya koreksi naskah. Studi ini merekomendasikan penguatan pengajaran penyuntingan akademik melalui rubrik yang mencakup indikator mekanis, daftar periksa ejaan pra-pertahanan, umpan balik tertulis yang terfokus pada kategori kesalahan dominan, serta praktik revisi bertahap dari tingkat kalimat hingga tingkat bab, sehingga penulisan skripsi menjadi lebih akurat, konsisten, dan siap untuk tinjauan akademik.

Kata kunci: analisis kesalahan; ejaan; PUEBI; penulisan skripsi

1. INTRODUCTION

The quality of an undergraduate thesis is shaped not only by methodological accuracy and argumentation but also by the accuracy of academic writing. In scholarly texts, spelling and mechanical errors, including punctuation, capitalization, and the writing of prepositions, can reduce readability, blur meaning, and influence readers' perceptions of the professionalism of the work. Inaccurate spelling may disrupt the clarity of clause relations, obscure the marking of details, and weaken the presentation of data and references. As a result, an academic message that should be concise and precise may become less effective.

Within the framework of error analysis, errors are not treated merely as forms of incorrectness but as systematic evidence that can reveal areas of competence that still need to be strengthened through focused language intervention (Rasyid & Ramadan, 2022; Saputra, 2022). In academic writing, the analysis of

recurring spelling errors is particularly important because such errors directly affect formal quality and the readability of research reports. Mapping these errors, therefore, provides an evidence-based basis for improving thesis writing guidance.

This study examines the profile of spelling errors in undergraduate theses written by students of Muhammadiyah University of Makassar in 2024. The analysis focuses on three categories that frequently appear in student writing: punctuation, capitalization, and prepositions. By describing the distribution of errors across these categories, the study seeks to provide data that can support more targeted academic editing, proofreading, and language development for thesis writers.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Error Analysis

Error analysis (EA) treats errors as empirical data that record the process of language acquisition and the development of a learner's or writer's competence (Hyland, 2022; Saputra, 2022). In this tradition, errors are not simply forms that must be eliminated; they are systematic indicators of the rules that writers are currently constructing in their language system. Because of that, EA is useful for identifying dominant error forms, interpreting why they occur, and formulating more precise pedagogical interventions, including written feedback and editing training (Mao et al., 2024; Park & Ahn, 2022).

A basic distinction in EA is the difference between error and mistake. An error is usually understood as a systematic deviation that occurs because the target rule has not been fully internalized, whereas a mistake is more incidental and may result from fatigue, time pressure, or carelessness (Rasyid & Ramadan, 2022; Saputra, 2022). This distinction is relevant to thesis writing because theses usually go through several stages of revision. When the same form continues to appear in multiple parts of a manuscript or across multiple writers, the problem is more likely to reflect an error pattern than a one-time mistake.

In general, EA proceeds through several stages: collecting language samples, identifying errors, describing and classifying them, explaining or interpreting them, and drawing pedagogical implications (Rasyid & Ramadan, 2022; Saputra, 2022). At the descriptive stage, researchers may use linguistic taxonomies or surface strategy taxonomies that focus on omission, addition, misformation, and misordering (Saputra, 2022). In the present study, the classification is limited to spelling and mechanical errors because these features are prerequisites for readability and for compliance with the formal standards of academic texts (Hyland, 2022; Peungcharoenkun & Waluyo, 2023).

EA also recognizes that errors may emerge from multiple sources. These include interlingual transfer, intralingual or developmental processes such as overgeneralization and simplification, the influence of teaching and learning contexts, and performance factors such as attention and cognitive load (Saputra, 2022). In academic writing, an additional factor is revision practice: writers who rarely perform careful self-editing are more likely to allow mechanical errors to remain in the final text (Hyland, 2022; Park & Ahn, 2022).

Interlanguage research further emphasizes that a learner's language system is dynamic and exists between the first language and the target language (Ajabshir & Ebadi, 2023; Saputra, 2022). In Indonesian thesis writing, this interlanguage condition may be reflected in spelling inconsistency caused by the influence of informal writing habits, spoken language patterns, or copied material that has not been edited carefully. For that reason, profiling spelling errors is valuable not only for description but also for determining which forms should be prioritized in instruction and revision exercises.

2.2. Indonesian Spelling in Academic Writing

Spelling functions as a system of graphic conventions that links sounds, words, and sentence structure in written form. In academic writing, spelling accuracy is strategic because it affects readability, the accuracy of references, and the credibility of the writer (Hyland, 2022; Peungcharoenkun & Waluyo, 2023). Spelling errors can also interfere with text processing. Inaccurate punctuation changes syntactic segmentation, while inconsistent capitalization can obscure the status of proper names or technical terms (Badan Pengembangan dan Pembinaan Bahasa, 2022; Putri, 2024).

This study focuses on three areas of Indonesian spelling that frequently produce errors in student writing. The first is punctuation. Marks such as commas, full stops, colons, and semicolons regulate pauses, clause relations, and the presentation of details. Errors such as excessive commas, missing commas in lists, or inconsistent sentence-final punctuation are often related to a weak understanding of the rhetorical function of punctuation in building clear academic prose (Badan Pengembangan dan Pembinaan Bahasa, 2022; Rasyid & Ramadan, 2022).

The second area is capitalization. Capital letters mark the beginning of sentences, proper names, and certain elements in titles. In scientific writing, appropriate capitalization helps readers recognize people, institutions, and places and prevents referential ambiguity. Capitalization errors often arise from carelessness, informal writing habits, or limited understanding of when a general expression functions as a proper noun in context (Badan Pengembangan dan Pembinaan Bahasa, 2022; Putri, 2024).

The third area is the writing of prepositions, especially *di*, *ke*, and *dari* in Indonesian. Writers must consistently distinguish prepositions, which are written separately from the following word, from affixes such as the passive prefix *di-*, which is attached to the word. This distinction requires morphological awareness because writers must identify grammatical function, not simply memorize rules. Effective spelling instruction, therefore, needs more than rule memorization; it also requires exercises that train writers to diagnose form and function through authentic examples and task-based editing (Badan Pengembangan dan Pembinaan Bahasa, 2022; Putriyanasari et al., 2025).

In writing assessment, mechanical accuracy is commonly linked to the dimension of accuracy alongside complexity and fluency. These dimensions interact: when writers attempt more syntactically complex expression, the risk of mechanical error can increase if revision is not adequate (Ajabshir & Ebadi, 2023). For that reason, the analysis of spelling errors provides practical diagnostic information for balancing the development of academic ideas and structure with the need for formal accuracy.

2.3. Academic Writing, Revision, and Feedback

Academic writing is a social and rhetorical practice that follows the conventions of a discourse community. Thesis writers are expected to present arguments, evidence, and references in a recognizable structure while using precise and consistent language (Hyland, 2022; Peungcharoenkun & Waluyo, 2023). From a genre perspective, mechanical accuracy is intertwined with rhetorical organization, paragraph management, and cohesion rather than standing as an isolated technical issue (Hyland, 2022; Peungcharoenkun & Waluyo, 2023).

The writing-process literature emphasizes that quality texts are produced through repeated cycles of planning, drafting, global revision, local revision, and final editing. Revision is a cognitive activity that includes evaluating the text, diagnosing problems, and making changes based on communicative goals (Hyland, 2022; Peungcharoenkun & Waluyo, 2023). In the context of thesis writing, local revision, including spelling and punctuation, is often neglected because students concentrate on content development and administrative formatting. As a consequence, mechanical errors may remain in the final manuscript and recur across chapters (Hyland, 2022; Peungcharoenkun & Waluyo, 2023).

Written corrective feedback is, therefore, an important mechanism for improving language accuracy. Its effectiveness depends on consistency, focus, and the writer's engagement with revision (Mao et al., 2024; Park & Ahn, 2022). Feedback that targets dominant categories, such as punctuation and capitalization, is generally easier for students to act on than feedback scattered across too many issues at once. In addition, the notion of noticing suggests that writers need to become aware of the gap between their current form and the target form if sustained change is to occur (Park & Ahn, 2022).

Collaborative practices also contribute to better revision. Research on peer review and collaborative writing shows that discussion among students can increase attention to both language accuracy and the coherence of argument, especially when rubrics and revision models are provided explicitly (Cao et al., 2022; Zou et al., 2023). At the final stage, mechanical checklists that ask students to verify punctuation, capitalization, and the writing of prepositions can help reduce recurring errors by turning revision from intuition into a systematic procedure (Badan Pengembangan dan Pembinaan Bahasa, 2022; Putri, 2024).

Based on this conceptual background, the present study treats spelling errors as indicators of areas of competence that are not yet stable. The dominance of certain error types signals where academic language intervention should be prioritized: explicit instruction on frequently violated spelling rules, exercises that emphasize grammatical function, and staged revision supported by focused written feedback.

3. METHOD

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a quantitative descriptive design to describe objectively the frequency, spread, and tendencies of spelling errors in undergraduate theses written by students of Muhammadiyah University of Makassar in 2024. A descriptive design was selected because the study did not aim to test hypotheses, establish causal relationships, or apply experimental treatment. Instead, it sought to portray the language phenomenon as it appears in numerical form. Through this approach, the profile of spelling errors can be

presented systematically through counts, percentages, and descriptive statistical summaries that make it easier to identify the most dominant error categories and the degree of variation across these.

3.2. Data and Data Source

The data consisted of a recap of spelling-error frequencies obtained from 49 undergraduate theses completed in 2024 at Muhammadiyah University of Makassar. The data source was the written thesis documents themselves. The analysis was limited to three major categories so that measurement would remain focused and reliable: punctuation errors, capitalization errors, and errors in writing prepositions. These categories were selected because they are central components of Indonesian spelling and writing mechanics, commonly appear in student academic texts, and can be counted consistently.

The unit of analysis was each occurrence of a spelling error in the thesis text. Thus, one inappropriate comma was counted as one punctuation error, one incorrect use of a capital letter was counted as one capitalization error, and one incorrect writing of *di*, *ke*, or *dari* as a preposition was counted as one preposition error. Using a consistent unit of analysis made it possible to produce frequency recaps that accurately represent the level of spelling accuracy in the theses.

3.3. Data Collection

Data were collected through documentation. The researcher examined thesis manuscripts as written documents and used an error-identification sheet or checklist to record every spelling error that matched the operational definitions of the three categories. To ensure consistency, the researcher referred to the prevailing Indonesian spelling guidelines when identifying and classifying each error.

After the identification stage, all marked errors were recorded in a recap table for each thesis. The recap counted the number of errors in each category per document and organized them into a frequency table. This stage produced structured quantitative data that could be aggregated to describe the error profile of the whole sample while also allowing comparison across individual theses.

3.4. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed quantitatively by means of descriptive statistics. The first step was to calculate the total number of errors in each category across the entire dataset. This produced the overall frequencies for punctuation, capitalization, and prepositions. The second step was to calculate the percentage contribution of each category to the total number of spelling errors so that the dominant and less dominant categories could be identified clearly.

The third step was to calculate descriptive statistics for each thesis, including the mean, minimum, maximum, and standard deviation. The mean indicates the general tendency of the number of errors per thesis, the minimum and maximum show the range of variation, and the standard deviation indicates how widely the error counts were distributed across documents.

To maintain the validity of the analysis, the total number of errors per thesis was not taken directly from the original total column. Instead, the total was recalculated from the sum of the three categories: punctuation, capitalization, and prepositions. This step ensured that the statistics accurately represented the recorded data. On the basis of these procedures, the study generated a clear quantitative map of spelling errors in the 2024 theses and a practical foundation for recommendations on academic language guidance.

4. RESULTS

Figure 1 displays the overall distribution of spelling errors across the three categories. The figure confirms that punctuation errors were the largest category in the dataset, followed by capitalization and prepositions.

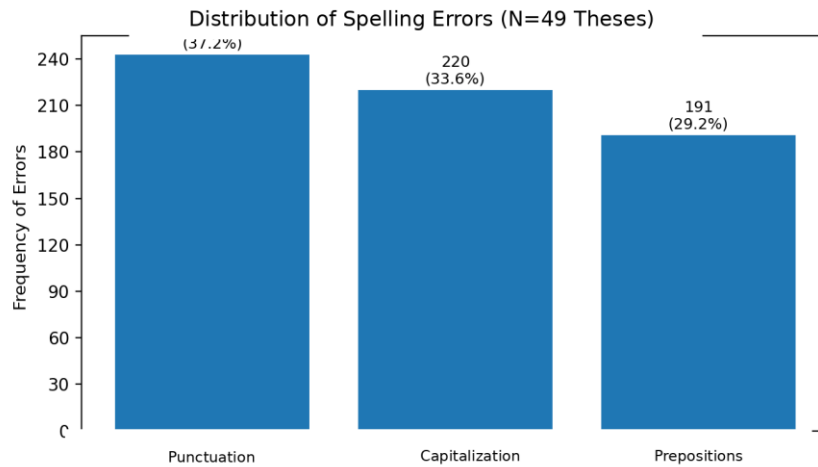


Figure 1. Distribution of Spelling Errors (Total).

4.1. Authentic Examples of Errors

Authentic examples from the theses clarify how the categories were identified. First, spelling and capitalization errors included the form *aktifitas*, which should be *aktivitas* (p. 12, Nurul Azizah's thesis), and the form *indonesia*, which should be *Indonesia* (p. 7, Andi Muhammad Fikri's thesis). These examples show inconsistency in applying standard Indonesian forms and the use of capital letters for proper nouns.

Second, punctuation errors included excessive commas, the omission of a full stop at the end of a sentence, and the use of double full stops such as *Kab..Takalar*. These forms indicate weak control of punctuation as a device for structuring sentences and presenting information clearly. They also suggest that some errors persist because of typing habits, copying and pasting, or insufficient proofreading.

4.2. Frequency and Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 presents the frequency and percentage of errors by category. Out of 654 total errors, punctuation accounted for 243 cases (37.16%), capitalization for 220 cases (33.64%), and prepositions for 191 cases (29.20%). The differences among the three categories are not extreme, but punctuation is clearly the most prominent source of inaccuracy.

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics of the number of errors per thesis. On average, each thesis contained 4.96 punctuation errors, 4.49 capitalization errors, and 3.90 preposition errors. The average total number of spelling errors per thesis was 13.35, with a minimum of 9 and a maximum of 15. The standard deviation for the total score was 1.82, indicating that the spread of errors across theses was present but not excessively wide.

Figure 2 complements the statistical summary by showing the distribution of errors per thesis in boxplot form. The spread suggests that punctuation, capitalization, and preposition errors recur in most theses rather than appearing only in isolated manuscripts. In other words, the problem is patterned enough to justify systematic instructional intervention.

Table 1. Frequency and Percentage of Errors by Category

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Punctuation	243	37.16
Capitalization	220	33.64
Prepositions	191	29.20
Total	654	100.00

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Errors per Thesis

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>SD</i>
Punctuation	4.96	4	7	1.04
Capitalization	4.49	3	6	1.04
Prepositions	3.90	2	6	1.33
Total	13.35	9	15	1.82

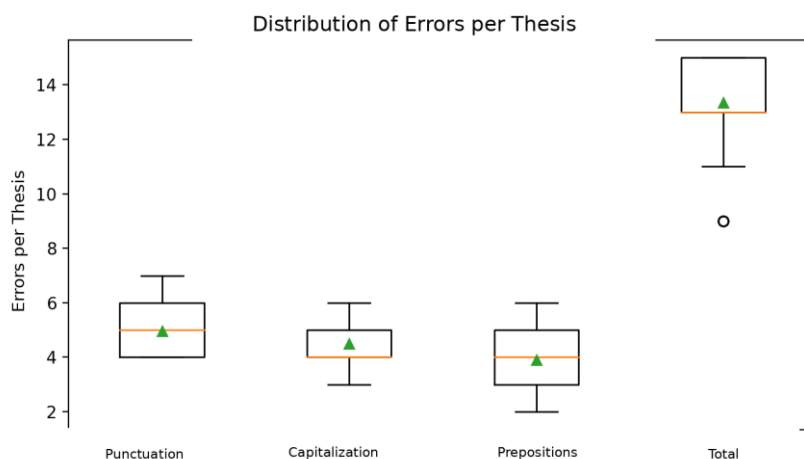


Figure 2. Distribution of Errors per Thesis (Boxplot).

5. DISCUSSION

The findings show that punctuation errors are the most dominant category. This result is understandable because punctuation requires sensitivity to sentence structure and to the conventions of academic prose (Badan Pengembangan dan Pembinaan Bahasa, 2022; Rasyid & Ramadan, 2022). Writers must decide where clauses should be separated, how lists should be marked, and how ideas should be segmented for readers. For novice academic writers, these decisions are often less stable than lexical choice, which helps explain why punctuation becomes the most frequent problem (Putriyanasari et al., 2025).

Capitalization errors also occurred at a relatively high level (Putri, 2024; Putriyanasari et al., 2025). Such errors are likely related to inconsistency in writing proper nouns, sentence openings, and titles or subheadings. The authentic examples show that capital letters were sometimes used where they were not needed and omitted where they were obligatory. Similarly, preposition errors reflect a common confusion in Indonesian between prepositions such as *di* and *ke*, which must be written separately, and affixes such as *di-*, which are written together. This confirms that the issue is not purely orthographic but also grammatical because writers must identify function before determining form (Rasyid & Ramadan, 2022; Putriyanasari et al., 2025).

From a pedagogical point of view, these findings support the importance of explicit academic editing instruction, consistent written feedback, and the use of mechanical checklists before a thesis is submitted for seminars or examinations (Mao et al., 2024; Park & Ahn, 2022). Because punctuation was the most dominant category, revision training should begin with punctuation use in clauses, lists, and sentence boundaries, followed by capitalization and the writing of prepositions. Rubrics that explicitly include mechanical criteria, focused comments from supervisors, and staged revision from sentence level to chapter level can help students improve the formal accuracy of their theses. Periodic monitoring and evaluation of revisions within the campus environment are also needed so that language improvement becomes part of the thesis-writing process rather than an afterthought.

6. CONCLUSION

This descriptive study identified 654 spelling errors in 49 undergraduate theses written at Muhammadiyah University of Makassar in 2024. Punctuation errors were the most dominant category (243 or 37.16%), followed by capitalization errors (220 or 33.64%) and preposition errors (191 or 29.20%). The results show that spelling and mechanical accuracy remain a real issue in student thesis writing. For that reason, academic editing needs to be strengthened through explicit guidance, focused feedback, spelling checklists, and staged revision practice so that theses become more accurate, consistent, and ready for academic review.

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