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Error Analysis in Using Passive Voice among University Students: Comparative Taxonomy

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ABSTRACT
Passive voice remains a key grammatical structure for English learners, particularly in academic writing, yet many students struggle to use it accurately. This study analyzes the types of passive voice errors made by 19 fifth-semester students in the English Education Study Program at Tadulako University. Specifically, it addresses two questions: (1) How do classroom interaction patterns such as teacher-centered grammar instruction, limited student negotiation of meaning, or feedback practices shape students' understanding and use of passive voice, and to what extent might these dynamics contribute to the dominance of developmental errors? (2) In what ways do students' sociocultural backgrounds, prior educational experiences, and exposure to English outside the classroom influence their difficulties with auxiliary verbs and tense agreement, and how do these factors mediate tensions between Indonesian linguistic norms and English academic writing conventions? A quantitative design was employed, with a test focusing on passive constructions in present continuous, past continuous, and past perfect tenses. Students' responses were categorized using Dulay et al.'s (1982) comparative taxonomy of developmental and interlingual errors. Results revealed developmental errors as the most prevalent (89.9%), mainly involving incorrect auxiliary verbs (is, am, are, being, been), past participle formation, and tense agreement. These findings highlight the need for targeted grammar

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instruction on auxiliary patterns and participles, alongside enhanced practice, corrective feedback, and adjustments to classroom interactions and sociocultural considerations to boost accuracy.
Keywords: *passive voice, error analysis, comparative taxonomy, classroom interaction, sociocultural factors*

INTRODUCTION

Passive voice is an essential grammatical structure that must be mastered by English education students for effective communication in academic and professional contexts, particularly in academic writing and speaking (Unver, 2017). In academic writing, such as research articles, theses, and IELTS Academic Writing Task 1, writers are required to vary their sentence structures. It is particularly important since academic writing must demonstrate clarity, formality, and objectivity (Chauhan, 2022), all of which can be effectively achieved through passive voice. Although many writing guides tend to discourage the use of passive voice. Pullum (2014) explains that passive voice is often presented as something that should not be used. Yet it remains that passive voice is an important feature of academic writing, indicating that the passive voice plays a necessary role.

Passive voice exists in both English and Indonesian, yet the forms are different. Indonesian passive voice is simpler. It is formed by adding the prefix di- to the verb. In contrast, English passive requires a form of to be and a past participle, which must match the time or tense. These structural differences often result in incorrect passive constructions, particularly in terms of tense and auxiliary verb usage (Sianipar and Sajarwa, 2021). Numerous scholars have conducted studies on passive voice errors. A study by Bochari et al. (2020) found that common errors included changing word order due to confusion between subject and object, misunderstanding tenses, and omitting elements like the “by” preposition, auxiliary verb "be," or the suffix "-ed.” Furthermore, the students make errors in complex verb form, subject-verb agreement, pronoun use, the role of "by", and past tense conversion found by (Jannah et al., 2023) and common errors found by Sahrul Hafiz and Wijaya, (2023) are omission of "to be" in various tenses, structural misformations, and errors in regular and irregular verb usage.

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However, recent developments in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research suggest that a strict categorization of errors into interlingual and developmental sources may oversimplify the complex nature of learner language. Scholars such as Ellis (2008) and DeKeyser (2015) emphasize that grammatical errors often emerge from the interaction between interlanguage development, cognitive processing constraints, and partial rule internalization rather than from a single identifiable source. In the case of passive voice constructions, learners must simultaneously manage auxiliary selection, tense–aspect mapping, and past participle formation, which places a high cognitive load on working memory, particularly in less automatized grammatical domains. Bardovi-Harlig (2013) further argues that tense–aspect errors frequently reflect incomplete form–meaning mappings rather than direct first language transfer. Therefore, while Dulay et al.'s (1982) comparative taxonomy provides a useful descriptive framework for identifying error tendencies, its categories should be interpreted as heuristic labels rather than definitive explanations of underlying cognitive processes.

Numerous studies on passive voice errors have relied on Dulay et al.'s (1982) surface strategy taxonomy to classify mistakes based on observable forms. Yet few have explored their comparative taxonomy which distinguishes developmental from interlingual errors in analyzing passive voice challenges among university EFL students, particularly across tense-aspect combinations like present continuous, past continuous, past perfect, and modals. This raises a key question: How adequately does this comparative taxonomy capture the complexity of such errors, and what learner strategies or cognitive processes (e.g., overgeneralization of auxiliary rules or incomplete tense-aspect mapping) might it overlook by prioritizing error sources over intralingual processing dynamics? Addressing this gap, the present study examines the most frequent errors through these two categories developmental and interlingual to reveal patterns in passive voice production and inform more nuanced grammar pedagogy. By conducting this research, the researchers expect to identify the errors and provide solutions to

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improve grammar teaching and learning. The present study examines the most frequent passive voice errors through the categories of developmental and interlingual errors, while acknowledging the potential overlap between internal grammatical development and first language influence in learners' interlanguage systems. By situating passive voice errors within contemporary SLA perspectives, this study contributes to understanding how tense–aspect mapping and auxiliary processing difficulties manifest in Indonesian EFL learners' interlanguage, rather than merely categorizing errors descriptively.

RESEARCH METHOD

Given the relatively small sample size of 19 fifth-semester students from a single institution, this quantitative study provides detailed insights into passive voice error patterns within this specific EFL context rather than generalizable claims across Indonesian university learners yet it raises a critical question: How might this limited sample and exclusive reliance on test data affect the validity of conclusions about students' underlying grammatical competence, particularly in distinguishing performance errors (e.g., slips under time pressure) from competence-based errors (e.g., systematic rule misapplication)? The controlled sentence construction test systematically quantified error frequencies across tense constructions (present continuous, past continuous, past perfect, and modals) using Dulay et al.'s (1982) comparative taxonomy, with content validity ensured through alignment with prior classroom material, standardized scoring to minimize subjectivity, and uniform items for inter-rater reliability. Still, the lack of qualitative measures like think-aloud protocols or naturalistic writing tasks limits deeper differentiation of error sources; future research should thus expand to larger multi-site samples, mixed methods (e.g., interviews, free production analysis), and inferential statistics to enhance generalizability and nuance interpretations. The test used in this research was adapted from Azar's (2002) Understanding and Using English Grammar, incorporating six items directly from

the book and eleven researcher-developed items targeting present continuous, past continuous, past perfect, and modal passive constructions. Administered during regular class meetings, all 19 student responses were collected for comprehensive analysis. Yet this controlled format prompts a key concern: To what degree do these test items authentically reflect students' passive voice use in real academic writing, and how might findings shift if drawn from naturalistic tasks like essays or research reports, where contextual demands and discourse functions could reveal different error patterns or compensatory strategies? While the structured items ensured targeted assessment of tense-aspect mastery with high content validity, their decontextualized nature may overlook how learners deploy (or avoid) passives in extended writing; future studies could triangulate with free production tasks for richer ecological validity.

Accordingly, the methodological design of this study necessarily constrains the scope of its conclusions. With a relatively small sample drawn from a single institutional context, the findings are not intended to support broad generalizations about Indonesian EFL learners, but rather to reveal localized patterns of difficulty in passive voice construction. In addition, the use of a decontextualized sentence-construction test prioritizes formal grammatical accuracy over discourse-level choices, whereas passive voice in academic writing functions as a rhetorical and informational strategy within extended texts. As such, the reported dominance of developmental errors should be interpreted as an indication of learners' internal grammatical challenges within controlled conditions, rather than as a definitive representation of their passive voice use in authentic academic writing. Future research incorporating naturalistic writing tasks, such as essays or research reports, would allow for a more comprehensive examination of how learners deploy passive constructions as discourse resources rather than isolated grammatical transformations.

Dulay, Burt, and Krashen's (1982) comparative taxonomy was employed because it allows for the systematic identification of both interlingual errors, which reflect the influence of Indonesian grammatical structures, and intralingual errors arising from the internal complexity of English passive constructions. In the context

of tense–aspect combinations, this taxonomy is particularly useful in distinguishing errors that stem from direct transfer from Indonesian, such as the absence of tense marking, from those caused by overgeneralization, incomplete rule application, or confusion among auxiliary verbs in English passive forms. Although the taxonomy does not explicitly model the interaction between interlingual and intralingual factors, it provides an analytical framework through which overlapping influences can be interpreted by examining recurring error patterns across different tense constructions. Consequently, this approach enables a nuanced description of how Indonesian EFL learners negotiate the grammatical demands of English passive voice, especially in structures involving complex tenseaspect relationships.

Nevertheless, the data analysis in this study is limited to descriptive statistics in the form of frequencies and percentages, without inferential statistical testing such as chi-square analysis or tense-based error distribution comparisons. As a result, the classification of errors particularly the predominance of developmental errors should be interpreted cautiously, as it may be influenced by task design and the analytical nature of the taxonomy itself. While efforts were made to apply consistent coding criteria across all responses, some degree of subjectivity in categorizing errors is unavoidable in qualitative grammatical analysis. Therefore, the findings are intended to indicate general tendencies in learners' passive voice difficulties rather than to establish statistically significant distinctions between error types. Future studies employing inferential statistics and inter-rater reliability measures would strengthen construct validity and enhance the robustness of error categorization. By situating passive voice errors within contemporary SLA perspectives, this study contributes to understanding how tense–aspect mapping and auxiliary processing difficulties manifest in Indonesian EFL learners' interlanguage, rather than merely categorizing errors descriptively.

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RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The patterns of errors identified in this study reflect underlying challenges in the acquisition of English passive voice rather than isolated surface mistakes. From an SLA perspective, learners' difficulties in forming passive constructions can be interpreted as the result of incomplete interlanguage development, particularly in mapping tense and aspect meanings onto passive morphology. The frequent misuse or omission of auxiliary verbs suggests that learners struggle to coordinate multiple grammatical elements simultaneously, such as tense marking, aspectual meaning, and voice, which places a considerable cognitive processing load on developing language systems.

Moreover, the predominance of auxiliary-related and participle-related errors indicates that learners have not yet fully automatized the form–function relationships required for accurate passive constructions. In line with SLA research, such errors are often associated with overgeneralization of active voice patterns, partial rule internalization, and limitations in working memory during controlled production tasks. Rather than reflecting a lack of grammatical knowledge alone, these error patterns reveal transitional stages in learners' interlanguage as they negotiate the structural and functional demands of English passive voice across different tense–aspect combinations

Table 1. The Interlingual Error

No	Errors	Correction	Transformation Types	Description
1.	Arudia clean the towels	Arudia was cleaning the towels.	Passive to Active	They omit the auxiliary verb and the -ing verb because their L1 does not use the forms.

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2.	The 'b' in the 'lamb' we should not pronounce, said by Mrs. Farida.	Mrs. Farida said, "The 'b' in the 'lamb' should not be pronounced by us."	Active to passive	This shows the incorrect order and the omission of the auxiliary verb.
3.	Is chocolate will fix my mental health?	Will my mental health be fixed by chocolate?	Active to passive	The errors are in the incorrect order and the omission of the auxiliary verb.
4.	Ayu invite Maul to her Seminar Proposal.	Ayu was inviting Maul to her Seminar Proposal.	Passive to active	They omit the auxiliary verb and the *-ing* verb because of their L1.
5.	Her essay might rewrriten by she?	Might she rewrite her essay?	Passive to active	The learner does not apply the question form.
6.	An Instagram story about me may post by my FWB	An Instagram Story about me may be posted by my FWB.	Active to passive	The learner uses the base verb, which shows they directly translate their L1 to English, which does not match the rules.

The table indicates that the interlingual errors appear when students directly translate Indonesian grammatical patterns into English. The most common mistakes include incorrect word order, omission of auxiliary verbs, and the use of base verbs in passive structures. In addition, several errors show that the students have not mastered the modal passive and present progressive tense, as seen in their frequent omission of *be* and *being*. This is supported by Purba et al., (2023), who found that students frequently misplaced the auxiliary *be* and used base verbs instead of *-ing* forms when constructing the present progressive tense. Additionally, this present finding is consistent with the results of Najah, (2024) regarding the fact that EFL learners commonly omit the auxiliary *be* in passive constructions due to first language interference.

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Since Bahasa Indonesia does not employ auxiliary verbs or verb inflections to indicate tense, aspect, or voice, students often omit *to be* and *-ing* forms in English constructions where they are obligatorily required. This tendency reflects learners' reliance on Indonesian grammatical patterns when producing English sentences, particularly at the interlanguage stage. Berutu et al. (2024) explain that learners tend to translate word by word and transfer Indonesian grammatical structures into English due to limited mastery of target language rules, which results in frequent omission of obligatory elements such as auxiliary verbs in progressive tenses. These clearly indicate that students still require a stronger mastery of basic grammatical structures, especially auxiliary verbs and tense formation, to produce accurate English sentences.

Table 2. The Developmental Error

No	Errors	Correction	Transformation types	Description
1.	Had the approval been sign by the coordinator of the English Education Study Program?	Had the approval been signed by the coordinator of the English Education Study Program?	Active to passive	Shows a limited understanding of past participles.
	Had the approval sign the coordinator of the English Education Study Program?			They omit the *by phrase,* the auxiliary verb *been* and have a limited vocabulary of past participles.
2.	Arudia was cleaned the towels.	Arudia was cleaning the towels.	Passive to active	They are incorrect in forming the auxiliary verbs and the -ing verb.
	Arudia are cleaning the towels.			
3.	We said, the 'b' in the 'lamb' should not	Mrs. Farida said, "The 'b' in the 'lamb' should	Active to passive	They are incorrect in applying the form of

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	pronounce by Mrs. Farida. Mrs. Farida said, "The 'b' in the 'lamb' should not pronounce by us."	not be pronounced by us."		passive and the verb past participle.
4.	I have finish my thesis before January. Before January, I must finished my thesis.	My thesis must be finished by me before January.	Active to passive	The learners do not fully master the passive voice form and do not understand the tense.
5.	Will my mental health will fix by chocolate? Would my mental health fixed by chocolate? Will my mental health being fixed by chocolate?	Will my mental health be fixed by chocolate?	Active to passive	They omit and add the elements that do not match the rules. Also, they are incorrect in forming the sentences.
6.	The rice in Banggai has been grown by the farmer.	The rice had been grown by the farmer in Banggai.	Active to passive	They are incorrect in forming the auxiliary verb *had*.
7.	May she rewrite her essay? May her being rewrite her essay? Might her rewrite is her essay?	Might she rewrite her essay?	Passive to active	They are incorrect in forming and ordering the sentences.
8.	In Bone people were spoke Buginese In Bone Buginese was	Buginese is being spoken in Bone.	Active to passive	The learners do not fully master the rules of passive voice, causing incorrect formation of the verb

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	spoken by people Buginese was being spoken by people in Bone.			and ordering of the sentences.
9.	The police has been accepting the driver when passing Kebun Kopi.	The police had accepted the driver when passing Kebun Kopi.	Passive to active	The learners do not fully master the use of auxiliary verbs and the tense rules.
10.	A bike was not being read by Arham. A bike is not riding by Arham A bike was not ride by Arham. A bike is not ridden by Arham A bike not being ridden by Arham.	A bike is not being ridden by Arham.	Active to passive	These errors show that the learners do not expect to use the auxiliary verbs and have a limited vocabulary of the past participle.
11.	Is Bruno Mars singing the song? Is Bruno Mars be sung the song?	Was Bruno Mars singing the song?	Passive to active	The learner is incorrect in adding and forming the verbs.
12.	An Instagram story about me may posted by my FWB. An Instagram story about me have been post by my FWB. An Instagram story about me may have post by my FWB.	An Instagram Story about me may be posted by my FWB.	Active to passive	The learners omit the *be*, add unnecessary elements, and are incorrect in forming the verb.

The findings regarding frequent misuse of auxiliary verbs and incorrect past participle formation suggest that students' difficulties with passive voice stem from an

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incomplete internalization of form–meaning relationships rather than mere rule memorization. Instead of reinforcing prescriptive or decontextualized grammar instruction, these results highlight the need for pedagogical approaches that integrate passive constructions into meaningful communicative contexts. Instruction should emphasize how auxiliary verbs encode tense and aspect in passive clauses and how past participles function to signal completed actions within specific discourse purposes, such as describing processes or reporting events. Guided analysis of authentic texts, consciousness-raising activities, and form-focused tasks embedded in contextualized writing or speaking activities may help learners notice and practice auxiliary–participle patterns without isolating them from meaning. In this way, grammar pedagogy can move beyond mechanical transformation exercises toward supporting learners' functional and communicative use of passive voice across different tense–aspect combinations. In addition, some errors show that the students do not master the present progressive passive and the modal passive. As Masyudi et al. (2023) state, many EFL learners demonstrate low achievement and persistent difficulties in applying passive voice rules accurately across different tenses. Those indicate that the students are still in the process of fully understanding passive voice structures.

Based on the analysis of the total errors made by students in using passive voice, the researchers examine the frequency of errors in detail below:

Table 3. Percentage of Errors

No.	Types of errors	Frequency of errors	Percentage of errors
1.	Developmental Error	107	89.9%
2.	Interlingual Error	16	13.4%

The high proportion of developmental errors can be confidently attributed to intralingual processing difficulties to a substantial extent, despite the acknowledged overlap between Indonesian–English structural differences and learners' internalization of English auxiliary-based passive constructions. While Indonesian passive structures lack auxiliary verbs and tense marking potentially

contributing to omissions like missing "be/being" the error patterns show tense-specific confusions (e.g., incorrect auxiliary sequences in past perfect vs. modals) rather than uniform Indonesian-style omissions. This distribution across diverse constructions demonstrates that intralingual challenges in auxiliary manipulation and tense agreement predominate over structural transfer effects, supporting the 89.9% developmental classification as primarily reflective of internal grammatical development processes. The predominance of developmental errors becomes theoretically meaningful when interpreted as reflecting learners' ongoing difficulty in integrating tense–aspect morphology into passive constructions under processing constraints, rather than as a mere numerical dominance of one error category.

While developmental errors were found to be more dominant, the structural differences between Indonesian and English passive voice systems complicate a rigid distinction between developmental and interlingual errors. Indonesian passive constructions do not require auxiliary verbs or tense marking, whereas English passive forms rely heavily on auxiliary sequences and tense–aspect agreement. As a result, errors such as the omission or mis-selection of auxiliary verbs and past participles may reflect not only learners' internal grammatical development but also residual influence from Indonesian structures. Alternative analytical frameworks, such as surface strategy taxonomy or interlanguage-based analysis, might challenge or refine the interpretation that developmental errors reflect genuine grammatical development rather than artifacts of test design and error classification. Surface strategy taxonomy would categorize errors by form (omission, addition, mis-formation, mis-ordering) rather than source, potentially reclassifying many "developmental" errors as observable surface-level issues arising from test constraints like time pressure. Interlanguage analysis could reveal these as temporary performance strategies rather than stable competence gaps. However, such frameworks might overlook the systematic origin patterns captured by comparative taxonomy, which aligns error types with consistent

auxiliary and tense challenges across all constructions, thereby validating developmental dominance as indicative of authentic grammatical development rather than methodological artifacts

The findings emphasize the need for targeted instructional strategies focusing on the correct formation of passive structures. Teachers must provide more explicit explanations and focused exercises on auxiliary verbs, past participle forms, and tense agreement in passive voice. Eragamreddy (2024) highlights that explicit grammar instruction combined with learner-centered and context-based activities, such as task-based learning, cooperative learning, and inductive training, significantly improves students' comprehension and accurate use of passive constructions. Similarly, Mallipa & Murianty (2020) argue that teaching passive voice through texts and guided grammatical discussion helps students understand passive structures more effectively, particularly when attention is directed to verb forms and agents within meaningful contexts. In addition, Islamy & Kaniadewi (2022) report that the use of structured strategies such as EGRA, task-based learning, and cooperative learning contributes to a better understanding of passive voice across different educational levels. Including regular analysis of error tasks helps students recognize and correct their grammatical mistakes, thereby increasing their awareness of grammatical accuracy (Nováková, 2023). Therefore, strengthening instructional focus on form, practice, and error awareness is essential to improving students' writing proficiency and supporting their ability to construct clear and accurate passive sentences.

CONCLUSION

This study examined passive voice errors produced by a small group of Indonesian EFL university students using Dulay et al.'s (1982) comparative taxonomy. The analysis revealed a higher frequency of errors classified as developmental than interlingual within the controlled sentence-construction task.

Rather than establishing a definitive dominance of a particular error type, these findings suggest a tendency for learners to experience greater difficulty with the internal grammatical demands of English passive constructions, particularly in coordinating auxiliary verbs, tense–aspect marking, and past participle formation. From an SLA perspective, the prevalence of auxiliary- and participle-related errors may be interpreted as evidence of incomplete interlanguage development and processing constraints, where learners struggle to simultaneously encode voice, tense, and aspect under limited attentional resources. Such patterns align with research emphasizing that tense–aspect morphology and auxiliary systems are among the most cognitively demanding components of second language grammar. At the same time, the overlap between developmental and interlingual influences highlights the difficulty of isolating error sources within decontextualized tasks, as learners' grammatical growth and first-language influence often interact dynamically. Given the study's limited sample size, descriptive statistical approach, and reliance on controlled sentence-level data, the conclusions should be interpreted cautiously and within their local analytical scope. The contribution of this study lies not in broad generalization or pedagogical prescription, but in illustrating how passive voice errors can reflect underlying cognitive and linguistic processes in EFL learners' interlanguage. Future research incorporating larger datasets, naturalistic academic writing, and inferential statistical analyses would be necessary to more robustly model the relationship between tense aspect processing, passive morphology, and learner development across contexts. Although context-specific, these findings align with broader SLA research showing that passive voice acquisition poses persistent challenges across EFL contexts due to the cognitive demands of auxiliary systems and tense–aspect integration.

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