

Mapping Syntactic Vulnerabilities in Thesis Writing among Islamic Religious Education Students: A Three-Level Error Profile

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Abstract

Syntactic accuracy is essential to the clarity, coherence, and effectiveness of academic writing, yet undergraduate thesis drafts may contain structural problems that extend beyond isolated grammatical errors. This study aims to identify and interpret syntactic problems in thesis writing among Islamic Religious Education students and to map these problems into a three-level profile of syntactic vulnerabilities. A descriptive qualitative approach with a language error analysis design was employed. The data consisted of phrases, clauses, and sentences identified in three undergraduate thesis drafts. Data were collected through documentation and note-taking and analyzed through identification, classification, description, correction, and interpretation based on Indonesian grammatical standards. The analysis identified 30 reported syntactic problems distributed across phrase, clause, and sentence levels. Phrase-level problems primarily involved redundancy, overlapping expressions, and inappropriate prepositional selection, reflecting weaknesses in syntactic economy and selection. Clause-level problems involved dependency relations, relative constructions, and conjunctive overmarking, indicating difficulties in dependency control. Sentence-level problems concerned introductory structures, parallelism, and coordination-subordination patterns, reflecting weaknesses in sentence architecture. The study proposes a three-level syntactic error profile that moves beyond cataloguing incorrect forms toward diagnosing broader areas of syntactic vulnerability in thesis writing. The profile offers practical implications for academic-writing instruction, thesis supervision, and analytical revision, while emphasizing the importance of contextual linguistic judgment in evaluating and correcting student writing.

Keywords: *Syntactic Vulnerabilities, Thesis Writing, Islamic Religious Education Students, Academic Writing, Error Analysis.*

Abstrak

Ketepatan sintaksis merupakan unsur penting dalam menjaga kejelasan, koherensi, dan efektivitas penulisan akademik, namun draf skripsi mahasiswa masih dapat memuat berbagai persoalan struktural yang tidak sekadar berupa kesalahan gramatikal yang berdiri sendiri. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengidentifikasi dan menginterpretasikan masalah sintaksis dalam penulisan skripsi mahasiswa Pendidikan Agama Islam serta memetakan masalah tersebut ke dalam profil kerentanan sintaksis tiga tingkat. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan desain analisis kesalahan berbahasa. Data berupa frasa, klausa, dan kalimat yang diidentifikasi dari tiga draf skripsi mahasiswa. Data dikumpulkan melalui teknik dokumentasi dan catat, kemudian dianalisis melalui tahap identifikasi, klasifikasi, deskripsi, koreksi, dan interpretasi berdasarkan kaidah gramatikal bahasa Indonesia. Hasil analisis menemukan 30 masalah sintaksis yang tersebar pada tingkat frasa, klausa, dan kalimat. Pada tingkat frasa, masalah utama berupa redundansi, konstruksi tumpang tindih, dan ketidaktepatan pemilihan

preposisi yang mencerminkan kelemahan dalam ekonomi dan seleksi sintaksis. Pada tingkat klausa, masalah meliputi hubungan ketergantungan antarklausa, konstruksi relatif, dan penandaan konjungsi yang berlebihan, yang menunjukkan kelemahan dalam kontrol dependensi. Pada tingkat kalimat, masalah berkaitan dengan konstruksi pengantar, paralelisme, serta pola koordinasi dan subordinasi yang mencerminkan kelemahan dalam arsitektur kalimat. Penelitian ini mengusulkan profil kesalahan sintaksis tiga tingkat yang tidak hanya menginventarisasi bentuk-bentuk kesalahan, tetapi juga mendiagnosis area kerentanan sintaksis yang lebih luas dalam penulisan skripsi. Profil tersebut memiliki implikasi praktis bagi pembelajaran penulisan akademik, pembimbingan skripsi, dan praktik revisi analitis, serta menegaskan pentingnya pertimbangan linguistik kontekstual dalam mengevaluasi dan memperbaiki tulisan mahasiswa.

Kata Kunci: Kerentanan Sintaksis, Penulisan Skripsi, Mahasiswa Pendidikan Agama Islam, Penulisan Akademik, Analisis Kesalahan.

INTRODUCTION

Academic writing requires more than the ability to communicate ideas. It also requires control over grammatical structure, syntactic organization, lexical precision, and conventions of formal written language. In undergraduate thesis writing, syntactic accuracy is particularly important because the clarity of an argument depends not only on the quality of the ideas presented but also on the way phrases, clauses, and sentences are organized. Inaccurate syntactic construction can obscure meaning, produce ambiguity, weaken logical relationships between propositions, and reduce the readability of academic texts.

For university students, thesis writing represents one of the most demanding forms of academic literacy. Students are expected to formulate research problems, construct theoretical arguments, describe methods, present evidence, and draw conclusions using formal academic language. These demands make thesis writing linguistically complex because students must coordinate content knowledge with language accuracy at the same time. Previous studies have shown that grammatical and syntactic problems remain common in university-level academic writing, including errors involving sentence structure, prepositions, clause formation, word order, redundancy, and incomplete constructions.¹

Recent research further suggests that syntactic problems in student academic writing do not occur randomly but tend to form identifiable patterns. Pham and Pham (2024),² for example, identify recurring syntactic problems involving sentence fragments,

¹ Luh Febilla Saswira Pradnyaswari et al., "Syntactic Errors Made by English Department Students in Writing Undergraduate Thesis Abstract," *ALFABETA: Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra, Dan Pembelajarannya* 5, no. 2 (2022): 57–65, <https://doi.org/10.33503/alfabeta.v5i2.1310>; Syaifullah Syaifullah and Helen M. Sukova, "An Analysis of Grammatical Errors on Undergraduate Thesis Abstract," *ELT-Lectura* 9, no. 1 (2022): 18–27, <https://doi.org/10.31849/elt-lectura.v9i1.9217>; Vu Phi Ho Pham and Nhu Pham Quynh, "Common Syntactic Errors in the Writing Skills of the 3rd Year Students at Van Lang University," SSRN Scholarly Paper no. 4823544 (Social Science Research Network, May 10, 2024), <https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=4823544>; Arifa Fiaz and Iram Rubab, "Grammatical Error Analysis of Postgraduate Theses in Natural Sciences," *Pakistan Languages and Humanities Review* 8, no. 2 (2024): 277–85, [https://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2024\(8-II\)24](https://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2024(8-II)24).

² Pham and Pham Quynh, "Common Syntactic Errors in the Writing Skills of the 3rd Year Students at Van Lang University."

prepositional use, and other sentence-level constructions. Naini and Ulya (2025)³ similarly show that students' scholarly articles contain systematic weaknesses in reasoning patterns and sentence construction, indicating that problems in academic writing are connected not only with surface grammar but also with the organization of propositions and syntactic relations. At the level of more complex constructions, Princess and Syarif (2021)⁴ found that university students experience difficulties in constructing complex sentences, particularly in coordinating and subordinating clauses appropriately.

Studies of thesis and academic-text writing reveal similar tendencies. Pradnyaswari et al. (2022)⁵ and Syaifullah and Sukova (2022)⁶ demonstrate that undergraduate thesis abstracts contain recurring grammatical and syntactic errors, while Fiaz and Rubab (2024)⁷ show that such problems can also persist in postgraduate theses. These findings indicate that progression to higher levels of education does not automatically eliminate syntactic difficulties. Instead, academic writing requires explicit control over sentence construction, revision, and disciplinary conventions.

In the Indonesian context, academic writing presents additional challenges because students frequently move between spoken Indonesian, informal written language, local-language patterns, and formal academic Indonesian. Although studies on Indonesian students often focus on English as a foreign language, they provide useful evidence that language transfer, limited familiarity with academic conventions, and insufficient syntactic awareness may influence student writing. Pasaribu et al. (2024),⁸ for example, identify grammatical and syntactic difficulties as important challenges in the academic writing of Indonesian university students. Munandar (2023),⁹ Rahmani (2023),¹⁰ and Ulhaq et al. (2022)¹¹ similarly show that morphosyntactic and grammatical patterns in student writing can be shaped by habitual language structures and limited control over formal written conventions.

However, the analysis of syntactic problems in Indonesian academic writing requires particular caution. Categories developed for English cannot simply be transferred to Indonesian because each language has different grammatical systems and acceptable

³ Ineng Naini and Ridha Hasnul Ulya, "Reasoning Patterns and Sentence Construction Errors in Students' Scholarly Articles: A Content Analysis of Academic Writing in Padang City," *AL-ISHLAH: Jurnal Pendidikan* 17, no. 2 (2025): 2786–96, <https://doi.org/10.35445/alishlah.v17i2.7447>.

⁴ Paradise Princess and Hermawati Syarif, "EFL University Students' Errors in Constructing Complex Sentences in Academic Writing," September 14, 2021, 34–40, <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.210914.007>.

⁵ Pradnyaswari et al., "Syntactic Errors Made by English Department Students in Writing Undergraduate Thesis Abstract."

⁶ Syaifullah and Sukova, "An Analysis of Grammatical Errors on Undergraduate Thesis Abstract."

⁷ Fiaz and Rubab, "Grammatical Error Analysis of Postgraduate Theses in Natural Sciences."

⁸ Arsen Nahum Pasaribu et al., "Challenges For Indonesian Efl Students In English Academic Writing," *English Review: Journal of English Education* 12, no. 2 (2024): 527–36, <https://doi.org/10.25134/erjee.v12i2.9780>.

⁹ Imam Munandar, "Investigating The Grammatical Interference of Indonesian-Gayonese EFL Learners," *Journal of Linguistics, Literature, and Language Teaching (JLLLT)* 2, no. 2 (2023): 86–97, <https://doi.org/10.37249/jlllt.v2i2.579>.

¹⁰ Eka Fajar Rahmani, "An Error Analysis of EFL Undergraduate Students' Writing Composition in Universitas Tanjungpura," *Jurnal Pendidikan Progresif* 13, no. 3 (2023): 1309–22.

¹¹ Hana Dhiya Ulhaq et al., "A Morpho-Syntactic Error Analysis Of University Students' Argumentative Writing," *Indonesian Journal of Learning and Instruction* 5, no. 2 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.25134/ijli.v5i2.6844>.

constructions. The identification of an error in Indonesian must therefore be grounded in Indonesian grammatical norms, including the structure of phrases and clauses, the relationship between syntactic functions, the use of conjunctions and prepositions, and the completeness and effectiveness of sentences. For this reason, the present study uses Indonesian grammatical references, including Chaer, Ramlan, Kridalaksana, EYD V, and KBBI, as the primary basis for determining whether a construction constitutes a syntactic deviation.

One important pattern in academic writing is redundancy, in which writers use overlapping expressions that perform the same grammatical or semantic function. Redundancy can make academic sentences unnecessarily lengthy and reduce stylistic precision. Tikhonova et al. (2024),¹² in their review of textual redundancy in academic writing, emphasize that unnecessary repetition can interfere with concision and communicative efficiency. In Indonesian student writing, constructions such as *sangat ... sekali*, *berbagai macam-macam*, or *dalam rangka untuk* similarly indicate difficulties in maintaining syntactic economy.

Another recurring problem concerns dependency relations at the clause level. Academic writers must distinguish between independent and dependent clauses and use conjunctions in ways that create complete syntactic relationships. Sentence fragments beginning with subordinate conjunctions, excessive use of paired conjunctions, and inappropriate relative constructions may indicate weak awareness of clause dependency. Such difficulties are especially important in academic writing because complex arguments often require the coordination and subordination of multiple propositions.

At the sentence level, problems of completeness and parallelism are also significant. A formal academic sentence requires a clear relationship between its principal syntactic functions, while coordinated elements should maintain structural equivalence. Demana (2025)¹³ highlights the importance of parallel structure in academic writing, showing that failure to maintain grammatical equivalence can disrupt coherence and readability. Similar problems can be observed when students combine verbal and nominal forms inconsistently in enumerations or when introductory constructions obscure the grammatical subject of a sentence.

The problem is also connected with revision practices. Academic writing is rarely produced accurately in a single draft; it requires repeated reading, editing, and restructuring. Long (2022)¹⁴ shows that self-editing remains an important component of grammatical correction even when digital grammar-checking tools are available. Al-Inbari and Al-Wasy (2023)¹⁵ likewise demonstrate that self-editing and peer-editing

¹² Elena Tikhonova et al., "Text Redundancy in Academic Writing: A Systematic Scoping Review," *Journal of Language and Education* (Россия, Москва) 10, no. 3 (39) (2024): 128–60.

¹³ Ndishunwani Vincent Demana, "Investigating Parallel Structure Competence in Academic Writing among First-Year Students at a South African University," *African Journal of Development Studies (Formerly AFFRIKA Journal of Politics, Economics and Society)* 2025, no. si1 (2025): 103–19, <https://doi.org/10.31920/2634-3649/2025/sin1a6>.

¹⁴ ロング ロバート ウィリアム and Long Robert William, "Online Grammar Checkers Versus Self-Editing: An Investigation of Error Correction Rates and Writing Quality," *Journal of Nusantara Studies* 7, no. 1 (2022): 441–58, <https://doi.org/10.24200/jonus.vol7iss1pp441-458>.

¹⁵ Fatima Abdullah Yahya Al-Inbari and Baleigh Qassim Mohammed Al-Wasy, "The Impact of Automated Writing Evaluation (AWE) on EFL Learners' Peer and Self-Editing," *Education and Information*

practices can support error awareness and revision. More recent studies involving AI-assisted revision also suggest that technological tools may facilitate error correction, although effective revision still depends on the writer's ability to evaluate and interpret suggested changes critically.¹⁶

Despite the growing literature on grammatical errors and academic writing, several limitations remain. First, many studies focus on English-language writing, particularly EFL essays, abstracts, and argumentative texts. Second, studies on Indonesian academic writing frequently emphasize spelling, diction, or general language errors rather than examining syntax systematically across multiple structural levels. Third, studies that identify syntactic problems often present lists of errors without developing an integrated profile showing how difficulties at the phrase, clause, and sentence levels relate to broader academic-writing competence.

This gap is particularly relevant to students of Islamic Religious Education (PAI). PAI students are expected to communicate educational and religious concepts through academic writing, often involving theoretical explanation, interpretation, argumentation, and qualitative research reporting. Their thesis writing therefore requires not only disciplinary knowledge but also control of formal Indonesian syntax. The original draft data used in this study show recurring problems involving redundancy and prepositional selection at the phrase level, clause dependency and conjunction use at the clause level, and sentence completeness and parallelism at the sentence level.

Accordingly, this study does not merely ask how many syntactic errors occur in student theses. It seeks to construct a three-level syntactic error profile in undergraduate academic writing by examining errors at the phrase, clause, and sentence levels. At the phrase level, the analysis focuses on syntactic economy, prepositional selection, and overlapping constructions. At the clause level, it examines dependency relations, relative constructions, and conjunctive organization. At the sentence level, it analyzes structural completeness, parallelism, and coordination-subordination patterns.

The study aims to identify, classify, and interpret syntactic errors found in three undergraduate thesis drafts written by students of the Islamic Religious Education Program at UII Darullughah Wadda'wah. In addition to describing the forms of error, the study examines recurring structural patterns and discusses their implications for academic writing instruction and revision practices. By developing a three-level syntactic error profile, the study seeks to contribute a more systematic understanding of syntactic vulnerability in Indonesian undergraduate academic writing and to provide a practical basis for improving editing awareness and formal writing competence among PAI students.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach with a language error analysis design. The study focused on identifying, classifying, describing, correcting, and

Technologies 28, no. 6 (2023): 6645–65, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-022-11458-x>.

¹⁶ Minjoo Kim and Yuh V. Chon, "The Impact of Self-Revision, Machine Translation, and ChatGPT on L2 Writing: Raters' Assessments, Linguistic Complexity, and Error Correction," *Assessing Writing* 65 (July 2025): 100950, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.asw.2025.100950>.

interpreting syntactic errors found in undergraduate thesis drafts. The data consisted of phrases, clauses, and sentences that were considered inconsistent with standard Indonesian syntactic rules. The primary data sources were three undergraduate thesis drafts written by students of the Islamic Religious Education Program at UII Darullughah Wadda'wah: *Strategi Menghafal Al-Qur'an Three Years di Pondok Pesantren Mathla'ul Anwar Kota Pontianak*, *Penerapan Metode Pembelajaran PAI dalam Meningkatkan Kedisiplinan Siswa*, and *Peran Guru PAI dalam Membentuk Karakter Santri*.

Data were collected through documentation and note-taking techniques. The researchers carefully read the thesis drafts, identified constructions that potentially contained syntactic problems, and recorded them in data sheets together with their sentence contexts, error categories, proposed corrections, and linguistic explanations. The acceptability of each construction was evaluated by referring to Indonesian language standards, including EYD Edition V, KBBI, and Indonesian syntax references by Chaer, Ramlan, and Kridalaksana. These references were used to reduce classifications based merely on intuition or on grammatical categories derived from other languages.

Data analysis was conducted through five stages: identification, classification, description, correction, and interpretation. The identified data were classified into three analytical levels: *phrase-level errors*, *clause-level errors*, and *sentence-level errors*. Phrase-level analysis included redundancy, prepositional misuse, and overlapping constructions. Clause-level analysis focused on dependency relations, conjunction use, and relative constructions. Sentence-level analysis examined structural incompleteness, unclear syntactic functions, nonparallel structures, and problems of coordination and subordination.

The analytical process also followed the principles of data condensation, data display, and conclusion verification proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña.¹⁷ Each classification was re-examined to minimize *false-positive errors*, namely constructions that may still be acceptable in Indonesian grammar but were initially identified as erroneous. Because the study relied exclusively on documentary data and did not include interviews with the thesis authors, factors such as spoken-language influence and limited self-editing practices were treated as plausible interpretations rather than empirically confirmed causes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overall Syntactic Error Profile

The analysis of three undergraduate thesis drafts identified 30 reported instances of syntactic problems distributed across three structural levels: phrase, clause, and sentence. The original dataset records ten cases at each level, although the specific forms of error differ. Phrase-level problems involve redundancy, prepositional misuse, and overlapping constructions; clause-level problems concern dependent clauses, relative constructions, and interclausal relations; while sentence-level problems involve subject-related structures, nonparallel constructions, and inappropriate conjunctive combinations.

¹⁷ Matthew B. Miles et al., *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*, 3rd ed. (SAGE Publications, 2014).

Table 1. Distribution of Syntactic Errors in Undergraduate Thesis Drafts

Level	Error Type	Frequency
Phrase	Redundancy / superfluous expression	4
	Prepositional misuse	3
	Overlapping phrase construction	3
Clause	Dependent clause used independently	4
	Inappropriate relative construction	3
	Problematic clause construction	3
Sentence	Subject-related structural problems	4
	Nonparallel structure	3
	Excessive or inappropriate conjunctional construction	3
Total		30

The equal numerical distribution should not be interpreted as evidence that phrase-, clause-, and sentence-level structures are equally difficult for PAI students in general. The corpus consists of only three thesis drafts, so the frequencies describe the documents examined rather than the wider population. More importantly, the distribution reveals that syntactic vulnerability is not confined to one grammatical unit. Problems occur from relatively local constructions, such as redundant phrases and inappropriate prepositions, to larger structures involving clause dependency and sentence organization.

Comparable patterns have been reported in university academic writing. Azizah et al. (2025)¹⁸ identified errors involving word choice, word order, incomplete sentences, omission, and addition in undergraduate thesis literature reviews, while Pham and Pham (2024)¹⁹ reported prepositional errors, sentence fragments, and run-on sentences among common syntactic difficulties. Kallaba (2025)²⁰ likewise found sentence-structure and preposition problems to be prominent in university academic essays. These studies concern English-language writing and therefore cannot determine the grammatical acceptability of Indonesian constructions. Nevertheless, they provide useful comparative evidence that academic-writing difficulties commonly operate across several structural levels. In the present study, these patterns are synthesized into a three-level syntactic error profile: syntactic economy and selection at the phrase level, dependency control at the clause level, and sentence architecture at the sentence level.

Phrase- and Clause-Level Syntactic Errors

At the phrase level, one of the most visible problems is redundancy, as seen in the construction *hal tersebut sangat memengaruhi sekali terhadap motivasi belajar siswa*, which contains overlapping intensifiers (*sangat* and *sekali*) and an unnecessary preposition (*terhadap*) after *memengaruhi*. A more economical form is *hal tersebut*

¹⁸ Siti Humairah Noor Azizah et al., “Analysis of EFL Students’ Grammatical Errors in Writing Literature Review,” *Tamaddun* 24, no. 2 (2025): 365–71, <https://doi.org/10.33096/tamaddun.v24i2.1019>.

¹⁹ Pham and Pham Quynh, “Common Syntactic Errors in the Writing Skills of the 3rd Year Students at Van Lang University.”

²⁰ Fjolla Kallaba, “Grammatical Error Analysis in Academic Essays: A Comprehensive Study of University Students in Kosovo,” *Journal of English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics* 7, no. 7 (2025): 01–12, <https://doi.org/10.32996/jeltal.2025.7.7.1>.

sangat memengaruhi motivasi belajar siswa. This issue reflects insufficient control of syntactic economy, where academic writing requires conciseness without duplicating grammatical or semantic functions, as also noted by Tikhonova et al. (2024)²¹ regarding functional repetition and excessive wordiness.

A similar pattern appears in *berbagai macam-macam media pembelajaran PAI telah diterapkan di kelas*, where *berbagai* overlaps with *macam-macam*, so it should be simplified to *berbagai media pembelajaran PAI telah diterapkan di kelas*. Likewise, *dalam rangka untuk meningkatkan kedisiplinan santri* contains two purposive markers and can be reduced to either *dalam rangka meningkatkan kedisiplinan santri* or *untuk meningkatkan kedisiplinan santri*, showing that grammatical effectiveness involves both conciseness and precision, as also emphasized by Naini and Ulya (2025).²² Another phrase-level issue is prepositional selection, as in *Faktor tersebut bergantung daripada keaktifan santri dalam kegiatan malam*, where *daripada* is incorrect and should be replaced with *pada*, producing *Faktor tersebut bergantung pada keaktifan santri dalam kegiatan malam*. This reflects the interface between lexical choice and syntactic structure, supported by findings from Ulhaq et al. (2022),²³ Munandar (2023),²⁴ and Rahim and Pilus (2026)²⁵ on frequent prepositional errors.

At the clause level, a key issue is dependency control, as in *Sehingga hafalan santri dapat terjaga dengan baik*, which lacks a proper main clause and should be embedded in a complete structure such as *Metode tkrar diterapkan secara konsisten sehingga hafalan santri dapat terjaga dengan baik*. Another example is *metode yang mana metode tersebut digunakan oleh pengasuh pesantren*, which is redundant and can be simplified to *metode yang digunakan oleh pengasuh pesantren*, showing that redundancy and relativization often co-occur, as also noted by Princess and Syarif (2021)²⁶ and Shah et al. (2026).²⁷ A further case is *Karena kedisiplinan guru meningkat, sehingga prestasi belajar siswa ikut naik*, where double marking of causality should be avoided by choosing either *Karena kedisiplinan guru meningkat, prestasi belajar siswa ikut naik* or *Kedisiplinan guru meningkat sehingga prestasi belajar siswa ikut naik*, indicating overmarking of clause dependency.

One construction requiring caution is *Data yang peneliti kumpulan merupakan data hasil wawancara mendalam*, which is not necessarily incorrect because Indonesian allows agent-internal constructions without *di-*, so it should not be automatically revised to *data yang dikumpulkan oleh peneliti*. This shows that error analysis must distinguish between ungrammatical forms, stylistic preferences, and alternative grammatical

²¹ Tikhonova et al., “Text Redundancy in Academic Writing.”

²² Naini and Ulya, “Reasoning Patterns and Sentence Construction Errors in Students’ Scholarly Articles.”

²³ Ulhaq et al., “A MORPHO-SYNTACTIC ERROR ANALYSIS OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS’ ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING.”

²⁴ Munandar, “Investigating The Grammatical Interference of Indonesian-Gayonese EFL Learners.”

²⁵ Nor Elena Abdul Rahim and Zahariah Pilus, “Language and Mechanical Errors in English Writing by Malaysian Tertiary Students,” *Journal of Advanced Research in Social and Behavioural Sciences* 44, no. 1 (2026): 343–56.

²⁶ Princess and Syarif, “EFL University Students’ Errors in Constructing Complex Sentences in Academic Writing.”

²⁷ Sayyed Rashid Ali Shah et al., “Sentence Complexity in Arab EFL Learners’ Academic Writing: A Qualitative Case Study,” *Cogent Education* 13, no. 1 (2026): 2675017, <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2026.2675017>.

constructions.

Sentence-Level Errors and Structural Organization

At the sentence level, the central problem concerns sentence architecture, particularly the relationship between introductory modifiers and the core syntactic structure. One example is *Berdasarkan hasil observasi di kelas menunjukkan bahwa siswa kurang fokus*. The phrase *berdasarkan hasil observasi di kelas* functions as an introductory adverbial construction. As a result, the sentence lacks an explicit grammatical element functioning as the subject of *menunjukkan*. The more coherent form is *Hasil observasi di kelas menunjukkan bahwa siswa kurang fokus*. The same structural mechanism appears in *Menurut Sanjaya (2014) menyatakan bahwa media pembelajaran berguna untuk* Here, *menurut Sanjaya (2014)* functions as an introductory source phrase, while *menyatakan* requires a grammatical subject. Two possible corrections are *Sanjaya (2014) menyatakan bahwa media pembelajaran berguna untuk ...* or *Menurut Sanjaya (2014), media pembelajaran berguna untuk* These constructions indicate that the underlying difficulty is more precise than simply “a missing subject.” Students appear to have difficulty distinguishing peripheral introductory elements from core syntactic functions. Academic sentences frequently contain source markers, prepositional phrases, and subordinate constructions before the principal proposition, so writers need to recognize which component actually serves as the syntactic nucleus.

Naini and Ulya (2025)²⁸ similarly found problems concerning sentence unity and effectiveness in student scholarly articles. Azizah et al. (2025)²⁹ identified incomplete sentences and word-order problems in thesis literature reviews, while Lau (2026)³⁰ argues that structural grammatical errors can create ambiguity and weaken the rigor of academic communication.

A second sentence-level problem concerns parallelism: *Tugas guru PAI meliputi merencanakan pembelajaran, pelaksanaan evaluasi, dan mengevaluasi hasil belajar*. The coordinated elements are not grammatically equivalent. *Merencanakan* and *mengevaluasi* are verbal constructions, whereas *pelaksanaan* is nominal. The sequence can be revised as: *Tugas guru PAI meliputi merencanakan pembelajaran, melaksanakan evaluasi, dan mengevaluasi hasil belajar*.

Parallelism is particularly important in academic writing because grammatical equivalence helps readers recognize that listed elements possess an equivalent logical status. Demana (2025)³¹ found that university students experienced substantial difficulty with parallel constructions, particularly in lists, comparisons, and structures involving paired conjunctions.

Another example requires reclassification: *Meskipun metode tersebut sangat baik, tetapi tidak semua guru mampu menerapkannya*. The original draft described this

²⁸ Naini and Ulya, “Reasoning Patterns and Sentence Construction Errors in Students’ Scholarly Articles.”

²⁹ Azizah et al., “Analysis of EFL Students’ Grammatical Errors in Writing Literature Review.”

³⁰ Hok Yin Lau, “Taxonomy of Grammar Error Analysis of Hong Kong Year One University Students’ Written Graphics Analysis of Quantitative Studies and Implications,” in *Engaged Learning and Innovative Teaching in Higher Education - Volume 1: Connecting Professional Development, AI-Driven Innovation, and Academic Experience*, ed. Will W. K. Ma (Springer Nature, 2026), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-95-9414-6_13.

³¹ Demana, “Investigating Parallel Structure Competence in Academic Writing among First-Year Students at a South African University.”

construction as lacking a clear subject and predicate. Yet the main clause *tidak semua guru mampu menerapkannya* clearly contains both a subject and a predicate. The actual issue lies in the simultaneous use of *meskipun* and *tetapi* in the standard formal construction. A clearer form is: *Meskipun metode tersebut sangat baik, tidak semua guru mampu menerapkannya*. Alternatively: *Metode tersebut sangat baik, tetapi tidak semua guru mampu menerapkannya*. This distinction is important because diagnostic accuracy determines the quality of corrective feedback. If a conjunctive problem is incorrectly labelled as a missing-subject problem, students may receive an acceptable correction but learn the wrong grammatical principle.

Overall, the sentence-level findings reveal that students' difficulties extend beyond constructing grammatically recognizable strings. The more fundamental challenge is controlling how grammatical functions are organized within a complete proposition. This supports the broader finding of Rahmani (2023),³² who reported large numbers of syntactic problems involving sentence patterns in undergraduate writing, and Rahim and Pilus (2026),³³ who found run-on sentences and sentence-formation problems alongside phrase-level errors.

Interpretation and Implications for Academic Writing

Taken together, the findings form a coherent three-level profile rather than a random collection of errors. At the phrase level, the primary vulnerability concerns syntactic economy and selection. At the clause level, the main vulnerability is dependency control. At the sentence level, the central issue concerns sentence architecture.

Thus, the profile can be summarized into three interconnected levels of syntactic control: phrase level, clause level, and sentence level. At the phrase level, the main issue concerns syntactic economy and selection; at the clause level, it relates to dependency control; and at the sentence level, it involves sentence architecture.

This synthesis extends the analysis beyond conventional error inventories by shifting the focus from merely identifying what types of errors occur to understanding the underlying areas of syntactic control that are weakened. In this sense, redundancy and inappropriate prepositions reflect problems in economy and selection, unstable subordination and excessive conjunctions indicate weaknesses in dependency control, and subject-related constructions together with nonparallel structures point to difficulties in sentence architecture.

The interpretation is broadly consistent with recent studies showing that university students' writing problems span local grammatical forms and larger syntactic structures. Pasaribu et al. (2024)³⁴ found syntactic errors to be the largest category in the academic writing of Indonesian EFL students, accounting for 61.69% of the errors identified in their corpus. Rahmani (2023)³⁵ similarly reported extensive syntactic problems in university writing, while Naini and Ulya (2025)³⁶ demonstrated that weaknesses in sentence

³² Rahmani, "An Error Analysis of EFL Undergraduate Students' Writing Composition in Universitas Tanjungpura."

³³ Rahim and Pilus, "Language and Mechanical Errors in English Writing by Malaysian Tertiary Students."

³⁴ Pasaribu et al., "Challenges For Indonesian Efl Students In English Academic Writing."

³⁵ Rahmani, "An Error Analysis of EFL Undergraduate Students' Writing Composition in Universitas Tanjungpura."

³⁶ Naini and Ulya, "Reasoning Patterns and Sentence Construction Errors in Students' Scholarly Articles."

construction can affect coherence, clarity, and the quality of scholarly arguments. Nevertheless, caution is necessary when explaining the causes of the errors. Several EFL studies attribute errors to first-language transfer, incomplete rule acquisition, or limited experience with academic-writing conventions. Pradnyaswari et al. (2022),³⁷ for example, associate syntactic errors in thesis abstracts with first-language interference, while Pasaribu et al. (2024)³⁸ identify interlingual influence and limited academic-writing experience as important factors. Dewanto (2025)³⁹ similarly interprets different syntactic errors in terms of interlingual and intralingual processes. Those explanations cannot automatically be transferred to the present study because the students examined here are writing in Indonesian rather than producing Indonesian as a foreign language. Furthermore, the study relies on document analysis and does not include interviews, think-aloud protocols, or observation of the writing process. Consequently, factors such as spoken-language habits, insufficient grammatical awareness, or limited self-editing should be treated as plausible interpretations rather than empirically demonstrated causes.

This distinction also suggests a direction for future research. Ulhaq et al. (2022),⁴⁰ for example, supplemented document analysis with interviews when examining the difficulties underlying students' morphosyntactic errors. A similar design could be used in future studies of Indonesian thesis writing to investigate whether the three syntactic vulnerabilities identified here are related to writing habits, supervisory feedback, limited metalinguistic awareness, or other aspects of the thesis-writing process.

The findings also have direct pedagogical implications. Academic-writing instruction should move beyond general advice to "use correct Indonesian." At the phrase level, students need exercises that develop sensitivity to redundancy and prepositional selection. At the clause level, instruction should emphasize relations between main and subordinate clauses and the logical functions of conjunctions. At the sentence level, students need practice identifying the grammatical nucleus of a sentence, distinguishing core functions from introductory modifiers, and maintaining structural parallelism.

Such instruction should preferably be integrated into revision activities using students' own academic texts. Turago (2026)⁴¹ found that revision focused too narrowly on mechanical correction may neglect coherence and meaning, whereas structured analytical revision addressing content, organization, and language can improve overall writing quality. This suggests that syntax should not be taught merely as proofreading at the final stage of thesis writing but as part of the broader process of constructing clear academic arguments.

Self-editing and digital tools can also contribute to this process. Al-Inbari and Al-

³⁷ Pradnyaswari et al., "Syntactic Errors Made by English Department Students in Writing Undergraduate Thesis Abstract."

³⁸ Pasaribu et al., "Challenges For Indonesian Efl Students In English Academic Writing."

³⁹ Novendra Dewanto, "Syntactic Errors in Indonesian EFL Students' Narrative Essay Writing," *IDEAS: Journal on English Language Teaching and Learning, Linguistics and Literature* 13, no. 2 (2025): 7550–62, <https://doi.org/10.24256/ideas.v13i2.7913>.

⁴⁰ Ulhaq et al., "A Morpho-Syntactic Error Analysis Of University Students' Argumentative Writing."

⁴¹ Addise Abame Turago, "Impact of Analytical Text Revision Experiences on Students' Writing Process and Success," *Asian-Pacific Journal of Second and Foreign Language Education* 11, no. 1 (2026): 60, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40862-026-00428-2>.

Wasy (2023)⁴² found that automated writing evaluation positively supported peer- and self-editing practices. Kim and Chon (2025)⁴³ reported that machine-translation- and ChatGPT-assisted proofreading reduced many grammatical errors, although prepositional problems remained resistant to correction. More recently, Chon and Shin (2026)⁴⁴ found that AI-assisted revision substantially corrected language errors but that sentence-structure and word-choice problems were among those that remained relatively difficult because they required contextual judgment.

This is particularly relevant to the present data. Constructions such as *bergantung daripada*, clause dependency problems, or *data yang peneliti kumpulkan* cannot always be handled accurately by mechanical replacement. An automated tool may produce a smoother sentence without determining whether the original expression is genuinely ungrammatical, merely inefficient, or simply one of several acceptable alternatives. Digital and AI-based tools should therefore function as revision aids rather than final grammatical authorities.

Siregar et al. (2026)⁴⁵ similarly indicate that AI-assisted feedback can reduce morphosyntactic errors and strengthen grammatical awareness, while Shah et al. (2026)⁴⁶ emphasize the importance of explicit grammar instruction and metalinguistic awareness in developing control over syntactic complexity. The implication for thesis supervision is that students should not merely receive corrected sentences. Whenever possible, feedback should identify what level of syntax is problematic and why, enabling students to develop transferable revision competence.

The contribution of the present study therefore lies not in claiming that phrase-, clause-, and sentence-level errors have never been identified before, but in organizing the observed problems in Indonesian undergraduate thesis drafts into a diagnostic three-level syntactic profile. The profile links observable forms of error to three broader domains of syntactic control: economy and selection, dependency control, and sentence architecture. It can potentially serve as a practical framework for academic-writing instruction and thesis revision.

At the same time, the profile should be interpreted within the limits of the corpus. The study analyzes only three thesis drafts from one academic program, and the 30 reported cases cannot be generalized statistically to all PAI students or Indonesian undergraduate writers. Future studies could test the profile using larger multidisciplinary corpora, compare early and final thesis drafts, examine supervisor feedback, or combine document analysis with interviews and revision histories. Such investigations would clarify whether the three areas identified here consistently represent major vulnerabilities in Indonesian academic writing and whether targeted intervention based on this profile

⁴² Al-Inbari and Al-Wasy, “The Impact of Automated Writing Evaluation (AWE) on EFL Learners’ Peer and Self-Editing.”

⁴³ Kim and Chon, “The Impact of Self-Revision, Machine Translation, and ChatGPT on L2 Writing.”

⁴⁴ Yuah V. Chon and Dongkwang Shin, “AI Chatbot as a Revision Aid in Second Language Writing: From Error Correction to Lexical Sophistication,” *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning* 42, no. 3 (2026): e70259, <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcal.70259>.

⁴⁵ Fitri Rayani Siregar et al., “Reducing Morphosyntactic Errors of Students’ English Writing through AI-powered Language Learning Tools,” *English Learning Innovation* 7, no. 1 (2026): 48–65, <https://doi.org/10.22219/englie.v7i1.43264>.

⁴⁶ Shah et al., “Sentence Complexity in Arab EFL Learners’ Academic Writing.”

improves students' syntactic competence.

CONCLUSION

This study identified 30 reported syntactic problems across three undergraduate thesis drafts written by students of the Islamic Religious Education Program. Rather than treating these problems as isolated grammatical errors, the analysis revealed a three-level syntactic profile. At the phrase level, the main difficulties involved syntactic economy and selection, particularly redundancy, overlapping expressions, and inappropriate prepositional use. At the clause level, the principal vulnerability concerned dependency control, including incomplete subordinate relations, inefficient relative constructions, and excessive conjunctive marking. At the sentence level, the dominant issue involved sentence architecture, particularly the distinction between introductory modifiers and core syntactic functions, structural parallelism, and the organization of coordination and subordination.

These findings indicate that syntactic problems in undergraduate academic writing are not limited to the formal correctness of individual sentences. They also involve students' ability to organize linguistic units efficiently and to construct clear relationships among phrases, clauses, and complete propositions. The study therefore proposes a diagnostic three-level syntactic profile consisting of syntactic economy and selection, dependency control, and sentence architecture. This profile may provide a more focused basis for academic-writing instruction and thesis supervision because corrective feedback can be directed toward the specific level and nature of the syntactic problem rather than merely supplying a corrected sentence. Revision activities, self-editing, and digital or AI-assisted tools may support this process, but automated suggestions should remain subject to linguistic judgment because not every alternative construction constitutes a grammatical error.

The findings should nevertheless be interpreted within the scope of the study. The corpus consisted of only three thesis drafts from one academic program, and the documentary design did not provide direct evidence regarding the causes of the identified errors. Consequently, factors such as spoken-language influence, limited grammatical awareness, or insufficient self-editing cannot be established as causal explanations. Future research should examine larger and more diverse academic corpora, compare different stages of thesis drafting, and combine textual analysis with interviews, revision histories, or supervisory feedback. Such studies could further test the three-level profile and determine how targeted syntactic instruction contributes to the development of more precise, coherent, and effective Indonesian academic writing.

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