

Exploring Inflectional Morphemes in Sentences Written by EFL Students

Artika¹⁾, Siska Bochari²⁾, Desrin Lebagi³⁾, Maf'ulah⁴⁾

Corresponding author: artikaharis04@gmail.com¹

Tadulako University, Sulawesi Tengah, Indonesia¹²³⁴

DOI: [10.35974/acuity.v10i2.3857](https://doi.org/10.35974/acuity.v10i2.3857)

Abstract

The objective of this research was to find out the types of inflectional morphemes that the students frequently misused and to find out the difficulty factors faced by students in using the type of inflectional morphemes. The population of this research consisted of 5th-semester students from the English Education Study Program at Tadulako University. The sample was selected using a simple random sampling technique, and there were 136 students in the 5th-semester class. The method of this research depends on the quantitative descriptive data using statistical analysis. Tests and questionnaires were used to collect the data. The researchers found that the ablaut adjective as an irregular form is the type of inflectional morphemes frequently misused by the students; the frequency of many incorrect forms is 160, and the difficulty factors that are affecting the students' use of inflectional morphemes are psychological as internal factors and peer and advisor support as the external factors.

Keywords: Morphology, Inflection forms, Regular form, Irregular form

INTRODUCTION

Morphology is the branch of linguistics that deals with word structure. The object of morphology is terms that correlate with the formation of words. Word formation is the creation of a new word; sometimes, it changes the word's meaning and class. According to Smith, Lehman, and Srijono (2003), morphology is the study exploring morphemes, encompassing their form variations and combinations within words.

Understanding morphemes is crucial in writing as it allows writers to select and combine words effectively to convey desired meanings. According to Qasem, Asaad, and Shabdin (2019), awareness of morphemes can automatically control the writing produced by students. For instance, knowledge of prefixes, suffixes, and roots enables writers to expand their vocabulary and express ideas more precisely. Moreover, a deep understanding of morphemes can help construct sentences more effectively, which ultimately enhances the effectiveness of writing. Therefore, understanding the morphology can help writers avoid confusion in meaning or improper word form structure in their writing.

In terms of word form, one of the morphological processes in word formation is inflection, which is the process of modifying word forms to convey grammatical function/category without changing the word category or class. Inflectional processes are fundamental in morphological analysis as they illustrate how inflectional morphemes, which are added to a base word, alter its form to indicate grammatical categories such as tense, number, case, and aspect (Seprudin, 2022). These processes can be categorized into regular and irregular inflections. For nouns, the regular inflectional process is typically characterized by the addition of the suffix "-s" or "-es" to form plurals, such as "cat" becoming "cats" or "box" becoming "boxes." Similarly, for adjectives, the regular inflectional process involves adding the suffixes "-er" to form the comparative, as in "tall" to "taller." These patterns are systematic and predictable, exemplifying regular inflection. Conversely, irregular inflections in nouns and adjectives often involve less predictable transformations. Irregular inflection includes processes such as ablaut, zero marking, and

suppletion. Comparative (Nurhayati, 2019). These irregular processes reflect deviations from the regular inflectional patterns and highlight the complexity of morphological changes.

Inflectional morphemes have been taught to students about the material of phonology and morphology. According to Santiwi Simanjuntak, Nasution, and Yusnita (2023), researchers suggest that increasing vocabulary and writing students' regular and irregular through crossword puzzles can enhance comprehension of students' understanding of inflectional processes, and this method is effective. However, in reality, according to the researcher's experience, the researcher found that many EFL students at Tadulako University had difficulty using inflectional, especially regular and irregular forms in sentences. Such as, some of them are accustomed to using the suffix "-s" to indicate plural forms of nouns. For example, in the sentence "The child played in the park," students use "child" instead of the correct plural form "children" for "child."

Based on the explanation above, the research aims to explore the use of inflectional morphemes in sentences produced by EFL students. On the other hand, there have been previous studies analyzing similar topics but with different focuses. Firstly, Fitria (2020) examined and analyzed derivational and inflectional morphemes in selected news from Tempo.co. Secondly, Manihuruk (2022) focused on error analysis by using inflectional morphemes in English students' recount texts. Lastly, Ifadloh, Najerin, Nufus, and Ulum (2022) researched inflectional morphemes in Charles Dickens' short story. In this research, by analyzing students' sentences, the researchers try to find whether inflectional morphemes are difficult for EFL students to use in sentences. It also identifies which types of inflectional processes pose the greatest difficulty for students to use in sentences. Gaining a comprehensive understanding of these elements can offer valuable perspectives on the grammatical obstacles encountered by students in learning English as a foreign language. This knowledge can then be used to devise practical teaching approaches aimed at enhancing their ability to construct sentences in English. Armed with this information, educators can develop targeted instructional methods to assist students in overcoming these challenges and enhancing their syntactic competence, ultimately leading to improved writing skills.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research used a quantitative descriptive method because it was the most suitable method for this research and uses clear measurements. This method was usually used to answer questions about who, what, when, where, and how without manipulating the variables. This was a non-experimental research. The process of conducting descriptive research involves collecting data to address current concerns and understand the current state of research on the subject matter, as examined by Gay in Gatot, Anwar, and Setyowati (2001). The process of collecting data to define these research findings, as taken into account by statistics, was known as quantitative descriptive. In conclusion, the researchers collected sentences about inflectional morphemes used by the students, analyzed the results, and wrote the results. Population is the general field consisting of a subject or object with certain qualities and characteristics. In addition, the population is the area that has been identified based on the researchers' problem.

Population and Sample

The target population in this research was the 5th-semester students of the English Education Study Program of Tadulako University. The total number of the 5th-semester students of the English Education Study Program was 207 students. According to Sugiyono in Sukmawati, Salmia, and Sudarmin (2023), a sample represents a small amount of the quantity and qualities that make up a population. The sample of this research was the 5th-semester students of the English Education Study Program of Tadulako University, consisting of 136 students.

Analyzing the Test

Data analysis was carried out in several steps. First of all, the researcher read the gathered students' test results. Second, identify the types of inflectional processes they used. Third, determine the frequently incorrect type of inflectional processes using the Excel program. In addition, it helps the researchers respond to the first research question.

Analyzing the Questionnaire

In the first step, the answers to the questionnaire were put in using the SPSS program. In the second step, the researchers summarized the results of the students' answers based on the theory of difficulty factors to see which variable becomes the dominant one. After the questionnaire is filled out, the results are then analyzed using the following frequency percentage formula:

$$P = \frac{F}{n} \times 100$$

P = percentage

F = frequency

N = sample

Frequency percentages are used to show how many students fall into the categories of strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. Furthermore, it assisted in answering the second research question.

Analyzing the Validity

The researchers checked the validity of the questionnaires using SPSS program. A two-tailed test of significance and Pearson coefficients was used to analyze the data using bivariate correlations. The researches can determine that the statements in the variable are legitimate if the significance (2-Tailed) is less than 0.05 (Widi, 2011).

Analyzing the Reliability

After checking the validity of the questionnaire, the researchers assesses the questionnaire's reliability. According to Kılıç in Tavakol and Dennick (2011), a questionnaire is generally regarded as reliable if its Cronbach alpha coefficient is above 0.60, with a value of 0.70 or higher indicating good reliability.

RESULTS

This section presents the data collected and explains the result of the data analysis. The data will be presented and described here based on tests and questionnaires.

The Analysis of the Data Collected from the Test

In this study, the researchers regulate the test in order to answer research question number one, which is to know what type of inflectional morphemes are frequently misused by the students. The

researchers took the data from the test. The researcher limits the suffixes used by the students, which can be seen in the table below:

Noun	Adjective
Regular Plural Marker (-s)	Regular Comparative Marker (-er)
Irregular Ablaut	Irregular Ablaut
Irregular Zero Marking	Irregular Suppletion

Table 4.1 shows the functions of inflectional forms that become the scope of this study. As we can see in the table above, there are two columns: the first column is in nouns with the functions and the names suffixes, while the second column is in adjectives.

Table 4.2: Frequency and Percentage of the Incorrect Answers for Inflectional Markings on Nouns

Types of inflectional	Frequency	Percentage
Reg Noun Suffix -s	48	14.4%
Noun Ablaut	138	41.3%
Noun Zero	148	44.3%

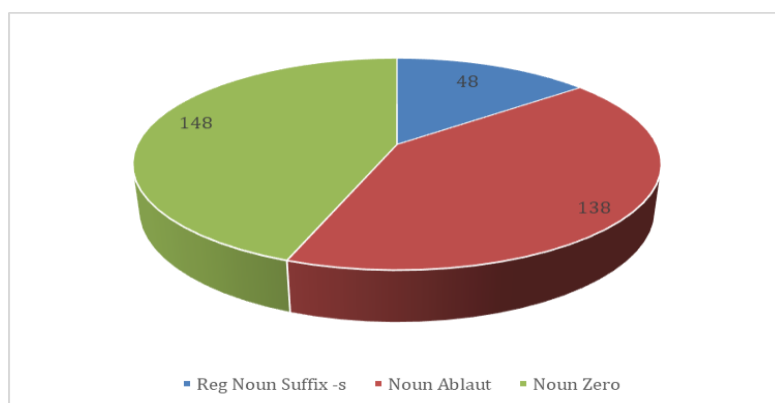


Figure 4.1: Diagram Frequency of the Incorrect Answers for Inflectional Markings on Nouns

Table 4.2 and Figure 4.1 provide information about the frequency of inflectional on nouns in the sentences produced by the students. It can be seen that there are regular noun suffix -s, noun ablaut, and noun zero in their sentences. The highest frequency in their sentences using “Noun Zero” shows that inflection is more misused in the sentences. Looking at the use of regular inflection on the noun suffix “-s” shows that students understand better compared to inflectional forms such as “noun ablaut” or “noun zero.”

This indicates that the use of the suffix “-s” to indicate the plural form is easier for students to understand and apply, as this form is simpler and appears more often in daily language use. It can be effective because the suffix -s is a simpler and more frequently occurring structure Nattinger (2014).

Table 4.3: Frequency and Percentage of the Incorrect Answers for Inflectional Markings on Adjective

Types of inflectional	Frequency	Percentage
Reg Adj Suffix -er	120	28%
Adjective Ablaut	160	38%
Adjective Suppletion	145	34%

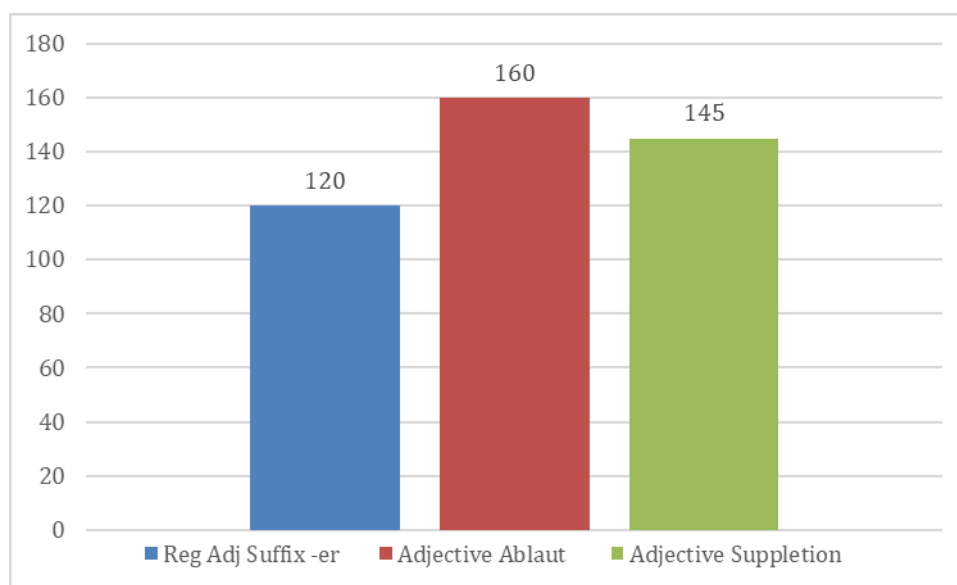


Figure 4.2: Diagram Frequency of the Incorrect Answers for Inflectional Markings on Adjectives

It can be seen that there are several types of inflectional morphemes on adjectives in students' sentences, as shown in Table 4.3 and Figure 4.2. The table also shows the frequency of inflectional morphemes used in students' writings. The irregular adjective ablaut is used with a total frequency of 160, the regular adjective suffix -er has a total frequency of 120, and the adjective suppletion has a total frequency of 145. It can be seen that the frequency of using the irregular adjective ablaut is higher than the others; this shows that students make many mistakes when using the irregular adjective ablaut in their sentences. This suggests that students have more difficulty with the irregular form of the adjective ablaut compared to the regular adjective suffix -er, reflecting the complexity and irregularity of the irregular form compared to the more predictable inflection of the regular adjective.

Table 4.4: Recapitulation Frequency and Percentage of the Incorrect Answers for Inflectional Markings on Noun and Adjective

Types of Inflectional	Frequency	Percentage
Reg Noun Suffix -s	48	6%
Reg Adj Suffix -er	120	16%
Noun Ablaut	138	18%
Noun Zero	148	19%
Adjective Ablaut	160	21%
Adjective Suppletion	145	19%

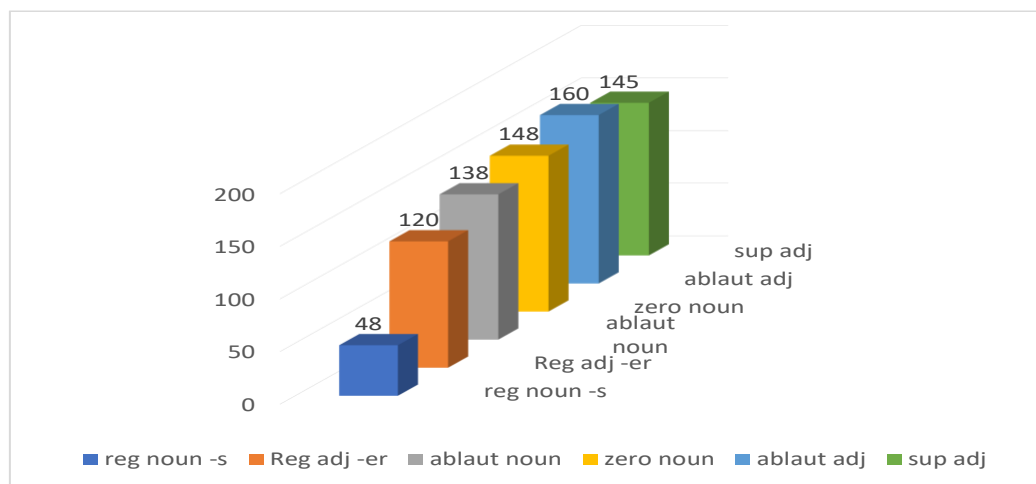


Figure 4.3: Type of Inflectional Morphemes is Frequently Used Incorrectly

Table 4.4 and Figure 4.3 display the types of inflectional morphemes that are frequently misused by the students. It can be seen that the students still do not understand comparison types of inflection, especially irregular ablaut adjectives. Most of the students understand the regular suffix -s as a plural marker. As a result, the researchers conclude that the most incorrect inflectional morphemes used by students are ablaut adjectives. This result is also supported by Rimikis, Nephawe, and Lambani (2023); differences between vowels and sounds in ablaut adjectives, as well as word changes, are difficult for English learners to use correctly during morphological processing in sentences. This suggests that students tend to understand and apply inflectional forms that are consistent and regular, such as the suffix “-s” for plural markers, more easily than more complex and irregular inflectional forms, such as the ablaut adjective. The frequently occurring incorrect use of ablaut adjectives shows that EFL students face challenges in understanding vowel changes or word forms that do not follow common patterns. Therefore, EFL students need to carefully identify the type of inflectional, ensuring the ablaut adjective is correct in sentences. The data in the Table 4.4 and Figure 4.3 are to answer research question number one.

The Analysis of the Data Collected from the Questionnaire

In order find out EFL students’ difficulty factors in using inflectional morphemes in writing sentences, the researchers take the data from valid questionnaire. The data for each variable is shown in table below:

Table 4.5: The Frequency of Students Based on the Variable 1

Psychological Factors	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	72	5.3%
Disagree	452	33.2%
Agree	707	52.0%
Strongly Agree	129	9.5%

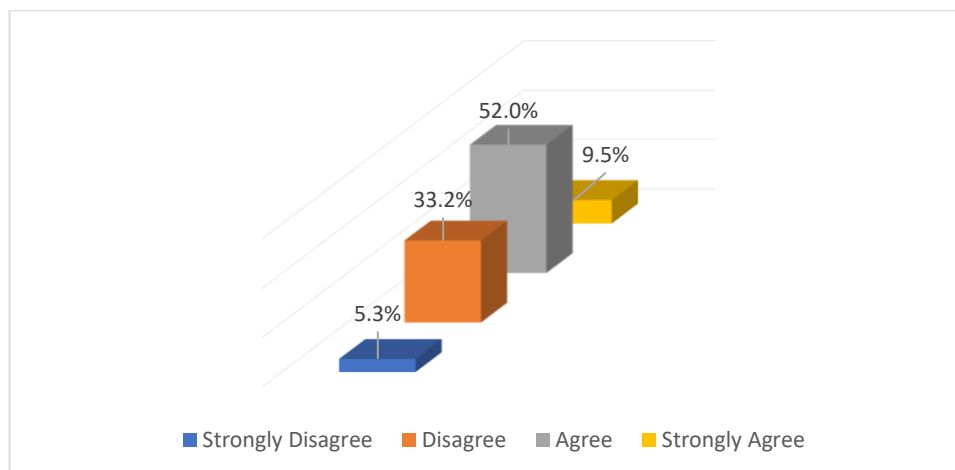


Figure 4.4: The Percentage of Students' Answers Based on the Variable 1

Table 4.7 and Figure 4.4 illustrate that more students agree than disagree with the statements on the Psychological Factors variable. Overall, 52,0% of students agreed, with an additional 5,3% strongly disagreeing. On the other hand, 33,2% of students disagreed with the statement, while only 9,5% strongly agreed. These results show this factor is a significant difficulty factor that influences the use of inflectional morphemes in their writing.

Table 4.6: The Frequency of Students Based on the Variable 2

Linguistics Factors	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	383	40%
Disagree	272	29%
Agree	231	24%
Strongly Agree	66	7%

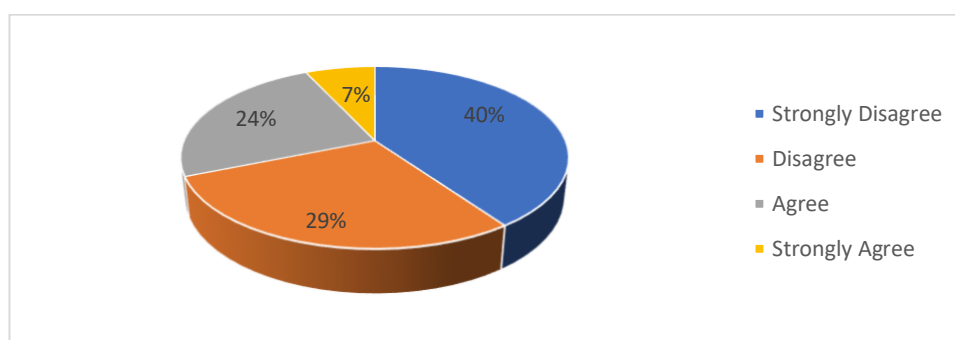


Figure 4.5: The Percentage of Students' Answers Based on the Variable 2

Variable 2 addressed Linguistic Factors that would affect the use of inflectional morphemes in students' writing. Table 4.8 and Figure 4.5 show that, based on students' responses, this factor is not a significant difficulty that affects the use of inflectional morphemes in sentences. This is evident as 29% of students disagreed and 40% strongly disagreed with the statement, compared to 24% who agreed and 7% who strongly agreed.

Table 4.7: The Frequency of Students Based on the Variable 3

Peer Support	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	82	6%

Disagree	432	32%
Agree	716	53%
Strongly Agree	129	9%

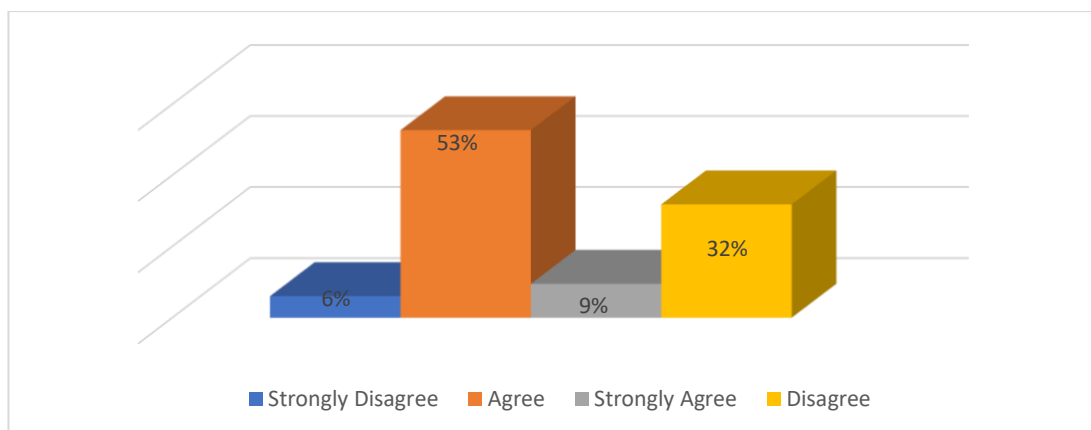


Figure 4.6: The Percentage of Students' Answers Based on the Variable 3

An analysis of the data in Table 4.9 and Figure 4.6 clearly shows students' responses regarding whether peer support can influence the use of inflectional morphemes in their sentences. The results show that more than half of the students with a total of agree responses indicated that Peer Support was a contributing factor to their difficulties. Specifically, 53% of students agreed 9% strongly agreed, while 32% disagreed, and 6% strongly disagreed.

Table 4.8: The Frequency of Students Based on the Variable 4

Advisor Support	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	74	5.4%
Disagree	257	18.9%
Agree	726	53.4%
Strongly Agree	303	22.3%

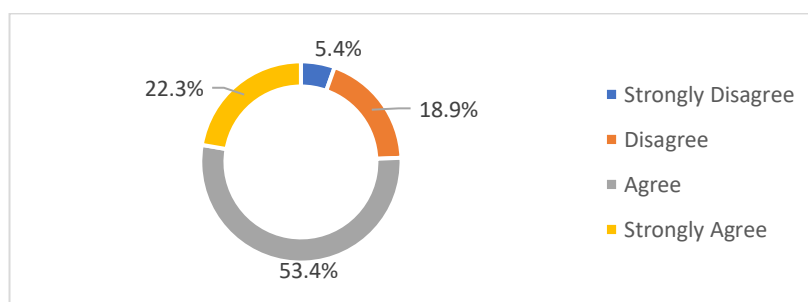


Figure 4.7: The Percentage of Students' Answers Based on the Variable 4

According to students' responses about the internal difficulty factor, only psychological factors are present, and the external ones are peer support and advisor Support. This suggests that advisor support is considered a significant difficulty factor that influences the use of inflectional morphemes in students' writing.

The researchers thoroughly examined the students' answers for every study variable in light of these findings. By looking at the students' responses in the "agree" and "disagree" categories

about all of the study's stated negative statements on all variables, the researchers identified three significant difficulty factors. These factors particularly impacted students' use of inflectional morphemes in their writing.

DISCUSSION

In this section, the researchers present the findings related to the research questions. Inflectional morphemes are frequently used incorrectly by EFL students. What are the difficulty factors faced by EFL students when using inflectional morphemes when writing their sentences?

For the first research question, the researchers focused on the type of inflectional morphemes frequently misused by EFL students' writing. Based on the findings, EFL students mostly misuse inflectional irregular ablaut adjectives. Furthermore, the second research question concerns the difficulty factors faced by students in using these morphemes.

The findings of this study can be compared with the study from Ifadloh et al. (2022), which investigated inflectional morphemes in Charles Dickens' short stories and revealed that inflectional morphemes of comparative adjective -er were lacking. Their findings are in contrast with this current study, where inflectional morphemes, comparative adjective -er is moderately used, and irregular ablaut adjective is the most incorrectly used. This difference in results can be attributed to the different theoretical frameworks used and the specific focus of the analysis. In addition, Manihuruk (2022) examined various errors when using inflectional morphemes for students. At the same time, Manihuruk's findings regarding errors are in line with this study. Students had a lot of misform errors in their writing, especially in the use of the suffix -s. Their findings contradict the current study, where the use of the suffix -s in the sentence was mostly not wrong.

For the second research question, the findings of this study show that the primary challenges influencing EFL students' use of inflectional morphemes in their writing are psychological factors, peer support, and advisor support. Although the scope and conclusions of this study are different from those of Febriani's (2022) investigation of the writing challenges of EFL students, they are somewhat similar. Applying an open-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. Febriani's study found that writing English essays presents both internal (peer and mentor support) and external (psychological and linguistic) problems. In contrast, this study, which used tests and questionnaires, explicitly focused on the inflection of regular and irregular forms (word form changes). Revealed psychological issues, peer support, and advisor support as the main challenges. Although both studies applied similar theoretical frameworks regarding writing difficulties, their different methodological approaches and scope of investigation resulted in different findings. The current study's more targeted focus on word form changes explains why psychological factors, peer support, and advisor support emerged as the main challenges, while Febriani's broader examination of essay writing revealed a more comprehensive range of difficulties. Furthermore, the finding of advisor support as the effecting variable is related to the study from Hyland (2000); this study examines how the lecturer's approach to providing feedback affects the development of students' writing skills. Therefore, the role of lecturers in creating a collaborative and supportive environment is key to improving the effectiveness of learning to write.

Lastly, during the research process, the researchers faced several challenges that required specific strategies to overcome. The first challenge was the difficulty in contacting students to complete the questionnaire. Despite repeated reminders, some students remained reluctant to participate. To overcome this, the researchers took a personal approach by approaching them directly, providing a more in-depth explanation of the importance of their contribution, and building a more intimate relationship. This effort succeeded in increasing student participation in filling out the questionnaire. The second challenge was the difficulty in arranging the time to

distribute the tests in class, especially since some classes were online and students were not present on campus. To solve this problem, the researcher communicated directly with the lecturers of the course, either through messages or face-to-face meetings, to ask for permission to use some of their class time. The support of the lecturers concerned made it easier for the researcher to distribute the tests to students at the agreed time. With a flexible approach and good communication, the researcher was able to overcome this challenge effectively.

CONCLUSION

After conducting the research and analyzing the data, the researchers found that the students frequently misuse the ablaut adjective as an irregular form. The frequency of many incorrect forms is 160. This means that students do not understand more about using an irregular form, specifically for ablaut adjectives. Furthermore, the researchers found that the correct form used by students is the suffix -s as a plural marker, and the frequency is 48. This means that students understand more about using a regular form, especially suffix -s, as plural in their writing. The data show that students still face difficulties in writing sentences correctly and according to the context.

Finally, based on the findings, the researchers conclude that psychological factors, as internal factors and advisor and peer support, as external factors, are the difficult factors faced by students when using inflectional morphemes. These two factors have the potential to affect the use of inflectional morphemes in writing sentences by EFL students.

REFERENCES

- Febriani, T. N. (2022). "Writing is challenging": factors contributing to undergraduate students' difficulties in writing English essays. *Erudita: Journal of English Language Teaching*, 2(1), 83–93. <https://doi.org/10.28918/erudita.v2i1.5441>
- Fitria, T. N. (2020). An Analysis of Derivational and Inflectional Morpheme in Selected News From Tempo.Co. *Rainbow: Journal of Literature, Linguistics and Cultural Studies*, 9(2), 146–155. <https://doi.org/10.15294/rainbow.v9i2.40348>
- Gatot, H., Anwar, A., & Setyowati, E. (2001). Exploring the Descriptive Research Methodology. *Journal of Educational Research and Practice*, 12(4), 235–247.
- Hyland, F. (2000). ESL Writers and Feedback: Giving More Autonomy to Students. *Language Teaching Research. Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 4(1), 33–54. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/136216880000400103>
- Ifadloh, N., Najerin, M. R., Nufus, Z., & Ulum, M. (2022). An Analysis of Inflectional Morphemes in a Short Story "The Child's Story" by Charles Dickens. *SALEE: Study of Applied Linguistics and English Education*, 3(2), 110–123. <https://doi.org/10.35961/salee.v3i2.330>
- Manihuruk, L. M. E. (2022). Error Analysis in Using Inflectional Morphemes Students' Recount Text of English Students. *IJECA (International Journal of Education and Curriculum Application)*, 5(1), 53. <https://doi.org/10.31764/ijeca.v5i1.7783>
- Nattinger, J. (2014). Some current trends in vocabulary teaching. In *Vocabulary and Language Teaching*.
- Nurhayati, N. (2019). Ablaut and Vowel Gradation: The Effect of Stress Shifts on Vowel Changes. *Journal of Linguistics and Language Teaching*, 15(2), 87–101.
- Qasem, H., Asaad, M., & Shabdin, A. A. (2019). Importance of Morphological Awareness to Academic Writing Among Second Language Postgraduate Students. *Juornal English*, 4(3), 156–167.

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.1307432>

- Rimikis, Nephawe, F. T., & Lambani, M. N. (2023). Exploring perspectives on the approach for teaching ablaut principles to English L2 learners: a case study in South African secondary schools. *Journal on English as a Foreign Language*, 13(2), 657–680. <https://doi.org/10.23971/jefl.v13i2.6623>
- Santiwi, W., Simanjuntak, B., Nasution, Y., & Muslim. (2023). Error Analysis Students' Ability in Using Regular and Irregular Verb at the Second Grade of SMP Satria Dharma Perbaungan. *Journal Continuous Education*, 4(1), 40–49.
- Seprudin. (2022). An Analysis of Inflectional Affixes in the Discourse on the Method Text By Rene Descartes. *Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan Dan Humaniora*, 8(1), 55–64.
- Smith, R., Lehman, C. S. (2003). Comparative Definitions of Morphology. *Journal of Linguistic Theory*, 8(3), 123–139.
- Sukmawati, Salmia, S. (2023). Population, Sample (Quantitative), and Selection of Participants/Key Informants (Qualitative). *Jurnal Pendidikan*, 7(1), 131–140.