The Frequent Errors in English Writing of Students Who Study in the English Writing for Careers Course

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Abstract
This study investigated common English language errors made by 28 participants who enrolled the English Writing for Careers course in Burapha University in 2003. Four writing assignments of all participants were analyzed. They were sentence writing according to the provided pattern, paragraph writing for introductory, resume writing, and cover letter writing. Errors were identified by the error checklist that was created by the researcher. The numbers of errors were calculated by using SPSS program. The four most frequent errors committed by the participants were vocabulary choice, parts of speech, punctuation, and spelling. The study is important to educators and material developers who influence on better educational system. For English learners, the error analysis can show the drawback in their English writing.

Keywords: error analysis, language learning, writng for careers

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Introduction

English is a world language. Every country around the world can use English language to communicate with people from other countries who speak different languages. In 2015, Thailand is a member of ASEAN Economic Community(AEC). This means that Thai students have opportunities to work in any member countries in AEC. English language is a lingua franca for AEC, so English language skill is important for Thai students, especially writing skill. For Burapha University students, English Writing for Careers course can enable them to increase their English writing ability.

Jefferson (2008) stated that written communication is important in the work place for three reasons. First of all, it enables readers to read and study at their convenience. And another reason is that it can be permanently recorded for future reference. Finally, it is a good way to transmit information to others.

Burapha University is aware of the importance of English writing skill well, so English Writing for Careers is a required course for second year students in some majors of Burapha University. The objectives of the course are to study basic to advanced grammar in writing, to enhance vocabulary skill in related career fields, and to improve students' writing skill to communicate for their job well. The materials of the courses are usually commercial books created by native speakers. Although theses textbooks are good, native speakers may not understand something about Thai students who study English as a foreign language clearly. As a result, some parts of these books are not suitable for Thai students. Commercial text without grammar usually is material of English writing for careers course. Using these commercial textbooks for English writing for careers course may not be the most effective for students in Burapha University. The way to solve this problem is creating a textbook that includes important content suitable for Thai students. To create a good textbook for the students, their frequent errors in English writing should be studied. And then the result of this study can be used to create the textbook for English Writing for Careers course. The suitable material with studied content can improve Burapha University students' writing skills.

Methodology

Subjects Of The Study

The population in this research were 112 Burapha university students who enrolled in section 1 and 2201 of the English Writing for Careers course in the summer semester in 2013. According to Teerawut Aekakul (2000), the suitable average amount of sample group of hundred population should be 25%.

The 25% of 112 students is 28 students, so these 28 students were the subjects of the research. They were chosen by random. Every four students from the name lists were pulled out as the subjects of the research. All subjects were taught by the researcher for 15 weeks. The content of teaching was from basic sentence pattern to paragraph writing in careers. They were assigned to do four tasks entire semester.

Research Instruments

To accomplish the objectives of the present study, two research instruments were employed. They were four writing tasks and the checklist for evaluating subjects' English writing tasks. The four writing tasks were writing sentences according to provided sentence patterns, writing a paragraph for introductory, writing a resume, and writing a cover letter for applying a job.

The second instrument of the research is the checklist for evaluating created by the researcher and revised by three reviewers who are English lecturers at Burapha University Language Institute. They have taught English writing for careers course more than three courses. They understand the course well and experienced about grading students' writing.

The error checklist was created by using table. It is easy to understand. All topics were grouped. There are four groups of errors to be checked. All topics are important for writing skill. They are content, organization, lexis, and grammar.

The first group is content with subtopic is address the task. It means whether writer response the tasks clearly.

The second topic is organization. The topic consists of three subtopics relating coherence, coordinating conjunction, and subordinating conjunction. Coherence means that all supporting details are organized to make information go together. Coordinating conjunction and subordinating conjunction enable organization of writing well.

Lexis is the third topic of the error checklist. There are two parts in the topic; vocabulary choice and spelling. Vocabulary choice was to check whether students chose suitable vocabulary in their writing. The vocabulary was used correctly. Spelling shows that students spell every word in their writing correctly.

The last topic of the error checklist is grammar. There are ten parts that are important points for writing skill. The grammatical errors for this topic as follows:

- article
- part of speech
- pronoun
- subject-verb agreement
- countable noun/ Uncountable noun usage
- tense
- gerund and infinitive
- fragment
- run-on
- punctuation

| Error Topic	Frequency	Average
Content		
address the task		
Organization		
coherence		
coordinating conjunction		
subordinating conjunction		
Lexis		
vocabulary choice		
spelling		
Grammar		
article		
part of speech		
pronoun		
subject-verb agreement		
countable noun/ Uncountable noun usage		
tense		
gerund and infinitive		
fragment		
run-on sentence		
punctuation		

Data Collection Procedure

The study was conducted for 15 weeks in the summer semester in 2013. Four assignments were given to the subjects. They were assigned to write sentences according to provided sentence patterns, to write a paragraph for introductory, to write a resume, and to write a cover letter for applying a job. And then all four writing assignment of 28 subjects were corrected by the error checklist that was reviewed by three experts who have experienced in teaching English writing for careers many semesters. The number of errors in each group of the error checklist was calculated by SPSS. Each error was categorized under only one error group.

Research Findings

The numbers of errors were tabulated in five tables. They are four tables for four participants' tasks and one summary table for all errors occurred in all participants' tasks. The first table showed frequent errors in writing sentences according to provided sentence patterns.

Table 1: Frequent errors in the participants' task I

| Error Topic	Frequency	Average
Content		
address the task	6	21.4
Organization		
coherence	-	-
coordinating conjunction	1	3.6
subordinating conjunction	1	3.6
Lexis		
vocabulary choice	1	3.6
spelling	6	21.4
Grammar		
article	9	32.1
part of speech	10	35.7
pronoun	1	3.6
subject-verb agreement	11	39.3
countable noun/ Uncountable noun usage	-	-
tense	-	-
gerund and infinitive	-	-
fragment	8	28.6
run-on sentence	-	-
punctuation	-	-
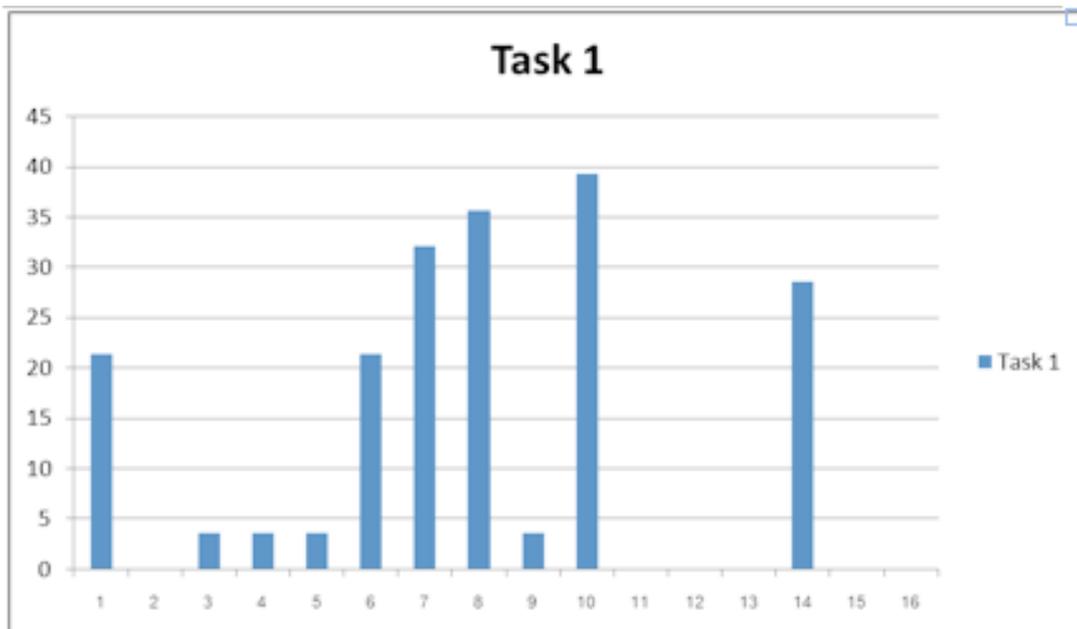
The most three frequent errors in writing sentences according provided sentence patterns were subject-verb agreement, part of speech, and article. Some participants created their sentences by using wrong verb forms. They might be nervous about the

patterns and pay less attention to agreement between subject and verb, part of speech of words they used, and article for nouns they used. Coherence, run on, and punctuation error didn't occur in this task because the task was only sentence creating not paragraph. Participants didn't make countable noun and uncountable noun usage and tense error because they used simple nouns and verbs they know how to use correctly to avoid making a mistake.

The second table showed the errors in participants' writings for writing paragraph for introductory

Table 2: Frequent errors in the participants' task II

| Error Topic	Frequency	Average
Content		
address the task	-	-
Organization		
coherence	2	7.1
coordinating conjunction	-	-
subordinating conjunction	-	-
Lexis		
vocabulary choice	14	50
spelling	14	50
Grammar		
article	6	21.4
part of speech	7	25
pronoun	-	-
subject-verb agreement	-	-
countable noun/ Uncountable noun usage	10	35.7
tense	4	14.3
gerund and infinitive	4	14.3
fragment	1	3.6
run-on sentence	2	7.1
punctuation	18	64.3

Task 2
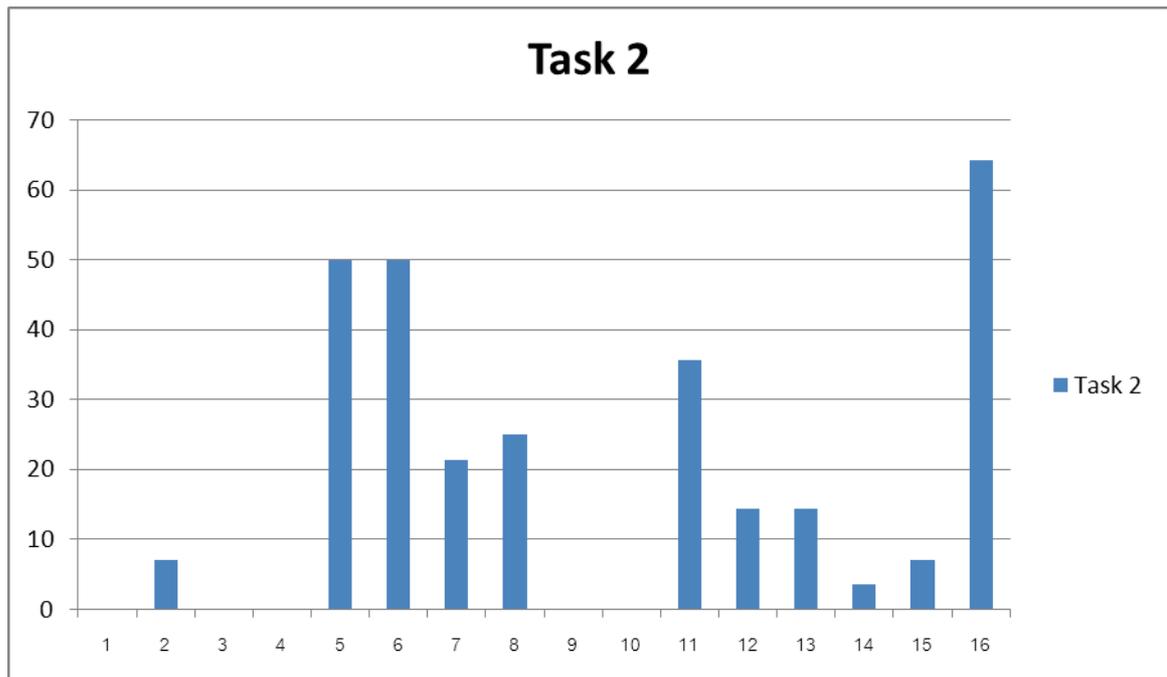
The most frequent error in task II was using punctuation. The task II was to create an introductory e-mail. All details for writing e-mail were taught before doing the task. The minor errors- using punctuation, choosing suitable vocabularies, wrong spelling, and countable noun and uncountable noun usage- occurred more frequent than other types of errors.

The third table demonstrated the errors in participants' writings for writing resume.

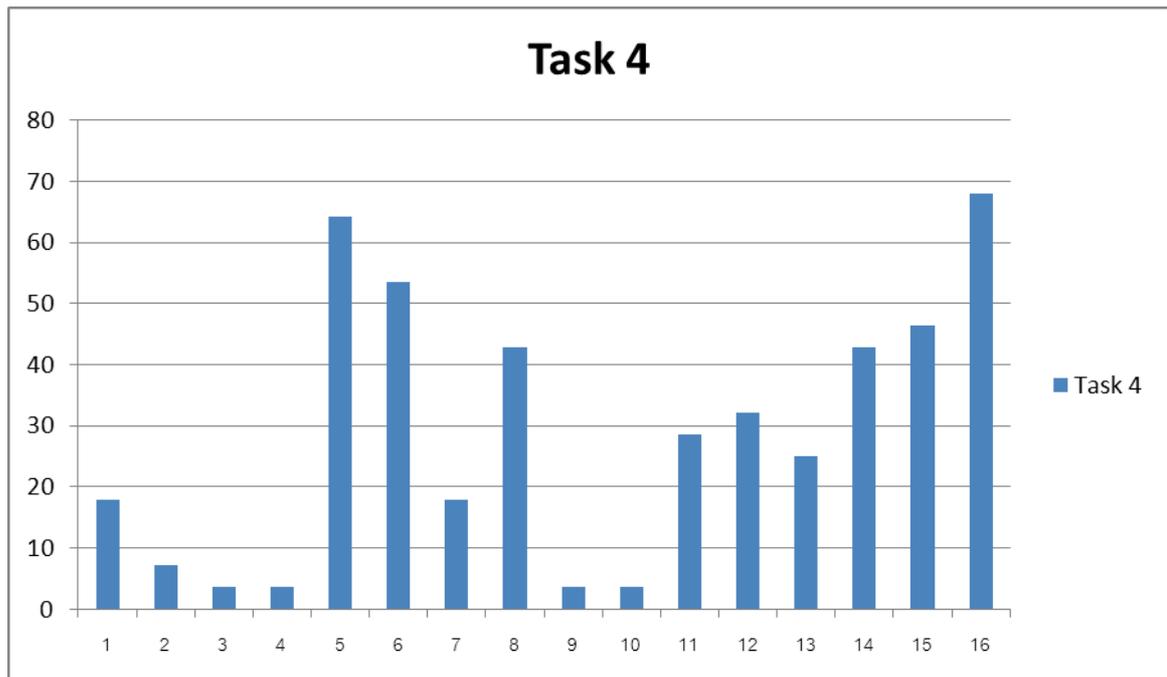Table 3: Frequent errors in the participants' task III

Error Topic	Frequency	Average
Content		
address the task	-	-
Organization		
coherence	-	-
coordinating conjunction	-	-
subordinating conjunction	-	-
Lexis		
vocabulary choice	12	42.89
spelling	2	7.1
Grammar		
article	1	3.6
part of speech	13	46.4
pronoun	-	-
subject-verb agreement	-	-
countable noun/ Uncountable noun usage	-	-
tense	3	10.7
gerund and infinitive	1	3.6
fragment	2	7.1
run-on sentence	6	21.4
punctuation	2	7.1
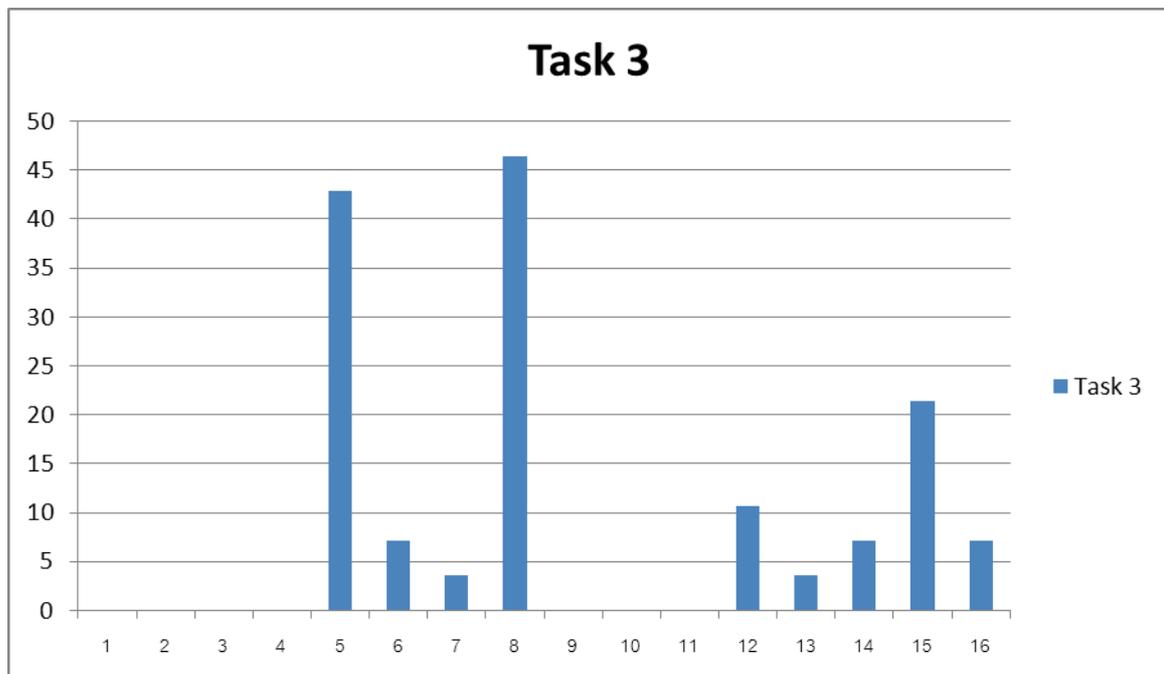
Using wrong part of speech of words participants used is the most frequent errors in the task III. Some participants couldn't use suitable words in the resume writing. The other types of errors occurred less frequently. The cause of this might be about time and environment in doing the task. The task was take-home assignment, so all participants had enough time to review their writings. The fourth table expressed the errors in participants' writings for writing a cover letter for applying a job.

Table 4: Frequent errors in the participants' task IV

Error Topic	Frequency	Average
Content		
address the task	5	17.9
Organization		
coherence	2	7.1
coordinating conjunction	1	3.6
subordinating conjunction	1	3.6
Lexis		
vocabulary choice	18	64.3
spelling	15	53.6
Grammar		
article	5	17.9
part of speech	12	42.9
pronoun	1	3.6
subject-verb agreement	1	3.6
countable noun/ Uncountable noun usage	8	28.6
tense	9	32.1
gerund and infinitive	7	25
fragment	12	42.9
run-on sentence	13	46.4
punctuation	19	67.9

Using incorrect punctuation is the most frequent error in the fourth task. In this task, participants had to write the cover letters to apply the job according to the provided advertisement. Writing a cover business letter was taught before the participants did the task, so they didn't make a lot of major mistakes. The last table showed total frequent errors of all four tasks of the participants in each kind of error topics according to the error checklist.

Table 5: Frequent errors in all participants' tasks

Error Topic	Frequency	Average
Content		
address the task	10	8.93
Organization		
coherence	5	4.46
coordinating conjunction	2	1.79
subordinating conjunction	2	1.79
Lexis		
vocabulary choice	45	40.18
spelling	38	33.93
Grammar		
article	21	18.75
part of speech	44	39.29
pronoun	2	1.79
subject-verb agreement	12	10.71
countable noun/ Uncountable noun usage	18	16.07
tense	16	14.29
gerund and infinitive	12	10.71
fragment	23	20.54
run-on sentence	23	20.54
punctuation	41	36.61
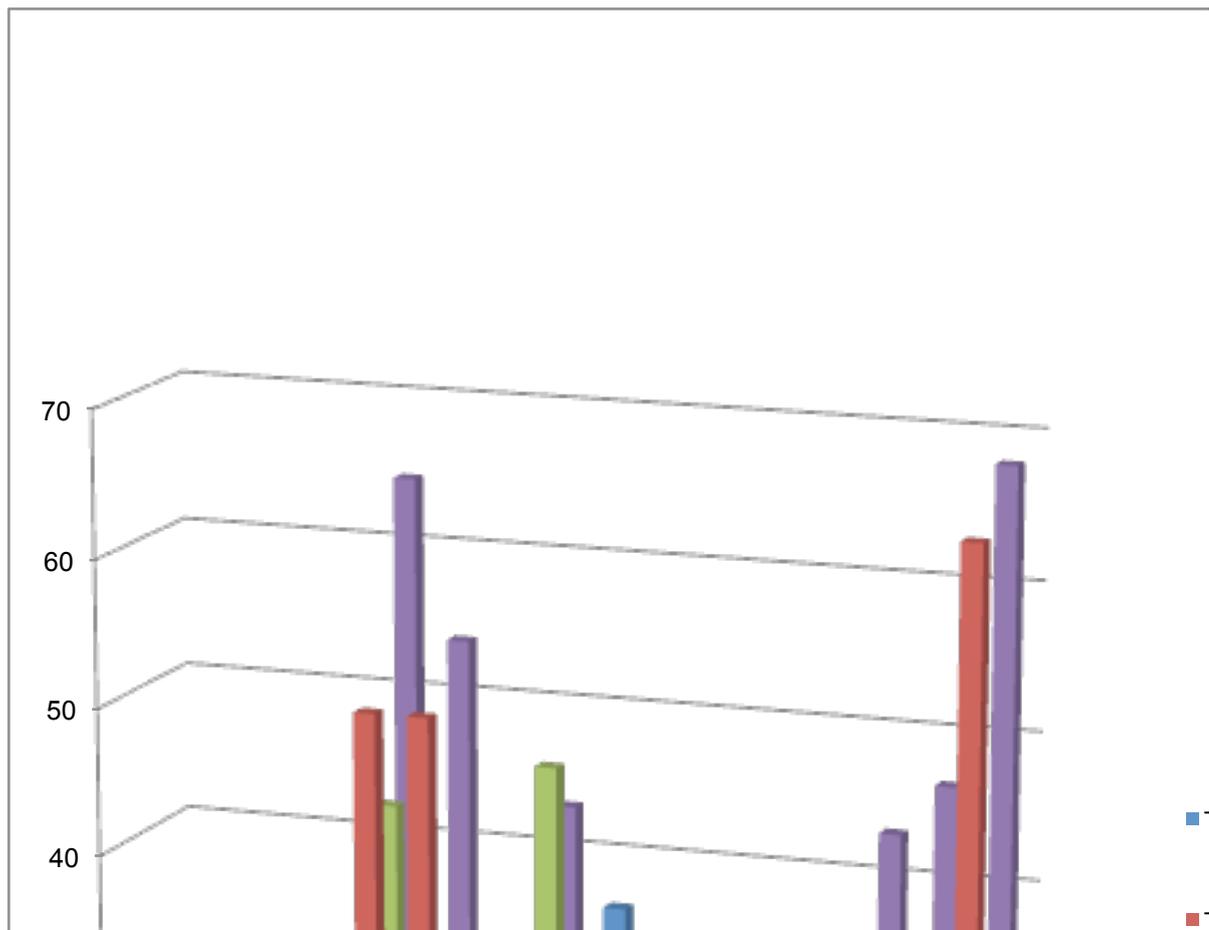
The most frequent four types of errors that happened in participants' writing were using unsuitable words, choosing incorrect part of speech of words, using wrong punctuation, and misspelling.

Discussion

As the finding show, the most frequent error of participants' tasks was vocabulary choice. Choosing the appropriate words in writing is the writing skill that should be prior improved. The other three frequent errors were using wrong part of speech of the words, using wrong punctuation, and misspelling. The surprised result was the frequent error in misspelling. Some teachers think that spelling shouldn't be taught in the writing class. Some teachers think that it is not writing skill.

Interestingly, students in writing class should be practiced about spelling more than the past. Spelling is important for written communication which is the goal of writing skill. For example, if there are some misspelling words in resume, an applicant may lose the opportunity to get a job. As job application context, misspelling shows unprofessional. To solve the problem is that teachers should use the writing class activity to practice their students in spelling. Dictation may be the interesting choice. For part of speech topic, some teachers may think that it should be taught in grammar course. The result of the research showed that it is not true. If writers understand the part of speech of each word, they can create their writing well. They will know how to choose and use the words in their writings correctly and appropriately. For using punctuation topic is very important for many writing activities. In the one of four

tasks in the research, the participants were assigned to write the cover letter to apply the job according the provided advertisement. Using wrong punctuation was the most frequent error in this task. Participants used comma incorrectly. For greeting part in the letter, they didn't use comma after the name of recipients. The way to deal with the problem is increasing variety tasks and activities in writing class to stimulate students practice using punctuation in many situations. The least frequent error were using personal pronoun, coordinating conjunction, and subordinating conjunction topics. Although they were fewer errors in the result of the research, they shouldn't be omitted in writing class. They can be taught together with using punctuation and coherence. The other two interesting topics were fragment and run-on. They may be taught that they are too difficult for students to learn in writing course. They should be taught in grammar course. The result of the research showed that they are the other two frequent error topics, so they should be taught in the writing class and appeared in the materials for writing course.

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