German Language Conjugation Errors in Written Assessments Among UiTM Degree Students

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study investigates grammatical errors made by 12 Mechanical Engineering students in learning German as a third language at Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Pulau Pinang (UiTMCPP). At UiTMCPP, foreign languages, including German, are offered as elective courses to diploma and degree students across various programmes, including engineering. To pass the course, students are required to complete three types of assessments: a listening test, a written test, and a role play. In this study, the researchers utilised students' written test responses as the primary data source. All data were collected, tabulated, and analysed through an error analysis framework, a methodological approach commonly used in second language research to

identify error patterns and their sources. The errors identified were examined and discussed in relation to standard German grammar rules. The findings revealed that half of the participants were unable to conjugate the verbs given in the questions correctly, demonstrated confusion in distinguishing between modal and auxiliary verbs and applied verb endings incorrectly across subjects. Similar to English, German verbs also require conjugation. However, the process is more complex in German. Several factors contribute to students' difficulties in conjugating verbs correctly. These include a lack of understanding of the meaning and function of personal pronouns as subjects, limited knowledge of verb types and uncertainty about the appropriate verb conjugation endings. The results of this study can assist German language educators in developing more effective teaching tools and strategies to enhance students' understanding and retention of German verb conjugation patterns.

Keywords: German as a foreign language, verb conjugation errors, error analysis, elective language course, teaching strategies

INTRODUCTION

1958 marked a new era of learning German in Malaysia with the establishment of the Goethe Institute in Penang. Since then, Malaysia and Germany have fostered strong ties through education, cultural exchange, and business. Acknowledging the importance of this relationship, the Malaysian government has encouraged Malaysians to learn German.

Acquiring a foreign language, however, is not an easy task, particularly when the target language has significant grammatical differences. According to Kendris (2007, p. 1), "Verbs have always been a major problem for students no matter what system or approach the teacher uses." For Malaysian learners, German verbs—especially modal verbs—pose challenges due to differences in word formation and usage (Schmitz, 1991; Koh, 2009). Since studies contrasting German and Malay remain limited, there is little academic discussion on solving these issues. The function of modal verbs is especially crucial, as they express possibility or obligation (Biber et al., 2004a). Incorrect use or translation may lead to misunderstanding of entire sentences (Hasmidar Hassan, 2014). Learners often rely heavily on their source language, grammar books, and classroom explanations, which can result in persistent errors (Schmitz, 1991; Koh, 2009). The scarcity of German-Malay or Malay-German dictionaries and other reading materials further compounds the problem. This study therefore seeks to provide an alternative approach to help new learners better understand the German language.

In language education, accuracy in written communication is a fundamental pillar for effective cross-cultural understanding and academic advancement. Within the context of German language acquisition, verb conjugation remains a pivotal challenge, often leading to errors in written assessments. Among degree students at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), such errors are particularly prevalent. Recognizing the significance of precise linguistic expression in fostering academic proficiency and cultural exchange, this research examines the root causes and implications of German conjugation errors in written assessments. By analyzing the underlying factors, this study aims to offer insights into pedagogical strategies that can improve learners' overall proficiency within the academic setting.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The purposes of this study are to:
1) Identify the functional verbs, modal verbs and separable verbs conjugation errors made by students in the German writing test.
2) To compare German and English language verb conjugation forms.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions are:
1) What are the mistakes in conjugating functional verbs, modal verbs and separable verbs made by students in the German writing test?
2) What are the differences between German and English verb conjugation forms?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Challenges of Learning German as a Foreign Language

Learning German presents significant challenges for Malaysian learners due to typological differences between German and Malay. German's inflectional grammar system, particularly its verb conjugation complexity, often poses difficulties for learners. According to Strutz (2007), verbs are persistently problematic for students regardless of teaching methods. The challenge intensifies with modal and separable verbs that diverge sharply from Malay grammar. Learners tend to apply structures from their mother tongue or English when constructing German sentences, leading to persistent errors (Koh, 2009; Jalis & Abd Rahim, 2014).

Kurniawati and Kartika (2021) also observed that students struggle with the placement and conjugation of verbs in sentence structures, especially in written form. Their findings highlighted that limited exposure to authentic materials and reliance on textbook-based grammar drills often lead to incorrect generalizations about verb use. This observation aligns with Tan's (2016) findings on Chinese Malaysian learners, who similarly exhibited errors in written German due to limited vocabulary and insufficient grammar mastery. Both studies point to the importance of input quality, whether in the form of authentic texts (Kurniawati & Kartika, 2021) or diversified vocabulary and structures (Tan, 2016), in shaping students' ability to internalise verb usage patterns.

Verb Conjugation in German: Functional, Modal, and Separable Verbs

In the German language, verb conjugation is a central grammatical feature. Errors in conjugating functional verbs such as *sein* (to be) and *haben* (to have), modal verbs like *möchten*, and separable verbs can significantly affect meaning (Biber et al., 2004b). Kurniawati and Kartika (2021) emphasised that students frequently make conjugation errors when faced with modal and auxiliary verbs, particularly in contexts requiring tense agreement or formal/informal pronoun distinctions.

Tan (2016) found that among the most common grammatical errors made by her participants were related to verb usage, especially incorrect conjugation of verbs and tense shifts. This mirrors Kurniawati and Kartika's (2021) categorisation of such mistakes as morphological errors, further reinforcing how learners struggle with conjugating both regular and irregular forms.

Moreover, German's verb-second word order and the placement of infinitives in subordinate clauses add to learners' confusion. These structural demands are unfamiliar to students whose first and second languages follow different syntactic rules, which leads to common errors in verb placement and tense usage (Tammenga-Helmantel & Maijala, 2018). This structural challenge was echoed in both Tan's (2016) and Kurniawati and Kartika's (2021) works, as students often defaulted to English or native language structures that do not conform to standard German word, particularly in main clauses requiring verb-second placement.

Contrastive Grammar: German vs. English Verb Conjugation

Many UiTM students approach German with prior knowledge of English, which can lead to interlanguage interference. While English does involve some verb conjugation (e.g., adding -s in third-person singular present tense), it is less morphologically rich than German (Klein, 2003). As Lado (1957) proposed, learners' first or dominant language heavily influences second language acquisition, often transferring familiar grammatical patterns into the new language.

The findings from Kurniawati and Kartika (2021) further reinforce this notion, as their Indonesian students displayed a tendency to transfer English syntax into German writing. Tan's (2016) study of Malaysian learners similarly demonstrated how over-reliance on English led to errors in verb placement and sentence structure, particularly in complex constructions. Together, these findings suggest that contrastive grammar strategies could help students become aware of where English and German diverge, a point supported by James (1998), who highlighted the need for explicit contrastive instruction to minimise negative transfer.

Error Analysis in Language Learning

Error analysis is a key approach in understanding second language learning, particularly in written production. It allows researchers and educators to identify recurring patterns in learners' errors and gain insights into the underlying linguistic systems that guide their language use (Corder, 1974; James, 1998). By examining grammatical, syntactic, and lexical errors, teachers can offer more focused feedback and design instruction that directly addresses learners' difficulties.

This method is especially valuable in the context of learning German as a foreign language, where structural differences between German and learners' first or second languages often result in specific types of errors. For Malaysian learners, for instance, error analysis provides a lens through which to understand recurring issues in verb conjugation, sentence structure, and word order which are common issues influenced by negative transfer from Malay or English (Tan, 2016; Kurniawati & Kartika, 2021; Tammenga-Helmantel & Maijala, 2018).

Hawash Muqbel and Aslam (2018) argues that error analysis helps reveal common areas of difficulty in second language writing, such as punctuation, spelling, and grammatical structure. His study, although focused on general ESL learners, showed that verb tense confusion, subject-verb disagreement, and article misuse were frequently observed, highlighting the importance of structured grammar instruction and error-based feedback in language classrooms. Corder (1974) and Dulay et al. (1982) emphasise that errors are a natural part of the learning process, providing insights into the learner's internalisation of grammatical rules.

Kurniawati and Kartika (2021) classified their students' errors into morphological, syntactic, and lexical categories, with verb conjugation errors being among the most prevalent. Tan's (2016) study showed a similar distribution, with morphological errors (especially in verb inflection) and syntactic issues (like word order) dominating learners' written output. These studies collectively show how error analysis can inform targeted pedagogical interventions, especially in areas like verb conjugation and syntactic structuring, and help instructors anticipate difficulties arising from interlanguage influences or insufficient exposure.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed an error analysis method in collecting data. Error analysis is considered one of the best ways that describe and explain errors made by learners who study English language as a second or foreign language. It reveals the types and sources of these errors (Muqbel, 2018). In the context of this study, the researchers collected errors made by students in conjugating German verbs. From these, the researchers were able to identify the patterns and types of errors. The researchers decided to select only 12 students to identify their verb conjugation errors, as the same types of errors were consistently made, making it unnecessary to gather data from a larger group because we adopted a purposive sample of 12 UiTM degree students because the unit of analysis in error analysis is the error instance, not the participant. During iterative coding, conjugation-error patterns stabilized (no new categories emerged), indicating saturation for our narrowly defined aim. Given the study's specific focus (German verb conjugation), the homogeneity of the cohort, and the high information power of the data (each script yielded multiple analyzable error tokens), a larger headcount was unlikely to add substantively new error types. This approach is consistent with established error-analysis goals of identifying systematic errors and their sources, and with qualitative guidance showing that focused studies can reach thematic saturation with relatively small samples. We prioritized depth and coding rigor (double-coding and consensus) over breadth, reserving estimation of prevalence and generalizability for future, larger-scale work.

Research Participants

This study adopted an error analysis approach to examine the verb conjugation skills of students learning German as an elective course at UiTM. The participants were degree students enrolled in three levels of German language study, where they were required to complete three types of assessments: a listening test, a written test, and a role play.

Data for this study were collected from the students' written tests, which comprised both objective and subjective questions. The written test was divided into six parts, with each part

containing five questions. Part 1 assessed reading comprehension through True or False questions. In Part 2, students were required to rearrange jumbled words and conjugate verbs to form grammatically correct sentences. Part 3 involved choosing the appropriate verb and conjugating it correctly. Part 4 asked students to select the correct answer based on a given question. In Part 5, students matched a provided answer with the most appropriate question. Finally, in Part 6, students were required to select the correct translation from a set of given options for each English phrase.

For the purpose of this study, the researchers focused specifically on students' responses in Part 2. This section was selected because it provided insights into students' abilities to restructure sentence elements while correctly applying verb conjugations in accordance with German grammar rules.

Research Design

This study is a qualitative study that identifies errors in the conjugation of auxiliary verbs, modal verbs, and functional verbs, and analyzes these errors by explaining them according to the correct usage rules of German grammar.

Study Participants

To conduct this study, 12 students from the "Introductory German Level I" course at UiTM Pulau Pinang Branch were involved as participants. The selection was done randomly. A total of 12 of their written test papers were used as study data.

Instruments

The researcher used the students' writing test answers as research data. The writing test contained 6 sections of questions. The section chosen for this study was the second section, which asked students to arrange words into correct sentences and conjugate the verbs found in those sentences.

Data Collection Procedure

Data was collected by selecting 12 writing test answer scripts completed by 12 students of the "Introductory German Level I" course within a predetermined period of 45 minutes. Students answered the questions online through the UFuture system (https://ufuture.uitm.edu.my/) from their residences or dormitories.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the researcher discusses the results based on the research questions. All students' responses to the five questions were reviewed, collected, and inserted into tables for analysis. The instructions for the questions asked students to rearrange the words and conjugate the verbs to form precise and grammatically correct sentences.

Table 1. Question and Answer Scheme

Question 1	Ankara / von / die Hauptstadt / der Türkiye / **sein** (Ankara/ of/ the capital city/ Turkiye/ to be)

Answer Scheme	1) Die Hauptstadt von der Türkiye **ist** Ankara.
	   (The capital city of Turkiye is Ankara)
	
	 2) Ankara ist die Hauptstadt von der Türkiye.
	   (Ankara is the capital city of Turkiye)

Table 2. Students' Answer

Student	Student's Answer	Result
Student 1	Die Hauptstadt von der Türkiye **ist** Ankara.	correct
Student 2	Ankara sind die Hauptstadt von der Türkiye	incorrect
Student 3	Seine Ankara die Hauptstadt von der Türkiye	incorrect
Student 4	Ankara sind von die Hauptstadt der Türkiye.	incorrect
Student 5	Ankara seid die Hauptstadt von der Türkiye	incorrect
Student 6	Sind Ankara die Hauptstadt von der Türkiye.	incorrect
Student 7	Die Hauptstadt von der Türkiye **ist** Ankara.	correct
Student 8	Ankara **ist** Die Hauptstadt von der Türkiye.	incorrect
Student 9	Ankara s	incorrect
Student 10	Ankara **ist** die Hauptstadt von der Türkiye	correct
Student 11	Ankara **ist** die Hauptstadt der Türkiye.	incorrect
Student 12	die hauptstadt von der türki **ist** ankara.	incorrect

Table 1 shows the questions and the answer scheme. After the data were analyzed, six students were able to conjugate the verb correctly. These students are Student 1, 7, 8, 10, 11 and 12. However, Students 8, 11 and 12 did not receive full marks because they made a few other grammatical errors. The verb used in this question and answer is "sein," which means 'to be' in English. As in English, the conjugation of German verbs depends on the personal pronoun and subject used. Table 3 below shows the conjugation forms of the verb "sein".

Table 3. Conjugation of verb "sein"

Category	Personal pronouns	Verb: sein (to be)
1st Person Singular	ich (I)	bin (am)
2nd Person Singular	du (you informal)	bist (are)
2nd Person Singular	Sie (you all formal)	sind (are)
3rd Person Singular	er/sie/es (he/ she/ it)	ist (ist)
1st Person Plural	wir (we)	sind (are)
2nd Person Plural	ihr (you all informal)	seid (are)
3rd Person Plural	sie (they)	sind (are)

The subject in the question can be either "die Hauptstadt von der Türkei" (The capital city of Turkey) or "Ankara," both of which fall under the third-person singular category. Therefore, the correct conjugation of the verb "sein" for these subjects is "ist." However, five students (Students

2, 3, 4, 5 and 6) wrote incorrect conjugation forms. Their answers included "sind," "seine" and "seid." Moreover, some of them were unable to correctly rearrange the sentence. One of the reasons students make errors in verb conjugation is their difficulty in identifying the subject when sentences include a proper name or a combination with a personal pronoun. For example, Stefan, Maria or meine Freundin (my girl friend) function as subjects in the third-person singular (er/sie, meaning he/she) and therefore require the verb ending -t. In contrast, meine Schwester und ich (my sister and I) is a first-person plural subject (wir, meaning we) and takes the verb ending -en. Similarly, Markus und sein Onkel (Markus and his uncle) is a third-person plural subject (sie, meaning they), which also requires the verb ending -en.

Table 4. Question and Answer Scheme

Question 2	Schwimmen / **mögen** / und / Reisen / Frau Meyer (swim/ to like/ and/ travel/ mrs. Meyer)
Answer Scheme	Frau Meyer **mag** Schwimmen und Reisen. (Mrs. Meyer likes to swim and travel)

In the question in Table 4 above, there is a verb that needs to be conjugated. That verb is "mögen," which means 'to like.'

Table 5. Students' Answer

Student	Student's Answer	Result
Student 1	Frau Meyer **mag** Schwimmen und Reisen.	correct
Student 2	Frau Meyer und Reisen **mag** Schwimmen	incorrect
Student 3	Frau Meyer **mag** schwimmen und reisen	incorrect
Student 4	Frau Meyer und Schwimmen <u>mögen</u> Reisen	incorrect
Student 5	Frau Meyer <u>mögert</u> Reisen und Schwimmen	incorrect
Student 6	Frau Meyer und Reisen <u>mögen</u> Schwimmen.	incorrect
Student 7	Frau Meyer **mag** Reisen und Schwimmen.	correct
Student 8	Frau Meyer <u>möget</u> Reisen und Schwimmen.	incorrect
Student 9	Frau Meyer	incorrect
Student 10	Frau Meyer **mag** Schwimmen und Reisen.	correct
Student 11	Frau Meyer **mag** schwimmen und reisen.	incorrect
Student 12	Frau Meyer <u>mögt</u> Reisen und Schwimmen.	incorrect

After all the students' answers above were checked, the researcher discovered that 6 students, specifically Students 1, 2, 3, 7, 10 and 11 had correctly conjugated the verb "mögen" to "mag" to match the subject "Frau Meyer," which is the third-person singular. Table 6 below presents the conjugation of the verb "mögen".

Table 6. Conjugation of verb "mögen"

Category	Personal pronouns	Verb: mögen (to like)
1st Person Singular	ich (I)	mag (like)
2nd Person Singular	du (you informal)	magst (like)
2nd Person Singular	Sie (you all formal)	mögen (like)
3rd Person Singular	er/sie/es (he/ she/ it)	mag (likes)
1st Person Plural	wir (we)	mögen (like)
2nd Person Plural	ihr (you all informal)	mögt (like)
3rd Person Plural	sie (they)	mögen (like)

However, five students had conjugated the verb incorrectly. Those students are 4, 5, 6, 8 and 12, who had conjugated the verb as "mögen," "mögert," "möget" and "mögt." Some students are confused with verbs and nouns. For example, if the words "Schwimmen" and "Reisen" are written with capital letters, that means these two words are nouns. However, these two words will be verbs when they are written with lowercase letters. Because of this confusion, Student 3 and 11 made a mistake by writing the words "Schwimmen" and "Reisen" with lowercase letters and the researcher also assumed that three students, 2, 4 and 6, thought these two were someone's names because they were written with capital letters.

Table 7. Question and Answer Scheme

Question 3	**möchten** / Kartoffelsalate / und / wir / Gemüsesuppen / **haben** / die
Answer Scheme	Wir **möchten** die Gemüsesuppen und Kartoffelsalate **haben**. (We would like to have the vegetable soups and the potato salads)

In Question 3, two verbs require conjugation, "möchten" and "haben." "Möchten" functions as a modal verb, while "haben" serves as an auxiliary verb. According to the rules of German sentence structure, when employing a modal verb, only the modal verb itself needs conjugation, while other verbs remain in their infinitive form and must place it at the end of the sentences. In this case, the subject is "wir," representing the first-person plural. Therefore, "möchten" must be conjugated to match the subject as "möchten," while "haben" remains unchanged in its infinitive form. Refer to Table 8 below for the conjugation of both "möchten" and "haben."

Table 8. Conjugation of verb "haben" und "möchten"

Category	Personal pronouns	haben (to have)	möchten (would like (to))
1st Person Singular	ich (I)	habe	möchte
2nd Person Singular	du (you informal)	hast	möchtest
2nd Person Singular	Sie (you/ you all formal)	haben	möchten
3rd Person Singular	er/sie/es (he/ she/ it)	hat	möchte
1st Person Plural	wir (we)	haben	möchten
2nd Person Plural	ihr (you all informal)	habt	möchtet
3rd Person Plural	sie (they)	haben	möchten

Table 9. Students' Answer

Student	Student's Answer	Result
Student 1	Wir möchten haben die Kartoffesalate und Gemüsesuppen.	incorrect
Student 2	Wir möchtest haben die Kartoffelsalate und Gemüsesuppen.	incorrect
Student 3	Wir möchtst die Kartoffelsalate und Gemüsesuppen haben.	incorrect
Student 4	Wir habe möchten die Kartoffelsalate und Gemüsesuppen.	incorrect
Student 5	Wir habest möchten Kartoffelsalate und die Gemüsesuppen.	incorrect
Student 6	wir haben möchtest die Kartoffelsalate und Gemüsesuppen.	incorrect
Student 7	Wir möchten die Gemüsesuppen und Kartoffelsalate haben.	correct
Student 8	Wir hat möchten die Kartoffelsalate und Gemüsesuppen.	incorrect
Student 9	No Answers	incorrect
Student 10	Wir möchten haben die Gemüsesuppen und Kartoffelsalate.	incorrect
Student 11	Wir möchten die Kartoffelsalate und Gemüsesuppen haben.	correct
Student 12	Wir möchten die Gemüsesuppen und Kartoffelsalate haben.	correct

Based on the students' answers above, only three students were able to conjugate both verbs and rearrange the words correctly. They are Students 7, 11 and 12. Student 3 managed to rearrange the verb but was unable to conjugate the verb "möchten." Five students (Students 1, 4, 5, 8 and 10) were capable of conjugating the verb "möchten" accurately. However, they were unable to achieve full marks because they did not keep the verb "haben" in its infinitive form and failed to place the verb "haben" at the end of the sentence. Students 2 and 6 kept the verb "haben" in its infinitive form, but their mistake was not placing the verb at the end of the sentence and they also conjugated the verb "möchten" incorrectly.

Table 10. Question and Answer Scheme

Question 4	an der / Sprachwissenschaft / Universität Mannheim / Schwester / **studieren** / ihre
Answer Scheme	Ihre Schwester **studiert** Sprachwissenschaft an der Universität Mannheim. (Her sister studies language and linguistics at the Mannheim University)

The German verb in the question above that needs to be conjugated is "studieren," which means 'to study' in English. The subject here is "ihre Schwester," which means 'her sister' and is in the third-person singular. Therefore, the verb "studieren" needs to be conjugated to "studiert." Table 11 below shows the conjugation of the verb "studieren".

Table 11. Conjugation of verb "studieren"

Category	Personal pronouns	Verb: studieren (to study)
1st Person Singular	ich (I)	studiere
2nd Person Singular	du (you informal)	studierst
2nd Person Singular	Sie (you all formal)	studieren
3rd Person Singular	er/sie/es (he/ she/ it)	studiert
1st Person Plural	wir (we)	studieren
2nd Person Plural	ihr (you all informal)	studiert
3rd Person Plural	sie (they)	studieren

Table 12. Students' Answer

Student	Student's Answer	Result
Student 1	Mein schwester studiert Sprachwissenschaft an der Universität Mannheim.	incorrect
Student 2	Schwester studiert ihre Sprachwissenschaft an der Universität Mannheim.	incorrect
Student 3	Ihre schwester studiert sprachwissenschaft an der Universität Mannheim.	incorrect
Student 4	Ihre schwester an der studiert Sprachwissenschaft Universität Mannheim.	incorrect
Student 5	Meine Schwester studieren Sprachwissenschaft an der Universität Mannheim.	incorrect
Student 6	Ihre Schwester studiert Sprachwissenschaft an der Universität Mannheim.	correct
Student 7	Ihre Schwester studiert Sprachwissenschaft an der Universität Mannheim.	correct
Student 8	Ihre Schwester studiert Sprachwissenschaft an der Universität Mannheim.	correct
Student 9	No Answers	incorrect
Student 10	Ihre Schwester studiert Sprachwissenschaft an der Universität Mannheim.	correct
Student 11	Meine Schwester studieren Sprachwissenschaft an der Universität Mannheim .	incorrect
Student 12	Ihre Schwester studiert Sprachewissenschaft an der Universität Mannheim.	correct

Among the 12 students who answered the question, Students 6, 7, 8, 10 and 12 responded correctly. Four students, Students 1, 2, 3 and 4 were able to conjugate the verb "studieren" accurately, but unfortunately, they made other mistakes. Only two students, Students 5 and 11, conjugated the verb "studieren" incorrectly. Compared to other questions, this one saw the highest number of correct responses, with five students answering accurately. There are three students (Students 1, 3 and 4) who did not achieve full marks because they wrote nouns with lowercase initials. It is important for all students to remember that in German, all nouns must begin with a capital letter.

Table 13. Question and Answer Scheme

Question 5	ihr Sohn / die / und / **bezahlen** / Frau Walter / Schokomilch
	(her son/ the/ and/ to pay/ Ms. or Mrs. Walter/ chocolate milk)
Answer Scheme	Frau Walter und ihr Sohn **bezahlen** die Schokomilch.
	(Mrs./ Ms. Walter and her son pay for the chocolate milk)

In the question above, the verb that needs to be conjugated is "bezahlen." This word is a regular verb and means 'to pay' in English. This verb must be conjugated as shown in Table 14 below.

Table 14. Conjugation of verb "bezahlen"

Category	Personal pronouns	Verb: bezahlen (to pay)
1st Person Singular	ich (I)	bezahle
2nd Person Singular	du (you informal)	bezahlst
2nd Person Singular	Sie (you/ you all formal)	bezahlen
3rd Person Singular	er/sie/es (he/ she/ it)	bezahlt
1st Person Plural	wir (we)	bezahlen
2nd Person Plural	ihr (you all informal)	bezahlt
3rd Person Plural	sie (they)	bezahlen

Table 15. Students' Answer

Student	Student's Answer	Result
Student 1	Frau Walter und Her sohn bezahlent die Schokomilch.	incorrect
Student 2	Frau Walter ihre Sohn die bezahlen und Schkomilch	incorrect
Student 3	Frau Walter und ihr Sohn **bezahlen** das Schokomilch	correct
Student 4	Frau Walter und ihr sohn die bezahlt Schokomilch.	incorrect
Student 5	Frau Walter er Sohn bezahlen und die Schokomilch	incorrect
Student 6	Frau Walter und ihr Sohn **bezahlen** die Schokomilch.	correct
Student 7	Frau Walter und ihr Sohn **bezahlen** die Schokomilch.	correct
Student 8	Frau Walter und ihr Sohn **bezahlen** die Schokomilch.	correct
Student 9	Frau Walter und ihr Sohn bezahlet did Schokomilch	incorrect
Student 10	Frau Walter und ihr Sohn bezahlt Schokomilch.	incorrect
Student 11	Frau Walter	incorrect
Student 12	Frau Walter und ihr Sohn **bezahlen** Schokomilch.	incorrect

There are only four students, namely, students 3, 6, 7 and 8, who can arrange, conjugate verbs, and write sentences correctly without any mistakes. Additionally, there are three other students, students 2, 5 and 12, who have also been able to conjugate the word "bezahlen" correctly, but they are unable to get full marks because of other grammatical errors in their sentences. Based on the students' answers, the researcher can infer that most of the students understand all the meanings of the words in the question, except for students 2 and 5, who do not understand all the meanings of the words, causing them to rearrange the words incorrectly. It is also possible that the word "bezahlen" is not conjugated but is just kept as in the question. To conjugate regular verbs in German, students must follow a systematic process. For instance, with verbs such as "machen" (to do) and "spielen" (to play), the first step is to remove the infinitive ending "-en" or "-n" in order to identify the verb stem (e.g., mach- and spiel-). Subsequently, the appropriate personal endings are added according to the subject pronoun. Table 16 illustrates the standard set of endings for regular verbs in the present tense.

Table 16. Conjugation of verb "machen"

Category	Personal pronouns	Ending & Verb: machen (to do)
1st Person Singular	ich (I)	-e; mache
2nd Person Singular	du (you informal)	-st; machst
2nd Person Singular	Sie (you/ you all formal)	-en; machen
3rd Person Singular	er/sie/es (he/ she/ it)	-t; macht
1st Person Plural	wir (we)	-en; machen
2nd Person Plural	ihr (you all informal)	-t; macht
3rd Person Plural	sie (they)	-en; machen

CONCLUSION

Learning a third language like German can be both exciting and challenging, especially for students from non-linguistic backgrounds. This study explored the grammatical struggles of Mechanical Engineering students at UiTMCPP, with a focus on verb conjugation. The findings showed that many students had difficulty applying correct verb forms, highlighting just how complex and different German grammar is compared to English. Instead of only listing the errors, this study also shows how German teachers can help. For example, since students often confuse about verbs, modal verbs and auxiliary verbs, teachers can use a method that compares German with English and Malay. For the problem of writing nouns without capital letters, teachers can give students real German texts like short articles or stories, so the student can see the rules in action. By using practice activities such as verb drills and sentence building exercises, teachers can focus directly on the mistakes students often make. With this kind of support, students can feel more confident and improve their German skills.

These insights serve as a reminder that language learning is not a one-size-fits-all process. By understanding where students struggle, educators can create more engaging and effective teaching strategies to support their learning journey. With the right tools and guidance, students can gain greater confidence and mastery in using the German language.

Beyond classroom teaching, the findings can also influence curriculum design, teacher training, and resource development. For example, the curriculum can give more focus to verb conjugation at beginner levels. Teacher training can prepare instructors to deal with common problems like modal–auxiliary confusion and capitalization. Resource developers can also create better tools, such as bilingual grammar guides and online exercises, to support learning.

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Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

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Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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