

Morphological Errors in Everyday Indonesian Texts as a Medium for Developing Critical Literacy in Higher Education

Nanda Veruna Enun Kharisma✉, State University of Surabaya, Indonesia

Dhesta Youlandi Rahayu Sulistiyawati, Wates Institute of Teacher Training and Education, Indonesia

Nureeman Jehyeh, Thaksin University, Thailand

✉ nandakharisma@unesa.ac.id

Abstract: This study examined morphological errors in everyday Indonesian texts and the critical literacy performance of prospective elementary school teachers who analyzed these errors, with reference to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 on quality education. A descriptive qualitative design was employed with 30 students of a linguistics course at a state university in Indonesia, and data came from 200 everyday texts (banners, social media posts, and student notes), analytical tasks, and semi-structured interviews with 10 students, which were analyzed through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, with critical literacy assessed by a five-indicator rubric. Of the 87 morphological errors identified, 45 (52%) were affixation errors, 25 (29%) were reduplication errors, and 17 (19%) were composition errors, and the proportion of students meeting each indicator was 90% for identification, 75% for analysis, 68% for evaluation, 60% for reflection, and 55% for transformation. These results suggest that analysis of authentic morphological errors can serve as a pedagogical resource for developing critical literacy in language teacher education, particularly when tasks require students to evaluate consequences and redesign texts, although the findings should be interpreted in light of the small, purposively selected sample and the dichotomous rubric.

Keywords: critical literacy; morphological errors; Indonesian language; teacher education; quality education.

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesian word formation relies on affixation, reduplication, and composition, and each process follows rules that govern both form and meaning. Asaad (2024) evaluated the writing of thirty postgraduate L2 writers before and after morphological awareness instruction and reported that vocabulary knowledge mediated the link between morphological awareness and writing. The same study found that writing performance improved significantly after the instruction. Saddhono et al. (2023) described how learners of Indonesian at a university in the United States produced the prefix *meN-* with six allomorphs, including a *meng-* form that deviated from the rules, and omitted the prefix in informal everyday conversation.

Error analysis shows how learners handle linguistic rules, and Aziz et al. (2020) found in the essays of 23 EFL students that omission accounted for 63% of 195 errors, with intralingual transfer as the main source. In the Indonesian context, Devina (2022) analyzed texts written by learners of Indonesian and reported cross-linguistic influence on word choice and on the use of affixes and particles. The same study found that learners who were familiar with informal daily Indonesian needed more time to develop formal Indonesian. Everyday texts such as social media posts and public signs make this kind of variation visible, as Mardikantoro et al. (2023) reported informal language, daily-conversation language, and shortened writing in Indonesian social media interactions, and Iye et al. (2023) documented language variation on signboards in public spaces in Maluku that was shaped by place, religion, culture, and media.

Critical literacy extends comprehension toward questioning texts and the social relations they carry, and Setyaningsih (2019) showed in a tertiary EFL reading class with 39 Indonesian students that critical questions and carefully chosen materials helped turn a conventional reading class into a critical literacy class. In that study, students progressed as text users and text analysts, and their critical stance depended on how easily they understood the text. Evidence on teachers shows that implementation is challenging, as Gustine (2018) found that some of the 21 English teachers at a teacher education university in Bandung had limited knowledge of critical literacy as a methodological approach. Blixen and Pannell (2020) reported a similar situation in a Scottish primary school, where the study identified a lack of a unified teaching method, and teachers said they would teach for critical literacy if they knew how.

These issues are relevant to SDG 4, which concerns inclusive and equitable quality education for all learners. Hsieh et al. (2024) surveyed and interviewed pre-service teachers in Taiwan and reported that they performed best on Quality Education among the SDG indicators, and that integrating the SDGs into teacher education programs could strengthen their awareness and performance. García González et al. (2020) reported that pre-service teachers who completed training on education for sustainability showed progress in their perceptions, knowledge of the SDGs, and methodological strategies, with the largest change in knowledge of the SDGs. Within this framework, teacher

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education programs are settings in which language knowledge and critical literacy can be developed together.

Existing studies have focused on morphological awareness and writing, on the description of learners' errors, and on the conditions under which critical literacy is practiced. Asaad (2024) and Saddhono et al. (2023) examined morphological knowledge and affixation among learners, Aziz et al. (2020) and Devina (2022) examined learners' errors, and Setyaningsih (2019), Gustine (2018), and Blixen and Pannell (2020) examined critical literacy practice. Research on how the analysis of authentic morphological errors in everyday texts can serve as a medium through which prospective teachers practice identification, analysis, evaluation, reflection, and transformation remains limited. This aspect needs further study, particularly within Indonesian teacher education and in relation to SDG 4.

This study aims to examine whether and how morphological error analysis can be used to develop critical literacy among prospective elementary school teachers. The study addresses an underexplored aspect of the field by treating errors found in banners, social media posts, and student notes as the object of critical literacy tasks. The novelty of this study is stated explicitly: it extends previous research by examining morphological errors in everyday Indonesian texts using a five-indicator critical literacy rubric within the context of teacher education. The study also relates the results to the pedagogical agenda of SDG 4 so that the findings can inform course design in language teacher education.

Accordingly, this study addresses three research questions that guide the design, analysis, and interpretation of the findings: 1) What types of morphological errors appear in everyday Indonesian texts? 2) How do prospective elementary school teachers demonstrate identification, analysis, evaluation, reflection, and transformation when analyzing these errors? 3) In what ways can the reflective and transformative dimensions of critical literacy be further developed to support SDG 4 on quality education?

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design, which stays close to the data and describes phenomena in everyday language (Sandelowski, 2000). The design was selected because the study aimed to describe the types of morphological errors found in everyday texts. The design also suited the second aim of describing how prospective teachers responded to these errors in written tasks and interviews. Data from several sources were combined so that the description of errors and the description of critical literacy performance could be examined together.

Participants and Data Sources

Thirty students enrolled in a Linguistic Studies course at a state university in Indonesia participated in the study, and they were selected purposively based on course enrollment, academic activity, and willingness to participate. The first data source consisted of 200 examples of everyday Indonesian texts, namely banners, social media posts, and student

notes. The second data source consisted of student analysis tasks that required identification, analysis, evaluation, reflection, and correction of morphological errors. The third data source consisted of semi-structured interviews with 10 students, which were conducted to obtain deeper insight into their reflective processes.

Procedure

Data collection followed three stages that were carried out in sequence. In the first stage, texts containing morphological errors were gathered from the three text types. In the second stage, students analyzed the texts and their responses were assessed with a critical literacy rubric. In the third stage, interviews were conducted with 10 students to deepen insight into their reflective processes.

Figure 1 presents the research procedure as a flow diagram that links data sources, stages, and analysis. The figure is included because the study combined texts, student tasks, and interviews, and readers need to see how these sources were connected. By tracing the flow from text collection to trustworthiness checks, readers can follow how the 87 errors and the five critical literacy indicators were produced. The diagram is placed before the description of the instruments so that the later sections can be read against a clear overall picture.

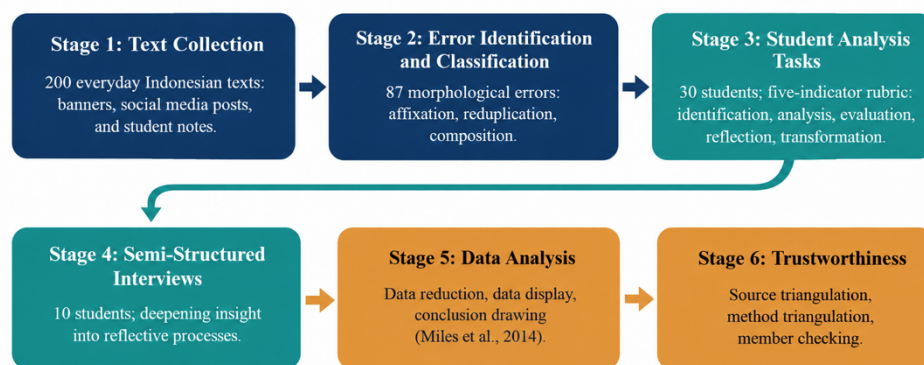


Figure 1. Research Procedure

Figure 1 shows that the study moved from collecting 200 texts to classifying 87 errors, then to student analysis with a five-indicator rubric, interviews with 10 students, data analysis, and trustworthiness checks. This sequence indicates that every critical literacy judgment was grounded in a concrete text and a documented student response. For readers, the figure clarifies the logic of the design and makes it easier to judge how the findings were derived. For researchers and teacher educators, the figure offers an outline that can be adapted for courses that use authentic texts as learning material.

Instruments

Morphological errors were classified into affixation, reduplication, and composition, with subcategories based on observed error patterns. Critical literacy was assessed with five indicators, namely identification, analysis, evaluation, reflection, and transformation. The indicators were adapted from McLaughlin and DeVogd (2004) and Luke (2012), who emphasize the analysis, evaluation, and reflective questioning of texts. Each indicator was

linked to a specific form of student data, as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 lists the five critical literacy indicators, their operational descriptions, and the data forms from which each indicator was judged. The table is included because the rubric determines how every percentage in the Results section was calculated. Presenting the operational descriptions gives readers a clear standard for what it meant for a student to meet an indicator. The table is placed here so that readers can refer back to it when interpreting Table 3 and Figure 3.

Table 1. Critical Literacy Indicators and Data Forms

Indicator	Operational description	Data form
Identification	Students find and classify morphological errors (affixation, reduplication, composition).	Written student analysis
Analysis	Students explain the causes of errors (interlingual, intralingual, or social context).	Written description
Evaluation	Students assess the impact of errors on communication clarity and linguistic norms.	Written student assessment
Reflection	Students reflect on the meaning of language errors in everyday life and their relationship to learning.	Written reflective statements and interviews
Transformation	Students propose strategies or solutions to correct errors and increase language awareness.	Written proposals and interview responses

Table 1 shows that the indicators progress from locating errors to proposing solutions, and that each indicator is tied to a distinct data form such as written analysis, written assessment, reflective statements, or proposals. This design makes the assessment transparent because readers can see which type of evidence was required for each judgment. For readers, the table supports an evaluation of the rubric's validity and facilitates comparison with other studies that use similar indicators. For practitioners, the table can serve as an assessment guide for tasks that ask students to analyze language errors critically.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the interactive model of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2014). A student was judged to have met an indicator when the response provided evidence that satisfied the operational definition in Table 1. The percentage for each indicator was calculated as the number of students who met the criterion divided by the total number of participants ($N = 30$). The distribution of error types was calculated as the number of errors in each category divided by the total of 87 errors.

Trustworthiness

Source triangulation was applied by comparing documents, student assignments, and interviews. Method triangulation was applied by combining document analysis, performance tasks, and interviews. Member checking, which Birt et al. (2016) discussed as a tool for enhancing trustworthiness, was carried out by asking participants to reconfirm the researchers' interpretation of their interview responses. These procedures were intended to strengthen confidence that the reported patterns reflected the data.

RESULTS

Types of Morphological Errors in Everyday Texts

A total of 87 morphological errors were identified in the 200 everyday texts, and each case was grouped into affixation, reduplication, or composition. Table 2 reports the number and percentage of errors in each category. The table is included to answer the first research question directly and to give readers the exact counts that underlie the percentages used throughout the article. Presenting the distribution first also establishes the linguistic material on which the critical literacy tasks were based.

Table 2. Distribution of Morphological Error Types (N = 87)

Type of morphological error	Number of findings	Percentage (%)
Affixation	45	52
Reduplication	25	29
Composition	17	19
Total	87	100

Table 2 shows that affixation errors were the most frequent (45 cases, 52%), followed by reduplication (25 cases, 29%) and composition (17 cases, 19%). This ordering indicates that errors in affix use accounted for just over half of all errors in the sampled texts. For readers, the table identifies which morphological processes appear most often in everyday texts and therefore deserve priority in instruction and in the design of analysis tasks. For researchers, the exact counts allow comparison with studies that use other text types or classification schemes.

Figure 2 presents the same distribution as a proportional chart. The figure is included because a visual summary lets readers see the relative size of each error type at a glance. This visual form complements Table 2 by showing that affixation alone accounts for more than half of the errors. The figure is therefore intended to support quick comprehension and to serve as a presentation-ready summary for teaching and dissemination.

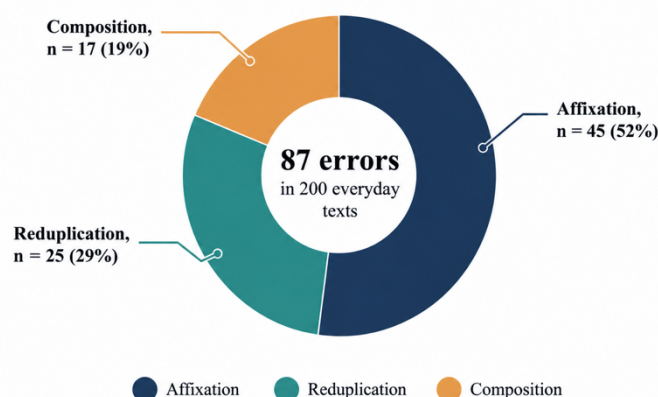


Figure 2. Proportion of Morphological Error Types (N = 87)

Figure 2 shows that the largest segment of the chart corresponds to affixation, with reduplication and composition occupying smaller segments. The proportional layout

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makes the dominance of affixation errors immediately visible. For readers, the figure reduces the effort needed to interpret the numbers and highlights where learning support is most needed. For teacher educators, the figure can be reused in class to open a discussion about which error types appear most often in everyday texts.

Affixation errors mainly involved affixes that did not comply with the rules, including the omission or addition of affixes that produced non-standard word forms. A typical case was *menyuci baju* in place of the standard form *mencuci baju*. The base form *cuci* begins with /c/, so the prefix *meN-* takes the allomorph *men-*, which yields *mencuci*. The form *menyuci* does not follow this morphophonemic rule and therefore counts as an affixation error.

Reduplication errors involved inappropriate or excessive repetition of word forms, such as the use of *lari-larian* in an inappropriate context. Another case was the use of *rumah-rumahan* to refer to many houses, whereas the standard meaning of *rumah-rumahan* in Indonesian is a house-shaped toy. This case shows that a reduplication error can change the meaning of a message in addition to departing from the standard form. Composition errors were the least frequent and involved ambiguous choices of compound words.

Critical Literacy Performance

Students did more than identify the errors, as many attempted to evaluate the impact of the errors on communication and to reflect on their relevance in everyday life. Table 3 reports the number and percentage of students who met each of the five indicators, together with an illustrative excerpt for each. The table is included to answer the second research question and to show readers the type of evidence that led to each judgment. Pairing the figures with excerpts allows readers to check whether the numerical results are consistent with what students actually wrote and said.

Table 3. Achievement of Critical Literacy Indicators (N = 30)

Indicator	Students meeting criterion (n)	Percentage (%)	Illustrative excerpt (source)
Identification	27	90	"This word is incorrect because the prefix doesn't follow the pattern." (student assignment)
Analysis	22	75	"The error occurs because the prefix 'meN-' cannot be followed by a word beginning with /s/." (student assignment)
Evaluation	20	68	"If used continuously, the sentence can confuse the reader." (written reflection)
Reflection	18	60	"The error on the banner makes the institution look unprofessional." (interview, M7)
Transformation	16	55	"I suggest using 'mencuci baju' so that it conforms to the rules and is easy to understand." (interview, M12)

Table 3 shows that 27 students (90%) met the identification indicator, 22 (75%) met analysis, 20 (68%) met evaluation, 18 (60%) met reflection, and 16 (55%) met transformation. The excerpts illustrate that responses at the higher indicators included judgments about readers and institutions, such as the comment that an error on a banner makes an institution look unprofessional. For readers, the table gives both the magnitude and the quality of the evidence, which supports a more informed judgment of the results. For teacher educators, the table indicates which competencies are already well developed and which require additional instructional support.

Figure 3 displays the proportions in Table 3 as a bar chart ordered from identification to transformation. The figure is included because the pattern across the five indicators is the central finding of the study, and a visual form makes the pattern easier to grasp. Seeing the bars together lets readers compare performance across indicators without reading each number separately. The figure also provides a compact visual that can be used for presentations and course materials.

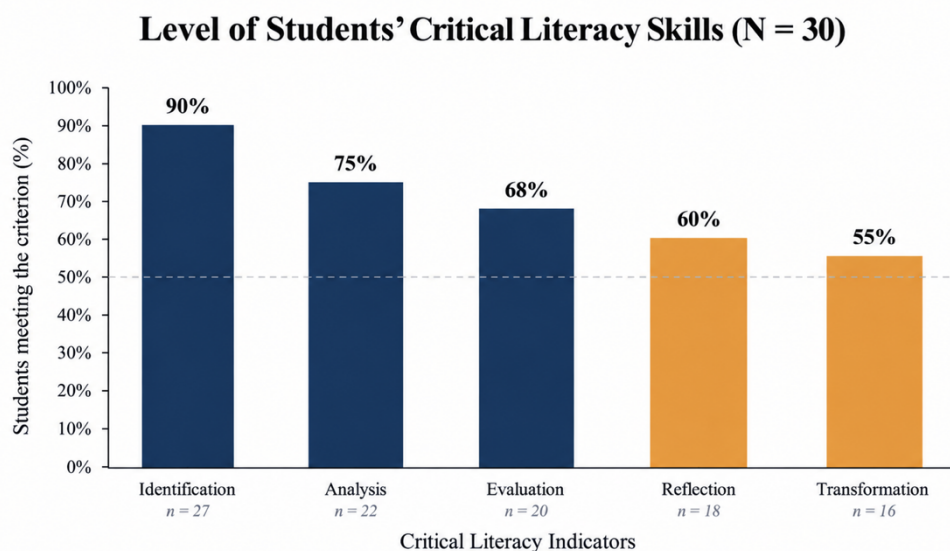


Figure 3. Level of Students' Critical Literacy Skills (N = 30)

Figure 3 shows a stepwise decline from identification (90%) to transformation (55%), with the largest drop between identification and analysis. This pattern suggests that tasks requiring rule-based detection were met by most students, and the share declined as tasks required social judgment and alternative proposals. For readers, the figure makes clear that reflection and transformation are the dimensions with the most room for development. For curriculum designers, the figure provides evidence for prioritizing these two dimensions in language analysis courses.

The interviews offered further detail about the lower indicators. One student stated, "I see the word is wrong, but I'm confused about its implications in everyday communication" (M3). Another student said, "Errors like the one on the banner can lead to misunderstandings, but in class we're rarely asked to think about the consequences"

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(M7). These statements indicate that some students could detect errors but had limited opportunities to consider their consequences.

Directions for Strengthening Reflection and Transformation

The accounts of students who did not meet the transformation indicator point to the form of the task. One student reported, “If I see a wrong word on a poster, I can only write it in the correct form. I haven’t thought about how to fix it to make it more interesting or easier to understand” (M12). Students who did propose improvements referred to language awareness activities on social media and to project-based learning. These responses suggest that tasks asking students to redesign public texts and to consider their audiences could address the reflective and transformative dimensions that scored lowest.

DISCUSSION

Types of Morphological Errors in Everyday Texts

The most frequent errors in the everyday texts were affixation errors (52%), followed by reduplication (29%) and composition (19%). One explanation is that Indonesian affixes interact with the phonological shape of the base, as the contrast between *menyuci* and *mencuci* shows, so writers must apply the allomorphy of *meN-* correctly. This interpretation is consistent with Kalee et al. (2018), who found that most affixation errors in Indonesian papers written by Thai students (86%) were attributed to ignorance of rule restriction, and with Fauziati (2017), who reported that both native language and target language influence shaped the interlanguage of Indonesian EFL compositions. Differences between informal and formal registers may be one factor behind affixation errors, although the present study did not test this explanation.

Comparison with earlier evidence should be made with caution, because earlier studies examined other learner groups and text types. Kalee et al. (2018) analyzed papers written by Thai learners, and Benu et al. (2025) analyzed 464 culinary signboards in Kupang with a focus on language choice and cultural identity, describing the signboards as cultural texts that connect tradition and globalization. Different distributions of error types may therefore appear in other text types, with other populations, or under other classification schemes. The present findings indicate that affixation errors signal incomplete command of rule-governed alternation, the case of *rumah-rumahan* shows that reduplication errors may alter meaning, and the practical implication is that authentic error samples can be used for explicit instruction on affix allomorphy and reduplication.

Students’ Critical Literacy in Analyzing, Evaluating, and Reflecting on Errors

The main finding is a gradient in performance from identification (90%) to transformation (55%), which indicates that students could detect and explain errors but fewer linked errors to audience perception or proposed alternative forms. One explanation is visible in the interview data, where student M7 reported that classroom activities rarely asked students to consider consequences and student M3 described uncertainty about implications in everyday communication. This pattern may reflect an emphasis on rule application in learning tasks, although the present data do not allow this explanation to be

confirmed. The pattern is relevant to critical literacy because Sánchez-Peña and Chapetón (2018) reported that pre-service teachers who worked with a critical literacy approach in argumentative writing took clear positions, weighed their claims, and reflected on their roles as future educators, which corresponds to the evaluation, reflection, and transformation indicators used here.

Similar difficulties have been reported in the implementation of critical literacy, and Johnson and Keane (2023) described what 40 pre-service teachers learned and the challenges they faced when they planned, taught, and reflected on critical literacy lessons for elementary classes. Their study and the present study share a focus on prospective teachers, yet they differ in language, instructional context, and task design, so the gradient should not be read as a fixed developmental sequence. The implication is that morphological error analysis may need to be paired with tasks that make audience, consequence, and alternative wording explicit. The effect of such pairing would need to be examined empirically.

Developing Reflective and Transformative Skills to Support SDG 4

The lower proportions for reflection and transformation suggest the need for structured opportunities to examine assumptions, evaluate consequences, and redesign texts. Nurfaidah et al. (2017) found that Indonesian EFL pre-service teachers' reflective journals rarely reached critical reflection, while Fuertes-Camacho et al. (2021) emphasized communication and supervision in reflective practice. Guided text-redesign tasks may therefore support higher-order literacy skills, although their effectiveness remains to be tested. The connection to SDG 4 also requires caution, as Aragón Núñez et al. (2025) reported limited explicit links between critical thinking and sustainability in pre-service teacher education. Morphological error analysis offers authentic learning material, but its long-term impact on critical literacy remains an empirical question.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The participants were thirty students from one course at one university and were selected purposively, so the findings cannot be generalized statistically. The rubric classified each indicator as met or not met, which does not capture degrees of performance on the more demanding indicators. The interview data came from 10 students, so the qualitative accounts represent a subset of the sample. Future studies could use larger and more varied samples, graded rubrics, and quasi-experimental or design-based approaches to test whether tasks involving text redesign strengthen reflection and transformation.

CONCLUSION

This study examined morphological errors in everyday Indonesian texts and the critical literacy performance of prospective elementary school teachers. Affixation was the most frequent error, followed by reduplication and composition. Students demonstrated stronger identification and analysis skills than evaluation, reflection, and transformation. These findings suggest that morphological error analysis can support critical literacy development through authentic texts. Tasks emphasizing consequences, audience, and

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text redesign may strengthen reflective and transformative skills. Given the study's scope, further research is needed to examine the effects of these tasks on critical literacy and their relevance to SDG 4.

AI Use Statement

AI tools were used, where applicable, to assist with language refinement. The authors reviewed the manuscript and remain responsible for its accuracy and integrity.

Author Contributions

NVEK: led the research and manuscript preparation. DYRS: assisted with data interpretation and the development of the discussion. NJ: contributed to critical feedback and refinement of the manuscript. All authors participated in approving the final version.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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