



Morphological Errors in Everyday Life: A Portrait of Critical Literacy of Elementary School Teacher Candidates to Support Quality Education

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze morphological errors in everyday Indonesian language use and to examine how prospective elementary school teachers employ these errors as a medium for practicing critical literacy skills in alignment with SDG 4 on quality education. Employing a descriptive qualitative design, data were collected from 30 students through 200 everyday texts (e.g., banners, social media posts, and student notes), analytical tasks, and 10 semi-structured interviews. A total of 87 instances of morphological errors were identified and classified into affixation (52%), reduplication (29%), and composition (19%). Critical literacy skills were assessed using a rubric consisting of five indicators: identification, analysis, evaluation, reflection, and transformation. Findings revealed that most students achieved high performance in identification (90%) and analysis (75%), while lower performance was observed in reflection (60%) and transformation (55%). These results indicate that although students are capable of detecting and analyzing morphological errors, they require further pedagogical support to strengthen reflective and transformative practices. The study highlights the pedagogical potential of integrating morphological error analysis into language education as a concrete strategy for developing critical literacy and supporting the objectives of SDG 4.

Keywords: Critical literacy, Indonesian language, Morphological errors, Teacher education, Quality Education

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INTRODUCTION

The Indonesian language is marked by a complex morphological system, including affixation, reduplication, and compounding. While these processes are essential for word formation, errors in their application remain pervasive in both academic and everyday contexts. Such errors appear not only in student writing but also in public spaces such as banners, social media, and advertisements, highlighting persistent challenges in applying morphological rules accurately (Sulistyaningrum & Astuti, 2020; Halid, 2022). Even prospective elementary school teachers, who are expected to model standard language use, are not exempt from these issues, particularly with affix selection, reduplication, and compounding.

At the same time, higher education is increasingly expected to foster critical literacy, which goes beyond literal comprehension and focuses on analyzing, evaluating, and reflecting on language use in its broader social and cultural contexts. Critical literacy emphasizes questioning texts, uncovering implicit meanings, and considering implications for communication and society (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004; Janks, 2013; Siswanto et al., 2025). However, in Indonesia, research shows that integration of critical literacy remains limited, as students often remain at the level of surface understanding without engaging in deeper reflection (Hardianti, 2024). This reveals a gap between students' structural linguistic knowledge and their ability to reflect on and transform language use.

This issue is particularly relevant to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 on quality education, which promotes inclusive and equitable education while strengthening higher-order thinking skills, including critical thinking and literacy (Adeoye et al., 2024; Ydo, 2022). While SDG 4 aspires to transformative learning, implementation in classroom practice often remains utilitarian rather than reflective (Mitter & Brissett, 2017; Khalil et al., 2023). Morphological error analysis offers a concrete pedagogical pathway for addressing this gap. Instead of treating errors merely as mistakes, they can be used as authentic learning resources that engage students in reflection on linguistic norms, social consequences, and alternative forms of expression (Wang & Wang, 2025; Jobeen et al., 2015; Erdoğan, 2005).

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Despite its potential, limited studies have connected morphological error analysis with the development of critical literacy in higher education. Previous research has largely focused on classifying types of errors or analyzing their causes, while overlooking their pedagogical value for building reflective and transformative practices among prospective teachers. To fill this gap, this study positions morphological error analysis not only as a linguistic exercise but also as a medium for cultivating critical literacy in line with the objectives of SDG 4. Accordingly, this research seeks to address three questions. (1) What types of morphological errors appear in everyday Indonesian texts? (2) How do prospective elementary school teachers describe, evaluate, and reflect on these errors as manifestations of critical literacy? (3) In what ways can these critical literacy skills be further developed to support the objectives of SDG 4 on quality education? The novelty of this study lies in integrating linguistic analysis with critical literacy within the SDG framework, offering fresh insights for language studies and higher education.

METHODS

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to explore morphological errors in everyday Indonesian language use and analyze the critical literacy skills of prospective elementary school teachers (Creswell, 2018). Thirty students enrolled in a Linguistic Studies course at a state university in Indonesia were selected purposively based on course enrollment, academic activity, and willingness to participate.

Data were collected from three sources: (1) 200 examples of everyday Indonesian texts (banners, social media, student notes), (2) student analysis tasks requiring identification, evaluation, reflection, and correction of morphological errors, and (3) semi-structured interviews with 10 students to deepen insights into their reflective processes. The data collection followed three stages: gathering texts with errors, student analysis using a critical literacy rubric (identification, analysis, evaluation, reflection, transformation), and interviews. Data were analyzed using Miles et al.'s (2014) interactive model of data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing. Morphological errors were classified into affixation, reduplication, and composition, with subcategories based on error patterns.

To map critical literacy, this study uses indicators adapted from McLaughlin & DeVogd (2004); Janks (2012); and Molden (2007), which emphasize analysis, reflection, and evaluation of text.



Table 1. Critical Literacy Indicators

Aspects,	Indicators	Data Forms
Identification	Students are able to find and classify morphological errors (affixation, reduplication, composition).	Student analysis writing.
Analysis	Students can explain the causes of errors (interlingual, intralingual, or social context).	Description in writing.
Evaluation	Students assess the impact of errors on communication clarity and linguistic norms.	Student assessment narrative.
Reflection	Students reflect on the meaning of language errors in everyday life and their relationship to learning.	Reflective statements in writing/interviews.
Transformation	Students propose strategies or solutions to correct errors and increase language awareness.	Proposals in writing or interview results.

The percentage of achievement for each indicator was calculated based on the number of students who met the indicator criteria compared to the total number of participants. To ensure data validity, this study employed source triangulation (documents, student assignments, and interviews) and method triangulation (document analysis, performance tests, and interviews). Results were also validated through member checking, which involved asking participants to reconfirm the researcher's interpretation of their interview results.

RESULTS

The results of the study indicate that morphological errors found in students' writing fall into several main categories, namely affixation, reduplication, and composition. Of the overall data analyzed, errors at the affixation level were the most dominant, followed by reduplication errors, while composition errors were relatively fewer. Affixation errors primarily involved the use of affixes that did not comply with the rules, for example, the omission or addition of affixes that resulted in non-standard word forms. In reduplication errors, students often used inappropriate or excessive rephrasing, while in composition errors, ambiguous compound word choices were found.

From 200 everyday texts collected (banners, social media posts, and student notes), 87 cases of morphological errors were found. Each case was analyzed and grouped into three main categories: affixation, reduplication, and composition. The following table shows the distribution of the types of morphological errors analyzed in students' writing.

Table 2. Distribution of Findings of Morphological Error Types

Type of Morphological Error	Number of Findings	Percentage (%)
Affixation	45	52%
Reduplication	25	29%
Composition	17	19%
Total	87	100%

Table 2 shows that the most dominant morphological errors occurred in the affixation process (52%), followed by reduplication (29%), and composition (19%). These findings indicate that the use of affixes is often a major challenge for students, especially in distinguishing similar prefixes. For example, a student wrote "*menyuci baju*" instead of "*mencuci baju*". This error indicates a lack of understanding of the morphological rules of the prefix *meN-*, because the base form *cuci* must undergo a morphophonemic process to become *mencuci*, not *menyuci*.

Reduplication errors found include the use of "*lari-larian*" in an inappropriate context. This indicates a weak understanding of the semantic function of reduplication. Meanwhile, compositional errors found include the use of "*rumah-rumahan*" to refer to many houses, even though the standard meaning of "*rumah-rumahan*" in Indonesian is a house-shaped toy. These data confirm that morphological errors are not only technical but also have implications for the clarity of meaning in everyday communication.

In addition to classifying morphological errors, this study also revealed how students demonstrated their critical literacy skills through this analysis. Students not only identified the type of error but also attempted to evaluate its impact on communication and reflect on its relevance in everyday life. Some students even proposed solutions for improvement, such as the importance of increasing language awareness through social media or project-based learning.

- Students' ability to analyze errors is evaluated using five critical literacy indicators: identification, analysis, evaluation, reflection, and transformation. Each indicator is assessed using a simple rubric: students are deemed to have "met" the criteria if they can demonstrate evidence that meets the operational definition.

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

Indicators	Students Fulfill (n)	Percentage (%)	Data Citation Example
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)

The data shows a consistent pattern: technical skills (identification & analysis) are stronger than reflective & transformational skills. Nearly all students can identify errors (90%), most can explain the principle (75%), but only a few are able to relate errors to social implications (60%) or offer creative solutions (55%).

An overview of the development of students' critical literacy skills can be seen in the following diagram, which shows the skill level based on the indicators of identification, analysis, evaluation, reflection, and transformation.

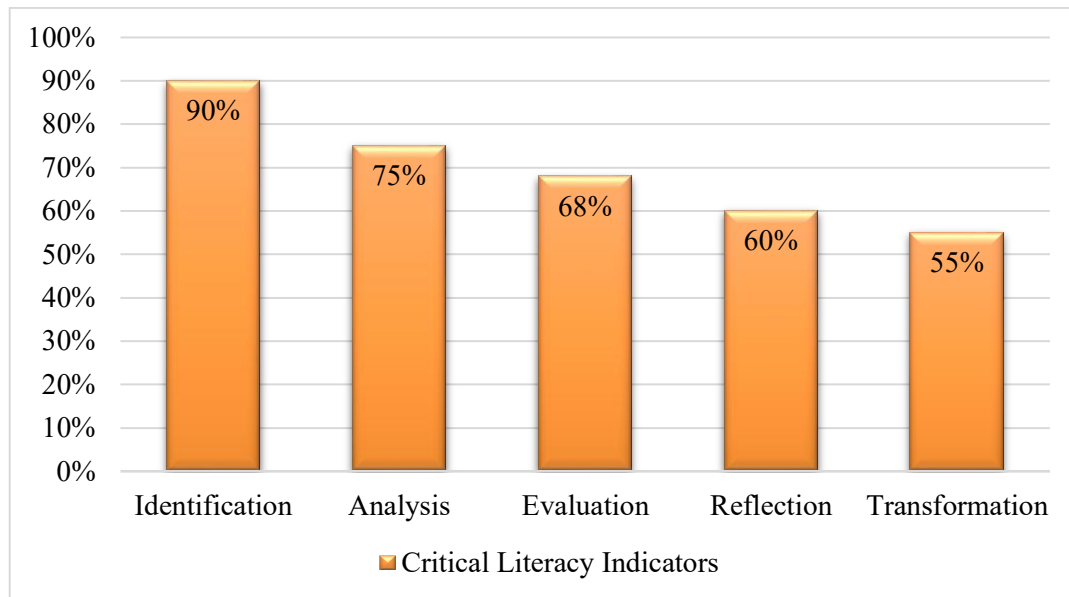


Figure 1. Level of Students' Critical Literacy Skills

The diagram shows that identification skills are the most strongly mastered aspect by students (90%), followed by analytical skills (75%) and evaluation (68%). Meanwhile, reflection (60%) and transformation (55%) aspects are relatively lower, indicating that students still need to be encouraged to develop deeper critical awareness and the ability to offer concrete solutions to linguistic phenomena. This shows that students are relatively skilled at finding and explaining error patterns, but are still limited in reflecting on social implications or offering alternative improvements.

In an interview, one student stated: *“I see the word is wrong, but I’m confused about its implications in everyday communication.”* (Interview, M3). This quote highlights the gap between structural linguistic skills and critical awareness. Another student added: *“Errors like the one on the banner can lead to misunderstandings, but in class we’re rarely asked to think about the consequences.”* (Interview, M7).

The low achievement of the reflection (60%) and transformation (55%) indicators indicates that these two aspects are weak points that need to be prioritized in the development of critical literacy. Reflection requires students to connect language errors to linguistic norms and social implications, while transformation encourages them to generate more appropriate alternatives. For example, one student stated: *“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.”* (Interview, M12).

This suggests that pedagogical strategies that emphasize language recontextualization (e.g., asking students to redesign public texts) can strengthen the transformation dimension. These findings suggest that morphological error analysis can be an effective tool for strengthening students' critical literacy, while contributing to the achievement of quality education as outlined in SDG 4.

DISCUSSION

Types of Morphological Errors in Everyday Texts

The results of this study indicate that the most common morphological errors occurred in affixation (52%), followed by reduplication (29%) and composition (19%). This finding is consistent with the results of research by [Afriana and Yuliawan \(2024\)](#), who also found a predominance of affixation errors in the writing of Indonesian language students. This pattern indicates that although students can accurately identify morphological forms (identification indicators reaching 90%), they still experience difficulties in the aspects of transformation (55%) and reflection (60%). This reflects findings from the literature that mastery of linguistic forms (form) does not automatically imply critical understanding and reflection on content and context (substance). [Sidorkin \(2025\)](#) discusses the importance of developing the ability of "form-substance discrimination" as an essential critical literacy skill in the modern information age.

Students' Critical Literacy in Describing, Evaluating, and Reflecting on Errors

Although students demonstrated strong skills in identifying and analyzing morphological errors, their reflective and evaluative responses often lacked depth. Many comments were limited to surface-level judgments such as labeling a form "incorrect" or offering a direct correction, without linking these errors to broader issues of meaning, audience perception, or cultural appropriateness. For example, one student noted, "*This word is wrong, it should be 'mencuci baju',*" but did not explain how such misuse could distort meaning or affect communication in public contexts. This pattern suggests that while technical proficiency has been achieved, students' critical stance toward language use remains underdeveloped. Similar trends have been reported in studies of critical literacy in EFL settings, where learners excel at mechanical analysis but struggle to move toward interpretive and reflective engagement ([Weng, 2023](#); [Ferdoush & Jahan, 2024](#)).

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In the realm of critical literacy, skills are not limited to recognizing language forms but also include the ability to analyze and evaluate their social and linguistic implications. [Hardianti \(2024\)](#) emphasized that the integration of critical literacy in higher education in Indonesia is still limited, primarily because students tend to stop at literal understanding without in-depth reflection. The results of this study reinforce these findings by showing that although students can identify and analyze structural language, they have not fully translated linguistic findings into reflections on linguistic norms or language improvement strategies. This condition indicates the need for a more intensive application of a structural linguistic approach in learning. This is in line with [Nenoliu et al. \(2024\)](#), who emphasized that a deep understanding of structural linguistic analysis can help students develop better Indonesian language skills through comprehensive phonological, morphological, and syntactic awareness.

In line with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 on quality education, specifically Target 4.7, which emphasizes the development of knowledge and skills for sustainable education, strengthening critical thinking and literacy skills is seen as a prerequisite for meaningful learning. Recent literature on ESD also positions “critical thinking” as a core competency in learning design in higher education ([Vaniev & Malt-Cullen, 2025](#)). Within this framework, morphological error analysis provides a concrete, practical platform for students to practice critical literacy: not only recognizing forms, but also examining their functions, meanings, and the implications of their use; empirical findings indicate that morphological awareness/analysis correlates with improved academic writing quality and literacy outcomes ([Asaad, 2024](#)).

Furthermore, a systematic review of critical thinking pedagogy in language education uncovered a gap between curriculum rhetoric and classroom practice, explaining why such a language analysis approach is rarely mainstreamed, and also confirmed the pedagogical potential of the language analysis-based learning model proposed in this study ([Yin et al., 2023](#)). This suggests that despite the emphasis on the importance of critical literacy, its implementation in the classroom is often limited to basic language skills. Therefore, analyzing the application of language as a learning strategy can be an effective bridge to realizing curriculum objectives while strengthening students' reflective abilities.

- Although language curricula often include critical literacy as one of their objectives, empirical studies show that teachers face difficulties in pushing students beyond a literal understanding of texts. For example, [Weng \(2023\)](#) noted that the lack of a structured pedagogical framework and classroom management challenges make the implementation of critical literacy in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms limited and fragmented. Furthermore, an exploratory study by a group of teachers in Bangladesh identified several key barriers, including the institutional environment, authoritarian teaching styles, and limited teacher training, that undermine students' ability to critically reflect on textual content ([Ferdoush & Jahan, 2024](#)). Therefore, strengthening reflection and transformation through critical pedagogy is not only relevant but also urgently needed for strategic development in language teaching contexts.

Developing Reflective and Transformative Skills to Support SDG 4

The relatively low achievement in reflection (60%) and transformation (55%) highlights a gap between students' structural knowledge and their critical awareness. This pattern can be attributed to instructional practices that prioritize accuracy in form rather than encouraging exploration of meaning and context, a limitation also identified by [Weng \(2023\)](#) and [Ferdoush & Jahan \(2024\)](#) in EFL contexts. To bridge this gap, pedagogical interventions should move beyond error detection and incorporate tasks that require students to recontextualize and redesign texts ([Elola & Oskoz, 2022](#)), for example, rewriting erroneous banners into socially meaningful messages or critically comparing student-produced corrections with authentic media examples. Such activities not only strengthen reflective and transformative skills but also align with SDG 4's call for transformative education, as they empower learners to become linguistically competent and critically aware individuals capable of making informed communicative choices. For further development, language curricula can be designed to include modules on language transformation: for example, inviting students not only to identify errors but also to formulate sustainable language strategies in the digital age.

CONCLUSION

Overall, this study revealed that (1) students' morphological errors mostly occurred in affixation, (2) students were able to identify and analyze errors but lacked in-depth reflection and transformation, and (3) aspects of reflection and transformation need to be

prioritized in language analysis-based pedagogy. By strengthening these dimensions, language learning can be more meaningful, socially relevant, and support the realization of SDG 4 on quality education. The implication is that language learning in higher education needs to be designed more innovatively by utilizing everyday language phenomena as a reflective and transformative medium so that students are not only able to recognize the form of errors, but also able to assess, reflect, and offer more meaningful linguistic solutions.

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