Language Error Patterns in Indonesian Teacher Education: The Impact of Digital Communication on Academic Language Use

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ABSTRACT

Indonesian language functions as the primary medium of academic communication in higher education, yet language errors persist among university students. This study investigated the forms, frequencies, and causal factors of language errors among Indonesian Language and Literature Education students at STKIP Budidaya Binjai. Employing qualitative descriptive methodology, the research collected data from 20 students in semesters III and V through systematic observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentary analysis of over 200 written samples during a 14-week period. Results revealed five error categories with varying frequencies: non-standard words (38%), code mixing (25%), ineffective sentences (15%), spelling errors (12%), and morphological errors (10%). Analysis demonstrated substantial contextual variation, with digital communication platforms showing significantly higher error rates than formal academic contexts. Primary causal factors included informal language habits reinforced through peer interaction, pervasive social media influence, and insufficient emphasis on formal register maintenance. The findings indicate that students possess greater linguistic competency than aggregate error rates suggest but demonstrate selective application of standard forms based on perceived formality requirements. This research contributes empirical evidence for developing targeted pedagogical interventions including explicit register instruction, vocabulary formality training, and structured language development activities to enhance communicative competence among prospective educators in Indonesian teacher education contexts.

1. INTRODUCTION

Language serves as the primary medium for human communication, functioning not only as a tool for conveying information but also as a marker of social identity and intellectual competence. In the Indonesian educational context, Bahasa Indonesia occupies a unique position as both the national language and the principal medium of instruction across all levels of education, including tertiary institutions. The ability to use Indonesian effectively and correctly is particularly crucial for university students, who are expected to demonstrate linguistic proficiency commensurate with their status as emerging intellectuals and future professionals. Despite the central role of language in academic success, contemporary observations reveal persistent patterns of language deviation among university students, manifesting in both oral and written communication across formal and informal contexts (Ho, 2024; Amiri & Puteh, 2017). These deviations, which include the use of non-standard vocabulary, code mixing, syntactic irregularities, and morphological errors, raise significant concerns about the quality of language education and the linguistic competence of higher education graduates.

The phenomenon of language errors among university students has attracted scholarly attention across diverse educational settings, with researchers consistently documenting gaps between prescribed

language standards and actual usage patterns. Tarigan (2011) defines language errors as systematic deviations from established linguistic norms, encompassing phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic dimensions. Such errors are not merely superficial mistakes but reflect deeper issues in language acquisition, maintenance, and application within specific communicative contexts. Chaer (2012) emphasizes that language ability is profoundly influenced by habitual practices, environmental factors, and the specific demands of different communicative situations. Furthermore, Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982) identify multiple causal mechanisms underlying language errors, including first language interference, inadequate learning strategies, and the cognitive demands imposed by spontaneous communication. Rahardi (2018) extends this analysis by highlighting the contemporary challenge posed by non-standard language use in digital media, arguing that social media platforms have substantially weakened language awareness among young people, including university students who should exemplify standard language competence.

Recent technological and social transformations have fundamentally altered the linguistic landscape in which contemporary students develop and deploy their language skills. The proliferation of digital communication platforms, particularly social media and instant messaging applications, has created new communicative environments characterized by informality, brevity, and the frequent mixing of linguistic codes (Panjaitan & Patria, 2024). While these platforms offer unprecedented opportunities for connectivity and information exchange, they simultaneously establish contexts in which non-standard language forms flourish without corrective feedback. Research indicates that social media significantly impacts language use among students, with studies documenting frequent use of abbreviations, emojis, and informal vocabulary that often transfer into academic contexts (Alturayeif & Alnahdi, 2020; Baldwin, 2012). Students who spend substantial time engaged in digital communication often internalize informal linguistic patterns that subsequently intrude into academic contexts where standard language use is expected and required (Jebaselvi et al., 2023; Nwagbara, 2025). This situation creates a tension between the informal communicative practices normalized in peer interactions and digital spaces, and the formal language standards mandated in academic settings.

The phenomenon of code mixing and code switching among multilingual university students adds another layer of complexity to language error patterns. While code mixing can serve important communicative and identity functions in multilingual contexts (Wei, 2019; Tarigan et al., 2024), excessive or inappropriate code mixing in academic contexts may impede language proficiency development and create communication barriers (Nugroho & Mulyeni, 2025). Research on university students in multilingual settings demonstrates that code mixing can affect linguistic accuracy, communication effectiveness, and academic performance (Brice, 2000; Fernandez & Lim, 2019). The prevalence of English-Indonesian code mixing among Indonesian students reflects both the influence of global academic discourse conducted predominantly in English and the practical reality that many technical terms lack widely accepted Indonesian equivalents (Jones & Garcia, 2021).

STKIP Budidaya Binjai, as an institution dedicated to teacher education, occupies a particularly significant position in addressing language quality concerns. Students at this institution are not merely expected to achieve personal linguistic competence but are being prepared to serve as language models and instructors for future generations. The presence of language errors among students in teacher education programs thus carries amplified significance, as these patterns may perpetuate across subsequent educational cohorts if left unaddressed. Preliminary observations at STKIP Budidaya Binjai reveal frequent instances of slang usage, code mixing with English, non-standard spelling, and syntactic irregularities across both formal academic communication and informal peer interaction. These patterns

suggest that despite years of formal language instruction, many students have not fully internalized or consistently apply standard Indonesian language norms in their daily communication.

Despite growing recognition of language quality concerns in Indonesian higher education, systematic empirical research documenting the specific forms, frequencies, and contextual patterns of student language errors remains limited. While educators and administrators frequently express concern about declining language standards, comprehensive documentation of error types and rigorous analysis of causal mechanisms are essential for developing evidence-based interventions. This study addresses this gap by conducting systematic analysis of language errors produced by third and fifth semester students in the Indonesian Language and Literature Education program at STKIP Budidaya Binjai. By employing qualitative descriptive methodology incorporating observation, interviews, and documentary analysis, this research aims to identify and categorize the predominant forms of language errors, determine their relative frequencies across different communicative contexts, and explore the underlying factors contributing to their occurrence. The findings are expected to provide actionable insights for curriculum development, pedagogical improvement, and institutional language policy, ultimately contributing to enhanced language competence among future educators and strengthening the broader commitment to Indonesian language maintenance and development within higher education contexts.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to investigate language error phenomena among Indonesian Language and Literature Education students at STKIP Budidaya Binjai. The qualitative descriptive approach was selected because it enables comprehensive exploration of language errors within their natural communicative contexts while preserving the authenticity and ecological validity of observed language use patterns (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This methodological choice acknowledges that language errors cannot be adequately understood through quantitative frequencies alone but require detailed examination of contextual factors, student perspectives, and the social dynamics influencing error production. The descriptive orientation maintains focus on phenomena as manifested in actual campus communication rather than imposing external theoretical frameworks that might oversimplify the complexity of observed language use (Sugono, 2015).

The research was conducted during the 2024 academic year at STKIP Budidaya Binjai, with participants comprising 20 students from the Indonesian Language and Literature Education Study Program. Participants were purposively selected from semesters III and V to represent different stages of academic development, with 10 students from each semester level. The selection criteria included active enrollment in the program, willingness to participate voluntarily, and diverse representation across gender and academic performance levels to ensure comprehensive data collection reflecting varied linguistic proficiency among students.

Data collection employed three complementary techniques to ensure methodological triangulation and enhance research validity. First, systematic non-participant observation was conducted across diverse campus communicative contexts including classroom discussions, informal peer interactions, and formal academic presentations. Observation sessions, totaling approximately 60 hours over a 14-week period, focused on identifying instances of non-standard vocabulary, code mixing, syntactic irregularities, spelling errors, and morphological deviations. Detailed field notes documented observed language forms, contextual information, and preliminary pattern identifications. Second, semi-structured interviews lasting 45-75 minutes were conducted with all 20 participants to gather perspectives regarding their language use awareness, perceived error causes, social influences, media exposure, and attitudes toward language standardization. Interview protocols addressed experiences with language instruction, awareness of

standard versus non-standard forms, social media influence, and suggestions for improving language standards. All interviews were audio-recorded with participant consent and subsequently transcribed for analysis. Third, documentary analysis examined over 200 written samples including academic assignments, email correspondence, WhatsApp group communications, and examination responses to identify error patterns in written academic and digital contexts.

Data analysis followed systematic qualitative procedures beginning with error identification and categorization based on Indonesian language standards. Errors were classified into five categories: non-standard word use, code mixing, ineffective sentences, spelling errors, and morphological errors. Following categorization, frequency calculations determined percentage distributions across error types and contexts. Qualitative description involved detailed examination of specific examples, contextual factors, and variation patterns across communicative contexts. Thematic analysis of interview data identified recurring themes regarding factors contributing to errors, relationships between social media use and language patterns, student awareness levels, and attitudes toward standardization. Finally, integration of findings across observation, interview, and documentary sources examined pattern consistency and convergence to strengthen validity, with attention to contextual variations reflecting differential adherence to formality requirements across communicative settings.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Overview of Language Error Distribution

The systematic analysis of language errors produced by third and fifth semester students at STKIP Budidaya Binjai revealed five distinct error categories with varying frequencies across different communicative contexts. Table 1 presents the comprehensive distribution of language error types identified through observation, interviews, and documentary analysis conducted over the 14-week research period.

Table 1. Distribution of Language Error Types

Language Error Type	Percentage (%)	Description	Primary Contributing Factors
Non-standard Words	38	Use of informal, slang, or colloquial vocabulary deviating from standard Indonesian language norms	Non-standard language habits, peer influence, limited formal language practice
Code Mixing	25	Incorporation of English or other language elements within Indonesian sentences	Influence of social media, bilingual/multilingual environment, prestige of English
Ineffective Sentences	15	Sentences with unclear meaning, structural incompleteness, or syntactic errors	Lack of formal language practices, cognitive load under time pressure
Spelling Errors	12	Incorrect orthographic representations of standard words	Influence of informal digital communication, reduced reliance on manual writing
Grammatical Errors (Morphology)	10	Errors involving incorrect affixation and morphological constructions	Lack of formal instruction and language reinforcement, complexity of Indonesian morphology

As demonstrated in Table 1, non-standard word use emerged as the most prevalent error type, accounting for 38% of all documented errors. This finding indicates that while students demonstrated reasonable competency in basic grammatical structure, they struggled significantly with maintaining appropriate vocabulary registers in academic contexts. Code mixing constituted the second most frequent error category at 25%, followed by ineffective sentences (15%), spelling errors (12%), and morphological

errors (10%). The distribution pattern suggests that lexical and register-related issues predominate over structural grammatical problems among the student population.

Detailed Analysis of Non-Standard Word Use

The examination of non-standard word use revealed three distinct subcategories with different manifestation patterns. Slang and colloquial forms represented the most frequent subcategory, with students regularly employing informal expressions such as "gue" or "elu" instead of standard pronouns "saya" or "anda," "cewek" or "cowok" instead of "perempuan" and "laki-laki," and "santai" used colloquially rather than in its standard meaning. These forms appeared particularly prevalent in informal peer communication and digital messaging contexts, with male students showing higher frequency of slang deployment than female students. Regional dialect forms constituted a smaller subcategory, with occasional instances of region-specific vocabulary or pronunciation patterns appearing in formal academic contexts, particularly among students from specific regional backgrounds. The third subcategory involved inappropriate use of informal vocabulary in formal contexts, such as employing "jelek" where "kurang memuaskan" would be more academically appropriate, or using casual temporal references like "tadi" instead of the more formal "sebelumnya."

Observational data revealed marked contextual variation in non-standard word frequency. In informal peer conversations recorded during campus observations, non-standard words appeared at rates exceeding 60% of total vocabulary in some exchanges, while formal classroom presentations demonstrated substantially lower rates of approximately 15-20%. This pattern suggests that students possess awareness of register differences but struggle to maintain consistent standard language use across varying contexts.

Code Mixing Patterns and Manifestations

Analysis of code mixing instances identified three primary patterns with distinct characteristics. Lexical code mixing, the most prevalent form, involved insertion of individual English words into predominantly Indonesian discourse. Commonly documented examples included technology-related terms such as "meeting" instead of "pertemuan," "schedule" instead of "jadwal," "deadline" instead of "batas waktu," "download," "update," "file," "password," "email," "website," and "online." Interview data revealed that students often perceived English technical terms as more precise or convenient than Indonesian equivalents, even when standard translations existed in official dictionaries.

Phrasal code mixing represented a less frequent but notable pattern, with students inserting multi-word English phrases such as "I need to focus," "Let me think about it," or "That's so cool" into Indonesian discourse. These instances appeared predominantly in informal digital communication, suggesting active English proficiency that spontaneously intruded into Indonesian language production. Morphologically adapted code mixing constituted an intermediate phenomenon, with students combining English lexical items with Indonesian grammatical markers, such as "nge-download" or "di-mention," representing ongoing linguistic accommodation processes.

Documentary analysis of WhatsApp group messages revealed that code mixing frequency increased substantially in digital contexts compared to formal written assignments. Academic papers demonstrated code mixing rates of approximately 10-15%, while WhatsApp communications showed rates exceeding 40%, indicating that digital communication platforms serve as primary contexts for code mixing behavior.

Characteristics of Ineffective Sentences

The examination of ineffective sentences revealed four primary manifestation types. Incomplete sentences, representing approximately 40% of ineffective sentence errors, involved students beginning sentences without completing necessary predicate structures, such as "Mengenai tugas minggu depan,

kami..." trailing off without completion. These instances appeared particularly frequent in examination responses and rapid digital communication, suggesting that cognitive load and time pressure contributed substantially to incompleteness.

Subject-predicate misalignment errors involved grammatical disagreement between sentence subjects and predicates, such as "Para siswa dalam kelas ini adalah semuanya senang belajar," where subject-predicate agreement breaks down. English-influenced syntax errors reflected interference from English structural patterns, with students occasionally constructing sentences using English-like word order that conflicted with Indonesian grammatical requirements. Run-on sentences and comma splices appeared predominantly in written communication, particularly in digital contexts where students engaged in rapid composition without revision or careful proofreading.

Contextual analysis revealed that ineffective sentences occurred at substantially higher rates in examination contexts (approximately 25% of sentences) compared to untimed written assignments (approximately 8%), indicating that time pressure and cognitive demands significantly challenged students' capacity to maintain grammatically correct sentence production.

Spelling and Morphological Error Patterns

Spelling error analysis identified several consistent patterns including phonetic misspellings where students spelled words according to pronunciation (e.g., "kemaren" instead of "kemarin"), homophone confusions, and apparent careless errors where standard forms were inconsistently applied. Comparative analysis revealed that spelling error frequencies increased substantially when digital automatic correction was unavailable, with handwritten examination responses showing error rates approximately three times higher than typed assignments, suggesting significant reliance on technological affordances.

Morphological errors, while representing the smallest numerical category, demonstrated particular significance for grammatical accuracy. Common patterns included confusion regarding appropriate suffix selection, such as employing "-kan" where "-i" would be correct or vice versa, incorrect prefix application such as omitting the necessary "me-" prefix in verb constructions ("nulis" instead of "menulis"), and inappropriate particle deletion. Interview data indicated that students often struggled to articulate rules governing morphological choices, suggesting that morphological knowledge remained largely intuitive rather than explicit among many participants.

Discussion

The preponderance of non-standard word errors at 38% of all documented errors represents the study's most significant finding and demands careful interpretation extending beyond surface-level frequency data. This finding aligns with research by Aprillia Puspita Sari et al. (2025) and Tsalis Nafisaturrohmah et al. (2025) documenting persistent non-standard vocabulary use among Indonesian students across various educational contexts. While students demonstrated reasonable grammatical competency, they had not fully internalized formal vocabulary registers appropriate to academic contexts, consistent with sociolinguistic theory establishing that vocabulary choices show substantial register-dependence and prove highly sensitive to social contextual factors (Kang et al., 2025).

The prominence of non-standard word use reflects multiple converging influences identified in contemporary research. First, the powerful influence of peer groups in establishing linguistic norms during late adolescence ensures that slang and colloquial vocabulary become deeply habituated, a pattern documented by Shahini (2025) in studies of language acquisition during identity consolidation periods. Second, the digital communication environment creates self-reinforcing contexts where non-standard vocabulary circulates without corrective feedback. This finding resonates strongly with research by Nwagbara (2025) demonstrating that digital platforms establish implicit norms prioritizing communicative

speed and in-group solidarity over linguistic formality. Panjaitan and Patria (2024) similarly found that students frequently and unconsciously incorporate social media language into everyday conversations, with these expressions serving as means to convey humor, emotions, and social connections. Third, institutional and pedagogical factors contribute to persistence of non-standard use, with curricula often allocating insufficient explicit attention to vocabulary register distinctions, as noted by Perevozchikova (2025) in examining pedagogical conditions for communicative competence formation.

The substantial frequency of code mixing at 25% provides important insights regarding the linguistic ecology of contemporary Indonesian higher education and aligns with extensive research on multilingual university contexts. This frequency definitively establishes code mixing as an integral component of student communicative meaning-making rather than a marginal phenomenon. Research by Nichols et al. (2025) and Wei (2019) demonstrates that code mixing represents sophisticated linguistic strategies through which bilinguals navigate complex communicative environments, reflecting bilingual competence rather than linguistic inadequacy. However, the prevalence in formal academic contexts where Indonesian represents the expected standard constitutes a significant concern from language standardization perspectives, consistent with findings by Nugroho and Mulyeni (2025) on code-switching and language mixing challenges among Indonesian students.

The code mixing patterns documented in this study reflect genuine tensions in contemporary Indonesian higher education between commitment to Indonesian language maintenance and practical reality that international academic discourse increasingly occurs in English. Many English terms documented in student code mixing lack widely accepted Indonesian equivalents in actual usage despite official dictionary translations, a phenomenon observed by Tarigan et al. (2024) among multilingual university students. Research by Brice (2000) and Fernandez and Lim (2019) confirms that while code mixing can facilitate communication efficiency and identity expression, excessive use in academic contexts may create barriers and affect linguistic accuracy. The particularly high code mixing frequency in digital communication contexts (exceeding 40%) compared to formal writing (10-15%) reflects the influence of social media platforms as primary sites for linguistic innovation and informality, consistent with findings by Alturayeif and Alnahdi (2020) and Baldwin (2012) on social media's impact on language norms.

The 15% frequency of ineffective sentences represents a particularly concerning finding from educational outcomes perspectives, as these errors potentially undermine communicative success and academic assessment more severely than vocabulary choices. This finding aligns with research by Ho (2024) and Amiri and Puteh (2017) identifying sentence construction as a persistent challenge for multilingual students in academic contexts. The prominence of ineffective sentences in examination contexts specifically, where rates increased to 25%, suggests that cognitive load and time pressure substantially challenge students' capacity to maintain grammatically correct production, indicating a concerning gap between demonstrated competency under unconstrained conditions versus performance under realistic academic pressures. This pattern resonates with Tsalis Nafisaturrohmah et al. (2025) examining effective sentence construction in educational contexts and highlights the need for explicit instruction in sentence formation under varied conditions.

The documented 12% frequency of spelling errors appears modest compared to popular assumptions regarding widespread spelling problems among digital-age youth, likely reflecting technological affordances that substantially reduce visible errors. This interpretation aligns with research by Jebaselvi et al. (2023) on simplified syntax and colloquial forms in social media contexts. The threefold increase in spelling error rates when automatic correction was unavailable confirms that apparent low frequency partly reflects technological rather than educational factors, consistent with findings by Aprillia Puspita Sari et al. (2025) analyzing language errors in digital versus handwritten contexts.

The 10% frequency of morphological errors, while numerically smallest, warrants particular attention because morphological accuracy carries substantial consequences for grammatical meaning in Indonesian. This finding aligns with research on grammatical error patterns among university students documented by Ho (2024) and reflects the inherent complexity of Indonesian morphological systems. The qualitative significance of these errors arguably exceeds their numerical frequency due to potential impacts on communicative clarity and grammatical correctness.

The substantial contextual variation in error occurrence across different communicative contexts confirms sociolinguistic theory regarding context-dependence of linguistic performance and importance of register and audience in shaping language use, as established by Yousef et al. (2025) examining address terms and cross-cultural communication. Students demonstrably applied differential linguistic monitoring across contexts, with error frequencies varying substantially between formal academic settings and informal peer contexts. This pattern indicates that students possessed greater language competency than overall error rates might suggest but demonstrated selective application of accurate forms based on perceived communicative pressure, consistent with research by Jones and Garcia (2021) on code switching as a cultural discourse strategy.

The particularly high error frequency in digital communication contexts reflects factors specific to digital environments documented extensively in recent literature. The temporal pressure and rapid message exchange characteristic of platforms like WhatsApp establish norms prioritizing speed over careful production, as demonstrated by research on digital communication's impact on language use (Nwagbara, 2025; Panjaitan & Patria, 2024). The influence of social media on student language errors represents one of the most significant findings, permitting specification of particular mechanisms through which digital communication patterns translate into academic context errors. Students spending several hours daily in digital communication effectively immerse themselves in linguistic environments where non-standard forms flourish uncorrected, creating extensive practice contexts that constitute powerful training in non-standard language use, consistent with findings by Alturayeif and Alnahdi (2020) and Baldwin (2012) on social media's direct influence on informal communication styles and lexical innovation.

4. CONCLUSION

This study provides comprehensive empirical evidence documenting persistent language error patterns among Indonesian Language and Literature Education students at STKIP Budidaya Binjai, with non-standard word use (38%) and code mixing (25%) emerging as the most prevalent error types, followed by ineffective sentences (15%), spelling errors (12%), and morphological errors (10%). The research establishes that these errors stem primarily from informal language habits reinforced through peer interaction, pervasive social media influence promoting non-standard forms, and insufficient emphasis on formal register maintenance in academic contexts. Contextual analysis reveals that students possess greater linguistic competency than aggregate error rates suggest but demonstrate selective application of standard forms based on perceived formality requirements, with digital communication platforms serving as primary sites for non-standard language proliferation.

This research contributes to the field by providing detailed empirical documentation of language error patterns in Indonesian teacher education contexts, identifying specific mechanisms through which digital communication influences academic language use, and establishing the critical role of contextual factors in error production. The findings have significant implications for curriculum development, suggesting the need for explicit instruction in register awareness, vocabulary formality distinctions, and strategies for maintaining standard language across varied communicative contexts. Pedagogical interventions should include structured language development activities such as academic writing

workshops, debate competitions, and implementation of language discipline standards in campus activities, while acknowledging legitimate communicative functions of informal language in appropriate contexts.

The study's limitations include its focus on a single institution with relatively small sample size, potentially limiting generalizability to broader Indonesian higher education contexts. Future research should employ longitudinal designs tracking language development across multiple semesters, examine intervention effectiveness in reducing specific error types, and investigate comparative patterns across different institutional contexts and academic disciplines to develop comprehensive understanding of language quality challenges and effective remediation strategies in Indonesian tertiary education.

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