

Analyzing Literal Translation Mistakes in English Language Learning

¹Annisa Triana Flyandjono*

²M. Afifulloh

¹English Literature Department, Universitas Terbuka, Indonesia

²English Literature Department, Universitas Bangka Belitung Indonesia

*Corresponding Author, Email: annisatriana3@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: 29-05-2025 Revised: 04-06-2025 Accepted: 09-06-2025 Published: 09-06-2025 Volume: 3 Issue: 1 DOI: https://doi.org/10.61276/loqula.v2i2.74	This paper aims to highlight pragmatic failure and to analyze the translation errors made by EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students at Everest English Course, Surabaya. The researcher focuses on the mistakes often occurring in English classes. The method of this study is descriptive qualitative, which focuses on describing student's translation errors. The acquisition uses the theory introduced by (Corder, 1967; Richards, 1971) to identify the types of interlingual or intralingual matters. The research involves 25 randomly selected students of varying ages (male and female) as subjects of this examination. They were given some translation tasks for seven phrases and sentences without looking up the meaning in a dictionary. The most frequent mistake appeared in the phrase "Thank you before," produced by 80% of students. Other recurring errors included "Thanks God" and incorrect adjective forms like "I am boring". The findings indicate that the students' errors were strongly influenced by the structure of their first language (L1). The results suggest that teaching translation should focus more on fixed expressions, pragmatic usage, contrastive understanding of sentence patterns, and pedagogical implications.
KEYWORDS <i>EFL students, Translation errors, Literal translation, Interlingual errors, Intralingual errors, Error analysis, Pragmatic failure.</i>	



Introduction

Learning English as a second language is an activity that requires skills in several aspects, such as vocabulary, grammar, and even the culture of the target language. For example, someone needs to understand grammar, vocabulary, and word order from the source to the target language. These aspects are challenges for some EFLs, especially Indonesian students, who want to translate a sentence or equivalent phrases from Bahasa Indonesia as their mother tongue, which called L1. (Bakri, n.d.) noted that vocabulary restrictions and word order confusion caused most errors in translating noun phrases.

Learning English is not that simple for some people. Due to the difficulties of understanding some patterns of grammar and memorizing some vocabularies, EFL students become too lazy to learn English as their second language intensively. There are so many rules that someone needs to understand, such as pronunciation, reading, listening, writing, and speaking skills. (Afifulloh, 2018) states that learners should enrich their vocabulary and understand grammar. Therefore, to master English, learners should have a good knowledge of the patterns in the second language to communicate well.

Pragmatic errors frequently occur in everyday language everywhere. For instance, misusing the word "boring," is often incorrectly used to express feelings when the appropriate term should be "bored." The issue happens because the learner misuses their native language (L1) grammar patterns into the second language (L2). According to **(Ariani & Artawa, 2022)**, achieving accurate, readable, and acceptable translations depends on the translator's understanding of lexical items, grammar, communication context, and cultural background in both the source and target languages by identifying the types of errors and understanding the learners' challenges in translating Indonesian noun phrases into English as their second language (L2).

Literature Review

EFL learners frequently encounter translation outcomes, which are the foundation of second language acquisition. The errors commonly arise from learners' over-reliance on their native language features. (Berutu et



This work is licensed under [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 Internasional](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).

Copyright © 2025, Annisa Triana Flyandjono & M. Afifulloh

al., 2024) discuss the interlanguage stage, where learners transfer the first language's patterns into the second language. They found that 30.8% of errors were due to a false concept hypothesis, which aligns with this observation of expressions like '*Thank you before*' and '*Thanks God.*' (Afifulloh, 2018) emphasizes that grammatical errors, such as misuse of articles, subject-verb agreement, and incorrect word choice, show the learners' lack of awareness of English syntactic rules (p. 107). These issues generally appear in English phrase errors analyzed in this study.

(Arapah, 2023) states that EFL learners often make predictable mistakes like overgeneralizing rules or misapplying grammar structures when translating as easily as possible using the word-for-word translation method. According to her concept, teachers can only genuinely identify the fundamental causes of students' language mistakes through a systematic error analysis process. Therefore, some techniques need improvement in this case (Muhammed Shawqi & Sultan, 2024) found that learners could identify word formation patterns more easily than using them. In his thesis, the examination projects were categorized into three morphological processes: clipping, blending and compounding, which line up with interlingual and intralingual errors that this paper claims.

Moreover, (Berutu et al., 2024), in his thesis titled "*An error analysis of Indonesian-English Translation*," identifies translation errors using Halliday and Hasan's (1976) cohesion device theory that the failure of some Indonesian English translation occurs due to students' lack of understanding of the transfer of meaning from the source language (SL) to the target language (TL). He mentioned that the understanding of cohesion devices such as reference, conjunction, and lexical cohesion needs to be implemented in the syllabus of the English subject at school. Furthermore, (Putra, 2021), in his book titled "*Teknik dan Ideologi Penerjemahan Bahasa Inggris*," declared that effective translation requires attention to both technique and ideology, as neither linguistic accuracy nor cultural equivalence alone is sufficient to produce an acceptable translation.

In some perspective, grammar and cognitive differences between children and adults in second language acquisition must be highlighted. According to the theory from (Sujono, n.d.), adults are more prone to misapplying explicit rules, leading to over-generalizations and inconvenient phrase constructions (p. 11). Meanwhile, children learn more implicitly through exposure. This matter supports the importance of



analyzing learner errors, particularly in structured environments like language courses and also helps explain the structural rigidity found in learner translations. **(R & Yusri, 2020)** explain that analyzing language errors involves pointing out what students do wrong and using those mistakes to improve teaching. When teachers understand the types and cause of student errors, they can plan lessons that directly target those weaknesses, especially in areas like grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure. **(Zoghbor et al., 2020)** highlight that language instruction needs to be adapted as teaching methods evolve.

There are so many studies conducted by several experts, researchers, and educators who analyze the mistakes that occur around and side by side in everyday life in Indonesia. As (Endarto, 2024) stated in his book *"Indonesian English a Linguistic Identity in a Global Tongue,"* English has become more popular in Indonesia and is included in school curriculum. This growth is seen as a positive change. However, many improvements still need to be made in the teaching system and implementation of English as a second language. Because Bahasa Indonesia (L1) and English (L2) have equally important roles in today's world of education and work. Therefore, this study aims to minimize mistakes that often appear repeated in each generation.

The Contrastive Analysis theory by Lado in (Kramsch, n.d.) becomes relevant to explaining how the structural differences between Bahasa Indonesia and English lead to translation errors due to direct translation. Students are more likely to translate based on their logic without considering the norms in the target language (L2). Interlanguage theory, introduced by Selinker in (Gomez, n.d.), helps explain how students develop a language system temporarily, with elements from both their first and second languages. It will explain why students make consistent translation errors, regardless of previous corrections.

The Literary Translation (Fuertes-Olivera_Pique-Noguera, n.d.)(2013) describes this phenomena as hypothesis, which states that pupils transfer native structures into the second language without adjusting to the target language's pragmatics or idiomatic conventions. Often resulting in misinterpretations in EFL translation, especially among



This work is licensed under [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 Internasional](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).

Copyright © 2025, Annisa Triana Flyandjono & M. Afifulloh

Indonesian students, literal translation strategies are therefore Students' first language (L1) sometimes causes them to translate sentences literally, therefore leading to pragmatic failure.

(Sermsook et al., 2017) discovered this, and a case study supports it as well. This situation is described by interlingual interference. The problem is errors brought on by translating L1 rules to L2 output. First-language interference and intralingual problems, including overgeneralization or inadequate grammatical knowledge, were found by their investigation on Thai EFL students to be the main causes of sentence-level mistakes. It aligns with this paper that the problem gets worse when children interpret words like "Thank you before" as true because they mirror the Indonesian "Terima kasih sebelumnya."

(Jannah et al., 2022) Using Miles and Huberman's qualitative model, the researchers stressed that ambiguities in L1 terminology, a restricted vocabulary, and a weak grammatical framework usually caused practical mistakes. Their pupils had problems translating narrative texts from Indonesian to English, which led to several omissions and errors.

(Mohammed AbdAlgane & Omer Elsheikh Hago Elmahdi, 2025) looked at how idioms are often misinterpret. They found that students often fell back on actual readings, therefore causing misunderstandings. This fits with what the pilot of this experiment observed during this inquiry. Pupils use terms like "I'm boring" or "This medicine for me" in their translations because they confound grammatical and practical meanings. They stress the need of particular instruction and cultural context to stop such abuse. Likewise, it looked at how Arabic-speaking pupils converted culturally particular proverbs. Their data show that students make mistakes in language and comprehension when they meet unfamiliar words.

Furthermore illuminating this subject is (Shin, 2002) perspective. Using Corder's theory of Error Analysis, he splits faults into interlingual, intralingual, developmental, and communication-strategy errors. He claims that students frequently make intralingual errors because they fail to grasp the regulations.

(Adelia, n.d.) brought up another topic in her thesis, *ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT TARBIYAH AND TEACHER TRAINING FACULTY UIN RADEN INTAN LAMPUNG*. Here is one possible explanation for the error. This is because students physically translate



words and phrases from their native tongue into the target language. Most likely, this results in the error.

Many other studies found other error investigations. One instance (Narulita, 2016) noted that students also make several of typical errors when translating English sentences. They find difficulty in converting English statements into Indonesian. In the target language, their shapes and interpretations will vary. In its constituent parts, a sentence conveys an idea. Including a tense, an adverbial, an object, and a complement all in the same sentence, a word has the role of a verb. Students often forget to consider the function of a word or phrase when translating into the target language.

To sum up this literature review, for teachers, they emphasized the need of lexical accuracy and contextual appropriateness in order to reduce translating errors. This journal shows that lexical difficulties in translation confront pupils from other countries besides Indonesia. Furthermore, there remain several circumstances that EFL students should face.

Methodology

Some data collection steps were conducted in May 2025 at Everest English Course in Surabaya. The researcher implements a qualitative descriptive method, focusing on the error phrases from translating Indonesian expressions into English. The research subjects consist of 25 students selected randomly (male and female). The students' stages were divided into three categories: elementary, junior, and senior or adult level. The data, as this research instruments, were collected through a translation task consisting of Indonesian phrases commonly misused in English translation, namely: *"Terima kasih sebelumnya," "Syukurlah," "Saya bosan," "Sama-sama (terima kasih kembali), "Obat ini untuk saya", "Saya sedang tidur", and "Aku kangen kamu"*. Students were asked to translate them into English without looking up the meaning in a dictionary. The participants' answers were analyzed using the error analysis framework proposed by Conrad and Richard, which focused on identifying, classifying, and explaining errors. Each response was grouped by error type (interlingual, intralingual, pragmatic, or structural) and discussed based on linguistic and pedagogical theories. The analysis of this study is derived from



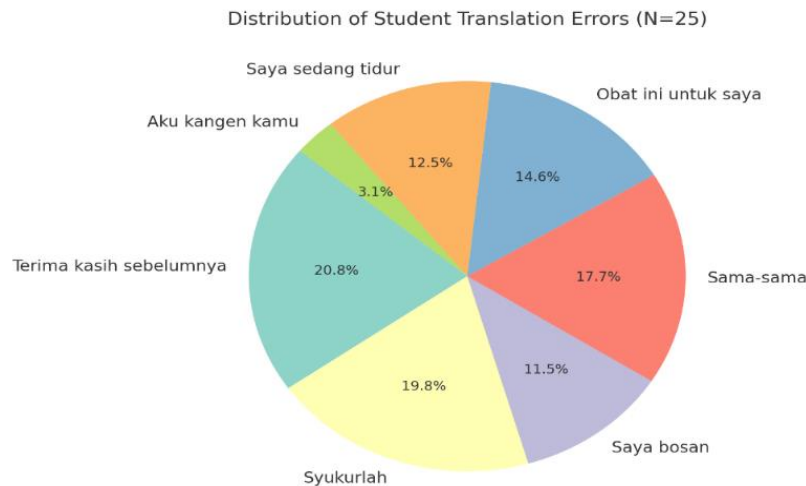
This work is licensed under [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 Internasional](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).

Copyright © 2025, Annisa Triana Flyandjono & M. Afifulloh

Corder's method in (Berutu et al., 2024) in a study titled *Error Analysis in Translating Bahasa Indonesia into English*. The method used three steps, namely (1) the collection of sample errors, (2) the identification of errors, and (3) the description of errors. This examination focused on the students' rendering results. Then, the results were described as errors made by the students. In the end, the pilot of this study corrected the errors by comparing the incorrect translations with the revised versions.

Finding and Discussion
Identification of errors

In this section, the researcher shows the data in a distribution diagram of errors. The writer first classifies the results; second, the frequent errors are identified by giving some informative examples. The tailing diagram shows the distribution of the errors made by the participants in their writing attempts.



The data demonstrated that most of the translation errors made by the students were caused by direct transfer from Bahasa Indonesia (L1) as their native language. Expressions like "thank you before" and "thanks God" appeared frequently, showing how students rely on literal meanings



instead of natural English patterns. (Wang, 2019) had the opinion that mistakes frequently occur because of the tendency to translate straight from the mother tongue. The issue mirrors the syntactic and semantic patterns of the first language. The following table presents the translation responses and the frequency of errors made by the 25 participants in the Everest English Course.

Discussion types of errors

Extract 1

Error Identification: Thank you before

Error Correction: Thank you in advance

Most students translate by directly transferring the language word for word without paying attention to lexical issues or other word formations. According to them, it occurs because this is the closest and most faithful translation. Mistranslations are primarily caused by interference from the Indonesian sentence structure. For example, "Thank you before" is a direct translation of "Terima kasih sebelumnya" that reflects interlingual transfer (Richards, 1970).

Extract 2

Error Identification: Thanks God / Alhamdulillah

Error Correction: Thank God

Out of 25 children, only 8 understood the command and translated the equivalent according to what the pilot of this study intended. They should be expected to translate the expression "Thank God" without using the adaptation technique by converting the equivalent to *Alhamdulillah*, which comes from *Arabic*.

Extract 3

Error Identification: I am boring

Error Correction: I am bored



This work is licensed under [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 Internasional](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).

Copyright © 2025, Annisa Triana Flyandjono & M. Afifulloh

The result translation "I am boring" gets a percentage of 11.5%, which means that more than half of the students mistranslated it. Most participants do not know the difference pattern between (*adjective + ing/ed*) and how to apply it to sentences. Unfortunately, in Indonesia school, in some general methods of English syllabus, this *ing/ed* adjective pattern is given when they are in junior high school. However, junior/senior classes still make mistakes when translating sentences. The term "I am boring" instead of "I am bored" is an intralingual error that demonstrates confusion between active and passive adjectives.

Extract 4

Error Identification: Your welcome

Error Correction: You're welcome

Only seven students could write the equivalent of "you're welcome" correctly, while 18 participants translated the equivalent incorrectly overall. On average, their mistakes are in the position of the possessive pronoun, which should not be requisite in the phrase. Because of their lack of knowledge, they make trivial mistakes, such as "you're welcome" becoming "your welcome."

Extract 5

Error Identification: This medicine for me

Error Correction: This medicine is for me

This sentence was deliberately given to the participants to determine whether they could construct simple sentences correctly. Disappointingly, this study found an error due to the emission of the verb "to be," which should have been given before the object of the sentence. This error also happened due to intralingual problems, such as the participants not knowing or understanding the target language's structure (L2).

Extract 6

Error Identification: I am sleep

Error Correction: I am sleeping

The results found in this case study were that 11 children did the same mistake by translating the sentence into "I am asleep." Most participants combined "to be" with the verb base (V1). It happened because of the verb agreement problem in their mother tongue. They should have used the present participle (V+ing) to form a present continuous sentence,



This work is licensed under [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 Internasional](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).

Copyright © 2025, Annisa Triana Flyandjono & M. Afifulloh

meaning that the activity is ongoing to replace the equivalent in the source language (L1).

Extract 7

Error Identification: I ... you

Error Correction: I miss you

This sentence is a piece of cake for most students because they can translate it correctly, which is accepted in the target language (L2). Only three children (elementary level) could not translate the sentence. In the interview, they declared that they did not know how to translate it (vocabulary issue).

Conclusion

This research investigates the translation mistakes made by students learning English at Everest English Course in Surabaya. It focuses on how Indonesian students incorrectly translate phrases from Bahasa Indonesia to English, often due to word-for-word translations. Many errors occur when students closely follow the structure of their native language while forming English sentences.

False concepts hypothesized happen because of the learners' misunderstanding. A previewed study conducted by (Berutu et al., 2024) used the same method as Richard, and the results showed that the most frequent error was a false concept hypothesis. (Arapah, 2023) also stated in her book *"Error Analysis in English Language Teaching"* that second/third languages or foreign languages cannot be separated by errors in either oral or written forms.

Data was collected from 25 students who translated seven phrases into English. The mistakes were categorized into interlingual, intralingual, and pragmatic types. The analysis showed that the highest error rates were with the phrase "Terima kasih sebelumnya," which 80% of students translated incorrectly as "Thank you before." Other frequent mistakes included "Thanks God" instead of "Thank God" and "I am boring" instead of "I am bored."



This work is licensed under [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 Internasional](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).

Copyright © 2025, Annisa Triana Flyandjono & M. Afifulloh

Data Presentation

Table 1. Frequency of errors

No.	Indonesian Phrase	Incorrect English Translation (n=25)	Correct Translation
1	Terima kasih sebelumnya	Thank you before (19)	Thank you in advance
2	Syukurlah	Thanks God (17)	Thank God
3	Saya bosan	I am boring (11)	I am bored
4	Terima kasih kembali (sama-sama)	Your welcome (18)	You're Welcome
5	Obat ini untukku	This medicine for me (12)	This medicine is for me
6	Saya sedang tidur	I am sleep (11)	I am sleeping
7	Aku kangen kamu	I ... you (3)	I miss you

Suggestions

Teachers should include pragmatic awareness in their curriculum and use factual translation errors as learning material. Furthermore, language instruction should incorporate examples of English expressions and explain their differences from the native language (L1). Demonstrating authentic English content, such as conversations and videos, can help students reach accurate sentence structures. The pilot of this study reckons factual translation errors as learning material. Error analysis is an effective tool for diagnosing learner challenges. The findings reveal that most errors were interlingual, mainly from direct translation. Some mistakes also stemmed from students' unclear understanding of English grammar. By prioritizing teaching common English phrases, recognizing that not all Indonesian phrases translate directly is better to apply at schools. Mistakes like "Thank you before" are often about pragmatical language use rather than grammar. Comparing English and Bahasa Indonesia grammar can help students understand translation issues, using their translations as examples. Teachers can turn student errors into learning opportunities, prompting discussions about translation. The



results suggest a need for English teaching to focus on grammar or pedagogical implications.

References

- Adelia, F. (n.d.). *Submitted as a Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for S1-Degree*.
- Afifulloh, M. (2018). Grammatical Error Analysis Of Written English Compositions Produced By First Grade Of Islamic Banking Student Of Stain Syaikh Abdurrahman Siddik Bangka Belitung In Academic Year 2017. *Akademika : Jurnal Keagamaan Dan Pendidikan*, 14(1), Article 1. <https://doi.org/10.56633/jkp.v14i1.45>
- Arapah, E. (2023). *Error Analysis in English Language Teaching*. Syiah Kuala University Press.
- Ariani, N. M., & Artawa, K. (2022). Analysis of the grammatical errors of English public signs translations in Ubud, Bali, Indonesia. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 18(2), Article 2. <https://www.jlls.org/index.php/jlls/article/view/2974>
- Bakri, U. (n.d.). *TRANSLATION ERRORS OF NOUN PHRASES: BAHASA INDONESIA INTO ENGLISH FOR EFL LEARNERS*.
- Berutu, H., Dewi, U., Daulay, S. H., Ar, M. F. A., Izar, J., & Nasution, M. M. (2024). Error Analysis in Translating Bahasa Indonesia into English. *Metathesis: Journal of English Language, Literature, and Teaching*, 8(2), Article 2. <https://doi.org/10.31002/metathesis.v8i2.408>
- Corder, S. P. (1967). THE SIGNIFICANCE OF LEARNER'S ERRORS. *IRAL - International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching*, 5(1-4). <https://doi.org/10.1515/iral.1967.5.1-4.161>
- Endarto, I. T. (2024). *Indonesian English: A Linguistic Identity in A Global Tongue*. UGM PRESS.
- Gomez, V. (n.d.). *Selinker-Interlanguage*. Retrieved June 4, 2025, from https://www.academia.edu/21533333/Selinker_Interlanguage
- Jannah, I. R., Yenni, C., Rahmi, T., & Alimnur, A. (2022). An Error Analysis of Students' Translation In Narrative Text. *JETLEE : Journal of English Language Teaching, Linguistics, and Literature*, 2(1), 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.47766/jetlee.v2i1.202>



This work is licensed under [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 Internasional](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).

Copyright © 2025, Annisa Triana Flyandjono & M. Afifulloh

-
- Kramersch, C. (n.d.). *Re-reading Robert Lado, 1957, Linguistics across Cultures. Applied linguistics for language teachers*. Retrieved June 4, 2025, from https://www.academia.edu/83730965/Re_reading_Robert_Lado_1957_Linguistics_across_Cultures_Applied_linguistics_for_language_teachers
- Mohammed AbdAlgene & Omer Elsheikh Hago Elmahdi. (2025). Common Mistakes EFL Learners Make When Using Idiomatic Expressions: A Case Study of Saudi Tertiary Level EFL Learners. *British Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 5(1), 01-16. <https://doi.org/10.32996/bjal.2025.1.1.1>
- Muhammed Shawqi, A. S., & Sultan, A. I. (2024). Error Analysis of EFL Students in Word-Formation Process. *Journal of Tikrit University for Humanities*, 31(6), 25-46. <https://doi.org/10.25130/jtuh.31.6.2024.24>
- Narulita, S. (2016). Error Analysis on Student's Narrative Text in Translation Class of English Department of Kutai Kartanegara University. *Intelegensia : Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pembelajaran*, 1(1), Article 1.
- Putra, P. P. (2021). *Teknik dan Ideologi Penerjemahan Bahasa Inggris (Teori dan Praktik)*. Samudra Biru.
- R, M., & Yusri. (2020). *Analisis Kesalahan Berbahasa (Sebuah Pendekatan Dalam Pengajaran Bahasa)*. Deepublish.
- Richards, J. C. (1971). A Non-Contrastive Approach to Error Analysis1. *ELT Journal*, XXV(3), 204-219. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/XXV.3.204>
- Sermsook, K., Liamnimitr, J., & Pochakorn, R. (2017). An Analysis of Errors in Written English Sentences: A Case Study of Thai EFL Students. *English Language Teaching*, 10(3), 101. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v10n3p101>
- Shin, S.-C. (2002). Error Analysis: Lexical Errors Produced by Australian KFL Learners. *KAREC Discussion Papers; Vol. 3, No. 3*. <https://doi.org/10.26190/UNSWORKS/453>
- Sujono. (n.d.). *Understanding The Differences In Second Language Acquisition Processess On Children And Adults | Dharma Pendidikan*. Retrieved May 27, 2025, from <https://journal.stkipnganjuk.ac.id/index.php/jdp/article/view/134>



-
- Wang, D. (2019). Translanguaging in Chinese foreign language classrooms: Students and teachers' attitudes and practices. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 22(2), 138–149. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2016.1231773>
- Zoghbtor, W., Shehadeh, A., & Alami, S. A. (2020). *Proceedings of the Applied Linguistics and Language Teaching Conference 2019: Engaging in Change: New Perspectives of Teaching and Learning*. Zayed University Press.



This work is licensed under [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).

Copyright © 2025, Annisa Triana Flyandjono & M. Afifulloh