



An Analysis of Simple Past Tense Errors in Grade X Students' Recount Texts

Auliatul Fitri¹, Piyanart Akkhakraisi², Naveed Ahmad Qaderi²

¹Department of English Education, State Islamic University Of Raden Intan Lampung, Lampung, Indonesia

²Dapartement of Sociocultural Linguistics, Social Sciences, Rajamangala University of Technology Srivijaya, Songkhla, Thailand

³Dapartement English Language Studie. Social Sciences, Al-Beroni University, Ghazni, Afghanistan

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the study: This study aims to identify and analyze the types of grammatical errors made by tenth-grade students in writing recount texts, particularly in the use of the simple past tense, using Surface Strategy Taxonomy and Linguistic Category Taxonomy to reveal patterns of learners' grammatical difficulties.

Methodology: This research employed a descriptive error analysis approach, combining qualitative interpretation with quantitative frequency analysis. The data consisted of recount texts written by tenth-grade students of Senior high school 1 Sumberejo Tanggamus, collected through documentation. The errors were identified, classified, and analyzed based on Surface Strategy Taxonomy and Linguistic Category Taxonomy, with percentages used to indicate error tendencies rather than statistical generalization.

Main Findings: The results show that misformation errors were the most dominant type (57.3%), followed by omission (24.3%), addition (5.6%), and misordering (2.8%). Most errors occurred in morphological and syntactic categories, particularly in verb forms related to the simple past tense. These findings indicate that students' difficulties stem from incomplete mastery of grammatical rules and verb inflections rather than careless mistakes.

Novelty/Originality of this study: This study contributes a dual-taxonomy error analysis that integrates Surface Strategy and Linguistic Category approaches to provide a more comprehensive diagnosis of students' grammatical errors. The findings offer specific pedagogical implications, including the need for targeted grammar instruction, focused practice on verb-form accuracy, and error-based corrective feedback in teaching recount text writing.

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Corresponding Author:

Auliatul Fitri,

Department of English Education, Tarbiyah And Teacher Training Faculty, State Islamic University Of Raden Intan Lampung,

Letnan Kolonel Road, Sukarame, Lampung, 35131, Indonesia

Email: auliatulfitri@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

The ability to write in English is a crucial productive skill that demonstrates students' mastery of language competence. Among the four essential skills listening, speaking, reading, and writing writing is considered the most complex because it requires grammatical accuracy, appropriate vocabulary use, and logical organization of ideas [1]-[3]. Writing enables students to communicate thoughts and experiences through structured language, but many second language learners find it challenging to produce well-formed sentences due to limited grammatical

knowledge. In the context of English as a foreign language (EFL), Indonesian students often transfer their first language structures into English writing, resulting in frequent grammatical errors [4]-[6].

In English language learning, grammar serves as the foundation for effective communication and comprehension. Mastery of grammar, particularly verb tenses, plays a vital role in expressing temporal meaning accurately [7], [8]. One of the tenses that frequently causes confusion among learners is the *simple past tense*, which is essential in constructing *recount texts* a genre that retells events or experiences from the past [9]-[11]. Errors in using the simple past tense can distort meaning and coherence, making students' writing difficult to understand. Therefore, identifying and analyzing these errors are necessary steps to improve students' writing competence and teachers' pedagogical strategies.

Previous studies have explored grammatical errors in students' writing using various taxonomies. Limur [12] found that omission errors were dominant in students' narrative texts, while Alawiyyah [13] reported that misformation errors were most frequent in descriptive texts. Although both studies employed the Surface Strategy Taxonomy, they did not integrate the Linguistic Category Taxonomy, which allows deeper analysis at morphological and syntactical levels. Consequently, there remains a gap in understanding how these two frameworks can complement each other in analyzing students' grammatical errors comprehensively. The present study fills this gap by combining both taxonomies to reveal not only the structural patterns of errors but also the linguistic domains in which they occur. Previous studies on grammatical errors in students' writing have mainly applied a single analytical framework, particularly the Surface Strategy Taxonomy, to identify error types such as omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. While this approach successfully categorizes surface-level deviations, it provides limited explanation of the underlying linguistic domains in which the errors occur. As a result, existing studies have not sufficiently explained whether students' errors originate from morphological or syntactic difficulties, nor have they offered detailed diagnostic insights for instructional improvement. This limitation creates a methodological gap, as teachers require more precise information to design effective grammar instruction and corrective feedback. Therefore, a more integrative analytical framework is urgently needed to capture both the structural forms and linguistic sources of grammatical errors in students' writing.

In response to this gap, this study aims to analyze grammatical errors in the use of the simple past tense in recount texts written by tenth-grade students by integrating Surface Strategy and Linguistic Category Taxonomies. Specifically, this research seeks to (1) identify the types of grammatical errors based on Surface Strategy Taxonomy, (2) classify the errors according to morphological and syntactic categories using Linguistic Category Taxonomy, and (3) determine the frequency and distribution of each error type to reveal dominant patterns of learners' difficulties. Accordingly, the research questions guiding this study are: (1) What types of simple past tense errors are made by tenth-grade students in writing recount texts? (2) In which linguistic categories do these errors predominantly occur? and (3) What error patterns indicate students' underlying grammatical problems?

The problem observed in classroom writing performance indicates that many students at SMAN 1 Sumberejo Tanggamus struggle with grammar accuracy when composing recount texts. Preliminary data showed that most students scored below the minimum standard in writing assessments, particularly in constructing past-tense sentences. These findings suggest that learners face difficulties in transforming their linguistic knowledge into accurate written forms. The persistence of grammatical errors reflects both interlingual and intralingual factors, such as interference from the native language and incomplete understanding of English tense formation [14]-[16]. Addressing these issues through systematic error analysis is therefore crucial in guiding remedial instruction.

This research employs *Surface Strategy* and *Linguistic Category* taxonomies to classify and interpret students' grammatical errors in writing recount texts. The Surface Strategy Taxonomy identifies the forms of errors omission, addition, misformation, and misordering while the Linguistic Category Taxonomy examines errors within morphological and syntactic domains [17]-[19]. The combined use of these frameworks provides a more holistic understanding of students' grammatical challenges and highlights specific areas requiring pedagogical attention. Such integration not only enhances the analytical precision but also offers practical insights for English teachers in developing targeted feedback and instructional interventions [20], [21].

The novelty of this study lies in its integrative dual-taxonomy approach, which synthesizes the Surface Strategy Taxonomy and the Linguistic Category Taxonomy into a unified analytical model. Unlike previous research that relied on a single, merely descriptive taxonomic framework, this combined model facilitates a multidimensional analysis that systematically connects surface-level error forms with their underlying linguistic-level sources. [22]-[24]. By revealing how specific morphological and syntactic deficiencies manifest as particular grammatical errors, this study offers a more precise diagnostic tool for assessing EFL learners' grammatical competence. This integration advances theoretical knowledge in error analysis and applied linguistics, while also providing significant pedagogical value. It serves as an informed basis for developing targeted grammar instruction and effective, error-specific feedback strategies in writing pedagogy [25].

This approach has significant theoretical implications by enriching the field of error analysis and contributing to the understanding of second language acquisition processes. Practically, this model offers high

pedagogical value by serving as an accurate diagnostic tool for teachers, enabling the development of more targeted teaching materials and the provision of meaningful error-based feedback in writing instruction.

This research is urgently needed to address the limitations of conventional error analysis approaches, which remain partial. Amidst demands for effective learning in the contemporary era, the findings of this study are expected to provide an empirical basis for creating more targeted grammar teaching interventions, which will ultimately contribute to strengthening the academic and professional literacy of EFL learners.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a descriptive error analysis design with a predominantly qualitative orientation, supported by quantitative frequency data to strengthen interpretative clarity. The qualitative approach was used to examine the forms and characteristics of grammatical errors in students' recount texts, while quantitative calculations were applied only to indicate error tendencies rather than to make statistical generalizations. The research was conducted through sequential stages, including data collection, error identification, classification, frequency calculation, and interpretation [26].

The focus of the analysis was students' grammatical errors in the use of the simple past tense within recount texts [27]. No variables were manipulated, as the study aimed to describe naturally occurring errors in authentic student writing. The population consisted of 92 tenth-grade students of Senior High School 1 Sumberejo Tanggamus in the 2018/2019 academic year. Purposive sampling was applied to select class X IPS 1 as the research sample because preliminary writing assessments indicated that this class demonstrated the lowest average writing performance. From this class, 26 complete recount texts were selected as valid data for analysis.

In qualitative research, the researcher functioned as the primary instrument, supported by document analysis sheets and an error classification checklist based on Surface Strategy Taxonomy (SST) and Linguistic Category Taxonomy (LCT). Data were collected through documentation of students' written recount texts. Each text was coded (S1–S26) to ensure confidentiality and systematic analysis. The data were analyzed through systematic error analysis following:

- Collection of learner language, gathering the students' written texts as raw data
- Identification of errors, detecting deviations from correct grammatical norms.
- Description of errors, categorizing errors according to SST and LCT
- Explanation of errors, determining possible causes (interlingual or intralingual interference).
- Evaluation of errors, quantifying the frequency and proportion of each error type.

The quantitative description was calculated using the following formula :

$$P = \frac{F}{N} \times 100\% \quad \dots(1)$$

Where :

P = Percentage of each error type

F = Frequency of occurrence

N = Total number of errors

The results of the classification are summarized in Table 1, which presents the four major error types identified through the Surface Strategy Taxonomy, showing their corresponding percentages.

Table 1. Distribution of Grammatical Error Types in Students' Recount Texts

| Type of Error | Category Description | Percentage (%) |
|---------------|---|----------------|
| Omission | Missing required linguistic elements | 24.3 |
| Addition | Insertion of unnecessary elements | 5.6 |
| Misformation | Incorrect word or morpheme formation | 57.3 |
| Misordering | Incorrect sequence of sentence elements | 2.8 |

Triangulation was employed to ensure data validity by comparing the researcher's classification with that of an experienced English teacher. Inter-rater agreement was calculated to confirm consistency in identifying and classifying grammatical errors. Expert consultation further validated the interpretation of data and reinforced the reliability of findings. To ensure data validity and reliability, triangulation was conducted through inter-rater validation. An experienced English teacher independently analyzed a subset of students' texts using the same SST and LCT classification criteria. The classifications were then compared with the researcher's analysis to identify discrepancies. Any differences were discussed until agreement was reached, ensuring consistency in error

identification and categorization. Expert consultation was also used to validate the interpretation of error causes and reinforce analytical credibility. Through these procedures, the findings were ensured to be methodologically sound and analytically reliable.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and discusses the findings of the study in relation to the research objectives by integrating quantitative distributions with qualitative interpretation. To avoid purely descriptive reporting, the discussion highlights dominant error patterns, provides representative examples of students' errors, and relates the findings to grammatical competence in EFL writing.

3.1. Distribution of Errors Based on Surface Strategy Taxonomy

The first dimension of the analysis identified grammatical errors according to the Surface Strategy Taxonomy (SST) developed by Ramadhiyanti [28]. This taxonomy classifies errors into four main types: *omission*, *addition*, *misformation*, and *misordering*.

The total of 87 grammatical errors were identified from 26 students' recount texts. The distribution of error types is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Frequency and Percentage of Grammatical Errors (Surface Strategy Taxonomy)

| Type of Error | Frequency (F) | Percentage (%) | Description |
|---------------|---------------|----------------|--|
| Omission | 18 | 24.3 | Missing obligatory grammatical items such as auxiliary verbs or -ed suffixes |
| Addition | 7 | 5.6 | Adding unnecessary elements (e.g., double tense markers) |
| Misformation | 60 | 57.3 | Incorrect form of morpheme or verb tense (e.g., <i>eated</i> instead of <i>ate</i>) |
| Misordering | 2 | 2.8 | Incorrect placement of words or morphemes within sentence structure |
| Total | 87 | 100 | — |

The findings show that misformation errors dominate (57.3%), indicating that students most frequently used incorrect verb forms when expressing past events. For instance, several students produced forms such as "*She buyed a book yesterday*" or "*They eated rice last night*", demonstrating overgeneralization of the regular *-ed* rule to irregular verbs. These errors suggest that students possess partial knowledge of past tense formation but have not fully internalized irregular verb patterns. Omission errors (24.3%) were the second most frequent type and commonly involved the absence of obligatory grammatical markers. Typical examples include "*He go to school yesterday*" and "*They not come last week*", where students omitted the past tense marker *-ed* or the auxiliary *did*. Such errors indicate insufficient awareness of tense marking and sentence construction in recount texts, which require consistent reference to past time.

In contrast, addition errors (5.6%) occurred when students applied redundant grammatical elements, such as "*She didn't went to school*" or "*He was cried last night*". These examples reveal confusion between affirmative and negative past tense constructions. Misordering errors (2.8%), although minimal, were found in sentences like "*He not went to school*", reflecting limited difficulties with English word order compared to other error types.

Overall, the dominance of misformation and omission errors indicates that students' main challenges lie in verb morphology rather than sentence arrangement, supporting the claim that simple past tense mastery remains problematic for EFL learners.

The quantitative distribution of these errors can be illustrated using the following equation, adapted from Corder's [29] error frequency model:

$$P_i = \frac{F_i}{N} \times 100\% \quad \dots(2)$$

Where :

- P_i : percentage of each error type,
- F_i : frequency of error type *i*
- N : total number of errors identified

Equation (1) shows that for *misformation*, $P = (60/87) \times 100 = 57.3\%$, confirming it as the most frequent error.

3.2. Error Patterns Based on Linguistic Category Taxonomy

The second dimension of analysis classified errors according to the *Linguistic Category Taxonomy* (LCT) as developed by Politzer and Kusumaningsih [30]. This taxonomy divides errors into morphological and syntactical domains, allowing for a more specific analysis of how students construct sentences. The results are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Distribution of Errors by Linguistic Category

| Linguistic Domain | Subcategory | Frequency (F) | Percentage (%) | Example of Error |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------|----------------|--|
| Morphology | Verb tense inflection (-ed forms) | 32 | 36.8 | <i>He go to school yesterday → He went to school yesterday</i> |
| | Irregular verb formation | 18 | 20.7 | <i>She buyed a book → She bought a book</i> |
| | Noun pluralization | 5 | 5.7 | <i>Two childs → Two children</i> |
| Syntax | Subject-verb agreement | 10 | 11.5 | <i>He have a car → He has a car</i> |
| | Word order and sentence structure | 4 | 4.6 | <i>He not went to school → He did not go to school</i> |
| | Prepositional misuse | 7 | 8.0 | <i>She arrived to the market → She arrived at the market</i> |
| | Article usage | 11 | 12.6 | <i>He is a honest man → He is an honest man</i> |
| Total | — | 87 | 100 | — |

To further examine the linguistic sources of errors, the second analysis applied the Linguistic Category Taxonomy, classifying errors into morphological and syntactic domains (Table 3). The results reveal that morphological errors account for 57.5% of the total, particularly in verb tense inflection and irregular verb formation.

The results reveal that the majority of errors (57.5%) fall under the morphological category, particularly in verb inflection and irregular verb formation. This suggests that students struggle to distinguish between regular and irregular past tense patterns. Errors at the syntactical level, such as subject verb agreement and prepositional usage, indicate incomplete understanding of English sentence structure. These findings are consistent with those reported by Syukur [31] and Kamal [32], but this study advances previous work by combining both taxonomies to obtain a multidimensional profile of learners' grammatical competence.

At the syntactic level, errors related to subject-verb agreement, prepositions, and article usage were also identified. Examples such as "*He have a car*", "*She arrived to the market*", and "*He is a honest man*" demonstrate incomplete understanding of English syntactic rules beyond tense usage. Although these errors are less frequent than morphological errors, they indicate broader grammatical weaknesses that may affect overall writing accuracy and coherence. By integrating Surface Strategy and Linguistic Category Taxonomies, this study provides a more comprehensive error profile than previous research that relied on a single framework. While earlier studies primarily described error frequencies, the present findings reveal how surface-level errors correspond to deeper linguistic problems, particularly in verb morphology. This multidimensional analysis strengthens the interpretation of students' grammatical competence and offers clearer pedagogical directions for addressing specific error types in EFL writing instruction.

The dominance of misformation and morphological errors can be attributed to intralingual transfer, where students overgeneralize the regular -ed rule to irregular verbs (e.g., *go → goed*, *buy → buyed*). This reflects a developmental stage in second language acquisition, where learners apply simplified internal rules before mastering exceptions [33]. Additionally, interlingual interference from Bahasa Indonesia contributes to omission errors, since Indonesian verbs do not inflect for tense. Consequently, learners often omit auxiliaries or tense markers, producing sentences such as *She go to market yesterday*.

Moreover, the limited exposure to authentic English writing contexts exacerbates these grammatical difficulties. Students tend to prioritize content over form, leading to higher rates of morphological and structural inaccuracies [34]. Teachers' emphasis on communicative competence rather than grammatical precision also affects students' awareness of correct syntax and morphology.

In terms of pedagogical implications, the findings suggest that teachers should integrate error-based feedback strategies that explicitly address verb tense formation and morphological regularity. Classroom instruction should include comparative analysis between regular and irregular verb patterns, as well as contextualized exercises focusing on past events. In addition, integrating corpus-based tools or grammar checking software can assist learners in recognizing and correcting their recurrent grammatical errors autonomously.

The use of dual taxonomy analysis in this study provides a novel diagnostic framework for identifying the multi-layered nature of grammatical errors in EFL writing. Unlike single-taxonomy approaches, this combined

model captures both the form-based (surface) and structure-based (linguistic) aspects of learners' deviations, offering a richer empirical basis for curriculum design and teacher training [35]-[37].

The predominance of misformation and morphological errors should not be interpreted merely as a quantitative finding but as an indication of learners' interlanguage development in acquiring English tense morphology. From the perspective of second language acquisition theory, these errors reflect an intralingual process in which learners actively construct grammatical rules by overgeneralizing regular patterns before fully acquiring irregular forms [38]. This phenomenon aligns with Selinker's interlanguage hypothesis, which views learner errors as systematic and developmental rather than random deviations. Compared to previous studies that reported similar dominance of misformation errors (e.g., Limur; Alawiyah), this study extends the discussion by demonstrating that such errors are closely linked to learners' incomplete morphological mapping between verb lemmas and tense realization, as revealed through linguistic category analysis.

Furthermore, the presence of omission errors can be critically explained through interlingual influence from Bahasa Indonesia, a language that does not encode tense morphologically. Unlike English, Indonesian relies on temporal adverbs rather than verb inflection, which leads learners to transfer this feature into English writing by omitting auxiliaries or past tense markers. While earlier studies have mentioned language transfer as a general cause of errors, they often failed to specify how such transfer manifests across different linguistic levels [39]. By combining Surface Strategy and Linguistic Category Taxonomies, the present study demonstrates that interlingual interference primarily affects morphological realization rather than syntactic arrangement, offering a more precise explanation of error sources.

In comparison with prior error analysis research that focused solely on error frequency, this study provides a more critical interpretation by linking error patterns to instructional context and learner exposure. Limited engagement with authentic written input and the dominance of fluency-oriented teaching practices may unintentionally reduce learners' attention to grammatical accuracy, particularly in tense formation. This finding supports earlier observations in EFL pedagogy that communicative approaches, when not balanced with form-focused instruction, may leave persistent grammatical gaps [40]. However, the present study advances this argument by empirically showing which grammatical domains are most vulnerable under such instructional conditions. The integration of Surface Strategy and Linguistic Category Taxonomies represents a methodological contribution by enabling a multidimensional diagnosis of grammatical errors. Unlike single-taxonomy approaches that describe what errors occur, this dual framework explains how and where these errors are linguistically constructed. This analytical depth allows for more informed pedagogical decisions, particularly in designing error-based feedback, grammar remediation, and teacher training programs. Thus, the contribution of this study lies not only in documenting students' errors but in offering a theoretically grounded and pedagogically actionable model for understanding grammatical development in EFL writing [41].

The use of the simple past tense is a fundamental grammatical requirement in narrative text writing, as this type of text focuses on retelling past events in chronological order; however, numerous studies have shown that tenth-grade students still experience significant difficulties in accurately applying this form. Based on two previously reviewed articles [42], [43], students' errors in using the simple past tense are mainly categorized into omissions, additions, misformations, and disorderings, with misformations emerging as the most frequent type of error, particularly in the incorrect use of verb forms and irregular verbs. These errors reflect students' incomplete understanding of English verb morphology and their tendency to rely on memorized patterns rather than grammatical rules. Furthermore, omission errors, such as the omission of the "-ed" ending in regular verbs or auxiliary verbs in negative constructions, indicate that students often focus more on conveying meaning than maintaining grammatical accuracy. The findings also revealed that first language interference, limited vocabulary mastery, and lack of exposure to authentic English writing significantly contributed to these errors, as students transferred native language structures into English sentence construction. Therefore, analyzing simple past tense errors in narrative texts of tenth-grade students is crucial not only to identify dominant error patterns but also to provide pedagogical insights to improve grammar teaching through explicit instruction, contextual practice, and continuous corrective feedback in writing activities.

Based on the identified research gap, the novelty of this study lies in its focused and systematic analysis of simple past tense errors specifically within Grade X students' recount texts, emphasizing both the types of errors and their underlying causes in an authentic classroom context. Unlike previous studies that often examine grammatical errors in general writing or combine multiple tenses without in-depth exploration, this research concentrates exclusively on the simple past tense as the core grammatical feature of recount texts [44]. By integrating error classification with contextual factors such as first language interference and instructional practices, this study provides a more comprehensive understanding of learners' grammatical challenges. This focused approach offers new insights into how tense-related errors manifest in secondary-level writing and highlights the importance of aligning grammar instruction with text-based writing tasks.

The findings of this study have important pedagogical implications for English language teaching, particularly in writing instruction at the senior high school level [45]. The identification of dominant error types in students' use of the simple past tense suggests that teachers should implement more explicit and contextualized

grammar instruction embedded within recount text writing activities. Emphasizing irregular verb forms, tense consistency, and meaningful corrective feedback can help students internalize grammatical rules more effectively [46]. Furthermore, the results can inform curriculum developers to design learning materials that integrate grammar and writing skills, enabling students to develop both linguistic accuracy and communicative competence in producing recount texts.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. The analysis is limited to recount texts written by Grade X students in a specific educational context, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other grade levels or text genres [47]. In addition, the study focuses solely on written data and does not examine students' oral language use or teachers' instructional strategies in depth. Future research could expand the scope by involving larger participant groups, comparing different text types, or incorporating classroom observations and interviews to obtain a more holistic understanding of students' tense acquisition and grammatical development [48].

Based on the limitations of this study, future research is recommended to involve a larger and more diverse sample across different grade levels and educational contexts in order to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Further studies may also compare students' use of the simple past tense across various text genres, such as narrative or descriptive texts, to identify whether similar error patterns persist. In addition, incorporating qualitative data through classroom observations, interviews, or teacher reflections would provide deeper insights into instructional practices and learners' cognitive processes in tense acquisition. Exploring the integration of explicit grammar instruction with technology-assisted or task-based writing activities may also offer valuable perspectives on effective strategies to reduce grammatical errors in students' writing.

4. CONCLUSION

The objectives outlined in the introduction to identify, classify, and interpret grammatical errors in the use of the simple past tense in students' recount texts through the integration of Surface Strategy and Linguistic Category Taxonomies have been consistently addressed in the results and discussion. The findings demonstrate that students' errors are dominated by misformation and morphological deviations, particularly in verb tense inflection, indicating that learners experience systematic difficulties related to interlanguage development and incomplete mastery of English tense rules. These results confirm the initial assumption that grammatical inaccuracies in recount writing are not random but stem from identifiable linguistic and developmental factors, including intralingual overgeneralization and interlingual interference from Bahasa Indonesia. Practically, this study highlights the need for more form-focused writing instruction, especially in verb morphology, supported by explicit error-based feedback and contextualized tense practice in recount texts. From a broader perspective, the dual-taxonomy analytical model applied in this study offers a diagnostic framework that can be adopted by teachers and curriculum developers to better identify students' grammatical weaknesses. Future research is recommended to expand the data corpus across different schools or proficiency levels, employ longitudinal or corpus-based approaches, and explore the integration of digital tools for automated error analysis, thereby extending the application of the present findings and strengthening the contribution of error analysis to EFL writing pedagogy.

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USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGY

The authors declare that no artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used in the preparation, analysis, or writing of this manuscript. All aspects of the research, including data collection, interpretation, and manuscript preparation, were carried out entirely by the authors without the assistance of AI-based technologies.

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