Teaching and Learning Journal of Mandalika (Teacher) e-ISSN: 2721-9666, p-ISSN: 2828-7126, Vol. 6, No.2, 2025
Accreditation Sinta 5 based on SK. No. 152/E/KPT/2023
Website: http://ojs.cahayamandalika.com/index.php/teacher

First Semester Students' Ability in Using Tag Questions at the Faculty of Culture, Management, and Business in the Academic Year 2024/2025

Terasne
Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, Fakultas Budaya, Manajemen, dan Bisnis, Universitas Pendidikan Mandalika
Email: terasne@undikma.ac.id

Abstract: *This study aims to evaluate the ability of first-semester students of the Faculty of Culture, Management, and Business in the academic year 2024/2025 to use question tags in English sentences. A descriptive quantitative method was applied. The instrument used was a 50-item multiple-choice test, each item weighted 2 points. Data analysis employed descriptive statistics to determine average scores, score distribution, and student pass rates. The findings revealed that 72% of the students scored ≥60, indicating a satisfactory mastery of question tag structures. However, 30% of the students still struggled, especially with sentence polarity and the appropriate use of auxiliary verbs. These findings suggest the need for a more contextual and application-based approach in teaching grammar at the university level.*
Keywords*: question tags, grammar, students, English teaching, quantitative analysis*

Abstrack: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengevaluasi kemampuan mahasiswa semester pertama Fakultas Budaya, Manajemen, dan Bisnis tahun akademik 2024/2025 dalam menggunakan question tag dalam kalimat bahasa Inggris. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah deskriptif kuantitatif. Instrumen yang digunakan berupa tes pilihan ganda sebanyak 50 butir soal dengan bobot masing-masing 2 poin. Teknik analisis data dilakukan secara statistik deskriptif untuk memperoleh skor rata-rata, distribusi nilai, dan persentase kelulusan mahasiswa. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa sebanyak 72% mahasiswa memperoleh skor ≥60, yang menandakan penguasaan struktur question tag tergolong cukup baik. Namun, 30% mahasiswa masih mengalami kesulitan, khususnya dalam memahami polaritas kalimat dan penggunaan auxiliary verb yang sesuai. Temuan ini menunjukkan perlunya pendekatan pembelajaran yang lebih aplikatif dan kontekstual dalam pengajaran grammar di pendidikan tinggi.
Kata Kunci: question tag, grammar, mahasiswa, pengajaran bahasa Inggris, analisis kuantitatif

Introduction

English is an international language that plays an important role in education, business, and global communication. In the current digital era and global economy, mastering English is a basic competency that students must have, especially those who study in English Education programs. In academic contexts, structural proficiency in English supports the effectiveness of scientific and professional communication (Rahayu & Utami, 2023; Nugroho & Mutiaraningrum, 2020).

One important part of English grammar is the *question tag*, a short question added at the end of a sentence to ask for confirmation or involve the listener. It has pragmatic functions such as softening a statement, confirming an opinion, or encouraging interaction in conversation (Holmes, 2016; Tottie & Hoffmann, 2015). In Indonesian, this structure is similar to expressions like "right?" or "isn't it?", but in English, the pattern is more complex and depends on the main sentence and the type of auxiliary verb used (Biber & Gray, 2016; Richards & Reppen, 2014).

Although *question tags* are usually taught in grammar lessons, studies have found that Indonesian students still struggle to use them correctly, especially when using modal auxiliaries like *can*, *should*, or *must* (Kartikasari & Maulina, 2021; Wulandari, 2022). The difficulty is not only related to grammar structure but also to understanding how *question tags* are used in different situations (Wardani & Kurniawan, 2023; Gunawan, 2022).

Previous studies mostly focused on junior and senior high school students. Research on university students, especially in their first semester, is still very limited (Silalahi & Simanjuntak, 2021; Rani, 2021). In fact, the first year of college is a crucial

This is an open-access article under the CC-BY-SA License.

transition period, where students must begin to use grammar in academic communication. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by examining the ability of first-semester students to use *modal auxiliary question tags* correctly.

Initial observations show that many first-semester students in the Faculty of Culture, Management, and Business for the 2024/2025 academic year still make mistakes in using *question tags*, both in writing and speaking. This indicates a gap between what has been taught and the students' actual skills (Aisyah, 2019; Sulistyowati & Aminatun, 2021). This study was designed to assess students' abilities and identify common errors in using *question tags*. The research question is: Are first-semester students of the Faculty of Culture, Management, and Business in the 2024/2025 academic year able to use *question tags* correctly and appropriately?

Research Method

This study employed a quantitative descriptive method, selected to provide an empirical overview of the first-semester students' ability in using *question tags* at the Faculty of Culture, Management, and Business in the 2024/2025 academic year. Quantitative descriptive research allows researchers to systematically analyse numerical data in order to address the formulated research question (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Sugiyono, 2019).

The research focused on collecting data through a structured test instrument and analysing it using descriptive statistical techniques to determine the students' grammar proficiency level. As explained by Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2016), descriptive quantitative methods are commonly used to measure specific variables within a population or sample without manipulating them. In this context, the variable being measured is the students' ability to construct and apply *question tags* correctly.

Data collection was conducted directly in the classroom through a multiple-choice test. The test results were analysed using descriptive statistics to obtain a quantitative understanding of the students' mastery. This approach is suitable for objectively identifying students' actual performance based on measurable and verifiable data (Nugroho & Mutiaraningrum, 2020; Hartono & Mulyono, 2020)

The population of this study consisted of first-semester students enrolled in the *Grammar Fundamentals* course at the Faculty of Culture, Management, and Business during the 2024/2025 academic year. The total population was 135 students, distributed across three classes, each consisting of 45 students. In this study, population refers to a group of individuals who share similar characteristics and serve as the object of the research (Ary et al., 2010).

To obtain representative data in a manageable way, a sample was selected from the population using cluster random sampling. Following Arikunto (2002), if a population exceeds 100 individuals, a sample of 10% to 25% can be taken. In this study, one class (45 students) was selected as the sample, representing approximately 33% of the total population. The selection of the class was based on the uniformity of curriculum, instructor, and academic background. This sample was considered sufficiently representative to describe first-semester students in using *question tags.*

In this research, the data analysed consisted of test results obtained after students completed the written instrument prepared by the researcher. The initial stage of data collection involved administering the test to the selected participants. The test aimed to assess the students' level of understanding and ability in using *question tags*. It was designed and administered directly by the researcher.

The test was grammar test especially question tags in the form of multiple choice consisted of 50 items. Students who answered most or all questions correctly were considered to have good command of *question tags*. Conversely, students with a low number of correct answers were deemed to have insufficient understanding. The scoring was done objectively based on the number of correct answers, which was used to evaluate both individual and collective performance.

The instrument used in this study was a grammar test developed by the researcher. Prior to implementation, the test underwent content validation by a grammar teaching expert to ensure that each item was aligned with the intended learning outcomes. The main instrument consisted of 50 multiple-choice items, with each correct answer awarded 2 points, making the maximum score 100.

The test was specifically designed to measure students' ability in using *question tags*, especially those involving modal auxiliaries such as *can, should, must,* and others. With this structure, the instrument was expected to yield an accurate quantitative representation of students' understanding of one of the core structures in English grammar.

The test was administered in one session per class, with a 60-minute time allocation. Students were instructed to complete the test independently without any electronic devices or external references. The researcher was present in the classroom as a supervisor to ensure order and academic integrity during the test, as well as to guarantee that the data reflected the students' actual abilities.

To determine whether the students were considered successful in using *question tags*, at least 70% of them or a minimum grade equivalent to (B-) needed to achieve a score of 60 or above. If fewer than 70% of the students reached this score, their overall proficiency would be deemed inadequate. This passing threshold was based on the total number of test items, which consisted of 50 multiple-choice questions. Each item was worth 2 points, resulting in a maximum score of 100. The data analysed in this study were collected from the students' test results. The analysis was conducted to determine the distribution of students' abilities. The stages of data analysis were carried out as follows:

Assigning scores to students' answers based on the provided answer key.

1. Converting the raw scores into quantitative values on a 0–100 scale. In other words, to analyse students' test, the following formula was used:

$$d = \frac{ss}{ts} \times 100\ \% = \ldots\ldots\ldots$$

Where:

ss = student's score

ts = total maximum score (100)

d = final score in percentage form

This formula was used to calculate each student's individual score in percentage form, which was then used to determine whether the student met the minimum competency standard. The percentage results were also used to assess group achievement and to classify students into successful or unsuccessful categories.

1. Grouping the results based on pass categories (≥60: Pass; <60: Fail) In other words, to determine the overall success level of students in using question tags, the following formula was used:

$$\frac{ds}{---------} \times 100\ \% = \ldots\ldots\ldots$$
$$N$$

2. Calculating the percentage of students who passed and those who did not To determine the percentage of students who did not meet the success criteria, the following formula was used:

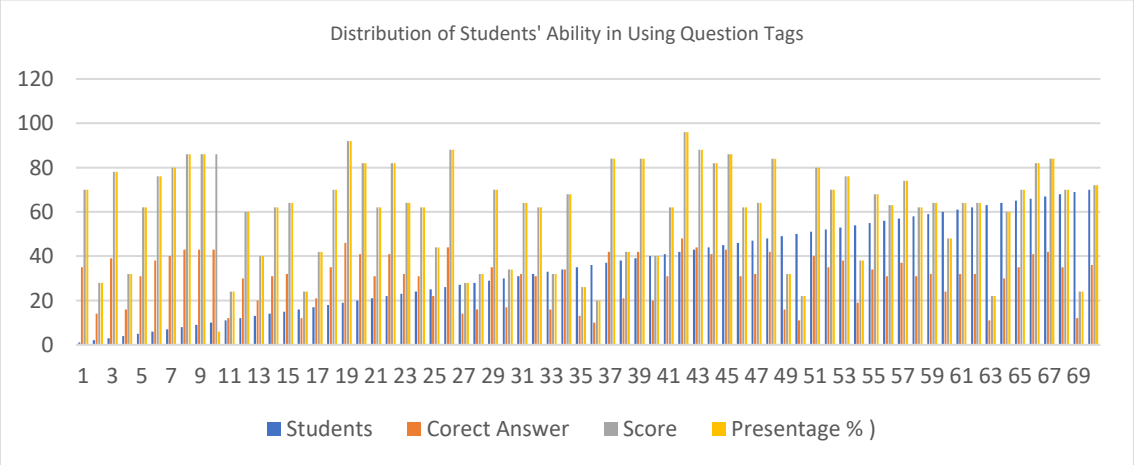
$$\frac{df}{----------} \times 100\ \% = \ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots$$
$$N$$

Results Finding and Discussion

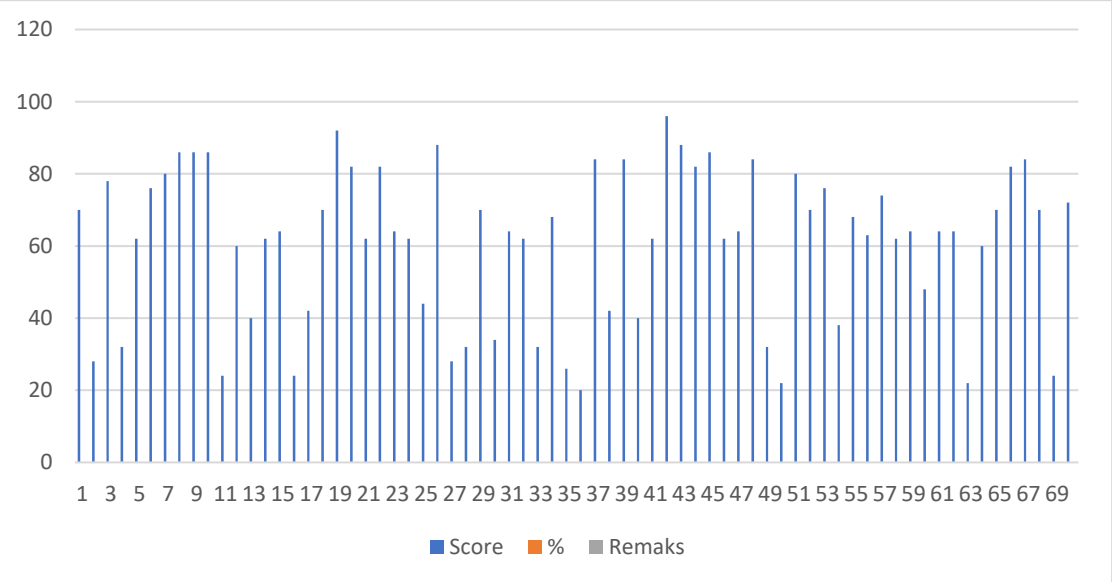
As explained in the previous section, the population in this study consisted of all first-semester students of the Faculty of Culture, Management, and Business in the 2024/2025 academic year, enrolled in the Grammar Fundamentals course in the English Language Education program. From the three available classes, one class was randomly selected as the sample, with a total of 45 students. The instrument used in this study was a multiple-choice test consisting of 50 items, designed to assess students' ability to use question tags, particularly in the context of modal auxiliaries such as can, should, must, and will.

It should be noted that question tags are a complex grammatical structure for learners of English as a foreign language. Based on initial observations, most students showed hesitation and a lack of confidence in answering questions related to this structure. This indicates that, although students have studied basic grammar, their understanding of question tags still requires reinforcement, particularly in its practical and functional application. The research process was conducted directly in the classroom, under full supervision of the researcher. Students were given 60 minutes to complete the test independently, without the use of additional tools or references. After all answer sheets were collected, the data were analysed to determine the distribution of scores and the students' ability. To provide a clearer picture of the research findings, a data summary in the form of a table is presented below. This table contains the distribution of students' scores and the percentage of success, which will be used as a basis for drawing quantitative conclusions about the students' ability to use question tags.

Chart 4.1. Distribution of Students' Ability in Using Question Tags



The following table 4. 1 above presents the initial results of the grammar ability test focusing on question tags, which was administered to the students. This table shows the number of correct answers from each student, the scores obtained, and the percentage of achievement. However, the data presented is still raw data and needs further processing to generate meaningful findings. After obtaining the number of correct answers from each student, the researcher then calculated the corresponding scores and percentages. An analysis was then conducted on the results to identify trends, the average achievement, and the distribution of students' ability to answer questions related to question tags. This analysis aims to determine the significance of the results obtained in relation to the students' mastery of this linguistic structure. Before performing more complex statistical interpretations, the following table (Chart 4.2) presents the total individual scores, achievement percentages, and remarks based on the predetermined evaluation criteria.
Chart 4.2 scores and percentages students' Question Tags.



Notes:

1. The total number of students who took the test was 70.
2. The test consisted of 50 questions, with each question worth 2 points, so the maximum score was 100.
3. The total score represents the score obtained by each student based on the number of correct answers.
4. The cumulative total score of all students was 4,420 points.
5. The percentage (%) is calculated based on each student's score relative to the maximum score.
6. Remarks:

   S = Success → Students who obtained a score of ≥ 60.

   F = Failed → Students who obtained a score of < 60.

In this study, students who are considered "competent" in completing the task are those who score 60 or higher. This criterion is based on a maximum score of 100, where each question is worth 2 points. By answering all the questions correctly, students will achieve a perfect score of 100. To obtain objective and proportional results regarding the overall ability level of students, a formula is needed to calculate the quantitative score and convert

it into a qualitative value. The formula used to calculate the students' scores and percentages is as follows:
Formulation:

$$d = \frac{ss}{ts} \times 100\ \% = \ldots\ldots\ldots$$

The results of this calculation are then used as the basis for classifying the overall success of students in using question tags.
Explanation:

ss: Student Score
ts: Total Score, which is 100
d: Percentage of student score (Total Amount / in percentage form)

This formula is used to calculate the achievement percentage of each student based on the number of correct answers. This percentage is then used to determine whether a student is categorized as successful (S) or failed (F).
Students who score ≥ 60% are categorized as successful (S), while those who score < 60% are categorized as failed (F).
Based on the data in Table 3, we can randomly select a student as an example. For instance, if we take student number 10, the data would be as follows:

Number of correct answers: 43
Total score: 86 (43 × 2)
Score percentage: 86%
Remarks**:** S (Success) because the score is ≥ 60

This example shows that the student falls into the successful category in answering the question tag items, as the score exceeds the minimum passing threshold (60%).

$$\mathbf{D = \frac{86}{4420} \times 100\ \% = 1.94}$$

To determine the collective test results of the students, the researcher used percentages to identify the failure and success rates of students in answering the question tag items.

$$\mathbf{= \frac{20}{70}\ x100\ \% = 39\ \%}$$

The percentage of success result is (>60)

$$\mathbf{= \frac{50}{70}\ x100\ \% = 71\ \%}$$

Based on the percentage calculation of both categories, it can be concluded that the majority of students were successful in answering the question tag items on the test. The percentage of students who scored ≥ 60 was 72%, while the percentage of students who scored < 60, or were categorized as failed, was 30%. This result indicates that, overall, students have a fairly good basic understanding of the use of question tags, particularly in the context of modal auxiliaries, although some students still face difficulties in mastering the structure comprehensively. In this study, the sample consists of first-semester students from the Faculty of Culture, Management, and Business in the

2024/2025 academic year, enrolled in the Grammar Fundamentals course in the English Language Education program. The sample includes 70 students from various backgrounds, all with equivalent academic levels. The assessment was based on the results of a written test consisting of 50 multiple-choice questions, each worth 2 points, with a maximum achievable score of 100. Based on the results in Table 2, it was found that the majority of students achieved scores that reflect their mastery of question tags. For example, student number 1 answered 35 questions correctly, resulting in a final score of 70 (35 × 2), with an achievement percentage of 70%. The scores of each student were then converted into percentages using the following formula:

$$d = \frac{ss}{ts} \times 100\ \% = \ldots\ldots\ldots$$

Explanation:

ss = student score

ts = maximum score (100)

d = score in percentage form

For example, student number 6 answered 38 questions correctly, resulting in a score of 76 (38 × 2) and an achievement percentage of 76%. This study aims to determine the extent of first-semester students' ability from the Faculty of Culture, Management, and Business in the 2024/2025 academic year to understand and use question tags in English, particularly those involving modal auxiliaries such as *can*, *should*, *must*, and *will*. The test used was a multiple-choice format consisting of 50 items, with each item worth 2 points, making the total maximum score 100.

Based on the data obtained from the 70 students who took the test, it was found that 50 students (71%) successfully achieved a score of ≥ 60 and were categorized as **Success**, while 20 students (29%) scored below 60 and were categorized as **Failed**. The average score achieved by all test participants was 63, indicating that, in general, the students' ability is considered fairly good. The most prominent scientific finding of this study is that the majority of students were able to use question tags correctly in the context of modal auxiliaries, despite the structural complexity of this grammar feature, which is often challenging for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. This success can be attributed to two main factors. First, the topic of modal auxiliaries is generally taught intensively in the basic English curriculum. Second, written and oral exercises provided during the course helped reinforce students' understanding of the patterns and rules of question tags. However, another significant finding is that 29% of students failed to reach the minimum passing score. This indicates that although question tags have been taught, there remains a gap in understanding—likely caused by limited mastery of concepts such as polarity (positive–negative), subject–auxiliary agreement, and sensitivity to context within a sentence. As explained by Azar (2002), the structure of question tags requires simultaneous understanding of tense, subject, and the positive/negative form of the auxiliary verb. This suggests that mastering question tags is not merely about memorization but also involves analytical skills in sentence structure. The findings of this study are also consistent with previous research by Gunawan (2022), who stated that question tags are one of the more complex grammatical structures and require special instructional strategies to improve students' mastery. Similarly, Kartikasari & Maulina (2021) found that although EFL students possess theoretical knowledge of grammar, they often struggle to apply structures such as question tags in everyday sentence contexts. Therefore, the findings of this research not only reflect the students' level of

understanding of the material but also highlight the need for a more contextual and applied approach to grammar instruction. Furthermore, the distribution trend of the scores shows that students with a strong grasp of basic grammar structures tend to answer the questions more accurately. Students who achieved high scores generally came from educational backgrounds that had reinforced the use of modal auxiliaries and question tags. On the other hand, students who faced difficulties seemed unable to integrate grammatical understanding with sentence context in a functional way. Considering that mastery of question tags is important for natural and coherent communication in English, these findings imply that grammar instruction at the university level should focus more on contextual usage and integrative practice. Reinforcement through dialogue, conversation simulations, and task-based learning is believed to support students in applying learned structures more meaningfully. Overall, this study shows that the majority of first-semester students are on the right track in understanding question tags. However, pedagogical reinforcement is still needed to ensure that all students reach optimal grammatical competence in line with the intended learning objectives.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis of the first-semester students' ability from the Faculty of Culture, Management, and Business in the 2024/2025 academic year to use question tags, it can be concluded that the majority of students have demonstrated a sufficient level of mastery of this grammatical structure, particularly in the context of modal auxiliaries. This finding indicates that although question tags are a complex grammatical structure, systematic and practice-based instruction can enhance students' grammatical competence. The students' ability to identify sentence polarity and adjust the auxiliary in question tags serves as a key indicator of success. However, some students were still found to struggle with applying this structure consistently, suggesting the need for reinforcement in contextual and analytical aspects of grammar learning. Thus, this finding addresses the research objective by showing that students have a foundational understanding of question tags. However, in order to achieve a higher level of communicative competence, a more applied, interactive, and integrated teaching approach within real communication contexts is required.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be proposed for future research, along with several limitations that need to be considered.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study opens opportunities for further, more in-depth research on the influence of question tags on students' language abilities in different contexts, such as the use of question tags in informal versus formal conversation situations. Future studies could also expand the sample to include students from various faculties in order to obtain a more representative overview. Additionally, the application of question tags in media such as films or books can serve as an object of study to explore their variations in both written and spoken texts.

References

Aisyah, N. (2019). The mastery of tag questions among senior high school students. *Journal of English Education and Linguistics Studies*, 6(2), 187–202. https://doi.org/10.30762/jeels.v6i2.1200

Al-Zoubi, S. M. (2018). The impact of exposure to English language on the language acquisition. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Language Research*, 5(4), 151–162.

Biber, D., & Gray, B. (2016). *Grammatical complexity in academic English*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511920776

Gunawan, A. (2022). The use of question tags in EFL classroom interaction: A pragmatic analysis. *Indonesian Journal of English Education and Linguistics*, 4(1), 12–23.

Hartono, R., & Mulyono, H. (2020). Common grammatical errors made by Indonesian EFL learners in writing. *International Journal of Language Education*, 4(1), 95–105. https://doi.org/10.26858/ijole.v4i1.12540

Holmes, J. (2016). Gender and politeness revisited: A sociolinguistic perspective. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 95, 31–45. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2015.12.008

Kartikasari, R., & Maulina, H. (2021). EFL students' difficulties in understanding English tag questions. *ELT Journal: Journal of English Language Teaching*, 9(1), 22–30. https://doi.org/10.33394/jelt.v9i1.3521

Nugroho, A., & Mutiaraningrum, I. (2020). Grammar instruction and corrective feedback in higher education: Indonesian EFL context. *Studies in English Language and Education*, 7(2), 383–396. https://doi.org/10.24815/siele.v7i2.16507

Rahayu, S., & Utami, L. (2023). Mastering grammar through digital platforms: A case study among first-year university students. *Journal of English Language Studies*, 8(1), 44–58. https://doi.org/10.24036/jels.v8i1.1234

Rani, A. (2021). Analysis of students' competence in using question tags at the university level. *Journal of Language and Literature Education*, 2(2), 85–95.

Richards, J. C., & Reppen, R. (2014). *Grammar: Teaching learners in context*. Cambridge University Press.

Sari, A. R., & Pratama, Y. (2022). Investigating Indonesian EFL learners' understanding of question tags. *Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra*, 22(2), 102–111.

Silalahi, R. M., & Simanjuntak, M. (2021). An error analysis on students' use of question tags. *ELTIN Journal*, 9(1), 37–48. https://doi.org/10.22460/eltin.v9i1.p37-48

Suherman, A., & Zahra, D. (2019). Teaching grammar through communicative approach: A focus on question tags. *English Language Teaching and Research Journal*, 2(2), 99–108.

Sulistyowati, D., & Aminatun, D. (2021). The correlation between grammar mastery and speaking ability. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Learning*, 2(1), 10–20.

Tottie, G., & Hoffmann, S. (2015). Tag questions in British and American English: Corpus-based perspectives. *English Language and Linguistics*, 19(2), 301–326. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1360674314000065

Wardani, N., & Kurniawan, H. (2023). Exploring students' pragmalinguistic competence in forming tag questions. *Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra*, 8(1), 65–76.

Wulandari, I. (2022). Students' difficulties in mastering question tags: A case study in Indonesian EFL context. *Jurnal Linguistik Terapan*, 11(2), 117–128.

Yusri, F., & Hasibuan, R. (2020). The effectiveness of online learning in grammar acquisition. *Asian Journal of Education and e-Learning*, 8(3), 152–159.

Zulfikar, T., & Alfarizi, H. (2023). Error analysis on the use of English question tags among Indonesian learners. *Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris*, 13(1), 89–98.