

Students' Perceptions of Using Google Translate in Learning English: A Mixed-Method study

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Abstract

English plays a crucial role in higher education, as many academic resources are presented in English. However, many students still face difficulties in understanding English texts due to unfamiliar vocabulary and complex sentence structures. To overcome these challenges, students often use machine translation tools, particularly Google Translate. This study aims to investigate undergraduate students' perceptions of using Google Translate in learning English within academic contexts. This study applies a mixed-method design using an explanatory sequential approach. Quantitative data were collected through a questionnaire consisting of 25 Likert-scale items distributed to 34 undergraduate students in Medan. Qualitative data were obtained from semi-structured interviews with five selected participants to provide deeper insights. The findings reveal that Google Translate is primarily used as a vocabulary support tool. A total of 73.53% of students use it to check word meanings, while 97.06% consider it useful for learning English. However, its use decreases in more complex tasks such as paragraph and essay writing. Students also recognize its limitations, especially in grammar and contextual accuracy. Despite this, students do not entirely rely on the tool. Instead, they use it critically by verifying the results with other sources and combining them with their own language knowledge. In conclusion, Google Translate serves as a supportive tool rather than a primary learning resource. Its effectiveness depends on strategic and critical use.

INTRODUCTION

English plays an important role in higher education. Many academic sources, such as journal articles, books, and research papers, are written in English. Therefore, university students must be able to understand English texts to complete academic tasks and conduct research. However, many students still face difficulties, especially when dealing with unfamiliar vocabulary and complex sentence structures (Elmahdi & Hezam, 2020; Majara, 2018; Sahnan & Daulay, 2025).

To overcome these challenges, students often use translation tools. One of the most widely used tools is Google Translate, an online machine translation tool that allows the users to translate words, phrases, sentences, and longer texts quickly and easily. Its accessibility and speed make it a popular choice among the students who need immediate assistance in understanding English materials (Bringman-Rodenbarger & Hortsch, 2020; Javaid et al., 2023; Rets et al., 2023).

Previous studies have shown that Google Translate plays a significant role in supporting students' language learning. Nugraeni and Ahmad (2024) and Samad et al. (2023) found that students commonly use this tool to understand unfamiliar vocabulary and grasp the general

meaning of texts. Similarly, Saputra et al. (2023) and Manasi and Tanasale (2023) reported that machine translation tools contribute to vocabulary development and literacy practices by providing immediate access to word meanings. In writing activities, Roslaini and Nugroho (2023) as well as Rizky and Martriwati (2025) found that Google Translate can assist students in expressing ideas in English, especially when they translate from their native language. Furthermore, Khasanah et al. (2022) highlighted that additional features such as pronunciation audio can support pronunciation learning.

In writing activities, students also rely on Google Translate to express ideas in English. The tool assist them in translating ideas from their native language into English and can support writing development when used appropriately (Roslaini & Nugroho, 2023; Rizky & Martriwati, 2025). Furthermore, features such as pronunciation audio contribute to language learning by supporting pronunciation practice Khasanah et al. (2022).

Despite these benefits, several concerns have been raised. Some educators argue that relying too much on Google Translate can make students overly dependent and also hinder their development. Students may depend on automatic translations without fully understanding their writing skills and critical thinking. Therefore, the accuracy of translations must be carefully evaluated (Azima & Fithriani, 2024).

Nevertheless, many studies report that students have positive perceptions of Google Translate. They consider it as a useful tool that facilitates learning and helps them complete academic tasks more easily (Margiana & Syafryadin, 2023; Putri & Marlina, 2022). Similarly, Indonesian EFL students generally perceive machine translation as a helpful learning aid Rahmawati et al. (2025). International studies also support these findings, showing that machine translation can assist students in writing, although its accuracy needs attention Lee and Tsai (2022).

Based on these findings, it is evident that Google Translate plays a significant role in students' English learning. While it offers various advantages, concerns about overdependence and its impact on language development remain an important issue. Therefore, it is necessary to examine students' perceptions of Google Translate in academic contexts. Although many studies have examined the use of Google Translate, there is still a gap in understanding how students perceive its role in academic contexts, particularly in Indonesian higher education settings. Most previous research focuses on either the effectiveness of the tool or its impact on specific skills such as writing or vocabulary development. However, limited studies explore students' perceptions comprehensively using a mixed-method approach that integrates both quantitative and qualitative insights.

This study aims to investigate undergraduate students' perception of using Google Translate in learning English. It focuses on students' evaluation tool's usefulness, advantages, and limitation in supporting their academic activities. This study is expected to provide several important benefits. Theoretically, it contributes to the development of EFL learning literature, particularly in understanding the role of machine translation tools in students' learning processes and perceptions. Practically, the findings can serve as a reference for lecturers and educators in guiding students to use Google Translate more effectively and critically in academic contexts. In addition, this study provides insights for students on how to utilize translation tools strategically without becoming overly dependent on them. For future researchers, this study can be used as a foundation for further investigation into the integration

of artificial intelligence-based tools in language learning across different contexts and skill areas.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research employed a mixed-method approach using an explanatory sequential design. In this design, quantitative were collected and analyzed first, the followed by qualitative data to explain and elaborate the quantitative findings. This approach is appropriate for examining students' perceptions, as it allows the identification of general patterns and deeper exploration of participants' experiences (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018)

The participants of this study were undergraduate students who use Google Translate in their English learning activities. The sample was selected using purposive sampling to ensure that all participants had relevant experience with the use of translation tools in academic contexts. The total number of participants was [n = 34], consisting of undergraduate students from several universities in Medan.

Two instruments were used in this study. The first was a questionnaire designed to measure students' perceptions of Google Translate, including its usefulness, advantages, and limitations. The questionnaire consists of 25 items using 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The second instrument was semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain deeper insights into students' experiences. The interview guide included open-ended questions focusing on how students use Google Translate, the benefits they receive, and the challenges they encounter.

Data were collected in two stages. First, the questionnaire was distributed to all participants to gather quantitative data. After the initial analysis, several participants were selected for interviews based on their responses to provide more detailed explanations. All participants gave informed consent before participating in the study.

The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including percentages and mean scores, to identify general trends in students' perceptions. Meanwhile, the qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), which involved coding, categorizing, and identifying key themes. The result from both data sets were then integrated to provide a comprehensive interpretation of the findings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the study based on data collected through questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The findings integrate quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of students' perceptions of using Google Translate in learning English.

Students' perceptions of Google Translate

The quantitative data were obtained from 34 undergraduate students (n=34) from several universities in Medan. The data were analyzed using percentage distribution and mean scores based on a 5-point Likert scale.

Table 1. Students' Perceptions of Google Translate

Statement	SD (%)	D (%)	N (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	Mean
Google translate is very useful	0.00	0.00	2.94	35.29	61.77	4.59
I used GT to find meanings	0.00	0.00	2.94	44.12	52.94	4.50
GT helps vocabulary learning	2.94	5.88	17.65	41.18	32.32	3.94
GT helps in writing	8.82	14.71	26.47	29.41	20.59	3.38
GT helps understand context	8.82	11.76	23.53	32.35	23.54	3.50
GT sometimes produce inaccuracies	5.88	8.82	11.76	23.53	23.54	3.85
I trust GT results	8.82	11.76	23.53	32.35	23.54	3.68
GT is easy to use	0.00	0.00	2.94	11.76	41.18	4.21

Source: Questionnaire data processed by the authors (2026)

From Table 1 the results show that students have a strong positive perception of Google Translate. The highest mean score is found in usefulness (M = 4.59), followed by finding meaning (M = 4.50) and ease of use (M = 4.21). These findings indicate that students rely on Google Translate primarily for vocabulary support and quick comprehension of English texts.

However, lower mean scores are found in writing (M = 3.38) and contextual understanding (M= 3,50), indicating that students are less confident in using the tool for more complex tasks. In addition, the mean score for inaccuracy (M = 3.85) and the moderate level of trust (M = 3.68) show that students are aware of its limitations and do not fully depend on it.

students' use of Google Translate in Learning Activities

Table 2. frequency of Google Translate Use in Learning Activities

No.	Statement	Never (%)	Rarely (%)	Sometimes (%)	Often (%)	Very often (%)	Used feature (%)	Frequent use (%)
1.	Check meaning of words	0.00	2.94	23.53	47.06	26.47	97.06	73.53
2.	Check collocations	11.76	26.47	35.29	17.65	8.82	61.76	26.47
3.	Check synonyms	8.82	17.65	35.29	26.47	11.76	73.53	38.23
4.	Translate phrases	14.71	29.41	32.35	14.71	8.82	55.88	23.53
5.	Translate sentences	8.82	23.53	35.29	20.59	11.76	67.64	32.35
6.	Translate paragraphs	17.65	29.41	29.41	14.71	8.82	52.94	23.53
7.	Translate essays	23.53	29.41	26.47	11.76	8.82	47.05	20.58

Source: Questionnaire data processed by the authors (2026)

From Table 2 the findings show that most of students most frequently use Google Translate to check word meanings (73.53%). In contrast, the use decreases as task complexity increases, particularly for translating paragraphs (23.53%) and essays (20.58%). This indicates that student mainly use Google Translate for basic tasks rather than advanced writing activities.

Students' Experiences Based on Thematic Analysis

The qualitative data were collected and analyzed using thematic analysis, which identified key themes related to students' experiences in using Google Translate.

Table 3. Summary of Thematic Analysis

Theme	Description
Usefulness	Helps students to understand vocabulary
Advantages	Fast, easy to use, and efficient
Limitations	Inaccuracy and lack of contextual understanding
Strategy	Verification and combination with other tools

Source: Interview data analyzed by the authors using thematic analysis (2026)

The themes indicates that students perceive Google Translate as a helpful and efficient tool, but they also realize its limitations. Students tend to use the tool efficiently and combining it with other learning sources.

Students' Experiences Based on Interviews

Table 4. Interview Responses of Participants

Participants	Q1: use of Google Translate	Q2: Advantages	Q3: Limitations	Q4: Impact of learning	Q5: Suggestions
P1	Used for translating words, sentences, and paragraphs.	Saves time and speeds up words	May reduce independent thinking	Helps complete tasks faster	Should be used wisely
P2	Used to find meanings of unfamiliar words	Helps understand vocabulary	Sometimes unsure of accuracy	Supports learning process	Needs careful checking
P3	Used for translating texts and finding synonyms	Helps comprehension vocabulary	Can create dependency	Improves understanding	Combine with own knowledge
P4	Used for translating words and sentences	Easy and practical to use	Limited accuracy in long sentences	Useful for basic learning	Should be used carefully
P5	Used for checking grammar and translating complex sentences	Helps improve writing accuracy	Sometimes gives unnatural sentence structure	Enhances writing skills and understanding of grammar	Should be combine with manual revision

Source: Semi-structured interview data processed by the authors (2026).

Based on Table 4 the interview findings support the quantitative results. Students reported that Google Translate is useful, easy to use, and helpful in understanding vocabulary and completing tasks. However, they also mentioned the limitations such as its inaccuracy and dependency.

Some participants highlighted that they still need to verify the translation results. For example, one participant stated that Google Translate “helps me work faster and saves time

“while other mentioned that “sometimes the translation is not accurate.” These responses indicate that students use the tool critically rather than relying on it completely.

Overall, the findings show that Google Translate functions as a supportive tool in English learning. It is effective for basic tasks such as understanding vocabulary, but less reliable for complex language use such as writing and contextual interpretation. Therefore, students need to use the tool carefully or combine it with their own knowledge to achieve better learning outcomes.

Use of Google Translate in Learning Activities

The findings show that students frequently use Google Translate as a tool to support their English learning, especially for vocabulary and basic comprehension. The high percentage of students who use Google Translate to check word meanings (73.53%) indicates that the tool is mainly used to understand unfamiliar vocabulary rather than to process complex texts. This suggests that the students rely on this tool is an immediate strategy while they encounter difficulties in reading English materials. This is also supported by the high mean scores for usefulness ($M = 4.59$) and the finding meanings ($M = 4.50$), this shows a strong dependence on the tool just for basic comprehension. This suggests that the students rely on this tool as an immediate strategy when they encounter difficulties in learning English materials.

These findings is in line with previous studies which report that students commonly use this translation tools to access word meanings quickly (Saputra et al., 2023; Nurhayati & Lahete, 2024). However, the use of Google Translate decreases when students deal with more complex tasks such as translating paragraphs (23.53%) and essays (20.58%). This also reflected in the lower mean scores for writing ($M = 3.38$) and contextual understanding ($M = 3.50$). This indicates that students do not fully depend on the tool for higher level language processing, which requires deeper understanding of grammar and context. These results also confirm the qualitative theme of limitations identified in the thematic analysis.

Advantages of Using Google Translate

Students perceive that Google Translate as a useful tool in learning English. The findings show a high level of agreement on its usefulness (97.06%), indicating that most of the students find that the tool is helpful in completing academic tasks. Students highlighted several advantages, including speed, ease of use, and accessibility. These features allow them to understand texts more quickly and complete their assignments more efficiently.

These result supports previous research states that Google Translate is widely used because it is easy to access and provides fast translation results (Rahmawati et al., 2025). In addition, this tool helps the students to learn new vocabulary and provides initial guidance when they are unsure about English expressions. This shows that Google Translate functions as a practical support tool, especially for students with limited vocabulary knowledge.

Students' Critical Use and Learning Awareness

The qualitative findings show that students do not use Google Translate passively. Instead, they often verify their translation results using dictionaries or other resources. This behavior indicates that students apply critical thinking when using this tool and are aware of the need to evaluate its output. It is also supported by the moderate level of trust ($M = 3.68$), which indicates that students do not fully rely on the tool.

This finding aligns with previous research which emphasizes that students should use the translation tools more critically and not rely on them completely (Delyana & Tedjasuksmana,

2023). By combining Google Translate with their own knowledge, students can reduce errors and improve their understanding. Interview findings also support this, as several participants mentioned the need to check and improve the translation results. This shows that students are actively involved in their learning process.

Role of Google Translate in Learning

Overall, Google Translate functions as a supportive tool rather than a primary source of learning. It is effective for basic tasks such as understanding vocabulary, but it has its limitations in handling complex language use. This supports Azima and Fithriani (2024), who argue that Google Translate can facilitate learning but cannot replace students' language competence.

Therefore, the effectiveness of Google Translate depends on how students use it. When it was used strategically and critically, it can support learning. However, excessive dependence may hinder the development of essential language skills. The integration of quantitative results, thematic analysis, and interview findings clearly shows that students position Google Translate as a supportive tool rather than a primary learning resource.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Google Translate plays a significant role as a supportive tool in students' English language learning. The findings show that students only use Google Translate for vocabulary related purposes and basic comprehension, particularly when dealing with unfamiliar words. The perceived high level of usefulness indicates that this tool is effective in helping students overcome difficulties in understanding English. However, the use of Google Translate decreases in more complex language writing. This suggests that the tool is less effective for higher level production, which requires grammatical accuracy, coherence, and contextual understanding. In this case, Google Translate cannot fully support advanced language skills. The study also finds that students are aware of the limitation of Google Translate. They also recognize that the tool may produce inaccurate translations and therefore, students have to use it critically by comparing the other sources. This states that all students should not rely on the tool but rather combine it with their own knowledge. Based on these findings, it is recommended that students use Google Translate wisely as a supporting tool rather than a primary learning source. Educators are also encouraged to guide students in using machine translation critically and effectively in academic contexts. Future research is suggested to explore the impact of other AI-based translation tools and their integration in developing students' language skills more comprehensively.

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