



Translation Challenges and Strategies Among EFL Students of English Language Education Study Program (*Tantangan dan Strategi Penerjemahan di Kalangan Mahasiswa EFL Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris*)

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Article history: Received: 11 November 2025 Revised: 18 December 2025 Accepted: 22 December 2025 Keywords: Translation Challenges Strategies EFL ELESP Kata Kunci: Penerjemahan Tantangan Strategi EFL ELESP	This study explores the translation challenges and strategies employed by EFL students in the English Language Education Study Program (ELESP) at Universitas Negeri Gorontalo. It adopts a quantitative descriptive design, collecting data from 38 fourth-semester students through a structured questionnaire adapted from Al-Sobh (2022). The instrument covered two key domains: ten items identifying various translation challenges and five items measuring the strategies students used to improve their translation competence. The findings reveal that students face considerable difficulties in several linguistic and cultural areas, particularly in interpreting pragmatic and semantic nuances, mastering grammatical structures, and bridging cultural gaps between the source and target languages. Despite these challenges, students actively implement a range of strategies, including intensive vocabulary learning, grammar-focused exercises, review of teacher feedback, and the application of translation skills through real-world texts. The study highlights the importance of both linguistic accuracy and cultural competence in translation training. These results provide valuable insights for enhancing translation pedagogy, particularly in EFL contexts, and offer recommendations for instructional practices to support students' translation performance. Abstrak Penelitian ini mengkaji tantangan dan strategi penerjemahan yang dihadapi serta digunakan oleh mahasiswa EFL dalam Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris (ELESP) di Universitas Negeri Gorontalo. Desain penelitian yang digunakan adalah deskriptif kuantitatif dengan pengumpulan data dari 38 mahasiswa semester empat melalui kuesioner terstruktur yang diadaptasi dari Al-Sobh (2022). Instrumen mencakup dua domain utama: sepuluh item mengenai tantangan penerjemahan dan lima item terkait strategi peningkatan kompetensi penerjemahan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa mengalami kesulitan yang cukup tinggi dalam aspek linguistik dan budaya, khususnya dalam memahami makna pragmatik dan semantik, menguasai struktur tata bahasa, serta menjembatani perbedaan budaya antara bahasa sumber dan bahasa target. Meskipun demikian, mahasiswa secara aktif menerapkan berbagai strategi, termasuk pembelajaran kosakata intensif, latihan tata bahasa, peninjauan umpan balik dosen, dan penerapan keterampilan penerjemahan melalui teks-teks nyata. Studi ini menekankan pentingnya akurasi linguistik dan kompetensi budaya dalam pelatihan penerjemahan. Temuan ini memberikan kontribusi penting bagi pengembangan pedagogi penerjemahan, khususnya dalam konteks EFL, serta menawarkan rekomendasi untuk praktik pengajaran dalam mendukung

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1. INTRODUCTION

Translation plays a crucial role in facilitating cross-cultural communication in an increasingly globalized world. As defined by Hatim and Munday (2019), translation is “the process of transferring a written text from source language (SL) to target language (TL) in a way that maintains its meaning, style, and purpose.” It is not merely a word-for-word replacement between languages, but a complex activity that involves linguistic, cultural, ideological, and contextual considerations (Munday, 2016). In academic contexts, translation has become an essential skill for language students, particularly those who aim to become future educators, translators, or interpreters. However, mastering this skill poses significant challenges, especially when students are required to translate authentic, real-world texts.

In an era characterized by global interconnectivity, translation plays a pivotal role in bridging linguistic and cultural divides. For students in higher education—particularly in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) contexts—translation is not only a learning activity but also a necessary skill for academic and professional development. However, translation is a complex, multi-dimensional process that requires more than just bilingual proficiency. It involves deep understanding of linguistic systems, cultural nuances, pragmatic appropriateness, and increasingly, technological competence (Munday, 2016).

University students often face numerous challenges in translation, including lexical ambiguity, syntactic mismatches, cultural interference, and inadequate training in the use of Computer-Assisted Translation (CAT) tools. For example, AlSobh (2022) found that students at Ajloun National University in Jordan struggled primarily with vocabulary choice, sentence structure, and context interpretation. These challenges are not exclusive to one cultural or linguistic group; they are observed globally in translation education (Çetiner, 2018; Josefsson & Rheinholdsson, 2011; Kavaliauskienė & Kaminskienė, 2009). Despite these difficulties, students develop and apply a variety of strategies to overcome translation barriers. These strategies range from the use of online dictionaries and translation memory tools to more cognitive approaches such as paraphrasing, restructuring sentences, and relying on contextual clues (Altuwairesh, 2021). Some students adopt literal translation when unsure, while others opt for free translation in an attempt to preserve meaning over form. Research shows that students often benefit from exposure to both types, and that success in translation is closely tied to metacognitive awareness and strategic competence (Schwieter & Ferreira, 2017).

Moreover, the classroom environment and instructional methods also significantly influence the development of translation strategies. Translation courses that incorporate collaborative activities, practical exercises, and instructor feedback tend to foster better strategic use among learners (Coban, 2015; Solhy & Teleiba, 2004). For instance, students who practice translating familiar texts such as news articles or narratives tend to report improved confidence and performance.

This study seeks to explore not only the challenges but also the strategies used by university students in translation activities. Understanding how students cope with translation difficulties can inform curriculum design, teaching approaches, and learner support systems, particularly in EFL context. It is hoped that this research will contribute to the improvement of translation pedagogy by identifying gaps in students’ preparation and proposing practical solutions to enhance their strategic competence.

A study conducted by AlSobh (2022) has significantly contributed to the understanding of translation challenges among EFL students, particularly in the context of Ajloun National University in Jordan. His work explored students’ attitudes, difficulties in translation, and strategies to improve translation skills, providing a comprehensive foundation for further inquiry in the field of translation pedagogy. However, as educational environments and student experiences may vary across cultural and institutional settings, it becomes important to examine how similar issues manifest in different contexts. Therefore, a study focusing on Indonesian university students is needed to gain context-specific insights that reflect the linguistic, academic, and curricular realities in Indonesia.

This present research aims to complement and expand upon Al-Sobh’s findings by narrowing its focus to two core aspects: the specific challenges students face in translation tasks, and the strategies they

apply to improve their skills, without including attitude analysis. Furthermore, this study will concentrate on a targeted group of fourth-semester EFL students at Universitas Negeri Gorontalo who are currently enrolled in a Translation course, ensuring that participants have relevant and immediate experience with translation activities. The novelty of this research lies in its effort to present a localized and focused perspective that can inform teaching practices and curriculum development within the Indonesian EFL context, while also enriching the broader discourse in translation education research.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a quantitative descriptive research design to describe the characteristics of translation challenges and strategies among EFL students using numerical data. The approach focused on collecting data through a structured questionnaire without manipulating variables. The purpose was to provide an objective overview of students' difficulties in translation and the strategies they apply, using statistical analysis to identify trends and patterns.

The population of the study consisted of 130 fourth-semester students from the English Language Education Study Program (ELESP) at Universitas Negeri Gorontalo. These students were chosen because they were currently taking a Translation course and had relevant experience with translation tasks. A simple random sampling technique was applied to select 38 participants, ensuring that each student had an equal chance of being chosen and enhancing the representativeness of the sample.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire adapted from AlSobh (2022). The instrument contained 15 items divided into two domains: the first focused on translation challenges (items 1–10), including lexical, grammatical, contextual, and cultural difficulties; the second covered strategies to improve translation competence (items 11–15), such as grammar practice, vocabulary development, and the use of online resources. Each item was rated using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). The questionnaire had been validated and tested for reliability by the original researcher, with Cronbach's Alpha values of 0.81 for challenges and 0.87 for strategies.

The data collection process was carried out online using Google Forms. The questionnaire link was distributed through class communication platforms like WhatsApp. Before participation, students were informed about the research objectives and assured of confidentiality and voluntary participation.

The data were analyzed using Microsoft Excel to compute descriptive statistics such as mean scores and standard deviations. Frequency and percentage distributions were also calculated to identify the most common translation difficulties and the most frequently used strategies. The interpretation of mean values followed AlSobh (2022) classification: low (1.00–2.33), moderate (2.34–3.67), and high (3.68–5.00). Although SPSS was used in the original study, Excel was considered a practical alternative for undergraduate research due to its accessibility and ability to perform essential statistical functions effectively.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

Table 1. The Most Common Translation Challenges Faced by EFL Students at ELESP

No.	Item	N	M	SD	Level
1.	I find difficulty in translating texts from Indonesia into English and vice versa.	38	2.89	0.98	Moderate
2.	Finding suitable structures in the target language(TL) to transfer the ideas causes difficulty in translation.	38	2.94	0.98	Moderate
3.	I find difficulty in choosing the appropriate meaning of vocabulary from context.	38	3.39	1.15	Moderate
4.	Lacking knowledge of pragmatic and semantic aspects of the target language (TL) leads to difficulty in translation.	38	4.02	0.88	High

5.	I find difficulty in translation because of the differences between the source language (SL) culture and the target language (TL) culture.	38	3.55	0.95	Moderate
6.	I find difficulty in translation because of grammar and sentence construction variations.	38	3.68	0.84	High
7.	Choosing appropriate vocabulary (Word Choice) makes it easy to translate texts from English into Indonesia and vice versa.	38	3.92	0.81	High
8.	I find difficulty in translation because of using inappropriate language levels.	38	3.34	0.84	Moderate
9.	Understanding special phrases and idioms in the target language (TL) texts causes difficulty in translation.	38	3.26	0.94	Moderate
10.	I find difficulty in translation because of unsuitable teaching methodology and atmosphere in translation class.	38	2.73	0.98	Moderate

The first set of data investigates the difficulties faced by EFL students in translation tasks. The results reveal a range of challenges, with varying levels of severity. Overall, the mean scores suggest that students face both moderate and high levels of difficulty in multiple areas of translation.

The highest mean score was observed in Item 4, which states: "Lacking knowledge of pragmatic and semantic aspects of the target language (TL) leads to difficulty in translation" ($M = 4.02$, $SD = 0.88$). This finding indicates a high level of difficulty and implies that many students are struggling not only with literal translation but also with interpreting meaning within context. The pragmatic and semantic components of language are often nuanced and deeply embedded in cultural understanding, which makes them particularly difficult for EFL learners. This is consistent with prior research highlighting that semantic mismatches between languages can significantly hinder translation accuracy (Baker, 2018).

Similarly, Item 6—"I find difficulty in translation because of grammar and sentence construction variations"—also received a high difficulty rating ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 0.84$). This reflects the challenges students face when navigating the syntactic differences between the source and target languages. Indonesia and English differ considerably in sentence structure, verb placement, and grammatical agreement, which may explain why many learners experience confusion when translating complex or compound sentences. Item 5, which concerns cultural differences between the source language (SL) and the target language (TL), received a relatively high mean score ($M = 3.55$, $SD = 0.95$), suggesting that students are moderately to highly challenged by cultural elements. This aligns with studies by Eugene. Nida (1964) and Newmark (1988), who emphasized that translation is not merely linguistic but also cultural. The lack of cultural equivalence, idioms, or context-specific phrases can make translation a daunting task, especially for learners unfamiliar with the socio-cultural background of the text.

Interestingly, Item 10, which involves the role of teaching methodology and classroom environment, received the lowest mean score ($M = 2.73$, $SD = 0.98$), indicating only a moderate level of difficulty. This may suggest that while the pedagogical setting does influence students' translation performance, it is not considered a major obstacle compared to linguistic or cultural barriers. Nevertheless, this result still reflects the need for more supportive and interactive teaching approaches that integrate real-life translation practices. Other areas with moderate difficulty include the choice of appropriate vocabulary from context (Item 3: $M = 3.39$, $SD = 1.15$), idiomatic expressions (Item 9: $M = 3.26$, $SD = 0.94$), and inappropriate language levels (Item 8: $M = 3.34$, $SD = 0.84$). These aspects point to a broader issue related to lexical flexibility and

discourse awareness, highlighting the students' struggle to adapt translation output to fit genre, audience, and tone appropriately.

In summary, the results clearly demonstrate that semantic-pragmatic understanding, grammar and sentence structure, and cultural awareness are the most prominent sources of translation difficulty among the students surveyed. While factors such as instructional method and teaching environment do play a role, they appear less impactful relative to the cognitive-linguistic challenges intrinsic to the act of translation itself.

Table 2. The Most Common Strategies Used by EFL Students to Improve Their Translation Skills at ELESP

No.	Item	N	M	SD	Level
1.	Learning a lot of vocabulary improves my translation skills	38	4.68	0.47	High
2.	Doing grammar exercises from grammar books develops my translation skills.	38	4.18	0.80	High
3.	Doing grammar and vocabulary exercises from the internet increases my translation skills	38	4.28	0.65	High
4.	Reviewing teacher's feedback to learn vocabulary, grammar and ways of using them correctly develops my translation skills	38	4.10	0.83	High
5.	Reading and practicing translating from newspapers, magazines, articles from English to Indonesia and vice versa improves my translation skills	38	4.10	0.72	High

The second part of the data focuses on the strategies adopted by students to enhance their translation abilities. Notably, all five items in this section received high mean scores, indicating that students are actively engaged in developing their skills through a variety of effective learning techniques.

The highest-rated strategy is Item 1—"Learning a lot of vocabulary improves my translation skills"—with a mean score of 4.68 and SD of 0.47. This underscores the critical importance of vocabulary acquisition in translation competence. A broad and nuanced vocabulary bank allows learners to better comprehend source texts and produce more precise translations. This aligns with Schäffner (2004) argument that lexical range is a foundational component of translator training.

Closely following is Item 3—"Doing grammar and vocabulary exercises from the internet increases my translation skills" ($M = 4.28$, $SD = 0.65$). This reflects the increasing role of digital platforms and online resources in translation learning. The accessibility of interactive language tools, such as online dictionaries, grammar checkers, and translation apps, has revolutionized the way students engage with language learning. These tools offer immediate feedback and authentic input, which are valuable for autonomous learning.

Item 2—"Doing grammar exercises from grammar books develops my translation skills"—also received a high mean ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 0.80$). Although traditional, this method is still perceived as beneficial. Grammar exercises reinforce students' understanding of syntactic rules and improve their ability to construct accurate sentences. This suggests that learners benefit from a balanced approach that integrates both conventional and digital resources.

Equally important is Item 4—"Reviewing teacher's feedback to learn vocabulary, grammar and ways of using them correctly"—with a mean of 4.10. Feedback plays a crucial role in shaping learners' awareness of errors and guiding them toward more accurate translation practices. According to Solhy and Teleiba (2004), timely and constructive feedback is a central factor in effective learning, as it helps students recognize gaps in their knowledge and apply corrective strategies.

Lastly, Item 5—"Reading and practicing translating from newspapers, magazines, articles from English to Indonesia and vice versa"—also scored a high mean of 4.10. This activity provides authentic exposure to real-world texts, which is essential for developing translation fluency. Exposure to diverse genres and registers enhances students' ability to deal with different communicative situations and strengthens both comprehension and production in the target language.

The overall high scores in this section reflect a proactive attitude among the students in addressing their translation difficulties. The findings indicate that students are aware of their weaknesses and are

adopting multi-dimensional strategies, including vocabulary building, grammar reinforcement, teacher guidance, and exposure to authentic texts.

3.2 Discussion

The quantitative data from the present study reveal that EFL students experience translation difficulties that span across linguistic, cultural, and pragmatic dimensions. The highest difficulty was reported in relation to the pragmatic and semantic aspects of the target language ($M = 4.02$), which aligns with Nida and Taber (2003) classification of linguistic factors—including semantics and context—as core challenges in translation. Pragmatic failure, in particular, may result from students' limited exposure to naturalistic language use and from the abstract nature of implied meaning in both English and Indonesia, as noted in AlSobh (2022) and Abdalla (2023).

Another major obstacle identified was grammar and sentence construction variations ($M = 3.68$), consistent with findings from Al-Jarf (2021), who emphasized syntactic mismatch as a key source of translation error among EFL learners. Structural discrepancies between English and Indonesia—such as verb placement, word order, and grammatical agreement—often compel students to rely on literal translation strategies, which may compromise meaning.

Additionally, a considerable number of students reported difficulty caused by cultural differences between source and target languages ($M = 3.55$). This echoes the claims of Newmark (1988) and Bassnett (2002) that effective translation requires cultural transposition, not just lexical substitution. The inability to comprehend or convey culture-specific terms, idioms, and references results in either awkward or inaccurate translations.

Interestingly, while cultural and pragmatic challenges were rated highly, teaching methodology and classroom atmosphere ($M = 2.73$) received the lowest score, suggesting that students place greater weight on intrinsic linguistic difficulties than on pedagogical ones. However, this does not negate the role of instructional design. As Coban (2015) suggests, translation instruction that lacks authentic materials, contextualized practice, and feedback may leave learners ill-equipped to transfer classroom knowledge into real-world translation performance.

Lexical ambiguity and idiomatic expressions ($M = 3.39$ and $M = 3.26$, respectively) were also cited as barriers. These findings reinforce Baker (2018) position that translation equivalence must go beyond literal substitution, particularly when dealing with idioms or context-dependent vocabulary. Students' challenges in decoding polysemous words or selecting proper collocations highlight the need for enhanced lexical training. In response to these challenges, students demonstrated a proactive orientation toward strategy-based learning, as indicated by the uniformly high means across all five strategic items. The most endorsed strategy was learning a lot of vocabulary ($M = 4.68$), which underscores the centrality of lexical competence in achieving accurate translation. As Shliakhtina et al., (2023) explain, dictionaries serve not only as tools for meaning retrieval but also as cognitive aids that support vocabulary acquisition and contextual discernment.

The second most utilized strategy was doing grammar and vocabulary exercises from the internet ($M = 4.28$), suggesting an integration of technology-enhanced learning into translation competence development. This is in line with Çetiner (2018), who found that familiarity with computer-aided translation (CAT) tools enhances students' engagement and accuracy. The use of interactive platforms, grammar quizzes, and digital flashcards not only reinforces form-based knowledge but also simulates authentic translation tasks.

Closely related is the high reliance on grammar exercises from textbooks ($M = 4.18$), which reflects students' recognition of the need for syntactic discipline, especially when navigating between two structurally divergent languages. This pedagogical approach is consistent with the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) discussed by Abrar et al (2020), where grammatical parsing and sentence-level practice enhance learners' ability to transfer linguistic knowledge into translation proficiency.

Additionally, the practice of reviewing teacher feedback ($M = 4.10$) demonstrates students' metacognitive engagement. Feedback fosters error awareness and self-regulation—core components of strategic competence, as defined by Schwieter and Ferreira (2017). Such reflective practices support long-term retention and adaptive performance in future translation tasks.

Engagement with authentic texts such as newspapers and magazines ($M = 4.10$) was also perceived as highly effective. This strategy exposes learners to diverse genres, idiomatic usage, and real-world discourse patterns—elements that classroom-based instruction may lack. As Solhy and Teleiba (2004) posits, translation skills are honed through continuous practice with meaningful texts, which helps bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and communicative application.

However, this study is not without limitations. The data were obtained from a single institution and based on a purely quantitative approach using a questionnaire. As such, it may not fully capture the nuanced experiences, cognitive processes, or emotional challenges students encounter during translation. Future research may benefit from adopting a mixed-method design or qualitative approaches such as interviews or

think-aloud protocols to gain deeper insight into the individual strategies and perceptions that shape students' translation performance.

4. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the translation challenges faced by EFL students and the strategies they employ to improve their translation competence. The participants consisted of fourth-semester students enrolled in the English Language Education Study Program at Universitas Negeri Gorontalo. By using a quantitative descriptive design and collecting data through a structured questionnaire, the study revealed several important findings.

The results indicated that students encounter both linguistic and cultural difficulties in translation tasks. The most prominent challenges were related to understanding the pragmatic and semantic aspects of the target language, navigating grammatical and sentence structure differences, and dealing with cultural gaps between the source and target languages. Additionally, issues such as lexical ambiguity, inappropriate language levels, and difficulties with idiomatic expressions were also evident, though to a lesser degree.

In response to these challenges, students adopted a range of effective strategies. These included intensive vocabulary learning, grammar practice using both printed and digital materials, reviewing teacher feedback, and engaging in authentic translation exercises. The consistently high mean scores across all strategic areas demonstrate that students are highly motivated and actively seek to enhance their translation abilities through both conventional and technology-enhanced approaches.

Overall, the findings emphasize the complex nature of translation in EFL contexts and highlight the importance of combining linguistic accuracy with cultural awareness. They also suggest that effective teaching methods and student-driven strategies can significantly support learners in overcoming translation-related difficulties.

However, several limitations should be acknowledged in this study. The research was conducted within a single academic setting and relied solely on quantitative data collected through a questionnaire. While this method provided valuable statistical insights, it may have overlooked the deeper cognitive, emotional, or situational factors influencing students' translation processes. To build upon these findings, future investigations are encouraged to incorporate qualitative or mixed-method approaches—such as interviews, focus group discussions, or think-aloud techniques—to uncover richer perspectives and better understand the individual learner experiences in translation tasks.

4.2 Suggestions and Recommendations

Based on the findings, several suggestions are proposed for future practice and research:

a. For instructors

It is recommended to integrate more practical translation exercises that reflect real-world contexts, especially those involving pragmatic and cultural nuances. Providing detailed and constructive feedback can also support students' metacognitive development and translation accuracy.

b. For students

Continuous vocabulary expansion and grammar reinforcement should remain a priority. In addition, exploring cultural references and engaging with authentic materials in both source and target languages can improve their interpretive and adaptive translation skills.

c. For future researchers

Further studies are encouraged to use qualitative or mixed-method approaches—such as interviews or think-aloud protocols—to explore deeper cognitive and emotional factors in students' translation performance. Researchers may also examine the roles of anxiety, motivation, or working memory through longitudinal designs for more comprehensive insights.

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