



EFL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF USING GOOGLE TRANSLATE TO UNDERSTAND ENGLISH TEXTS

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates university-level EFL students' perceptions of using Google Translate to facilitate comprehension of advanced English texts. It explores how final-year students conceptualize the tool's cognitive role in reading, the frequency and academic contexts of its use, and the pedagogical benefits and linguistic challenges associated with machine-assisted text interpretation. Employing a descriptive qualitative design, data were collected through an open-ended questionnaire distributed via Google Forms to 32 seventh-semester undergraduate EFL students. The responses were systematically analyzed using the qualitative analysis framework of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. The findings indicate that students perceive Google Translate as a supportive tool that reduces reading anxiety and accelerates lexical recognition. However, the study also reveals a cognitive paradox in which the convenience of the tool may foster psychological dependency. In addition, literal word-for-word translations and limited contextual sensitivity often lead to semantic confusion when students engage with complex academic texts. The study offers practical implications for EFL pedagogy, curriculum design, and digital literacy by emphasizing the importance of balancing machine-assisted translation with autonomous, critical, and independent reading practices.

Keywords: *Google Translate, EFL Students, Students Perceptions, Reading Comprehension, Translation Tool.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of English for learners (EFL), mastering reading comprehension is highly crucial for students. Reading is not merely about recognizing words, but it serves as the primary gateway for learners to access global academic resources, scientific journals, and textbook materials (Sari & Wardhani, 2020; Fadilah et al., 2023; Puripunyanich, 2025). In higher education, English learners are required to possess critical reading skills to analyze complex texts. Without adequate reading comprehension, learners will face significant difficulties in achieving their academic goals and expanding their knowledge. While productive skills like speaking and writing often receive prominent focus in daily communication, reading

comprehension stands as the ultimate cognitive backbone for advanced EFL students, particularly in higher education (Smith et al., 2024; Mohinur, 2024). The uniqueness of reading comprehension lies in its intense cognitive demand, it requires the synchronous operation of word recognition, syntactic parsing, and critical contextual integration. This skill is uniquely vital because academic survival and independent knowledge acquisition rely entirely on a student's ability to critically decode and evaluate complex, heavy text materials independently. Therefore, understanding English texts effectively becomes a foundational competence that every EFL student must develop.

However, many EFL students in Indonesia still face major obstacles in understanding English texts due to a lack of vocabulary and complex grammatical structures. Researchers have found persistent problems in this learning process: first, many learners struggle to comprehend texts independently and often seek fast and instant results. Second, they have a heavy dependency on translation tools due to low confidence and a lack of reading references. In an effort to understand the material, learners generally rely on translating the text into Indonesian to bridge their comprehension gap (Setiawan & Axelina, 2022; Nayeem et al., 2025; Maryamah et al., 2024).

To overcome these reading difficulties, technology has increased innovation in the field of education by creating various tools that strive to meet learning objectives (Abdalhussein, 2021; Darzhinova, 2025; Utami et al., 2024). Nowadays, due to advanced technology, the habit of opening a conventional dictionary has significantly shifted into opening digital translation platforms. This phenomenon is highly apparent among Generation Z learners who inherently prefer practical and instant solutions to support and aid their language learning process (Pham et al., 2022). Media is anything that can stimulate students' thoughts, attention, and interests so that the learning process occurs smoothly (Ammade et al., 2023; Xianli, 2024; Arif, 2023).

One of the most popular digital media widely utilized by learners to assist text comprehension is the Google Translate Application. Google Translate is a free multilingual translation service that serves as a tool for translating sentences, checking word meanings, and acting as an efficient online dictionary (Khasanah et al., 2022; Sagita & Balqis, 2021; Nygård, 2024; Abdelhalim et al., 2025). Instead of using conventional dictionaries which tend to spend a lot of time, modern learners prefer Google Translate to comprehend English texts

quickly (Sagita & Balqis, 2021). While translation can be viewed as a method of explanation in classroom activities (Mulyani & Afina, 2021). Google Translate specifically helps learners to enhance new vocabularies and makes it easier for them to digest descriptive or academic texts (Khotimah et al., 2021; Siahaan et al., 2023). In the specific context of advanced learners, such as seventh-semester EFL students, specific interactive features within digital tools such as direct phrase translation and quick contextual word checks have become a prevalent independent strategy to acquire swift vocabulary access and support immediate text processing (Imaroh and Aisyah, 2026).

To deeply analyze how digital translation shapes reading processes, this study draws upon Perfetti's Verbal Efficiency Theory Charles Perfetti (2007) as the theoretical framework. Perfetti argues that reading comprehension depends heavily on the efficient execution of low-level processing, such as word identification and lexical decoding, if these lower-level processes consume too much cognitive working memory, lesser cognitive resources remain for high-level textual integration and critical comprehension. In the context of machine translation, previous literature by Karnal and Vera (2013) established that Google Translate directly alters this cognitive load by instantly managing the lexical decoding burden for non-proficient readers. By taking over the tedious task of word-for-word vocabulary identification, the tool theoretically frees up the learners' working memory capacity, allowing them to shift their remaining cognitive energy toward global text comprehension and contextual synthesis. However, as unraveled by modern empirical studies, a distinct cognitive paradox often occurs where over-reliance on automated tools inadvertently minimizes active cognitive engagement, thereby limiting actual language acquisition. Therefore, examining university EFL students' perceptions through

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this framework is essential to see how they navigate the fine line between automated text decoding and autonomous, critical comprehension.

While previous studies have widely investigated the role of Google Translate in language environments, they have predominantly focused on lower-level linguistic skills, such as passive vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation training, and literal word-for-word translation in writing classes. In the specific realm of reading, several dominant studies have explored machine translation primarily as a mechanical tool for basic comprehension, for instance, (Young, 2024) highlighted that Google Translate effectively serves as a practical scaffolding aid for students to execute skimming and scanning when reading dense academic materials. Similarly, Alhaisoni and Alhaysony (2017) investigated how EFL learners utilize the application as an instant substitute for paper dictionaries to bypass immediate vocabulary barriers. Furthermore, Alim and Aisyah (2025) demonstrated how application-based digital aids primarily excel at building a student's receptive lexical foundation and enhancing immediate vocabulary recognition. However, there is an evident empirical gap regarding how advanced EFL learners utilize machine translation for higher-order cognitive processing, specifically critical text comprehension. This study deliberately shifts the focus away from simple vocabulary decoding to high-level reading comprehension, examining how undergraduate students manage text cohesion, evaluate implicit contextual meanings, and synthesize dense academic articles through the aid of automated tools. By focusing on reading comprehension rather than isolated vocabulary learning, this study uncovers the critical cognitive boundaries where automated translation ends and authentic, critical text comprehension must begin.

To anchor this investigation critically, perception in this study is theoretically

defined based on cognitive acceptance frameworks, representing students' subjective interpretation and evaluation of their mental workload rather than an objective measurement of actual learning outcomes or objective reading proficiency (Robbins & Timothy A. Judge, 2021). This distinction is vital because a positive perception does not automatically mean the tool effectively improves long-term language mastery; rather, it reflects how the tool assists immediate information retrieval and alters their reading engagement. Therefore, this study explores university-level EFL students' perceptions of using Google Translate for text comprehension. This study is guided by the following research questions: (1) How do university-level EFL students perceive the use of Google Translate for understanding English texts? (2) How frequently and in what contexts do learners use Google Translate when reading English texts? and (3) What benefits and challenges do students perceive when using Google Translate for text comprehension?

2. METHODS

The design of this study employed a descriptive qualitative approach. According to Creswell and Creswell (2014), qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meanings that individuals or group ascribe to a social or human problem. This study was classified as descriptive qualitative research because the data were described narratively and analyzed based on students' perceptions. Undergraduate seventh-semester EFL university students were involved as the research participants.

The participants of this study were undergraduate seventh-semester EFL university students. The participants were selected because they had experience using Google Translate to understand English texts during their learning activities. The respondents were considered appropriate for this study since they frequently interacted with English reading materials and translation tools in academic contexts.

2.1 Respondents

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2.2 Instruments

The research instrument used in this study was an open-ended questionnaire consisting of ten questions designs using semi-structured interview principles. The questions aimed to explore students' perceptions, experiences, perceived usefulness, benefits, and challenges in using Google Translate to understand English texts. The questionnaire items were developed based on relevant theories and previous studies related to students' perceptions of using Google Translate in EFL learning contexts. To ensure content validity, the instrument was reviewed and validated through expert judgement by the research supervisors, who evaluated the clarity, relevance and suitability of the questions for university-level EFL students.

2.3 Procedures

The data were collected through an open-ended questionnaire administered through Google Forms. The questionnaire was distributed to undergraduate seventh-semester EFL university students. Participants were asked to provide descriptive and reflective responses based on their experiences using Google Translate to understand English texts. This procedure allowed the participants to express their opinions and experiences in detail regarding their interaction with the translation tool.

2.4 Data Analysis

After all responses were collected from 32 participants through the Google Form, the data were analyzed using descriptive qualitative analysis following the interactive model proposed by (Miles Matthew B et al., 2014) First, in the data reduction stage, the open-ended responses from the distributed questionnaire batches were comprehensively

collected, reviewed, and compiled. To ensure analytical depth, the text was screened to focus exclusively on highly informative and relevant participant insight, and the remaining text was categorized into code themes: usage frequency, perceived usefulness, and linguistic challenges (such as word-for-word translation issues). Second, in the data display stage, these categorized perceptions were organized into clear thematic descriptions to contrast text translation versus text comprehension. Finally, conclusion drawing and verification were conducted to determine how English learners utilize the tool as a supportive reading aid. This systematic process ensured that the findings accurately represented the participants' perceptions and experiences while maintaining the consistency and reliability of the qualitative interpretation.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the empirical findings and comprehensive discussions regarding EFL university students' perceptions of utilizing Google Translate to facilitate English text comprehension. The qualitative insights presented herein were rigorously extracted from the descriptive, reflective responses of 32 seventh-semester EFL university students who habitually interact with advanced academic texts. Rather than presenting fragmented data, the findings are systematically organized into emergent thematic categories directly aligned with the three formulated research questions, allowing for a nuanced exploration of both the cognitive support and the linguistic challenges perceived by the participants.

Result

EFL University Students' Perceptions of Using Google Translate for Understanding English Texts (RQ 1)

The investigation into the comprehensive perceptions of the 32 seventh-semester EFL university students revealed a highly polarized and multi-layered spectrum of attitudes toward Google Translate. Rather than displaying a uniform acceptance, the participants segmented into distinct cognitive and psychological clusters based on how they

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evaluate the tool's impact on their reading comfort, academic confidence, and independent language development. At the primary level, a significant portion of senior students perceive Google Translate as a vital psychological mechanism to alleviate academic anxiety. In their final year, these students are routinely bombarded with dense international research journals and thick textbooks, which frequently trigger severe linguistic panic and reading resistance. In this high-pressure environment, the application is perceived not just as a mechanical dictionary, but as a defensive safety net that makes advanced English texts feel substantially less intimidating.

This emotional relief and cognitive stabilizing effect were dynamically described by Participant 18, who shared how the platform completely changes her psychological readiness when facing heavy academic expectations:

"Relieved because it saves a lot of time... Yeah, it does [make me more confident]. At least I don't panic or give up right away when the lecturer gives us a thick English textbook, because I know I have a backup. Definitely. It takes the pressure off. I don't have to stress about every single hard word, so reading English feels way less intimidating."

This defensive reliance is closely echoed by Participant 16, who highlighted that the tool prevents academic paralysis and grants him the emotional baseline needed to approach difficult words with confidence:

"I feel more relaxed and less anxious because it helps me quickly grasp meanings... It reduces my fear of misunderstanding. Even if the translation is not perfect, it gives me a starting point to interpret the text. Yes, it makes me more comfortable because I know I have a tool to support me. It helps me avoid panic when facing difficult words and allows me to continue reading with more confidence."

For these students, the tool creates a sense of comfort by smoothing out the

immediate friction of encountering unfamiliar words. Participant 19 shared a similar positive perception, noting that the tool transforms reading from a stressful task into an approachable activity:

"I feel more comfortable and less worried because it helps me understand English texts more easily and quickly... As a result, reading English texts becomes easier, more enjoyable, and less stressful."

Furthermore, Participant 7 conceptualized her perception through a practical lens, establishing that the tool's core value lies in its instantaneous processing speed, which directly enhances her reading self-efficacy:

"I feel like its' been helpful and has boosted my confidence, because Google Translate makes it easy for me to understand English text quickly ... which makes reading less of a challenge"

In addition to pure textual decoding, another distinct cluster of participants perceived Google Translate positively due to its non-textual, integrated technical features. These advanced students look beyond the basic translation box and exploit specialized tools like the audio playback synthesizer and camera scanning features to build a multi-sensory reading experience. For example, Participant 2 focused her appreciation on the platform's capacity to model authentic pronunciation, adding an auditory layer to her vocabulary acquisition:

"Yes [it makes me confident], because it also provides speaker that can give example how to read a word or sentences correctly... it has many figure such speaker, many language choices and synonyms."

This practical appreciation for pronunciation features was similarly validated by Participant 11, who stated:

"I feel easy using Google Translate... Yes because there is sound effect when i didn't know the pronunciation."

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Meanwhile, Participant 6 evaluated the comfort of the application based on its visual translation features, tracking how the camera tool eliminates manual typing and modernizes the workflow of a busy student:

"In Google Translate there are many features that can make things easier and help users, one of which is the camera feature. Which makes it easy for users to comfortably and practically interpret text."

However, the findings for this first research question would be fundamentally incomplete and analytically unbalanced without highlighting the intense wave of negative perceptions, deep academic skepticism, and total cognitive rejection expressed by several senior students. Despite the overwhelming appreciation for its convenience and psychological support, the seventh-semester participants did not maintain an exclusively positive or biased perspective toward the tool. Because they are advanced learners standing on the verge of graduation, their positive perceptions were heavily balanced by a strong, critical awareness of the machine's limitations and its potential to cause cognitive regression. A major negative perception centers on the realization that Google Translate operates as an unhelpful shortcut that suppresses real vocabulary learning and breeds academic laziness.

Participants 18 critically self-reflected on this downside, pointing out the regression in her own learning habits:

"But sometimes I feel a bit lazy for relying on it too much instead of actually learning the words."

A more profound level of academic rejection emerged from students who possess high language proficiency and find the machine's outputs too rigid and grammatically flawed to be trusted for university-level work. For these critical observers, the tool is a completely unreliable partner for professional scholarship. Participants 31 expressed an explicit distaste for the platform, drawing a sharp,

uncompromising line between casual assistance and strict academic requirements:

"don't really like... A little bit [confident], because sometimes the grammar isn't quite right. In general yes, but academically no, because sometimes the grammar does not meet academic standards."

This exact sentiment of strict academic distrust is reinforced by Participant 12, who warned against blind faith in automated systems, noting that human contextual overview remains irreplaceable:

"Very helpful but must remain careful... Google Translate is helpful for understanding the general meaning, but cannot be completely trusted for nuance, culture, or high-level accuracy... often requires human review to ensure accuracy of context, idiom, and grammar."

Furthermore, some students perceived the tool with a sense of complete indifference, claiming that it plays no role whatsoever in their confidence or reading development. Participant 5 adopted a highly detached, neutral posture, viewing the tool as a basic, primitive application rather than a transformative reading asset:

"I feel neutral when using it. It helps sometimes, but I don't really depend on it. It is helpful for basic understanding... Not really [confident]. Since I already understand English quite well, Google Translate doesn't significantly boost my confidence."

This total dismissal of the tool's impact is mirrored by Participant 28, who perceived the utility of the machine as entirely marginal and structurally weak:

"Just fine I guess, not something extraordinary... Tbf not much... Nope, it doesn't impact anything to be fair... it doesn't help much other than easy to use for translating a word not sentence."

The most severe, absolute rejection of the application came from Participant 17 ,

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who completely by passed Google Translate, perceiving it as an inferior system compared to general search engines due to its structural stiffness:

"None since I don't use them... It's not that helpful, I'd recommend go search it in google search, much more better... No [not confident], reason being is that it felt so stiff whenever i read things using google translate."

Ultimately, the collective perception of Google Translate among seventh-semester EFL students is characterized by a deep tactical division. The tool is simultaneously perceived as an invaluable emotional buffer against reading anxiety and a flawed, robotic shortcut that threatens genuine language acquisition. While less proficient or stressed students embrace its instant convenience and multi-sensory features to escape linguistic panic, advanced and highly critical students view it with intense academic skepticism, openly rejecting its unrefined grammar, contextual blindness, and structural stiffness in favor of autonomous human comprehension.

The Frequency and Context of Students' Use of Google Translate When Reading English Texts (RQ 2)

The second thematic line addresses the operational parameters—namely the behavioral frequency and explicit situational contexts—that dictate how seventh-semester EFL students integrate Google Translate into their reading routines. Far from being a random or steady habit, the findings indicate that the frequency of machine translation usage fluctuates dynamically depending on text difficulty, academic pressure, and individual language proficiency. In terms of high frequency and specific operational contexts, senior students rely most heavily on the application when forced to navigate complex academic registers, review international literature for their final projects, or process dense theoretical frameworks that contain domain-specific terminology.

For instance, Participants 18 revealed that her usage is highly situational and spikes primarily under the structural demands of advanced scholarship rather than casual reading tasks:

"Pretty often, mostly when I'm dealing with heavy academic papers or journals. For casual reading, I barely touch it... When I'm crammed with assignments, reviewing literature for a paper, or when I run into a weird word that I can't figure out from the context."

This targeted contextual pattern is mirrored by Participant 16, who explained that the tool serves as a front-end parsing assistant when he is confronted with complex texts during research or course assignments:

"I use it quite often, especially when I face unfamiliar vocabulary or complex sentences. I usually rely on it when reading academic articles, online news, or assignments that contain difficult words or expressions."

Similarly, Participants 19 established that high-frequency usage is triggered by the necessity to verify textual accuracy under academic pressure:

"Very often... I usually use Google Translate when I read English articles, academic materials, or assignments and find unfamiliar words or difficult sentences. I also use it when I want to make sure I understand the meaning correctly."

Furthermore, the data demonstrates that even for students who describe their general frequency as selective, the tool becomes a critical asset when encountering multi-clause structures or unfamiliar vocabularies. Participants 7 contextualized her frequent interventions around these specific reading barriers:

"I often use Google Translate when reading or trying tounderstand English texts. I usually use Google Translate when I come across difficult vocabulary, long sentences, or academic texts in English that are hard to understand"

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This situational reliance for vocabulary decoding is further corroborated by Participants 11 and participants 30, who both noted that the core context of deployment involves overcoming unfamiliar semantic units in assignments and academic articles:

"I often use Google Translate... I usually use Google Translate when I find unfamiliar words, read articles, or do English assignments." (Participants 11) "I use it quite often, especially when I find difficult words or sentences. I usually use it when reading school materials, articles, or assignments in English." (Participants 30)

However, to provide a complete and scientifically rigorous analysis, the findings must thoroughly account for the pervasive negative patterns, limitations, and situational frustrations that occur within these reading contexts. The data unraveled that while students frequently turn to the application, they consistently encounter frustrating boundaries—both technical and structural—that disrupt their academic workflow. A major negative operational context relates to the rigid constraints of the platform's interface. For students attempting to process high-volume research data, technical caps on text inputs cause immediate operational friction. Participants 2 expressed direct irritation toward these functional constraints when attempting to translate larger blocks of text:

"Very often... Unhelpful because there is word count restriction to translate."

This technical complaint was explicitly supported by Participants 13, who marked word caps as a primary point of functional dissatisfaction:

"Often... [confusing because of] the existence of word input restrictions."

Beyond interface limitations, students reported that using Google Translate in advanced academic contexts often injects fresh semantic confusion into their reading process rather than clarifying it. Because the

engine frequently produces inaccurate translations for idioms, multi-clause sentences, and specialized jargon, students often find themselves in situations where the machine's output completely distorts the author's original intent. This negative experience of contextual deviation was clearly detailed by Participants 20 :

"Sometimes, when I dunno the new vocab, I spontaneously opened it... When I actually already know the meaning of the sentence, I used that app to make sure. But the translate wasn't what I wanted."

This structural failure creates a dynamic where the tool is perceived as highly unhelpful for complex analytical reading. Participants 32 noted how the machine's failure to handle syntactic length undermines reading flow and induces academic self-doubt:

"I sometimes use Google Translate... Yes. Sometimes Google Translate gives unclear or inaccurate translations, especially for long or complex sentences. I feel confused and less confident, so I usually double-check the meaning using other resources."

The frequency of use drops significantly among a small group of high-proficiency students who view the application as structurally inferior or unhelpful for genuine scholastic work. For these participants, the tool's inability to grasp context makes it a poor alternative to manual comprehension or standard search engines. Participants 5 maintained a low usage frequency due to her advanced linguistic standing, evaluating the tool as largely unnecessary:

"Not often... I usually use Google Translate when I encounter unfamiliar vocabulary or technical terms that I want to confirm the meaning of. But overall, I rarely use it because I already understand English quite well."

Similarly, Participants 28 and participants 31 indicated that their frequency is strictly limited to isolated word failures

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rather than full sentence decoding, due to the persistent need to audit the machine's flawed grammar:

"Not much... When I forgetting the word to translate... Just about the grammar I need to check myself." (participants 28) "Not often... only if I come across an unfamiliar word." (participants 31)

The absolute baseline of contextual rejection is anchored by participants 17, who completely distances himself from the application. He explicitly avoids integrating the tool into any academic context, arguing that the system's pervasive structural stiffness makes general search engines a far superior alternative for research verification:

"I don't really use it much. I only search the meaning in google search instead. [Situation to use:] Never... Yes, sometimes the things that we want to say doesn't get translate accurately."

In conclusion, the behavioral deployment of Google Translate among seventh-semester EFL students is defined by a highly conditional frequency. While the application is routinely utilized as a rapid decoding mechanism when reading heavy academic papers, its operational context is severely hampered by technological word count caps, structural stiffness, and chronic contextual inaccuracies. As a result, senior students utilize the tool with extreme caution, navigating a constant struggle between the convenience of quick word lookups and the frustrating reality of automated grammatical corruption.

The Benefits and Challenges for Students in Perceiving The Use of Google Translate for Understanding Text (RQ 3)

The third thematic cluster extracted from the data provides a comprehensive evaluation of the explicit structural benefits and deep linguistic challenges perceived by seventh-semester EFL university students when utilizing Google Translate as a reading aid. Rather than presenting a simplistic or one-dimensional automated tool, the findings

reveal a profound academic trade-off. Advanced language learners constantly weigh the immediate instrumental advantages of machine translation—such as speed, ease of access, and macro-level scanning—against its severe structural flaws, contextual blindness, and grammatical corruption, creating a pattern of critical vigilance during text comprehension.

In terms of perceived benefits, the data highlights Google Translate as a powerful catalyst for time efficiency and baseline lexical accessibility. For senior students under intense final-year pressures, the primary benefit of the platform is its ability to instantly dismantle surface-level vocabulary barriers. Participants 3 explicitly emphasized this operational speed and accessibility as key practical advantages:

"It's really helpful because it make us very straight forward... Speed, convenience, and ability to provide quick translations of text, speech, and images across over 100 languages."

This practical efficiency is heavily supported by participants 12, who perceived the tool's core benefit as a front-end processing mechanism for rapid skimming and macro-level text digestion:

"Google Translate is very useful for quickly understanding content (skimming/getting the gist)... What's loved about Google Translate is its ease of access, speed, and diverse features such as live camera translation, conversation mode... all of which help understand and communicate across languages conveniently."

Similarly, participants 18 lauded the immediate functional value of the application's advanced interface features, specifically noting how the tool accelerates her academic workflow:

"Super helpful, like 80% of the time. It's perfect for getting the general idea of a long paragraph really quickly. It's fast, and the camera feature is a lifesaver for scanning"

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printed books. It really speeds up my homework."

Furthermore, students like participants 5 and participants 19 verified that the application offers an easy entry point for validating single, unfamiliar words without wasting excessive time:

"It is helpful for basic understanding... It is fast, convenient, and easy to use for checking vocabulary or quick translation." (participants 5) "Google Translate is very helpful. It helps me understand vocabulary, phrases, and the general meaning of a text... I like that it is fast, easy to use, free... It also helps me save time while studying." (participants 19)

An advanced lexical benefit was further identified by participants 2, who observed that the application acts as an automated thesaurus, offering alternative word choices that allow students to evaluate synonyms:

"Because it provides many language to translate and provides suggestion or similar words to choose."

However, the core analytical focus of this research question lies in the substantial negative responses, frustrations, and linguistic challenges reported by the participants. The findings demonstrate that while Google Translate delivers immediate baseline access, it consistently fails under high-level academic scrutiny. The most pervasive linguistic challenge highlighted by twenty-six participants is the engine's chronic dependency on rigid, word-for-word literal translation. In advanced academic registers—which are packed with abstract metaphors, complex sentence structures, and domain-specific jargon—this literal bias proves highly disruptive.

Participants 18 forcefully captured this structural failure and the resulting cognitive alienation with intense frustration:

"It translates word-for-word too much. It ruins the grammar and makes the

Indonesian version sound completely unnatural and robotic."

This sentiment of structural breakdown is strongly reinforced by participants 16, who detailed how awkward automated syntax undermines his reading confidence and introduces deep professional skepticism:

"Sometimes the grammar is awkward, and idiomatic expressions are translated incorrectly, which makes me doubt the result."

A deeper linguistic challenge identified by the participants is the machine's absolute blindness to contextual nuances, cultural references, and academic registers. Because the software translates strings of data mathematically rather than semantically, the resulting Indonesian output frequently misrepresents the author's argument. Participants 3 critically dismantled this technological limitation, pointing out its failure to process high-level text layers:

"Its inability to capture context, cultural nuances, idioms, and tone, which often results in literal, awkward, or even inaccurate translations, especially for complex or sensitive content."

This contextual inaccuracy was further complained about by participants 5 and participants 15, who both noted that the machine fails to cross the boundary into specialized terminology or non-literal expressions:

"Sometimes the translation lacks contextual accuracy, especially in academic or idiomatic expressions." (participants 5) "The level of accuracy especially in translating slang." (participants 15)

The challenge intensifies when the tool processes complex-compound or long sentences typical of international scholarship. The machine often distorts the logical relationship between subject and predicate, creating severe syntactic confusion. Participants 7 detailed how this lack of

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precise structure directly forces students into a state of cognitive doubt:

"Google Translate can sometimes be confusing when translating long sentences or specialized terms, resulting in less than accurate translations. At that point, I felt confused and unsure about the translation results ... especially regarding sentence structure and context, which can make the meaning confusing."

This operational frustration was mirrored by participants 11 and participants 29, who emphasized that long, multi-clause structures are consistently rendered into unnatural, incoherent phrasing:

"Sometimes the translations sound unnatural or do not match the context, especially for long or complex sentences." (participants 11) "Sometimes Google Translate gives literal translations that sound unnatural or miss the correct context, especially for idioms or complex sentences." (Participants 29)

Ultimately, the linguistic challenges culminate in a dynamic where students cannot rely on the automated text as a final product. As summarized by participants 32, the unnatural phrasing complicates rather than simplifies text comprehension:

"I find it confusing when Google Translate produces inaccurate or unnatural translations, especially for long or complex sentences. This sometimes makes it difficult to understand the intended meaning."

In conclusion, the result for the third research question shows that there are two contrasting sides to using Google Translate. While students greatly appreciate its practical benefits—such as speed, ease of use, and the ability to scan large paragraphs quickly—they are also heavily troubled by major language problems. These problems include rigid word-for-word translations, messy sentence structures in long paragraphs, and a complete failure to understand the true context of academic texts. For seventh-semester EFL university students, this reality

prevents uncritical reliance; they are forced to act as active human editors, deploying their own grammatical knowledge to reconstruct and validate the machine's flawed outputs.

Discussion

In this section, the empirical findings are critically interpreted and synthesized through the perspectives of cognitive processing, practical language pedagogy, and digital tool integration. While the preceding subsections systematically presented students' responses, the discussion elucidates the broader significance of these findings within the context of advanced EFL reading challenges.

The findings reveal a notable psychological and cognitive tendency in which Google Translate functions primarily as an immediate anxiety-reduction mechanism and a tool for lexical efficiency. When advanced EFL students encounter dense academic articles or international research journals, the abundance of unfamiliar vocabulary and complex syntactic structures often generates academic stress and reading hesitation. In this context, Google Translate operates as an affective support mechanism that enables learners to approach challenging texts with greater confidence. This interpretation aligns with Perfetti's Verbal Efficiency Theory, which posits that efficient reading comprehension depends on rapid and automatic word identification; excessive cognitive effort devoted to lexical decoding reduces the resources available for higher-level textual integration and comprehension (Perfetti, 2007). By providing instant lexical translations, Google Translate assists learners in bypassing laborious vocabulary decoding and allocating greater cognitive capacity to understanding the overall meaning of the text.

However, the findings also indicate a significant cognitive trade-off. Although the tool facilitates immediate comprehension, overreliance on machine translation may discourage learners from engaging in contextual inference and deep vocabulary processing. Participants acknowledged that

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the convenience of Google Translate can foster dependency, leading to reduced autonomous vocabulary development and limited critical engagement with the text. This observation is consistent with previous studies reporting that digital translation tools, while useful for immediate comprehension, may also create reliance that constrains independent language learning (Alhaisoni & Alhaysony, 2017; Pham et al., 2022; Setiawan & Axelina, 2022). Thus, although Google Translate supports verbal efficiency by accelerating lexical recognition, its long-term impact on learner autonomy requires careful pedagogical consideration.

Furthermore, the situational frequency of Google Translate use demonstrates that advanced EFL students employ the tool strategically in response to specific academic demands. The concentration of use during thesis preparation and literature review activities suggests that students rely on the application for skimming lengthy texts, extracting general ideas, and conducting preliminary checks of unfamiliar terminology. Similar findings have been reported by Young (2024), who identified machine translation as a practical scaffolding tool for processing dense academic materials. Nevertheless, the present findings indicate that the effectiveness of Google Translate decreases when applied to highly specialized academic discourse characterized by precise registers, complex sentence structures, and abstract conceptual language.

The limitations of the tool become particularly evident in relation to contextual interpretation. The findings show that literal word-for-word translation and insufficient sensitivity to contextual nuances frequently produce semantic distortions, awkward sentence structures, and robotic phrasing. Such limitations correspond with previous research demonstrating that Google Translate may struggle to accurately convey idiomatic expressions, cultural references, and context-dependent meanings (Abdalthussein, 2021; Karnal, 2013; Khotimah et al., 2021). Consequently, high-proficiency students expressed skepticism regarding the reliability of machine-generated translations for

academic purposes, emphasizing that the outputs often fail to satisfy the standards required for university-level scholarly work.

Ultimately, the significance of this study lies in the transformation of learners' roles from passive users of technology into active evaluators of machine-generated information. Because Google Translate outputs may contain grammatical inaccuracies, literal renderings, and contextual inconsistencies, students are compelled to apply their own grammatical knowledge, semantic awareness, and reading strategies to assess and refine the translated text. In this sense, successful text comprehension is not solely achieved through the use of Google Translate; rather, it depends on learners' critical capacity to evaluate and reconstruct the tool's outputs. This finding supports a pedagogical perspective that positions machine translation not as an independent problem-solving mechanism, but as an auxiliary resource requiring rigorous human oversight to ensure academic validity and meaningful comprehension.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the empirical findings and discussion, this study concludes that seventh-semester EFL students perceive Google Translate as a useful support tool for understanding English texts. The application helps reduce reading anxiety, provides rapid lexical access, and enables students to manage heavy academic reading demands more efficiently. Nevertheless, students also recognize the potential drawbacks of excessive reliance on the tool, including psychological dependency, reduced motivation to develop independent vocabulary skills, and limited engagement in deeper contextual processing.

In terms of frequency, context, benefits, and challenges, Google Translate is used primarily in situations involving high academic pressure, such as reading international journal articles and preparing thesis-related literature reviews. Although the tool offers practical advantages, including

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instant word translation and synonym suggestions, its limitations remain significant. Literal word-for-word translation, grammatical inaccuracies, and limited contextual understanding may create semantic confusion, particularly when students encounter complex academic texts. Consequently, successful text comprehension depends not solely on the tool itself, but on students' ability to critically evaluate, adjust, and reconstruct machine-generated translations through their own linguistic knowledge and reading strategies.

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