

Exploring Translation Challenges: Difficulties Faced by Seventh-Grade Students of SMP Negeri 1 Kayuagung in Translating English Texts into Indonesian

Mardiana¹, Masagus Firdaus², Santi Mayasari³

^{1,2,3}Universitas PGRI Palembang

Corresponding author: anasenawah83@gmail.com

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi kesulitan siswa kelas tujuh dalam menerjemahkan teks bahasa Inggris ke dalam bahasa Indonesia serta faktor-faktor yang memengaruhinya. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain deskriptif dengan melibatkan 128 siswa dari total populasi 256 siswa tahun ajaran 2024/2025. Data dikumpulkan melalui tes terjemahan dan angket terstruktur. Tes digunakan untuk mengukur kemampuan siswa dalam menerjemahkan teks pendek, sedangkan angket mengidentifikasi faktor seperti penguasaan kosakata, pemahaman tata bahasa, penggunaan kamus, dan frekuensi latihan terjemahan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa sebagian besar siswa mengalami kesulitan dalam menemukan makna kata yang tepat (53,75%) dan memahami struktur kalimat bahasa Inggris (33,75%). Penyebab utama adalah kurangnya penguasaan kosakata (37,5%) dan keterbatasan penggunaan kamus (36,25%). Meskipun sebagian besar siswa memiliki sikap positif terhadap pembelajaran bahasa Inggris, 65% siswa jarang berlatih terjemahan di kelas. Temuan ini menunjukkan pentingnya pengembangan kosakata, penguatan tata bahasa, dan latihan terjemahan secara rutin untuk meningkatkan kompetensi siswa.

Kata kunci: Masalah terjemahan, penguasaan kosakata, penguasaan tata bahasa, siswa Indonesia

Abstract

This study aimed to investigate seventh-grade students' difficulties in translating English texts into Indonesian and to identify the factors influencing those difficulties. A descriptive research design was employed involving 128 students selected from a population of 256 students in the 2024/2025 academic year. Data were collected through a translation test and a structured questionnaire. The test measured students' ability to translate a short English text, while the questionnaire examined factors such as vocabulary mastery, grammatical understanding, dictionary use, and frequency of translation practice. The results revealed that most students experienced difficulties in finding appropriate word meanings (53.75%) and understanding English sentence structure (33.75%). The primary causes were lack of vocabulary (37.5%) and limited access to dictionaries (36.25%). Although most students showed positive attitudes toward learning English, 65% reported seldom practicing translation in class. The findings indicate that vocabulary development, grammar reinforcement, and regular translation practice are essential to improve students' translation competence.

Keywords: Translation problems, vocabulary mastery, grammar mastery, Indonesian students

1. INTRODUCTION

English is one of the most widely used international languages. In Indonesia, it is taught as a compulsory subject in secondary and higher education. To achieve communicative competence, learners must master listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills supported by adequate vocabulary and grammar. Translation plays a vital role in bridging

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communication between English and Indonesian. Translation is generally defined as the process of transferring meaning from a source language into an equivalent target language text (Bassnett, 2002). It involves not only linguistic equivalence but also cultural understanding (Katan, 2014).

Indonesian students often find translating English texts challenging. They may misinterpret word meaning in context, struggle with syntactic structures, or lack familiarity with English culture. Previous research indicates that vocabulary and grammar mastery strongly influence translation performance (O'Neill & Dogan, 2019; Berns & Gurevich, 2017). Students who possess limited lexical knowledge or weak grammatical awareness tend to produce inaccurate translations. Therefore, this study investigates (1) the specific translation problems faced by the seventh-grade students of SMP Negeri 1 Kayuagung and (2) the main causes of those problems.

Various studies have shown that junior high and high school students experience significant difficulties in translating English texts into Indonesian. Agustin and Oktavia (2023) found that the main difficulty students faced in translating recount texts lay in grammatical meaning and linguistic structure, particularly in understanding complex sentences. This finding is supported by Puspita et al. (2022), who stated that limited vocabulary, understanding of language structure, and a lack of understanding of cultural context were the dominant factors causing translation errors. Similar findings were also revealed in a study at IAIN Metro (2022), which showed that students struggled to adapt English syntactic patterns to Indonesian structures and experienced limitations in non-linguistic terms.

In the context of argumentative and narrative texts, Nababan et al. (2024) emphasized that translation barriers are not only linguistic, such as vocabulary and grammar, but also non-linguistic, such as a lack of practice and translation strategies. Siahaan et al. (2024) added that differences in language structure and cultural expressions in narrative texts pose a particular challenge for junior high school students. Research by Sibuea et al. (2022) also showed that idioms and argumentative language styles are difficult for students to understand due to differences in language systems and ways of conveying meaning.

Furthermore, research by Irawan (2022) showed that students often have difficulty finding appropriate equivalents even when using a dictionary due to a lack of understanding of contextual meaning. Translation errors in lexical, grammatical, and textual aspects were also found in research on basic translation classes (International Journal of Business English and Communication, 2023). Hartono (2017) emphasized that many errors arise from mother tongue interference (interlingual transfer), where Indonesian language structure influences the English translation.

These findings are supported by another qualitative study, which stated that limited vocabulary and understanding of sentence structure are dominant factors in the difficulty of translating descriptive and narrative texts (Innovative Journal, 2023). Research at SMA Negeri 3 Parepare (2022) also demonstrated the dominance of vocabulary and sentence structure factors in inaccurate translation of argumentative texts. The interference of Indonesian with English usage has also been shown to affect students' logical thinking when translating texts (Litera, 2023).

Theoretically, Bassnett (2002) explains that translation is not simply a process of transferring words, but also the transfer of meaning across cultures and language systems. House (2015) adds that translation quality is influenced by the equivalence of the meaning and function of the text in the target language. Katan (2014) emphasizes the importance of cultural understanding in the translation process, as cultural differences can lead to distortions of meaning. In the context of language learning,

O'Brien (2016) states that translation can be an effective tool in language learning, but requires adequate vocabulary and grammar mastery. O'Neill and Dogan (2019) also found that vocabulary competence has a strong correlation with students' translation skills. Pintado Gutiérrez and Rabadán (2020) add that pedagogical translation helps increase awareness of language structures when implemented with appropriate strategies.

Gile (2009) explains that cognitive load in the translation process can lead to errors when students lack sufficient language competence. Kiraly (2015) emphasizes the importance of project-based learning in translation training to enhance students' reflective skills. Tseng and Hung (2020) even demonstrated that the use of digital tools in translation training can help improve accuracy and understanding of language structures. Overall, empirical and theoretical research indicates that the main challenges students face in translating English texts into Indonesian include limited vocabulary, grammatical structure difficulties, mother tongue interference, a lack of translation strategies, and a limited understanding of the text's culture. Therefore, research into the challenges faced by seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Kayuagung is crucial to provide a specific overview of translation difficulties at the junior high school level and to inform improvements in learning strategies.

2. METHOD

A descriptive research design was adopted (Borg, 2021; Snyder, 2019). The population consisted of all seventh-grade students (256 in total) in the academic year 2024/2025. A sample of 128 students was selected based on consistent attendance and classroom participation. Data were collected through a translation test and a questionnaire (Santiago et al., 2022). The test measured students' ability to translate a short English text into Indonesian, while the questionnaire identified factors influencing their difficulties vocabulary, grammar, dictionary use, and translation practice frequency. The students' translations were assessed using an analytical scoring procedure adapted from current translation-assessment models (Gile, 2009; House, 2015). Questionnaire responses were analyzed using percentage analysis.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

This study employed a descriptive research design to examine students' translation ability and the factors influencing their difficulties. Data were collected from 128 seventh-grade students through a translation test and a questionnaire. The results are presented descriptively using percentage analysis in accordance with the research method.

1. Students' Attitudes toward Learning English

The questionnaire results indicate that most students demonstrated positive attitudes toward learning English.

Table 1. *Students' Interest in Learning English*

Category	Frequency (n=128)	Percentage (%)
Very much like	48	37.5
Like	74	57.5
Do not like	6	5.0
Total	128	100

Table 1 shows that 37.5% of students reported that they liked learning English very much, while 57.5% stated that they liked English. Only 5% expressed dislike. These findings suggest that students' general attitude toward English is positive, which is an important affective factor in language learning.

2. Translation Practice in the Classroom

Students were asked about the frequency of translation practice in class.

Table 2. *Frequency of Translation Practice*

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Seldom practice	83	65.0
Often practice	45	35.0
Total	128	100

As shown in Table 2, 65% of students reported that they seldom practiced translation in class. This indicates that translation activities were not frequently integrated into classroom instruction.

3. Explicit Instruction in Translation

Students were also asked whether they had received explicit instruction on how to translate.

Table 3. *Teacher Instruction in Translation*

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Received instruction	75	58.75
No explicit instruction	53	41.25
Total	128	100

Table 3 reveals that 58.75% of students reported receiving instruction on translation techniques, while 41.25% had not received explicit guidance. This suggests that structured translation instruction was not uniformly provided to all students.

4. Students' Perception of Translation Difficulty

Students' perceptions of translation difficulty are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. *Students' Perception of Translation Difficulty*

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very difficult	19	15.0
Difficult	61	47.5
Easy	48	37.5
Total	128	100

The data show that 47.5% of students considered translation difficult, and 15% perceived it as very difficult. Only 37.5% considered translation easy. This indicates that more than half of the students experienced notable challenges in translation tasks.

5. Main Difficulties in Translation

Students identified their primary difficulties in translating English texts into Indonesian.

Table 5. *Main Difficulties in Translation*

Difficulty	Frequency	Percentage (%)
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Finding correct word meaning	69	53.75
Understanding English structure	43	33.75
Cultural unfamiliarity	16	12.5
Total	128	100

Table 5 indicates that the most common difficulty was finding the correct word meaning (53.75%), followed by understanding English sentence structure (33.75%). Cultural unfamiliarity accounted for 12.5% of responses. These findings suggest that lexical and grammatical issues are the dominant obstacles in translation.

6. Main Causes of Translation Difficulties

Students were further asked about the causes of their translation difficulties.

Table 6. Causes of Translation Difficulties

Cause	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Lack of vocabulary	48	37.5
Lack of grammar mastery	24	18.75
No dictionary available	46	36.25
Seldom practice	18	13.75
Total	128	100

Table 6 shows that lack of vocabulary (37.5%) and absence of a dictionary (36.25%) were the primary causes of translation difficulties. Lack of grammar mastery (18.75%) and limited practice (13.75%) were also contributing factors.

Based on the descriptive analysis, although students generally have positive attitudes toward learning English, many of them experience difficulty in translation tasks. The main challenges are related to vocabulary mastery, grammatical understanding, and limited practice opportunities. The findings suggest that strengthening vocabulary development, grammar instruction, and structured translation practice may help improve students' translation ability.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that the majority of students experienced difficulties in translating English texts into Indonesian, particularly in lexical and syntactic aspects. This is clearly reflected in the data showing that 53.75% of students reported difficulty in finding the correct word meaning, while 33.75% struggled with understanding English sentence structure. These results indicate that vocabulary mastery and grammatical competence are the two dominant challenges in students' translation performance. Such findings are consistent with previous research by O'Neill and Dogan (2019), as well as Muñoz and Varela (2018), who emphasize that vocabulary depth and grammatical awareness are fundamental components in producing accurate and meaningful translations. Without sufficient lexical knowledge and structural understanding, students tend to rely on literal translation, which often results in semantic inaccuracies and unnatural expressions in the target language.

The data further indicate that although students generally have positive attitudes toward learning English (95% reported liking or very much liking English), 65% of them seldom practiced translation in class, and 41.25% reported not receiving explicit instruction in translation techniques. This limited exposure appears to contribute significantly to their difficulties. Additionally, 36.25% of students reported not having access to a dictionary, while 37.5% identified lack of vocabulary as the primary cause of their translation problems. These findings support the argument of Pintado Gutiérrez and Rabadán (2020), who highlight that limited resources and insufficient translation practice reduce learners' translation competence. Similarly, O'Brien (2016) notes that exposure to translation tasks and the use of appropriate tools are essential for developing strategic translation skills.

From a pedagogical perspective, the results suggest the need for more systematic and structured translation instruction. Since 47.5% of students perceived translation as difficult and 15% as very difficult, instructional intervention becomes crucial. Lundmark (2022) emphasizes that effective translator training should integrate vocabulary development, grammar reinforcement, and regular translation practice. Likewise, Kiraly (2015) proposes a process-oriented and collaborative approach to translation teaching, where students actively construct meaning through guided practice and reflection. In the context of this study, increasing translation frequency and providing explicit strategy instruction may help reduce students' perceived difficulty.

Moreover, the findings align with pedagogical translation theories that view translation not only as a skill but also as a language-learning strategy. Pintado Gutiérrez (2021) argues that translation activities enhance learners' metalinguistic awareness and deepen their understanding of both source and target languages. Similarly, Valdeón (2016) states that translation serves as an effective tool for developing linguistic competence and intercultural understanding. In this study, only 12.5% of students identified cultural unfamiliarity as a major difficulty, suggesting that linguistic factors were more dominant than cultural ones; however, cultural awareness remains an important dimension of translation competence.

Furthermore, research by Grech and Grech (2022) demonstrates that students who engage in frequent translation practice develop stronger analytical thinking and linguistic sensitivity. This is particularly relevant to the present findings, where limited practice (reported by 65% of students) appears to be associated with higher perceived difficulty levels. Regular translation tasks encourage learners to analyze sentence structure, compare linguistic systems, and make informed lexical choices, thereby improving overall language proficiency.

Overall, the discussion of the findings confirms that students' translation difficulties are primarily rooted in insufficient vocabulary mastery, limited grammatical awareness, and inadequate practice opportunities. Although students show positive attitudes toward English, structured instructional support and systematic translation training are necessary to enhance their competence. Integrating vocabulary enrichment programs, grammar-focused

instruction, dictionary skills training, and frequent translation exercises may significantly improve students' translation performance and linguistic development.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that although most seventh-grade students show positive attitudes toward learning English, they experience considerable difficulties in translating English texts into Indonesian, particularly in lexical and syntactic aspects. The dominant problems include finding appropriate word meanings, understanding English grammatical structures, limited vocabulary mastery, lack of dictionary use, and insufficient translation practice. These findings imply that English instruction should integrate systematic vocabulary development, explicit grammar reinforcement, guided dictionary training, and more frequent translation exercises as part of classroom practice. Translation should be positioned not merely as an assessment task but as a structured pedagogical strategy to enhance linguistic awareness and analytical skills. For future research, it is recommended to investigate the effectiveness of specific instructional interventions such as strategy-based translation training, technology-assisted translation tools, or collaborative translation models using experimental or mixed-method designs to determine their impact on students' translation competence and overall language proficiency.

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