



Translation Tools as a Vocabulary Acquisition Strategy among ESL Learners: A Descriptive Survey Study

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received: March 13, 2026

Revised: May 10, 2026

Accepted: May 11, 2026

Available Online: May 12, 2026

Keywords:

English as a Second Language

Translation Tools

Vocabulary Acquisition

AI-based Translation

Language Learning Strategies

Learner Perceptions

Funding:

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

ABSTRACT

Digital and AI-powered translation tools have transformed the way English as a Second Language (ESL) learners learn new words in an academic setting. The present study looked into what translation was as a vocabulary acquisition strategy and studied the vocabulary domains that prompt translation support, the use of translation tools by the learner, and the perception of the benefits and limitations of translation. The design of the study was quantitative descriptive survey, data were gathered from 55 students learning English as a second language at University College of Darb, Jazan University using a structured online questionnaire. The results indicate that the respondents used translation tools regularly, with AI-powered tools like Google Translate and ChatGPT being the tools of choice. Academic vocabulary and technical terms were the most common reasons for needing translation assistance, with the number of times idiomatic expressions were requested coming in third. The majority of learners felt that translation was useful to understand and memorize new vocabulary, but they also expressed worries about becoming overly dependent on translation, having incorrect translations, and losing their capacity to think in English. The conclusions of the study are as follows: When translation is used critically, selectively and together with other learning strategies, it can be used as a supporting vocabulary learning strategy. While the study assumes its conclusions from self-reported data collected from a small sample, the results reflect the practices and perceptions of the learners and not the direct effectiveness of translation as a method of vocabulary acquisition.

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1. Introduction

English as a Second Language (ESL) teaching has shifted away from the traditional "English-only" approach to language instruction in recent ESL classrooms. The earlier monolingual methods tended to assume that the more contact with the target language the more the language would be acquired. Recent scholarship research in applied linguistics,

however, has questioned the potential of L1 and other multilingual resources in L2 learning when they are purposefully and pedagogically used (Cook, 2010; García & Wei, 2014). Translation is no longer considered a traditional and obsolete classroom activity but a potential learning strategy for the learners to make meaning, to check their comprehension and to link the new linguistic input with the prior knowledge. It is also a reflection of the translanguaging viewpoints, which argue that learners should be able to access their entire language systems to construct meaning and engage more effectively in learning activities (García & Wei, 2014). In the age of digital technologies in language learning, this evolving attitude towards translation has gained its significance. Access to mobile dictionaries, online bilingual resources, Google Translate and AI-based language tools that offer on-demand translation support is now easy. The use of these tools has transformed student English language use inside and outside the classroom, especially when they come across words, phrases, academic expressions, technical terms or complex sentence constructions that are new. Research on Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) and Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) indicates that digital technologies can be used effectively and appropriately to enhance vocabulary acquisition, learner autonomy, and flexible learning to support language learning (Kukulska-Hulme, 2020; Stockwell, 2010). Likewise, studies on machine translation in language learning have shown that programs like Google Translate can help learners write, revise and check their word knowledge, as well as enhance their written expression, but the effectiveness relies on the level of competence the learners have in checking the accuracy and contextual appropriateness of the output produced by the machine (Chon, Shin, & Kim, 2021; Lee, 2020; Tsai, 2019).

Vocabulary learning is one of the most significant aspects of L2 development since L2 learners must have adequate vocabulary knowledge to comprehend texts, communicate ideas, and engage in academic communication. The learners typically employ various approaches to learning the meaning of words, such as using a dictionary, guessing the meaning from the context, repeating, taking notes and translating the word (Nation, 2001; Oxford, 1990; Schmitt, 2000). Translation can be particularly helpful for the students when they come across academic vocabulary, technical terms, and idiomatic expressions whose meaning might not be immediately apparent from the context. In these cases, translation can be used to gain immediate access to meaning and relate new words in English to known concepts in the target language. Translation must not be an absolute substitute, however, for active acquisition of vocabulary. When learners rely on translation without thinking, this can limit opportunities for inferencing, contextual learning, and direct thinking in English (Cook, 2010; Lee, 2020). Notwithstanding the increased adoption of AI-driven and digital translation tools, there is a need for greater descriptive accounts of the use of these tools in learners' daily vocabulary learning practices. The benefits and drawbacks of translation in language teaching have been discussed before in the literature; however, many studies have been conducted on general issues regarding the use or non-use of translation in language teaching. Few studies have focused on the specific ways the learners use it: the frequency with which learners use various translation tools, the types of vocabulary that most frequently encourage learners to seek translation assistance, and what learners perceive to be the advantages and disadvantages of translation for learning. This gap is crucial as teachers may make classroom decisions regarding translation without support of students' own use of translation tools in real academic situation.

The present study is an attempt to fill this gap by considering translation as a vocabulary learning strategy for the ESL learners. Specifically, it examines the frequency, and type of, translation tools employed by the learners, the lexical domains that most frequently call for translation help, and learners' attitudes towards usefulness and limitations of translation in learning languages. The three areas investigated in this study are aimed at offering a more descriptive picture of the use of translation tools by learners without grand claims to the effectiveness of translation itself for vocabulary learning. The importance of this

study is that it contributes to the current ESL pedagogy and TALL. The implications of the findings for practice are useful for teachers to have from a practical point of view, as they can help them to better comprehend how learners are using the translation tools and how the guidance given in class can facilitate the use of such tools in a balanced and critical way. Rather than seeing translation as entirely harmful or entirely beneficial, the study sees translation as a means of learning, whose value lies in its purposeful and selective utilization. The study at the theoretical level adds to the ongoing debate on translanguaging, the use of learner strategies, and vocabulary learning by highlighting how vocabulary learning is a component of the learners' language learning behavior. So, translation should not be regarded as a "crutch" but should be considered as a supportive means which can help in learning words alongside active engagement, contextual approach, and critical appraisal of translated products, argues the study.

2. Literature Review

The use of translation tools in ESL learning environments has become a trend recently in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), Educational Technology, and Language Learning Strategies. The traditional treatment of translation is usually taken with a pinch of salt since it was usually linked with reliance on the first language and exposure to the target language is limited. A more recent view, however, is that translation could be a meaningful learning tool when it is purposeful, selective and critical (Cook, 2010). This change is also in line with the notions of multilingualism and translanguaging, both of which suggest that language systems are not strictly partitioned but that learners fluidly navigate between linguistic systems to create meaning, facilitate comprehension, and engage in learning activities (García & Wei, 2014). In this respect translation is a cognitive and strategic process in addition to a language activity that helps students cope with new words, ambiguous meanings and academic language. As technology becomes more prevalent, the importance of translation in language learning is also evolving. The learners today can have the use of AI based translation systems, Google Translate, bilingual dictionaries accessible via the internet, mobile dictionaries and translation practices supported by peers. The materials enable students to access help as needed when they come across new words or complicated grammatical forms. Research on mobile-assisted and computer-assisted language learning demonstrates that digitally based tools can serve to enhance learner autonomy, facilitate vocabulary development, and promote flexible learning when used with a critical awareness and pedagogical guidance (Kukulska-Hulme, 2020; Stockwell, 2010). Likewise, machine translation in the context of EFL learning suggests that machine translation can be used to help students draft, revise, check their vocabulary and improve their writing performance, though the effectiveness of such tools is dependent on how and what students evaluate and use the translated text (Chon, Shin, & Kim, 2021; Lee, 2020; Tsai, 2019). For instance, Lee (2020) reported that machine translation could help learners to minimize lexico-grammatical errors and make better revisions, but also pointed out that teachers should be aware of the limitation and give guidance.

The translation-as-a-vocabulary-learning strategy approach is helpful for this study. Second language acquisition is inextricably linked to the acquisition of vocabulary, since the acquisition of the language is essential for comprehending texts, expressing ideas, and engaging in academic activities. There are several strategies for vocabulary learning: using a dictionary, repetition, meaning guessing, inference from context, note taking and translation (Nation, 2001; Oxford, 1990; Schmitt, 2000). Translation seen from this angle can facilitate the linking of unknown English words with familiar concepts in the L1. It can also help to verify meaning, provide some word order and help to minimize uncertainty in reading and writing. But translation should not be seen as a substitute for the learning of the active vocabulary. Instead, it is most effective when used in conjunction with other methods including repeated exposure to words in meaningful contexts, contextual analysis and example-based learning. Translation tools are found to be in wide use by ESL/EFL learners,

especially in the higher education environment, where students regularly read, write and study academic text in English. The use of machine translation tools like Google Translate has become a part of the students' learning processes due to their speed, availability and ease of use (Koehn, 2020; Pym, 2013). It is common that learners will use a mixture of AI-based tools, bilingual dictionaries, monolingual dictionaries, teacher support, and peer support. The combination implies that the learner does not necessarily rely on one tool to learn, he/she might compare meaning, check accuracy, and adjust their understanding by referring to several tools. Regarding the use of Google Translate by EFL learners, Tsai (2019) reported that it was used during EFL drafting tasks, and regarding the possibility of using MT for L2 writing, Chon, Shin and Kim (2021) revealed that MT could enhance some linguistic features of L2 writing, but mistranslations and inadequate word choices could be produced.

The use of translation tools also indicates general changes in the behaviour of learners. Learners are increasingly using machine-generated assistance and human judgment in technology-mediated language learning environments. O'Hagan (2019) argues that translation technology has changed the way language users relate to translation processes and MT studies in L2 learning reveal that students modify, adjust and assess MT output instead of reproducing it. This is especially crucial in academic language learning as students must be provided with words' meanings as well as the correct usage, collocation, register, and context in which the words can be used. Thus, the use of translation tools needs to be investigated along with learners' strategy use rather than as a token of dependence. The other one of significant interest in literature is the class of the vocabulary that most frequently activates the use of translation. The learners are prone to translation if the words are difficult, unfamiliar, and abstract, particularly in academic and technical settings. Academic vocabulary can sometimes be difficult to master as it contains abstract meanings, degrees of usage in different disciplines and words which may not be used in everyday speech. Technical terminology can also be a challenge as it is associated with specific disciplines and can involve specific conceptual understanding. According to Nation (2001), the degree of connection between vocabulary learning and frequency, context, and the purpose of word use by the learner is very strong. In this sense, translation can serve as a rapid access to meaning in cases of word-to-word translation when faced with academic or technical vocabulary that is not easily understood from the context.

An idiomatic construction also has the need for translation support as its meaning is often not directly inferable from individual words, but is figurative, culturally specific and requires interpretation. As Boers et al. (2006) states, idiomatic or figurative language can be challenging for second language learners as they need cultural and contextual interpretation. However, translation can be useful to help learners identify the general meaning of idiomatic expressions, but can cause difficulties at the same time if learners use literal translations. Thus, it is essential that idiomatic language be carefully explained, illustrated with context and compared with literal and intended meanings. In actual practice, students might rely on translation as well as inferencing and dictionary work and teacher explanation to gain a more precise understanding of the meaning of idiomatic expressions (Nation, 2001; Oxford, 1990). The level of proficiency may also affect the use of translation tools by learners. Translation can be used by lower proficiency learners for basic understanding or for immediate meaning and by more advanced learners for words or expressions that carry more meaning or learned content, such as academic or technical terms or complex expressions. This is significant because the importance of translation is not the same for all learners or all tasks. For instance, translation might be more appropriate for reading and writing because learners have the time to check and evaluate meanings but it might not be as useful to their speaking activities, where they need to communicate in real time. Recent studies also indicate that machine translation could facilitate the learning process in students' writing ability, but the quality of learning can be impacted by whether students will compare, revise, and reflect on the MT output or accept it as is Chon, Shin and Kim (2021); Lee (2020).

Literature shows that the general attitude of students towards translation tools is positive, especially in learning comprehension, vocabulary and compositional activities. Many learners find translation tools useful as it can give them instant access to meaning, minimise uncertainty and assists them in independent learning. From a cognitive point of view, translation can ease cognitive load by clarifying the meaning of difficult words prior to doing a reading task or a writing task (Sweller, 1988). This benefit might be particularly important in educational settings, where learners need to grasp exact definitions and accomplish tasks quickly and effectively. Translation tools can also give the students confidence as they feel they are supported if they have vocabulary difficulties. But the drawbacks of translation tools are also well known. Relying too heavily on translation can diminish the learner's ability to draw inferences from context, to think straight in English, and to engage in more advanced lexical processing (Cook, 2010). Moreover, the machine translation may yield false translations or contextually inappropriate translations for idiomatic expressions, ambiguous words, discipline-specific terms, and culturally loaded language (Koehn, 2020). Chon, Shin and Kim (2021) concluded that machine translation may be useful for some L2 writing improvement aspects while it also brings about mistranslation and poor word choice. This demonstrates the lack of automatic reliability in machine translation and that learners must be trained how to critically analyse translated output.

An equilibrium perspective of translation is thus needed. It is not advisable to abandon completely the use of translation tools because they are not part of learners' real L2 learning activities. They should never be used as a replacement for the other essential vocabulary input and output strategies that have proven successful such as contextual reading, feedback from the teacher, and communicative practice, however. Translation, when combined with reflection and guidance, can help facilitate comprehension and knowledge of vocabulary in the most productive way. This is aligned with the argument that machine translation can help in language learning provided that teachers understand its potential and its limitations (Lee, 2020). The analyzed literature provides the following three key insights. First, the use of translation is prevalent in ESL and EFL classrooms, as digital and AI tools offer quick and readily available assistance. Second, translation plays a significant role in vocabulary learning because learners tend to use translation to comprehend academic words, technical terms, idiomatic expressions and other hard-to-understand words. Third, translation can be useful to the learners, it can be useful if it is used critically, in a suitable task, with a suitable level of proficiency, and with a suitable guide instructing the teacher. These are the reasons for the present study which explores the use of translation tools, the lexical domain that triggers translation support and the benefits and constraints of using translation to acquire vocabulary by ESL learners.

3. Methodology

This study used quantitative descriptive survey design in investigating the use of translation tools as a vocabulary acquisition strategy for ESL learners. A descriptive design was used as the purpose of the study was not to test causal relationships, but to explore the reported practices, vocabulary-related translation needs, and perceptions of learners. Descriptive survey designs are often utilized in applied linguistics or educational research to describe learners' experiences, attitudes, and language learning behavior in a particular educational setting (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018; Dörnyei, 2007). Structured Online Questionnaire was used to collect the data, designed according to the study objectives and research questions. There are three main areas the questionnaire focused on. The first part investigated the frequency and the kinds of tools used by learners for translation, such as applications based on AI technology, bilingual dictionaries, monolingual dictionaries, teacher's help, and peer supported translation. The second part examined the lexis that helped motivate the use of translation, including academic words, technical vocabulary, idiomatic expressions and common vocabulary. The third part discussed students' perception of advantages and disadvantages of translation instruments in vocabulary acquisition such as gaining faster

comprehension, autonomous learning, depending on translation too much, getting translation errors, and decreasing ability in thinking directly in English. The questionnaire items were designed based on the previous studies, such as those of Chon, Shin and Kim (2021); Cook (2010); Kukulska-Hulme (2020); Lee (2020); Nation (2001); Oxford (1990); Schmitt (2000); Stockwell (2010), which are concerned with language learning strategies, vocabulary acquisition, translation in language teaching, and technology-assisted language learning. The questionnaire was pre-tested for clarity, relevance and relevance to the study objectives prior to final distribution. A small pilot study was conducted to make sure that the items are understandable for the target respondents. Some minor wording and formatting changes were made prior to the distribution of the questionnaire.

The participants included 55 students from the University College of Darb in one of the colleges of Jazan University. They were deemed appropriate for the study because they read, write and use English for academic and classroom purposes regularly and are likely to experience vocabulary-related problems when reading, writing and participating in other learning activities. The study adopted a convenience sampling method because the questionnaire was sent to every social media. Convenience sampling was used as the study was conducted using social media. This is significant in the context of online dissemination of questionnaires as it gives access to the available and willing respondents, but not equivalent access to all students in the population. This small-scale descriptive survey was deemed appropriate for the sample size of 55 learners as the study was designed to report frequencies, percentages, and learners' perceptions and did not involve advanced inferential analysis or broad population level claims. The sample size adequacy in questionnaire-based applied linguistics research is determined by the applied linguistics research purpose, design, availability of the participants and analysis type (Dörnyei, 2007; Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2009). Likewise, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) state that the size of the sample should be evaluated based on the type and extent of the study. The sample was therefore suitable for descriptive evidence from this particular group of ESL learners, but caution must be taken and any conclusions should not be taken out of context from similar situations.

Ethical issues were considered when collecting data. The participation was voluntary and the respondents were told that the information they gave would only be used for academic research. No personal identifying information was gathered and individuals' answers were kept anonymous and confidential. The participants could choose whether or not to fill in the questionnaire. The data collected were analysed descriptively. Frequencies and percentages were used to summarize the learners' translation tool use, lexical domains that needed translation support, and feelings towards translation. When open-ended questions were asked, responses were analysed and subsequently sorted by common themes, including better understanding, autonomous learning, excessive reliance, incorrect translation, and diminished direct thinking in English. The study was descriptive in nature and so no inferential statistical tests were applied. Therefore, the findings presented are not to be interpreted as an effect of translation on the learners' vocabulary acquisition, but as his/her perception of and practices of it.

4. Findings and Discussion

The results of the questionnaire give descriptive evidence of the ways that learners use translation tools, of the categories of vocabulary that most frequently prompt learners to seek translation support, and of learners' perceptions of the usefulness and unhelpfulness of translation in language learning. The interpretation of the research results is based on the self-reported data obtained from the questionnaire in this study and is not the evidence of the achievement of vocabulary or improvement of language proficiency. The first research question focused on how often learners relied on the translation tools and which tools they preferred to use. The result reveals that translation was a common strategy of learners' language learning activities. Of the 55 respondents, 24 students (43.6%) indicated that they

always used translation tools and 16 (29.1%) indicated that they used tools often. 27.3% (the remaining 15 students) said they sometimes used translation tools. This means that all the respondents have used translation tools at least sometimes and that translation has become part of their learning routine and not something exceptional or occasional.

Table 1: Frequency of Translation Tool Use

Frequency of use	Frequency	Percentage
Always	24	43.6%
Often	16	29.1%
Sometimes	15	27.3%
Total	55	100%

This trend is in alignment with the latest studies indicating that digital and machine translation tools have become integrated into the EFL and ESL learning context. Lee (2020) and Ebrahimi and Chowdhury (2025) have revealed that machine translation can be helpful to learners in their writing and revision activities, provided that learners are able to use it critically and the teachers make adequate pedagogical guidance for their use. Likewise, Tsai (2019) demonstrated that the Google Translate was employed by the EFL learners in the actual writing and learning process of the writing tasks that were designated as drafting tasks. The results of the present study corroborate this work as they reveal that pupils have been using translation facilities in their language learning process consistently. As to the kinds of tools being used, the AI tools, like Google Translate and ChatGPT, were the most widely chosen. Overall, 63.6% (35 students) indicated that they have used AI translation apps. The 12 students (21.8%) chose bilingual dictionaries, and 5 students (9.1%) chose monolingual dictionaries. 3 students (5.5%) indicated they used primarily teacher assistance.

Table 2: Types of Translation Tools Used

Translation tool	Frequency	Percentage
AI-based tools such as Google Translate and ChatGPT	35	63.6%
Bilingual dictionaries	12	21.8%
Monolingual dictionaries	5	9.1%
Teacher assistance	3	5.5%
Total	55	100%

The high demand for AI tools could stem from their efficiency, accessibility, and facilitating instant support while reading and writing. It does not imply that AI-driven tools are invariably more accurate or educationally "better" than a dictionary or teacher support. Instead, it demonstrates that students want tools that can help them in time-saving and convenient ways. This result is consistent with the research that indicates that machine translation can be used to help students with vocabulary selection, sentence revision and the production of texts; however, it can also create mistakes and inappropriate words if evaluated but not used (Chon, Shin, & Kim, 2021; Lee, 2020). As a result, the prevalence of AI-powered tools in this research emphasizes the importance of providing guidance and support in the classroom about assessing and verifying the translated output created by AI tools. The study also looked into the context in which the learners engage in translation. 42 students (76.4%) mentioned that they mainly use translation tools in reading and writing activities. 12 students (21.8%) however, indicated that they used them more often during speaking and listening activities. One response did not fit into one of the main categories or was not provided.

Table 3: Situational Use of Translation

Learning activity	Frequency	Percentage
Reading and writing tasks	42	76.4%
Speaking and listening activities	12	21.8%
Other/no clear response	1	1.8%
Total	55	100%

The pedagogical significance of this result is that it is an opportunity for students to use translation tools, compare meanings and adjust their understanding while reading and writing. Translation, on the contrary, is not as easily applicable when it comes to speaking and listening, as there is a need to understand and produce what is heard at the same time. The finding hence implies that the use of translation tools is expected to be more expected in learning situations where learners can pause, check and reflect. The finding that translation tools are used in the process of drafting, revision and written production tasks but not in spontaneous oral communication aligns with the previous study on the role of machine translation in the process of writing in EFL writing (Lee, 2020; Tsai, 2019). The results also revealed that the participants had moderate confidence regarding accuracy of translation. For example, 32 students (58.2%) had moderate to high confidence, and 23 students (41.8%) had a neutral level of confidence. This suggests that learners had confidence in translation tools in general but many learners also knew that translated output could not always be trusted.

Table 4: Confidence in Translation Accuracy

Level of confidence	Frequency	Percentage
Moderate to high confidence	32	58.2%
Neutral	23	41.8%
Total	55	100%

This finding helps to balance the interpretation of the use of translation tools. Learners seem to understand that translation tools are useful for their practical purposes but they are also aware of the potential for errors in translation, given their neutral responses. This is important since machine translation could be useful when the text is easy to understand in a short time but would not be as accurate for language that is idiomatic, ambiguous, is used in a specific field, or used in a specific context. Koehn (2020) states that MT systems are indeed much more advanced but that the quality of translation is still dependent on the context, language pair, and complexity of the input. In language learning situations, it implies that the students must acquire the ability to check the meaning of what is issued, rather than blindly trusting the translation. A second research question focused on the lexical domains that were most frequently used to make students resort to translation. The results show that the most frequently used category was academic vocabulary. Sixty per cent (33 students) said they used translation for academic words. The 14 students (25.5%) chose technical terms, while 6 students (10.9%) opted for idiomatic expressions. Only 2 students (3.6%) chose everyday vocabulary.

Table 5: Lexical Domains Prompting Translation Use

Vocabulary type	Frequency	Percentage
Academic words	33	60.0%
Technical terms	14	25.5%
Idiomatic expressions	6	10.9%
Everyday vocabulary	2	3.6%
Total	55	100%

This might be because of the university context in which the participants are working, as in the case of the high usage of translation for academic vocabulary. Academic vocabulary can be abstract, not used in daily language, and closely tied to reading, assignments and classroom activities. According to Nation (2001), vocabulary learning is highly correlated with the needs of learners, the number of exposures, and their capacity to comprehend words in functional contexts. It is not surprising, therefore, that university students would translate academic words more often than common words. The relatively low percentage of everyday vocabulary translated indicates that learners might already have the knowledge of basic words well established in their L1 and more academic and technical words need further support through translation. The translation of words used in technical and academic settings is also

a testament to the importance of accurate communication in specific contexts. The technical terms used may have special significance in that discipline, which is not apparent in general use. Idiomatic expressions were used less often but this is not to say that idioms are easy. Rather, it could be argued that students are more likely to see academic and technical vocabulary in their formal learning setting than idiomatic vocabulary. Idioms are often challenging because they tend to have figurative meanings that are deeply rooted in the culture and meaning may be lost in translation. This reinforces the importance of helping students identify literal translation, context, and contextually appropriate usage. The third research question focused on the learners' attitude towards translation. The results indicate that the majority of students had positive attitudes towards translation. Of the 55 respondents, 47 students (85.5%) found translation to be helpful or very helpful, especially to help them understand and remember new words.

Table 6: Learners' Perceived Usefulness of Translation

Perception item	Frequency	Percentage
Translation is helpful or very helpful	47	85.5%
Other/less positive responses	8	14.5%
Total	55	100%

The result indicated that learning translation was regarded as a helpful tool by the students during the time of learning new words in the second phase of the study. It needs to be used with caution, however. The outcome does not indicate the direct efficacy of translation in the improvement of vocabulary acquisition or language proficiency. Instead, it demonstrates that students think that translation helps them to understand and remember words. This is significant because the present study is descriptive and perception-based. This is also in line with previous studies. Lee (2020) concluded that machine translation can be used to help the learners make better revision and decrease lexico-grammatical errors, but also noted that it is important to be aware of its limitations and being guided by the teacher to use it effectively. The results also indicated that learners are aware of the possible problems in translation. 69.1% of the students (38 students) said they use too much translation tools. Also, 67.3% of the students (37) recognized that sometimes translation tools provide incorrect results. 27.3% (15 students) believed that it might be difficult to think directly in English if they use translation a lot.

Table 7: Perceived Limitations of Translation Tools

Perceived limitation	Frequency	Percentage
Overdependence on translation tools	38	69.1%
Translation tools are sometimes inaccurate	37	67.3%
Reduced ability to think directly in English	15	27.3%

Note: Percentages are based on the total sample size of 55 students. Since respondents could report more than one limitation, the percentages do not total 100%.

This shows that students don't use translation tools without critical thinking. While many students find it helpful to translate, they are also aware that over-reliance on translation can restrict more in-depth processing of vocabulary and hinder inferring meaning from context. This lends support to Cook (2010) who claims that translation is not a legitimate pedagogical tool and should not be viewed as an alternative to substantive interactions with language. The finding is also consistent with the results of the study indicating that the machine translation tools can be used to help language learning even if they make errors, particularly in word choice, idiomatic meaning and contextual appropriateness (Chon, Shin, & Kim, 2021). The attitudes of learners towards the use of translation in their classroom were

also positive. 51 students (92.7%) felt that it was possible to translate in English classes at least sometimes.

Table 8: Attitudes Toward Translation in the Classroom

Classroom attitude	Frequency	Percentage
Translation should be allowed at least sometimes	51	92.7%
Other responses	4	7.3%
Total	55	100%

This is a finding that suggests the learners do not have a preference for the replacement of the learning of English by translation, rather learners seem to prefer a balanced class where translation is available when necessary. This aligns with the translanguaging oriented and strategy-based approaches which state that learners' first language and multilingual resources can be leveraged for meaning construction if purposefully used (García & Wei, 2014). But with the strong support for classroom translation, teachers must also provide guidelines. Translation can be helpful with academic vocabulary, complex texts, and for clarification of meaning, but it should be used in conjunction with other strategies such as contextual guessing, using a dictionary, paraphrasing, practicing your sentences and using them to communicate. The qualitative findings of the open-ended responses corroborated the quantitative results by explaining the reasons behind the learners' use of translation tools. The most common gain was found to be faster understanding of new vocabulary reported by 44 students and 80.0% of the sample. This suggests that the main interest of learners in valuing translation is to get meanings in a faster way and to not stop the reading or writing process significantly. Further, some respondents commented that translation tools helped them to save time in difficult situations of reading and writing and also facilitated independent learning as they were able to solve the vocabulary problems without the support of teachers at all times. These were supplemental responses and not presented as results of a set of categories to answer the question, but rather are discussed in a thematic fashion.

These responses lend credence to the notion that translation can serve as a scaffolding tool, particularly when the learner is presented with new words. From a vocabulary acquisition point of view, the ability to access meaning quickly might support the learner to keep reading or composing without interrupting the task flow. But it is not to be mistaken for deeper acquisition, however. The acquisition of vocabulary should be re-exposed, contexted, retrieved, and practiced meaningfully (Nation, 2001; Schmitt, 2000). As a result, translation can help with initial understanding, but without further interaction with the target language words, the learners' long-term vocabulary knowledge will not be gained. Important limitations to the use of translation tools were also mentioned in the open-ended responses. These responses were not coded into mutually exclusive fixed-choice categories, so the results are not shown as the total distribution but as coded themes. 52.7% (29 students) reported overdependence as an issue. 27.3% (15) of students indicated that using translation often hinders them from thinking directly in English. Seven students (12.7%) cited the possibility of incorrect translation, and 3 students (5.5%) noted that using translation could limit the exposure to authentic use of English in context.

Table 9: Perceived Disadvantages of Translation Tools

Perceived disadvantage	Frequency	Percentage
Overdependence on translation tools	29	52.7%
Reduced ability to think directly in English	15	27.3%
Risk of inaccurate translation	7	12.7%

Reduced exposure to authentic English use	3	5.5%
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Note: Percentages are based on the total sample size of 55 students. Since these categories were derived from open-ended responses and students could mention more than one disadvantage, no total is reported.

These responses demonstrate why pedagogical voice needs to be well balanced. Translation can help with understanding and learner autonomy, but overreliance can hinder the learners' active use of English. According to the results, it is recommended that learners be given explicit teaching in critical translation. For instance, teachers can have students read AI translations and then check dictionary translations, find incorrect translations, look at example sentences, and determine whether or not a translation is appropriate. These activities can make the translation process from passive shortcut to active learning. The results overall directly relate to the research objectives of the study. The first was realized by finding out the frequency and type of translation tools used by learners, and the learners' results showed that all of them used translation tools at least sometimes, and AI-based tools were the most preferred translation tools. The second objective was accomplished by locating the lexical domains that were most frequently associated with translation support: Academic, Technical and Idiomatic lexical domains. The third objective was accomplished by analyzing the learners' perceptions on the concept of translation, in which it was found that most learners think translation is a very useful activity in gaining vocabulary knowledge but also feel that there are limitations, including overdependence, inaccurate productions in the target language and less use of direct thinking in the target language, English. Thus, the results give a clear descriptive image of the translation as a vocabulary learning strategy for the ESL learners who were sampled.

The participants used and appreciated the translation tools, as summarized below. The most preferred resource was tools based on artificial intelligence, academic vocabulary was the most common reason for seeking translation support, and learners were more inclined to believe that translation was useful for them to understand and learn their academic vocabulary. Meanwhile, students learned of the potential dangers of too strong of an English dependence, incorrect production, and lessened direct thinking. The results of this research justify an approach of caution and balance in the ESL translation process. The use of translation cannot be considered a bad practice, but neither it can be considered a panacea for vocabulary acquisition. Rather, it is to be used as a supplementary tool that is complemented with teacher guidance, context-based learning, and analysis of translated products.

5. Conclusion, Recommendations, Limitations, and Future Research Directions

The purpose of this study was to investigate the frequency of use and type of translation tools used by ESL learners, the lexical domains that trigger the need for translation support, and the perceptions of benefits and constraints of translation as a vocabulary acquisition strategy. The results indicate that translation tools are part of the learners' study routine, as all the respondents admitted to using translation tools at least occasionally. The use of AI tools, like Google Translate and ChatGPT, were the most popular and widely-used, reflecting that learners have come to depend on technology-mediated, fast and accessible means of support in language. The results also indicate the use of academic vocabulary as the most common cause of using translation, followed by technical terms and idiomatic expressions. This implies that a primary reason for using translation is to utilize complex words that can only be understood by translation, rather than context. As a general rule, students saw translation as a useful tool for acquiring better understanding of the vocabulary and meaning of the passage, and that it could help them understand the text faster; at the same time, they realized that it has its own limitations such as over dependence, inaccurate translation, and their less ability to think directly in English. The study makes a unique input into ESL pedagogy by demonstrating that translation should not only be considered as a bad

habit or as a lazy way of teaching. However, it may be viewed as a supportive vocabulary learning strategy when used judiciously, selectively and in conjunction with other strategies. The results were obtained from a small sample of students in one institutional setting and should be interpreted with some caution, however, due to the self-reported data. The study, therefore, does not suggest that translation has a direct impact on vocabulary learning or language proficiency. Instead, it is about the use of translation devices and the attitude of the learners towards vocabulary learning.

The following recommendations can be made based on the findings. First, it is important for teachers to understand that the translation tools are already integrated into learners' language learning practices. Many learners often rely on AI translation tools, so merely forbidding translation from the classroom isn't enough. Rather, students should be directed by their teachers to responsibly and critically use these tools. For instance, students can learn how to compare the translations created by AI with the dictionary definitions, review example sentences, and determine if the translated word is suitable for the academic or communicative context.

Second, academic and technical terminology should be taught with particular emphasis as vocabulary areas that were most often the basis for the use of translation. Academic word lists, discipline-specific vocabulary, collocations, word families and contextual examples can be introduced by the teachers, so that learners do not rely only on direct equivalents. Translation may be used as one of the initial steps of meaning clarification, but should be followed by activities that involve using the new words in sentences, summaries, discussions, and writing assignments.

Third, students should not be told to translate as their only means to understand the meaning of words. The results indicate that, the learners are aware of overdependence and inaccurate translations. It is important that teachers encourage balanced vocabulary learning strategies including (but not limited to): (1) Guessing by context, (2) Using a monolingual dictionary, (3) Paraphrasing, (4) Note taking, (5) Repeated exposure, and (6) Retrieval practice. This can be advantageous for learners to learn from translation but also have some independent vocabulary learning capability.

Fourth, translation should be engaged in in the classroom in a controlled and purposeful manner. Because most learners thought that translation should be permitted at least occasionally in their English classes, teachers can plan tasks for students to assess their peers' translations, to find mistakes in students' translations, to consider alternative word orders and meanings, and to explain why one translation is better than another. These sorts of activities can transform translation from passivity to the process of learning.

There are some limitations to the study. The first of these was the small number of subjects (55 students). This sample was appropriate for a small-scale descriptive survey, but restricts the generalizability of the findings. Secondly, participants came from one context of the study, which is one college of the University of Jazan (institutional context of the study), namely University College of Darb. Thus, the results may not completely be applicable to ESL learners from other universities, regions or educational levels. Third, the study employed a convenient sampling method due to the distribution of the survey using social media. This may have created a sampling bias since only available and willing students were involved. Fourth, the data was self-reported, so that is the practice and perception of the learners rather than actual practice. Fifth, it failed to measure directly the vocabulary learning outcomes, retention or language proficiency gains. So, it can't conclude if translation aids really enhance vocabulary learning. Last, the study failed to examine in-depth some of the variables that may affect the use of translation, such as age, gender, English proficiency level, prior experience of learners with translation tools, or their field of study.

There are limitations that need to be taken into consideration in future research. First, future research could utilize larger and more diverse samples drawn from a number of universities/educational institutions to bolster the generalizability of the results. Second, comparative research can also explore the differences in the use of translation tools based on the learners' proficiency, academic subjects, gender, age and/or prior experience with English. Thirdly, experiments or quasi-experiments could be used in future research to determine if there was a measurable effect on vocabulary acquisition, retention, writing quality or reading comprehension for the use of translation tools. Fourth, further studies can be conducted following the learners to find out whether their dependence on the use of translation tools diminishes along with time and whether the use of translation guides helps to enhance vocabulary learning strategies. Fifth, future studies can employ questionnaires in conjunction with interviews, classroom observation or learning logs to collect more concrete evidence of how the learners actually use the translation tools in authentic learning tasks. Finally, future studies can compare the effectiveness of various translation tools: AI-based translation tools, bilingual dictionaries, monolingual dictionaries and teacher-assisted translation tasks for various vocabulary categories and learning tasks.

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