

A CASE STUDY OF TRANSLATION DIFFICULTIES AND STRATEGIES AMONG EIGHTH-GRADE STUDENTS IN TRANSLATING NARRATIVE TEXT

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ABSTRACT

Translation is an important skill in English learning. However, EFL learners experience difficulties when transferring meaning from English into Indonesian. This study analysed the difficulties encountered by eighth-grade students at SMP Panca Budi Medan in translating *The Golden Cucumber (Timun Mas)*, a Central Javanese folktale, and identified the strategies they used to address these difficulties. The study employed a qualitative-dominant mixed-methods design involving 18 eighth-grade students and two English teachers. Data were collected through a translation test, a 15-item questionnaire, and teacher interviews. The qualitative part analysed students' translations, open-ended questionnaire responses, and teachers' interviews. The quantitative part was complemented with Likert scale items measuring perceived difficulty and close-ended questions highlighting frequently utilized techniques. The results showed lexical, grammatical, and cultural problems, with lexical difficulties being the most important, mainly due to unknown vocabulary and improper word choice. Students used strategies such as dictionary use, simplification, changing word order, copying, omission, contextual guessing, substitution, and asking for help. Dictionary use was the most frequently reported strategy. The teachers found the independent use of strategies useful, although the students still required assistance when handling complex vocabulary, grammatical structures, and cultural expressions. The study's conclusion is that students are partially independent in solving translation problems. Nevertheless, a balance of self-regulated strategy use and structured teacher scaffolding is still necessary for successful translation learning.

Keywords: English-Indonesian translation, translation difficulties, translation strategies, narrative text, EFL learners



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INTRODUCTION

Translation is an important aspect of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning because it enables learners to transfer meaning from one language to another while developing their understanding of linguistic differences. However, translation involves more than replacing words between languages. Learners need to interpret meaning, attend to the context and the communicative purpose, and find acceptable equivalents in the target language. Thus, in addition to linguistic expertise, effective translation involves a combination of the goal of communication and cultural understanding (Larson, 1984; House, 2015; Munday et al., 2024).

Although it is important, many EFL learners still have issues in executing translation jobs. Translation tasks require the learners to understand vocabulary, grammatical structures, and cultural meanings simultaneously. Limited language proficiency may cause the students to be unable to produce accurate and natural translations because understanding individual words does not always guarantee successful meaning transfer (Nation, 2022; Siahaan et al., 2025). Therefore, translation activities can reveal learners' linguistic limitations while also showing how they solve problems during the translation process.

Among various English text genres, narrative text represents one type that may create challenges for students because it contains specific linguistic and contextual characteristics. Narrative texts usually contain past tense forms, descriptive expressions, figurative meanings, and other culture-based elements that require interpretation beyond the literal meaning. Narrative texts are organized through

sequences of events that contain characters, problems, and resolutions (Emilia, 2021). Consequently, the translation of narrative texts requires learners to understand both the language forms and the contextual meaning contained in the story.

The difficulties of translation for EFL learners are generally associated with three main aspects, namely lexical difficulties, grammatical difficulties, and cultural difficulties. Lexical difficulties include problems in understanding unfamiliar vocabulary, selecting appropriate equivalents, and interpreting contextual meanings. Limited vocabulary may restrict learners' ability to understand and convey meaning accurately (Nation, 2022; Rosyada-AS & Apoko, 2023). Grammatical difficulties may result from differences between English and Indonesian grammatical systems, particularly in tense usage, sentence structure, and pronoun forms. Students may understand the general meaning of a sentence but still experience difficulties in transferring grammatical meanings appropriately into the target language (Manullang et al., 2022). In addition, cultural difficulties arise when expressions or concepts in the source language do not have direct counterparts in the target language. Because meaning is influenced by social contexts, traditions, and communicative practices, cultural expressions may require interpretation and adaptation to produce accurate and natural translations (Baker, 2021; House, 2022; Munday et al., 2024).

Previous studies have examined the difficulties and strategies of students in translation from various perspectives. Manullang et al. (2022), who studied the challenges faced by junior high school students in translation, identified



vocabulary knowledge, grammatical structures, and sentence construction concerns. However, the study was mainly concerned with identifying students' difficulties and did not precisely investigate the solutions that students used to overcome these difficulties or teachers' perspectives on the translation learning process. Likewise, Siahaan et al. (2025) explored the students' challenges in translation and discovered that the students' problems of vocabulary and grammar influenced the usage of the tactics of paraphrase, omission, etc. The study considered translation strategies but was mainly concerned with the challenges encountered in students' translations and the strategies linked to those problems, without exploring teachers' perspectives on how students experience and handle translation difficulties.

Other studies have emphasized the importance of strategies in helping learners solve translation problems. Jannah et al. (2026), for example, examined the use of translation strategies, while Nofrian and Syafryadin (2023) highlighted the role of strategies in supporting learners during translation. These studies provide important insights into how learners approach translation problems; however, they do not simultaneously examine the specific difficulties encountered by students, the strategies used to overcome each difficulty, and teachers' perspectives on students' translation challenges and strategy use. As a result, previous research has tended to examine translation difficulties or strategies separately rather than exploring their relationship within a particular translation learning context.

Accordingly, the gap addressed by the present study is specifically related to the integration of students' subjective perceptions and their objective translation

performance in examining translation difficulties. Previous studies have commonly focused on either difficulties identified from students' translation products or difficulties reported through their experiences and perceptions. Although some studies have also examined translation strategies, less emphasis has been placed on directly comparing what students perceive as difficult with the difficulties reflected in their actual translation performance within the same translation learning context.

The present study addresses this gap by combining a translation test and a questionnaire to examine the relationship between students perceived and actual translation difficulties in translating English narrative texts into Indonesian. The translation test provides the evidence of the difficulties that are reflected in students' actual performance, and the questionnaire shows how students perceive these obstacles and the techniques they describe adopting to overcome them. This comparison is especially crucial since students' perception of the difficulty of translation does not always coincide with their actual performance. For example, students may find a certain aspect of translation quite easy, but their translated output shows problems they are not completely aware of.

Teachers' interviews are included as an additional source of evidence to provide an external perspective on students' translation challenges, strategy use, independence, and need for guidance. Thus, teachers' perspectives are not presented as a separate broad research gap but as a complementary perspective that helps interpret the relationship between students' perceived difficulties, actual performance, and strategy use. By integrating these



sources of data, the present study provides a more focused examination of the possible discrepancy between students' self-reported translation difficulties and the difficulties demonstrated in their actual translations. This relationship is important because students do not merely experience translation difficulties but actively attempt to overcome them through different strategies. Their ability to manage these difficulties may vary depending on the complexity of the translation problem and the extent to which they can use strategies independently. Teachers' perspectives offer a deeper understanding of students' independence and their need for support during the translation process. This perspective can be interpreted through self-regulated learning, which involves learners actively managing their learning through strategy use, monitoring, and evaluation (Panadero, 2017). Teachers can therefore provide insights into the extent to which students can manage translation problems independently and the situations in which teacher guidance or assistance remains necessary. Based on this perspective, the present study connects students' translation difficulties, the strategies they employ to overcome those difficulties, and teachers' perspectives on students' independence and need for support. Self-regulated learning is used as an interpretive perspective for understanding teachers' views of students' independent strategy use and their continuing need for guidance during the translation learning process.

Therefore, this study was conducted at SMP Panca Budi Medan to investigate eighth-grade students' difficulties and strategies in translating English narrative texts into Indonesian. Specifically, this study aims to (1) identify students' translation difficulties and the most dominant difficulty, (2) examine the

strategies employed by students to overcome these difficulties, and (3) explore teachers' perspectives on students' translation challenges and strategies.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative-dominant mixed-method approach to investigate students' difficulties and strategies in translating English narrative texts into Indonesian. The design integrated quantitative and qualitative data to provide a thorough understanding of the students' translation experiences. The study primarily focused on interpreting students' translation difficulties, strategies, and teachers' perspectives, making the qualitative aspect dominant. Quantitative data were analysed with frequencies and percentages to identify general patterns in students' perceived difficulties and strategy use.

The study examined lexical, grammatical, and cultural difficulties using a translation test, questionnaire, and teachers' interviews. The translation test provided evidence of students' actual translation performance, the questionnaire identified students' perceived difficulties and strategies, and the interviews provided teachers' perspectives on students' challenges, independence, and need for support. The datasets were integrated during the analysis and interpretation stage. Findings from the questionnaire were compared with students' actual performance in the translation test and complemented by teachers' interview perspectives. This integration enabled the study to examine the convergence and differences between students' reported experiences, actual translation performance, and teachers' observations.



Research Site and Participants

The research participants consisted of 18 eighth-grade students from the Full Day Class at SMP Panca Budi Medan and 2 English teachers who participated in the interviews. The student participants were selected based on the following criteria: (1) they had basic English skills; (2) they had learned narrative texts and basic translation activities in English classes; (3) they had experience translating English texts into Indonesian; and (4) they voluntarily agreed to participate after being informed about the purpose of the study. In their previous learning, the students were generally accustomed to using dictionaries and participating in teacher-guided English to Indonesian translation exercises, which may have influenced the strategies they used during the study.

The English teachers were included as interview participants to provide additional perspectives on students' translation difficulties, strategies, and the assistance provided during translation activities. As the study involved participants from one specific educational setting, the findings should be interpreted as context-specific and are not intended to represent EFL learners or teachers in general.

Data Collection

The data were collected through three instruments: a translation test, a questionnaire, and teacher interviews.

First, a translation test was administered to identify students' actual difficulties in translating an English narrative text into Indonesian. Students translated the text "*The Golden Cucumber*" within 50 minutes, and their translations were analysed to identify lexical, grammatical, and cultural difficulties. The

translations were compared with an appropriate Indonesian reference translation, which was reviewed by the researcher's thesis supervisor. The *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (KBBI) was also used as a lexical reference to verify standard Indonesian words and their meanings. However, the analysis considered not only word-for-word equivalence but also contextual meaning and naturalness in Indonesian.

Second, a questionnaire consisting of 12 closed-ended and 3 open-ended items was administered immediately after the translation test and took approximately 40 minutes to complete. The questionnaire indicators were adapted from Larson's translation difficulty categories and Lörcher's problem-solving strategies. The closed-ended items to assess difficulties in translation used a five-point Likert scale consisting of: 1 (Very Easy), 2 (Easy), 3 (Neutral), 4 (Difficult), and 5 (Very Difficult). The questionnaire also included additional closed-ended items designed to explore students' translation strategies by asking them to select the strategies they commonly used. Furthermore, open-ended items were included to obtain more in-depth information about students' opinions and experiences during translation activities.

Third, structured interviews with two (2) English teachers were conducted after the test session with a duration of 5-10 minutes and were audio and video-recorded with permission from the teachers. The interview guide consisted of six questions concerning students' experience with narrative text, translation activities, translation difficulties, and problem-solving strategies. To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, data triangulation was applied by comparing the results of the translation test, questionnaire,



and teacher interviews. The use of these instruments provided a broader understanding of students' translation difficulties and strategies.

Data Analysis

The data were analysed in numerous steps. First, the students' translations were assessed for translation problems and were categorized into grammatical, lexical, and cultural categories with their appropriate subcategories using predetermined indications. Coding and classification were undertaken by the researcher. The analysis has been done considering three interrelated criteria, namely accuracy, acceptability, and naturalness of the translations. Accuracy was the extent to which the translation conveyed the intended meaning of the source text. Acceptability was the extent to which the translation was linguistically appropriate and comprehensible in Indonesian. Naturalness was the extent to which the translation was suitable and naturally expressed when compared to an Indonesian narrative text. The meanings and equivalents of Indonesian vocabulary items were obtained from the *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI)*, and the chosen reference translations utilized in the analysis were verified by the researcher's thesis supervisor. The research did not assume that just one Indonesian translation was acceptable. Instead, where more than one equivalent could reasonably convey the intended meaning, the translation was evaluated for its correctness, acceptability and naturalness in context.

In an effort to resolve any apparent overlap across categories, each inaccuracy was viewed in connection to the meaning of the source text, the narrative context, and the student's Indonesian translation and was categorized according to whichever source of difficulty was most prominent. The

coded data were constantly compared with the original translations for correctness.

Secondly, the results gathered from the close-ended questionnaire were examined quantitatively by computing the frequency and percentage of replies in each category from Very Easy to Very Difficult. The percentage analysis was used to describe the distribution of students' perceived difficulties across the categories and identify the most dominant challenges. Thirdly, thematic analysis was performed on the open-ended questionnaire responses and the interview data to find common themes on the students' translation difficulties, strategies, independence, and need for supervision. Thematic analysis was utilized to find and analyse patterns in the qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Finally, the results were given in the form of tables and descriptive explanations and were compared across the translation test, questionnaire, and interviews through triangulation. The comparison intended to highlight similarities and differences about students' perceived difficulties, their real translation performance, their reported strategies, and the teachers' views. Conclusions were then reached by assessing the consistency of the findings across the different data sources.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study were obtained from three sources of data: translation tests, questionnaires, and teacher interviews. The analysis revealed that eighth-grade students experienced three major difficulties in translating English narrative texts into Indonesian: lexical, grammatical, and cultural difficulties. Among these categories, lexical difficulty emerged as the most dominant problem. In addition, students employed several strategies to overcome translation difficulties,



particularly dictionary use, contextual interpretation, substitution, and structural adjustment.

Students' Translation Difficulties

The findings of the questionnaire demonstrated the different level of difficulty reported by the students in translating English narrative texts into Indonesian. Table 1 presents the distribution of the students' responses.

Table 1. Distribution of Students' Perceived Difficulties in Translating

Difficulty Category	Very Easy	Easy	Normal	Difficult	Very Difficult	Total Respondents
Grammar	3	6	8	1	0	18
Lexical	2	3	1	3	9	18
Cultural	2	8	7	1	0	18
Sentence Order	2	4	7	2	3	18

These perceptions provide an initial overview of the challenges experienced by students during the translation process. However, the questionnaire results alone do

not fully explain the specific errors made by students. Therefore, the students' translation test was further analysed to identify the actual difficulties and error patterns underlying their perceptions. The findings are discussed in the following sections.

Lexical Difficulties

Lexical difficulty was identified as the most dominant challenge experienced by students in translating English narrative texts into Indonesian. Previous studies have shown that students' translation difficulties vary according to text characteristics, with unfamiliar vocabulary, ambiguous meanings, and sentence structures frequently becoming major challenges (Putri et al., 2024). The results showed that students had problems in unknown vocabulary, wrong word choice, literal translation, and synonym confusion. The summary of students' difficulties in the translation test is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of Students' Lexical Difficulties in the Translation Test

Subcategory	Source Item	Translation Results	Total Error Percentage
Unknown Vocabulary	She prepared a plan to outsmart the Giant.	7 students (38.9%) translated it appropriately as <i>mengakali</i> , while 9 students (50%) used <i>membodohi</i> .	61.1% (11 students)
	A loud voice roared.	None of the students (0%) produced the most appropriate equivalent, <i>menggelegar</i> ; 3 students (16.7%) used <i>terdengar</i> , while others selected different sound-related words.	100% (18 students)
	She prepared a clever plan.	7 students (38.9%) used <i>rencana cerdik</i> , while 5 students (27.8%) used <i>rencana cerdas</i> and 3 students (16.7%) produced <i>tanaman clever</i> .	61.1% (11 students)
	Courage was more important than fear.	All 18 students (100%) translated it appropriately as <i>keberanian</i> .	0% (0 students)
Wrong Word Choice	She remembered a story about a magical seed.	8 students (44.4%) used <i>benih ajaib</i> , while 6 students (33.3%) used <i>biji ajaib</i> , and the remaining 4 students (22.2%) produced other alternatives.	55.6% (10 students)
	The Giant made a deal with her.	4 students (22.2%) selected the most appropriate equivalent, <i>kesepakatan</i> , while the remaining 14	77.8% (14 students)



		students (77.8%) used other semantically related alternatives.	
	A giant cucumber appeared.	17 students (94.4%) appropriately used <i>raksasa</i> , while 1 student (5.6%) used <i>sosok besar</i> .	5.6% (1 student)
	A shadow suddenly appeared.	15 students (83.3%) used <i>muncul</i> , while 3 students (16.7%) used <i>ada</i> .	16.7% (3 students)
	She realized the truth.	15 students (83.3%) selected the appropriate equivalent, <i>menyadari</i> , whereas 3 students (16.7%) incorrectly used <i>mewujudkan</i> .	16.7% (3 students)
Literal Translation	“That cucumber belongs to me!”	8 students (44.4%) produced <i>Timun itu milikku!</i> , while 5 students (27.8%) used <i>Timun itu untukku!</i> and 5 students (27.8%) used <i>Timun itu punya!</i> .	55.6% (10 students)
	Arni's heart beat very fast.	8 students (44.4%) translated <i>heart</i> as <i>hati</i> , while 8 students (44.4%) used the more appropriate <i>jantung</i> .	55.6% (10 students)
	She took a deep breath.	5 students (27.8%) produced <i>menarik napas dalam-dalam</i> , while the remaining 13 students (72.2%) used other, less natural alternatives.	72.2% (13 students)
	She did not run away.	Only 1 student (5.6%) used <i>melarikan diri</i> , while 13 students (72.2%) used <i>tidak lari</i> and 2 students (11.1%) used <i>tidak kabur</i> .	94.4% (17 students)
Synonym Confusion	Arni used her intelligence.	5 students (27.8%) used the more appropriate <i>kecerdasan</i> , while 11 students (61.1%) used <i>kepintaran</i> .	72.2% (13 students)
	The Giant made a deal with her.	9 students (50%) used <i>perjanjian</i> , while 2 students (11.1%) used <i>persetujuan</i> , indicating difficulty distinguishing closely related equivalents.	61.1% (11 students)

Table 2 presents students' performance on the selected lexical items. Overall, the average percentage of inaccuracy on the 15 items was 53.7%, which showed that the issues in the lexical aspect were a serious challenge in translating the English narrative text into Indonesian. However, the degree of difficulty depended on the familiarity with the word, contextual meaning, and availability of an adequate Indonesian counterpart.

The first pattern was the difference between known and unknown terminology or vocabulary that depends on the situation. In general, students performed better on items they were familiar with, such as *courage* and *giant*, but faced more difficulty with items like *outsmart*, *roared*, and *clever plan*. The results of the open-ended questionnaire confirmed this tendency, as

many students found unknown words to be the most difficult part of translation. Some students said words like *outsmart*, *clever*, *roared*, and *magical seed* as difficult because they did not know the meaning of the words or did not know how to say them in Indonesian. This shows students had more trouble when the language demanded an interpretation beyond a simple word-for-word substitution.

The second pattern was choosing the equivalents which were contextually acceptable from semantically comparable Indonesian words. In elements such as *magical seed*, *deal*, and *intelligence*, students' translations often conveyed related meanings but differed in their precision, acceptability, or naturalness within the narrative framework. This pattern was further supported by the questionnaire results. Some students had

trouble identifying the “correct” Indonesian word, while others were unsure when more than one source meaning appeared to be available. For example, a student said that she could not choose whether *magical* should be translated as *ajaib* or *sihir*. Thus, lexical difficulty was not confined to encountering unfamiliar words but also required the task of discriminating between comparable meanings and choosing the most suitable equivalent in a given situation. Finally, students often translated words and multi-word statements, especially *belongs to me*, *took a deep breath*, and *run away*, literally. The translations generally were literal and based on each word of the English language, so they were understandable but less natural in Indonesian narrative style. This tendency was also reflected in the responses to the questionnaire, where the students pointed to the discovery of the proper words and making the translation sound natural rather than “weird” as difficult aspects of translating the narrative text.

The translation test and open-ended questionnaire yielded similar results in

general. Students’ lexical challenges were unfamiliar and context-dependent vocabulary, confusion in choosing suitable equivalents, and dependence on literal translation. Thus, lexical difficulty was not only related to restricted vocabulary knowledge but also students’ ability to grasp contextual meaning and transfer it naturally into Indonesian.

Grammatical Difficulties

Compared with lexical difficulties, grammatical problems were less dominant in students’ translation performance. The questionnaire results showed that most students considered grammar relatively manageable. However, the translation test indicated that students still had difficulties in transferring English grammatical meanings and structures into suitable expressions in Indonesian. The problems were mainly in the interpretation of tense, adjustment of sentence structure, and the use of personal pronouns. Table 3 presents students’ grammatical difficulties in the translation test.

Table 3. Summary of Students’ Grammatical Difficulties in the Translation Test

Subcategory	Source Item	Translation Results	Total Error Percentage
Tense Usage	Arni had to use her intelligence to save herself and her village.	12 students (66.7%) translated <i>had to</i> appropriately as <i>harus</i> , while 6 students (33.3%) omitted the meaning of obligation.	33.3% (6 students)
Sentence Order	She remembered her mother’s old story about a magical seed.	1 student (5.6%) produced a natural Indonesian structure into <i>Ia teringat cerita lama ibunya</i> , while 8 students (44.4%) used <i>Dia mengingat cerita lama ibunya</i> , and 4 students (22.2%) used <i>Dia mengingat cerita ibunya dulu</i> .	94.4% (17 students)
Personal Pronoun	She went to her garden.	All 18 students (100%) translated <i>she</i> as <i>dia</i> , which is grammatically acceptable but less appropriate for formal narrative writing than <i>ia</i> .	100% (18 students)
	Arni had to use her intelligence to save herself and her village.	Only 2 students (11.1%) translated <i>herself</i> appropriately as <i>dirinya sendiri</i> , while 11 students (61.1%) used <i>dirinya</i> and 4 students (22.2%) used <i>diri</i> .	88.9% (16 students)
	That cucumber	17 students (94.4%) appropriately used the	5.6% (1 student)



	belongs to me!	possessive suffix <i>-ku</i> , while 1 student (5.6%) student) used <i>aku</i> .	
Subject-Verb Agreement	-	No subject-verb agreement errors were found in the students' translations.	0% (0 students)

The findings revealed that students primarily struggled with transferring grammatical functions and adapting English structures to natural Indonesian. The translation test revealed that the most significant areas of difficulty were personal pronouns and sentence order, followed by tense usage, especially in transferring the obligation expressed by “had to”. In contrast, no errors were identified in subject-verb agreement. The students’ open-ended questionnaire responses supported these findings, as several students reported being confused when translating English grammatical forms, especially when the forms did not have direct equivalents in Indonesian. This suggests that students generally understood the basic meaning of grammatical forms but experienced difficulties when those forms required interpretation, structural adjustment, or adaptation in the target language. The discrepancy between students’ reported difficulties and their actual translation performance also indicates that some grammatical problems may not have been fully recognised by the students themselves. Overall, the findings suggest that students’ grammatical difficulties were more strongly associated

with cross-linguistic structural differences and grammatical meaning transfer than with a lack of basic grammatical knowledge. This finding is consistent with Catford’s (1965) concept of translation shifts, which emphasises the need for structural adjustments to achieve equivalence between the source and target languages. It also agrees with previous studies reporting that grammatical differences remain a challenge for Indonesian EFL learners during translation activities (Manullang et al., 2022; Siahaan et al., 2025).

Cultural Difficulties

Cultural difficulties are difficulties in conveying cultural meanings and adapting expressions to the conventions of the target language. Difficulties in literary translation are often related to maintaining style, tone, cultural references, and appropriate expressions, showing that translation requires both linguistic and cultural competence (Yunita et al., 2026). Although students did not think cultural factors were difficult, the translation test showed that cultural knowledge affected the naturalness and appropriateness of their translations. Table 4. presents students’ cultural difficulties.

Table 4. Summary of Students’ Cultural Difficulties in the Translation Test

Subcategory	Source Item	Translation Results	Total Error Percentage
Translating Cultural Expressions	Once upon a time	Only 3 students (16.7%) appropriately translated the expression as <i>Pada zaman dahulu</i> , while 7 students (38.9%) used <i>Pada suatu hari</i> and 8 students (44.4%) used <i>Pada suatu waktu</i> .	83.3% (15 students)
Lack of Naturalness	It was the Green Giant.	Only 3 students (16.7%) produced the appropriate translation <i>Ternyata itu adalah Raksasa Hijau</i> , while 14 students (77.8%) used <i>Itu adalah raksasa hijau</i> and 1 student (5.6%) produced another alternative.	83.3% (15 students)



	Mr. Giant	10 students (55.5%) translated it as <i>Tuan Raksasa</i> , while 5 students (27.7%) used <i>Pak Raksasa</i> and 3 students (16.7%) produced other alternatives, such as <i>Sang Raksasa</i> and <i>Tuan Besar</i> .	44.4% (8 students)
Contextual Meaning	—	No difficulties related to contextual meaning were identified in the students' translations.	0% (0 students)

The findings indicate that cultural difficulties were less prominent in students' self-perceptions but were still evident in their translation performance. The students generally understood the basic meanings of culturally related expressions; however, they experienced difficulties in producing conventional and natural equivalents in Indonesian narrative discourse. For example, the expression *Once upon a time* was often translated into general expressions referring to past time rather than the conventional Indonesian storytelling expression *Pada zaman dahulu*. Similarly, translations of *Green Giant* and *Mr. Giant* showed that students understood the intended references but were sometimes uncertain about the most natural and contextually appropriate way to express them in Indonesian. These findings suggest that cultural difficulties were not mainly caused by a lack of knowledge about unfamiliar cultural objects, but by difficulties in recognising cultural and genre-specific conventions in storytelling. This is also reflected in the questionnaire, where only one student perceived cultural aspects as difficult, while most students considered them easy or moderate. The difference between students' perceptions and their actual translation performance suggests that some cultural difficulties were not fully recognised by the students themselves. Therefore, cultural competence in translation should include not only understanding cultural references but also recognising conventional expressions,

narrative styles, and natural target-language usage. This finding supports Newmark's (1988) view that effective translation requires attention to cultural meaning and appropriate expression in the target language.

Students' Translation Strategies

The results showed that students used different strategies to overcome translation problems. Translation strategies served as problem-solving procedures that assisted students to overcome lexical, grammatical, and cultural constraints in seeking to preserve the sense of the source text (Jatikusumo et al., 2022). But the frequency with which a strategy was used did not necessarily indicate its effectiveness. The results thus distinguish between the procedures that students most frequently use and their presumed contribution to the accuracy of the translation. Students' close-ended questionnaire responses are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Distribution of Students' Translation Strategies

Translation Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
Dictionary Use	16	88.9%
Word Order Adjustment	15	83.3%
Context Picking	15	83.3%
Substitution	15	83.3%
Simplification	11	61.1%
Asking for Help	11	61.1%
Omission	8	44.4%
Copying	5	27.8%



Table 5 shows that the most often used approach was dictionary use (88.9%) followed by word-order adjustment, context selecting, and substitution (83.3% each). The translation findings, however, showed that the effectiveness of these strategies varied. Some strategies favoured more precise and natural translations, while others sometimes resulted in wrong word choices, literal structures, or loss of meaning.

Strategies for Overcoming Lexical Difficulties

The students overcame lexical issues largely through dictionary use, context choosing, substitution, and simplification. The most frequently adopted approach was dictionary use, with 16 students (88.9%) reporting its use. This approach was useful for students to recognize the meanings of unknown vocabulary, but relying too much on the dictionary did not always guarantee accurate translation, as students occasionally chose the definitions without giving enough thought to the context. Fifteen students (83.3%) employed context choosing, and this strategy seemed beneficial when students could relate new words to the surrounding material. Nonetheless, this strategy was less successful when students had a limited understanding of the word. The translation of *outsmart* into *membodohi*, for instance, demonstrated that students could still misinterpret the contextual meaning even while trying to employ contextual indicators.

Furthermore, 15 students (83.3%) used substitution, especially if they were not sure about the best lexical equivalent. This method often permitted students to keep the broad sense, but occasionally at the expense of lexical correctness. For instance, several students interpreted *intelligence* as

kepintaran instead of the more fitting *kecerdasan*. Simplification, employed by 11 students (61.1%), assisted students in managing complex statements but sometimes led to a reduction or loss of specific meanings. Overall dictionary use was the most frequent lexical strategy, although contextual interpretation seems to be more effective when backed by appropriate vocabulary knowledge. Substitution and simplification, in contrast, enabled the students to continue the translation process, although occasionally there was a trade-off between ease of expression and lexical accuracy. The results are in line with the prior research showing students use several cognitive, metacognitive, and social techniques to cope with the translation challenges linked to vocabulary (Syamsinar et al., 2026).

Strategies for Overcoming Grammatical Difficulties

Students mainly adjusted word order, omitted and copied to cope with grammatical problems. Word-order adjustment was used by 15 students (83.3%) and seems to be the most beneficial grammatical method since it enabled students to adapt the English structures into more natural Indonesian sentence patterns. However, its effectiveness was contingent on students' awareness of the structural distinctions between the two languages, as some students continued to hold onto the English word order. Eight students (44.4%) employed omission, particularly when students encountered trouble transferring grammatical meanings. However, this method proved less effective in keeping the sense of the source text since information that was crucial was sometimes lost. For instance, the removal of *had to* from *Arni had to use her intelligence* removed the notion of duty.



Five students (27.8%) used copying when they were unable to locate an Indonesian equivalent. This approach enabled students to do the translation but, in general, did not improve the translation accuracy or acceptability. For example, the use of *clever* in a *clever plan* translation showed that the copying could lead to an artificial translation.

These data imply that word-order adjustment was more successful than omission and copying in trying to maintain both grammatical meaning and naturalness in the target language. Meanwhile, omission and copying worked mostly as compensatory strategies that allowed students to continue translating but sometimes led to loss of meaning or diminished acceptability. This tendency is in line with earlier studies revealing that EFL learners employ linguistic adjustment and other compensatory strategies when encountering grammatical translation challenges (Anisah & Basri, 2023).

Strategies for Overcoming Cultural Difficulties

Students primarily used substitution and sought help to address cultural issues. 15 students (83.3%) employed substitution when students met expressions that did not have a direct counterpart in Indonesian. This strategy was common, although it did not always work to preserve cultural meaning, since students sometimes substituted culture-specific terms for more universal ones. For example, translation issues in *Once upon a time* showed that students commonly produced expressions like *Pada suatu hari* rather than the more culturally appropriate narrative expression *Pada zaman dahulu*. This pattern indicates that substitution may help students produce an intelligible translation, but it does not

always preserve the cultural and stylistic purpose of the original term. Eleven students (61.1%) used asking for help, and it seems that it was especially necessary when it was not enough to interpret cultural meaning by language knowledge alone. This technique might help facilitate more correct translations, because students would have the chance to be provided with further explanations, regarding cultural allusions and adequate terms in the target language.

The results indicate that strategy use was important but did not necessarily result in more accurate translations. However, the success of a method was dependent on the implementation of it and the language, contextual, and cultural expertise of the students. The most often used approach was the use of a dictionary, although strategies including contextual interpretation, word-order adjustment, and asking for help seemed to offer higher support for accurate translation when used appropriately. Omission, copying, excessive substitution, and simplification, in contrast, occasionally helped students complete the translation at the cost of meaning correctness, cultural appropriateness, or naturalness. Thus, students' translation strategies should be analysed not only based on the frequency of their use but also based on their role in the preservation of meaning in the target language (Kembaren et al., 2023; Wartabone et al., 2025).

Teachers' Perspectives

The interviews with the teachers provided more information about the students' problems and strategies in translating English narrative texts into Indonesian. The teachers' views generally supported the results of the translation test and questionnaire, especially about the students' problems in vocabulary,



grammar, and culture. One of the most common problems students faced, according to the teachers, was vocabulary. They said students often found it difficult to understand unfamiliar words in narrative texts because they were more familiar with common words than less frequently used words. For instance, students tended to recognise simple words like *big* and *small*, but struggled with related words such as *huge*, *tiny* and *enormous*. The teachers also indicated that students sometimes chose incorrect equivalents because they focused on the direct meaning of words rather than taking the context of the text into account.

The teachers reported that the grammatical difficulties were related to students' problems in understanding the differences of English verb forms and the meanings of tenses. Students often confused such forms as *go* and *went* and had difficulties in transferring the meanings of past tense and past perfect into Indonesian. These findings support the results of the translation test, which showed that grammatical problems mainly occurred when the students had to transfer grammatical meanings rather than simply recognising grammatical forms.

The teachers also identified the cultural and contextual problems in translation. The students sometimes encountered the problems in understanding the unknown cultural concepts, such as *castle*, *ballroom*, and *Thanksgiving turkey feast*. These problems occurred because students had limited background knowledge and tended to interpret expressions with their literal meanings only. Therefore, cultural understanding was considered necessary to help students generate the translations that were appropriate in both meaning and style.

Teachers also stressed the importance of offering students help beyond the dictionary. The students showed independence in consulting translation resources and using different strategies, but teachers were still essential to help them interpret meanings, grammatical functions and choose suitable equivalents. This is consistent with the notion of self-regulated learning as presented by Panadero (2017), where learners control their learning processes by selecting strategies and resources to overcome challenges. However, self-regulation does not eliminate the need for ongoing external support, as teacher assistance is still necessary to help students assess the effectiveness and appropriateness of their strategies.

Overall, the teachers' perspectives reinforce that students' translation difficulties were interconnected, involving linguistic knowledge, contextual interpretation, and cultural awareness. The findings suggest that translation instruction should focus on vocabulary and grammar mastery and develop students' ability to interpret meaning and produce natural translations in the target language.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated students' difficulties and strategies in translating English narrative texts into Indonesian, as well as the teachers' perspectives on these difficulties. The results showed that students had three main kinds of difficulty, namely lexical, grammatical, and cultural difficulties. Among these, lexical difficulty was the most evident, especially in comprehending contextual meanings and choosing appropriate lexical equivalents. The main grammatical challenges concerned the transfer of meanings



connected to tense, sentence order, and pronouns. The main cultural issues concerned the translation of statements requiring culturally acceptable alternatives. The study discovered that students adopted a variety of strategies to deal with these issues, such as dictionary use, contextual interpretation, substitution, simplification, word-order modification, omission, copying, and asking for help. The most used approach was dictionary use, although regular use did not always result in a precise translation. The use of strategies that seem suitable, for example, contextual interpretation, adjustment of word order, and asking for help, seems more conducive to good translation, but omission, copying, and over-simplification sometimes resulted in loss of meaning or diminished naturalness. Teachers also saw students trying to solve translation problems on their own but pointed out the need for help when students met challenging terminology, grammatical meanings, and cultural expressions. The findings imply that translation teaching should go beyond vocabulary memory and word-for-word translation by establishing contextual, grammatical, and cultural awareness of the students. Vocabulary building, analysis of context, structural modification, and reflection on translation choices may therefore be part of the translation process, along with appropriate teacher input to help students become more independent.

This study discusses its limitations. The findings were based on a small sample of students from one research site, only a small number of teachers, and one translation task. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to all EFL learners or translation circumstances. Future research could encompass larger and more diverse samples, numerous schools and teachers,

and different sorts of translation tasks. Another direction for future research could be to study the impact of any specific instructional strategies or digital resources in enhancing students' translation accuracy and strategic competency.

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