



## Investigating the Role of Google Translate in English Vocabulary Acquisition among Junior High School Students in the Digital Era

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**Abstract:** *This study investigates the role of Google Translate in supporting English vocabulary learning among junior high school students in the digital era. The research employs a qualitative approach involving seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 19 Medan. Data were collected through pre-test and post-test, classroom observation, interviews, and documentation. The findings reveal that Google Translate significantly helps students understand vocabulary more quickly, improves their learning efficiency, and increases their confidence in completing English tasks. Students also demonstrate greater autonomy in exploring new vocabulary independently. However, the study also identifies challenges, particularly students' tendency to rely excessively on direct translation without fully understanding context, which may lead to superficial learning. Therefore, teacher guidance is essential to ensure the effective and critical use of this tool. The study concludes that Google Translate can serve as a valuable learning resource when integrated appropriately into classroom instruction. The findings contribute to the development of technology-enhanced language learning and provide practical implications for teachers in utilizing digital tools effectively.*

**Keywords:** *digital learning; Google Translate; junior high school; vocabulary learning*

### 1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Vocabulary constitutes a fundamental component of language competence, encompassing not only a collection of words but also the meanings, structures, and appropriate contexts in which those words are used. Mastery of vocabulary plays a crucial role in enabling learners to communicate effectively through speaking, listening, reading, and writing. As emphasized by Hamdani (2020), vocabulary knowledge forms the basis of language proficiency, determining how well individuals can express ideas and understand others. Consequently, acquiring a sufficient range of vocabulary is essential for students who aim to participate actively in communication and achieve success in English language learning.

In the context of English as a foreign language, vocabulary development is considered a core aspect of language acquisition. Studies such as Salawazo et al. (2020) and Wahyudin et al. (2021) highlight that students' ability to use English largely depends on the extent and depth of their vocabulary knowledge. Vocabulary mastery is not merely about knowing a large number of words; it also involves understanding their meanings, forms, pronunciation, and contextual usage. Therefore, effective vocabulary learning requires active engagement through reading, speaking, and writing, supported by strategies such as repetition, contextual

practice, and meaningful exposure to language.

However, many students encounter significant challenges in learning English vocabulary. According to Sari and Aminatun (2021), mastering vocabulary is a time-consuming process that requires continuous practice. Learners often struggle with memorizing a large number of words, dealing with multiple meanings of a single word, and distinguishing between similar words with different meanings. In addition, differences in pronunciation and spelling further complicate the learning process. Similarly, Surmanov and Azimova (2020) note that students frequently face difficulties related to pronunciation, spelling, and retention of vocabulary, which can hinder their ability to communicate effectively in English.

In the digital era, technological advancements have introduced new opportunities for language learning, particularly through the use of digital tools and applications. One of the most widely used tools is Google Translate, a machine translation application that allows users to translate words, phrases, and texts instantly across multiple languages. This tool is accessible through various devices, including smartphones and computers, making it highly convenient for students. Features such as instant translation, audio pronunciation, and alternative word suggestions provide learners with immediate support in understanding unfamiliar vocabulary.

The integration of Google Translate into language learning has been shown to offer several benefits. It enables students to independently explore the meanings of new words, improve their pronunciation through audio features, and gain exposure to synonyms and contextual variations. Research by Perdana and Arifani (2024) suggests that when used appropriately, translation tools can enhance vocabulary acquisition and support learner autonomy. Furthermore, in contexts where bilingual learning materials are limited, this tool can facilitate access to English texts by providing quick translations, thereby reducing vocabulary barriers and supporting comprehension (Manik et al., 2025).

In addition, the use of Google Translate can support metacognitive learning strategies. Students are not only able to identify the meanings of unfamiliar words but also encouraged to reflect on their understanding and evaluate the accuracy of translations (Manik et al., 2024). This process can promote deeper learning, especially when students are guided to analyze the context and use the translated vocabulary in meaningful communication. The tool can also assist learners in understanding pragmatic aspects of language, such as expressions of politeness and social meanings, which are often challenging for beginners (Manik, 2023).



Despite its advantages, the use of Google Translate in language learning requires careful guidance. Gumartifa et al. (2022) emphasize that students should critically evaluate translation results rather than relying on them blindly. Without proper guidance, learners may develop a dependency on the tool and fail to develop deeper language skills. Therefore, teachers play an important role in directing students to use this technology effectively, ensuring that it supports not replaces the learning process.

Considering these perspectives, it is evident that Google Translate has significant potential as a tool for vocabulary learning in the digital era. However, its effectiveness depends on how it is used by students and guided by teachers. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the role of Google Translate in English vocabulary learning among junior high school students. By examining students' use of this tool, the study seeks to provide insights and recommendations for integrating digital technology into language learning in a more effective and meaningful way.

The integration of digital tools in language learning has attracted increasing attention in recent years, particularly in the context of vocabulary acquisition. Numerous studies have highlighted the importance of vocabulary mastery for English language learners and have explored various strategies to support vocabulary development. At the same time, the emergence of machine translation tools such as Google Translate has introduced new possibilities for facilitating vocabulary learning in the digital era. Previous research has generally acknowledged the practicality and accessibility of this tool, emphasizing its potential to assist learners in understanding unfamiliar words, improving pronunciation, and accessing bilingual resources.

However, despite the growing body of literature, several gaps remain insufficiently explored. First, many existing studies tend to focus on the general effectiveness of translation tools without examining in depth how students actually use Google Translate as part of their vocabulary learning process. There is limited empirical evidence on students' learning behaviors, strategies, and levels of dependency when using this tool, especially among junior high school learners. This indicates a need for more context-specific investigations that capture students' real experiences in using digital translation tools.

Second, previous studies often emphasize the advantages of Google Translate, such as convenience and speed, but pay less attention to its potential limitations in supporting deep vocabulary understanding. Issues such as inaccurate translations, lack of contextual appropriateness, and over-reliance on instant results are not always critically addressed. As a result, there is still a lack of balanced understanding regarding both the benefits and challenges of using this tool in vocabulary learning.

Third, in the context of Indonesian junior high school students, research specifically investigating the role of Google Translate in vocabulary learning remains limited. Most prior studies have been conducted at the university level or focus on general language skills rather than targeting vocabulary as a specific area of learning. Given that junior high school students are in a crucial stage of language development, it is important to explore how digital tools influence their vocabulary acquisition and learning habits.

Based on these gaps, this study seeks to address the following problem: although Google Translate is widely used by students as a learning aid, its actual role in supporting English vocabulary learning, particularly in terms of effectiveness, usage patterns, and potential challenges, has not been fully understood. Without a clear understanding of how students utilize this tool, educators may find it difficult to provide appropriate guidance and integrate technology effectively into the learning process.

Therefore, the main problem of this study is formulated as follows: to what extent and in what ways does Google Translate contribute to English vocabulary learning among junior high school students in the digital era? This central question is further supported by the need to explore students' experiences, the benefits they perceive, and the challenges they encounter when using this tool for vocabulary learning.

## **2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

This study is grounded in several interrelated theoretical perspectives, including vocabulary acquisition theory, technology-enhanced language learning, and the pedagogical use of machine translation tools such as Google Translate. These frameworks provide a conceptual basis for understanding how digital tools influence students' vocabulary learning processes in the contemporary educational context.

Vocabulary acquisition is a central component of second and foreign language learning. Recent perspectives emphasize that vocabulary learning is not merely a process of memorization but involves deeper cognitive engagement, contextual understanding, and repeated exposure to language. Learners develop vocabulary knowledge through meaningful interaction with texts and communication activities, allowing them to internalize word meanings, forms, and usage patterns (Nation, 2022; Schmitt, 2020).

Furthermore, vocabulary knowledge is commonly divided into receptive and productive dimensions. Receptive vocabulary refers to words that learners can recognize and understand, while productive vocabulary involves the ability to use words accurately in speaking and writing. According to Webb and Nation (2021), effective vocabulary learning

requires balanced development of both aspects through continuous exposure and practice. In digital learning environments, repeated exposure to vocabulary through multimedia input can significantly improve retention and understanding (Zhang & Graham, 2022).

The integration of digital technologies into language education has led to the development of Technology-Enhanced Language Learning (TELL), which emphasizes flexibility, accessibility, and learner-centered approaches. TELL enables students to engage with language beyond traditional classroom settings, supporting independent and self-paced learning.

Recent studies indicate that digital tools play a significant role in increasing students' motivation and engagement. For example, research by Lai and Zheng (2021) found that technology-supported learning environments encourage active participation and improve vocabulary acquisition outcomes. Similarly, Huang et al. (2023) highlight that students' acceptance of digital tools is influenced by perceived usefulness and ease of use, as explained in the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). These factors are particularly relevant in the use of tools such as Google Translate, which are widely adopted due to their convenience and accessibility.

In the Indonesian context, recent studies also show a growing trend in the use of digital applications for vocabulary learning. However, their effectiveness depends largely on how teachers integrate these tools into instructional practices (Rahman et al., 2024).

Machine Translation (MT) has become increasingly prominent in language education, especially with the advancement of artificial intelligence. Tools like Google Translate provide instant access to translations, pronunciation, and alternative lexical choices, making them valuable resources for vocabulary learning.

Recent research demonstrates that MT tools can support vocabulary acquisition by enabling learners to quickly understand unfamiliar words and phrases. For instance, a study by Garcia and Pena (2022) found that students using machine translation tools showed improvement in vocabulary recognition and spelling accuracy. Similarly, a systematic review by Nurhayati and Sari (2024) reports that Google Translate enhances learners' vocabulary knowledge by providing immediate meaning, synonyms, and contextual examples.

However, the use of MT is not without limitations. Studies indicate that overreliance on translation tools may reduce learners' ability to infer meaning from context and limit deeper language processing (Lee, 2023). In addition, inaccuracies in translating idiomatic expressions or context-specific meanings can lead to misunderstandings (Alhaisoni, 2022). Therefore, while Google Translate offers practical benefits, its pedagogical value depends on how critically and appropriately it is used.

Learner autonomy is another key concept underlying this study. It refers to students' capacity to take responsibility for their own learning, including setting goals, selecting strategies, and evaluating progress. Digital tools such as Google Translate can foster learner autonomy by enabling students to independently access vocabulary information and monitor their understanding.

In addition, metacognitive strategies play an important role in vocabulary learning. These strategies involve planning, monitoring, and evaluating one's learning processes. According to Teng and Zhang (2022), students who apply metacognitive strategies in digital learning environments tend to achieve better vocabulary retention and comprehension. When learners use translation tools reflectively by checking meanings, comparing contexts, and applying new words they develop deeper understanding rather than surface-level knowledge.

However, without proper guidance, students may rely excessively on translation tools, which can hinder critical thinking and independent language development (Kim, 2023). Therefore, teacher support remains essential in guiding students toward effective and balanced use of digital tools.

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study employs a qualitative approach to investigate the role of Google Translate in English vocabulary learning among junior high school students. The research is conducted at SMP Negeri 19 Medan, North Sumatra, from October to November. The participants are seventh-grade students selected through purposive sampling, as they are actively involved in English learning and the use of Google Translate.

The study is carried out over four weeks. In the first week, a pre-test is administered to assess students' initial vocabulary knowledge. In the second and third weeks, students are introduced to the use of Google Translate and engage in vocabulary learning activities using digital devices. In the fourth week, a post-test is conducted to identify improvements, followed by semi-structured interviews to explore students' experiences, perceptions, and challenges.

Data are collected through interviews, classroom observation, and documentation such as students' assignments and test results. The data are analyzed qualitatively through familiarizing with the data, organizing and categorizing into themes, interpreting the findings, and drawing conclusions about the role of Google Translate in vocabulary learning.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, four criteria are applied: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility is achieved through data triangulation by combining interviews, observations, and documentation, as well as member checking to confirm the accuracy of participants' responses. Transferability is ensured by providing clear and detailed descriptions of the research context and participants, allowing readers to determine the applicability of the findings to other settings. Dependability is maintained by documenting the research procedures systematically so that the study can be audited or replicated. Confirmability is established by ensuring that the findings are based on the data rather than researcher bias, supported by maintaining an audit trail and using direct evidence from participants.

## **4. RESEARCH FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

### **4.1. Research Implementation**

This research was conducted over four weeks, with one meeting per week. The participants were seventh-grade students at a junior high school. This study aimed to identify how Google Translate helped one technology frequently used by students was Google Translate students learn English vocabulary in the digital age. In today's modern learning environment, technology played a crucial role in supporting students' learning activities. One technology frequently used by students was Google Translate, which helps them understand the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary. Through this study, students were examined for how they see used Google Translate as a learning tool. The study also examined how Google Translate helps students learn English vocabulary. Therefore, this study focused on the students learning process when using Google Translate in vocabulary learning. At the first meeting, the activity began by introducing the research objectives and explaining the learning process that was out during the research. The students were informed that the English learning activities used Google Translate as a tool to help them understand English vocabulary. After the introduction, the researcher gave a pre-test to determine the students' ability to understand English vocabulary. The pre-test consisted of several multiple-choice questions where students had to choose the correct answer. The content of the questions was about vocabulary that required students to identify the meaning of words and understand them in order to answer the questions correctly. During the pre-test, students answered the questions individually without using any translation tools. The results of the pre-test showed that some students still had difficulty translating unfamiliar vocabulary. Many students also found it difficult to understand vocabulary when the vocabulary appeared in simple sentences. In addition, some students appeared hesitant and lacked confidence when

answering vocabulary questions without assistance. Based on the pre-test results, it was apparent that students had varying levels of vocabulary comprehension. Some students were able to successfully answer some questions correctly because they already knew the meaning of certain English words. However, other students struggled due to their limited vocabulary knowledge. They often guessed the meaning of vocabulary without first analyzing its meaning because they did not know the meaning of the vocabulary. This situation indicates that vocabulary learning is a challenge for students. It also indicates that students needed learning assistance to help them understand English vocabulary more effectively. Therefore, the use of translation tools such as Google Translate was considered beneficial in assisting students during the vocabulary learning process

In the second and third meetings, the research was conducted with learning activities involving the use of Google Translate as a learning aid. At the beginning of the lesson, students were given material containing several English vocabulary words. Students were asked to understand the meaning of the vocabulary they knew. Students would be asked and when the student did not know the meaning of the vocabulary asked, the student was allowed to use Google Translate to check the meaning of unknown words. They typed the vocabulary into Google Translate and observed the translation results. The use of Google Translate was guided so that students could use Google Translate correctly so they could get accurate meaning. During the learning activities, students were closely observed interacting with Google Translate. Some students quickly grasped the use of Google Translate. Furthermore, they began to understand how certain vocabulary words were used in sentences. Students became more active in asking questions when they encountered unfamiliar vocabulary. However, some students still needed instruction to ensure they were using the tool correctly. Therefore, students were reminded not to rely solely on the translation results but to also understand the context of the sentences. Through these observations, we learned how Google Translate supports students' vocabulary learning.

In the fourth meeting, a post-test was conducted to measure students' vocabulary knowledge after learning to use Google Translate. The post-test contained slightly more difficult vocabulary questions than the pre-test. This post-test aimed to determine whether there had been any improvement in students' English vocabulary comprehension. After completing the post-test, students were asked to gather their opinions about using Google Translate in their learning activities. Students answered questions about their experiences, including the benefits and challenges they faced when using Google Translate. The interview results were used as additional information to support the research findings on vocabulary learning using Google Translate.

#### **4.2. Pre-Test and Post-Test Results**

Pre-tests and post-tests were administered to see how students' vocabulary skills improve over time because this research used qualitative methods, the score data were not analyzed using statistical methods. Instead, the data were used as additional information to support and reinforce the findings from observations and interviews. This research used a qualitative approach therefore scores were used as supporting data to provide an overview of students' vocabulary development throughout the research process. The purpose of including these scores was to strengthen the results obtained from classroom observations and student interviews. In general, the test results were expected to show that scores improve after using Google Translate to aid the learning process. Most students are expected to score better on tests after the lessons than before the lessons.

<b>Names</b>	<b>Pre-Test</b>	<b>Post-Test</b>
Ald	95	100
Aza	95	95
Dho	95	85
Ezr	95	90
Fia	95	100
Fib	90	85
Gvn	60	80
Haf	70	85
Hou	70	95
Jol	100	100
Mikg	100	95
Mutn	95	90
Nayr	65	60
Nat	85	90
Raf	100	100
Raf	95	100
Ra	95	85
Riz	80	95
Yr	85	75
Zah	90	100

Based on the test results, although some students' scores dropped, they aren't significantly lower, while others improved, and others maintained their scores. Use Google Translate helped students learn word meanings and answer vocabulary questions better.

### **4.3. Observation Result**

Based on the results of research conducted during the learning process, most students appeared to be more enthusiastic and complete tasks more quickly when using Google Translate. Students did not need to spend too much time looking up the meaning of a word because they can immediately find its meaning using Google Translate. However, it was also found that some students often directly copy the translation results without trying to understand the meaning of the sentence. Therefore, teacher guidance is needed so that the use of Google Translate remains useful in the learning process and students do not just copy words from Google Translate.

### **4.4. Interview Results**

The interview results were used as data and to gather students' perspectives on how they use Google Translate. Twenty students were interviewed about their opinions on using Google Translate when learning vocabulary. The interview results provide evidence of Google Translate role as a tool to help students learn vocabulary.

What difficulties do you encounter when learning English vocabulary?

1. What do you usually do when you encounter an English word you don't understand?
2. Do you use Google Translate to help you understand vocabulary?
3. How often do you use Google Translate when learning English?
4. Do you usually use Google Translate to translate words, sentences, or texts?
5. How do you think Google Translate helps you understand the meaning of new words?
6. Does Google Translate help you complete English assignments more quickly?
7. Have you ever encountered an inaccurate or confusing translation?
8. How do you ensure the meaning of a word from Google Translate is correct?
9. In your opinion, how should Google Translate be used in vocabulary learning to ensure it remains effective?

From the interviews conducted, students said that Google Translate was very helpful when they were learning English vocabulary. Many students explained that when they encounter new vocabulary in reading texts or exercises, they often feel confused about the meaning. By using Google Translate, they can quickly find the meaning of these words. This makes the process of learning English vocabulary easier for students, especially for those who still have limited English vocabulary. Students also mentioned that Google Translate is very useful when they are doing assignments that require them to understand English vocabulary. With Google Translate, students can immediately type the word into the application and get its meaning instantly. This helps them complete their assignments more quickly. With the help and role of Google Translate, students feel more confident when doing English exercises because they have a tool that can support their vocabulary comprehension, another advantage mentioned by students is that Google Translate saves time in the learning process. When students encounter vocabulary word they don't know, they can immediately look up the meaning by typing the word into Google Translate. The translation results appear quickly, allowing students to continue reading or answering questions without spending too much time looking up meanings. This convenience encourages students to explore new vocabulary and become more independent in their learning. However, the interview results also show that students still need guidance and assistance when using Google Translate. Some students simply copy the translation directly without understanding the correct use of the vocabulary. Therefore, students need to be guided and assisted on how to use Google Translate correctly and explained that some vocabulary words may have different meanings depending on the context in which they are used. With proper guidance, students can use Google Translate more effectively as a learning tool rather than relying on it without understanding the meaning

#### **4.5. Research findings**

Based on the results of the pre-test, post-test, and interviews, several important points were found, as follows:

1. Google Translate helped students understand the meaning of words more quickly.
2. Students can complete vocabulary assignments quickly.
3. Scores improved, indicating progress in vocabulary skills.
4. Some students still simply copied translations without understanding their meaning
5. Guidance from teachers is essential to ensure that Google Translate is used more effectively.

From the research findings, it can be concluded that Google Translate helped students learn and complete assignments using Google Translate. However, some students sometimes simply copy without understanding the vocabulary they are looking for. Therefore, students need teacher guidance to ensure effective use of Google Translate.

In general, the use of Google Translate in the process of learning English vocabulary has a positive impact on seventh grade students' understanding of the words they learn as well as on grades and interviews. However, the use of Google Translate still needs to be guided so that its use is correct.

#### **4.6. Discussion**

The findings indicate that Google Translate plays a positive role in supporting students' English vocabulary learning. The improvement in post-test results suggests that the use of this tool helps students better understand and retain vocabulary. This supports vocabulary acquisition theory, which emphasizes that repeated exposure and meaningful interaction with words enhance learning (Nation, 2022).

In addition, classroom observations and interviews show that Google Translate improves learning efficiency and student engagement. Students can quickly access word meanings, which allows them to complete tasks more effectively and remain active in the learning process. This finding is consistent with Technology-Enhanced Language Learning (TELL), where digital tools facilitate learner-centered and flexible learning environments (Lai & Zheng, 2021). The tool also promotes learner autonomy, as students independently explore vocabulary and monitor their understanding (Teng & Zhang, 2022).

However, the study also reveals several challenges. Some students tend to rely too much on direct translation without fully understanding the context, which may lead to superficial learning. This supports previous findings that overreliance on machine translation can limit deeper language processing (Lee, 2023). In addition, inaccuracies in translation may cause confusion, especially when words have multiple meanings (Alhaisoni, 2022).

Therefore, teacher guidance is essential to ensure the effective use of Google Translate. Teachers need to guide students to use the tool critically, understand context, and apply vocabulary in meaningful ways. Overall, Google Translate can be an effective vocabulary learning tool when used appropriately and supported by proper instruction.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Google Translate plays a meaningful role in supporting English vocabulary learning among junior high school students. The findings show that the use of this tool helps students understand word meanings more quickly, improves their vocabulary performance, and increases their confidence in completing English tasks. In addition, Google Translate promotes learner autonomy by enabling students to independently explore unfamiliar vocabulary.

However, the study also reveals that some students tend to rely excessively on direct translations without fully understanding the context, which may lead to superficial learning. This indicates that the effectiveness of Google Translate depends not only on its features but also on how it is used in the learning process.

Theoretically, this study contributes to vocabulary acquisition and Technology-Enhanced Language Learning (TELL) by demonstrating that digital translation tools can support vocabulary development when combined with meaningful engagement and metacognitive strategies. It also reinforces the idea that technology functions as a learning mediator rather than a replacement for cognitive processing.

Pedagogically, the findings highlight the importance of teacher guidance in integrating Google Translate into classroom practice. Teachers should encourage students to use the tool critically, verify meanings, and apply vocabulary in context. Proper integration of digital tools can create a more interactive, efficient, and autonomous learning environment.

Overall, when used wisely and supported by effective instruction, Google Translate can serve as a valuable tool to enhance vocabulary learning in the digital era.

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