

EFL LEARNERS' TRANSLATION STRATEGIES IN NARRATIVE TEXTS: A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF READING AND MEANING CONSTRUCTION

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ABSTRACT

Translation plays an important role in helping EFL students comprehend English texts; however, many junior high school students still experience difficulties in translating narrative texts accurately due to linguistic and contextual challenges. This study aimed to identify the translation strategies used by eighth-grade students in translating English narrative texts into Indonesian and to explore the challenges they encountered and the references they used during the translation process. This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design involving 52 eighth-grade students of MTs Al-Hidayah, Bitung Jaya. Data were collected through observation, translation tasks, and semi-structured interviews and analyzed using Miles and Huberman's Interactive Model, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings revealed that students employed four translation strategies: literal translation, idiomatic translation, addition, and omission. Literal translation and addition were the most frequently used strategies (26 occurrences each), followed by idiomatic translation (25) and omission (10). Students also encountered challenges related to limited vocabulary, grammatical confusion, and sentence construction, while relying on dictionaries, Google Translate, AI-based applications, teachers, and peers to support their translation process. These findings contribute to translation education at the junior high school level by providing insights into students' translation practices and may assist English teachers in designing more effective instructional strategies to improve students' translation competence, vocabulary mastery, and grammatical awareness.

Keywords: translation strategies, narrative text; English-Indonesian translation; qualitative study; EFL students

INTRODUCTION

English plays an important role in education because it enables students to access information and communicate in a global context. In Indonesia, English is taught as a foreign language at various educational levels, including junior high schools. To achieve effective communication, students are expected to develop four integrated language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Sukri et al., 2025). Among these skills, reading is particularly important because it allows students to understand textbooks, academic materials, and other written sources in English. (Huang, 2024) emphasizes that reading comprehension is essential for understanding academic texts and acquiring knowledge. Therefore, reading comprehension is a crucial component of English language learning.

However, understanding English texts remains a challenge for many EFL learners, particularly at the junior high school level. Students frequently experience difficulties due to limited vocabulary, differences in grammatical structures between English and Indonesian, and insufficient contextual understanding (Siahaan et al., 2025). Empirical studies have reported that these difficulties often result in inaccurate translations, misunderstanding of textual meaning, and low translation performance among junior high school students, especially when translating narrative texts (Rizki et al., 2024; Rosyadi et al., 2023). Such problems may hinder students from comprehending the intended meaning of English texts and negatively affect their learning process. Therefore, students need appropriate learning support and effective translation strategies to facilitate their comprehension of English texts.

One strategy that can facilitate students' comprehension of English texts is translation. Translation is the process of transferring meaning from a source language into a target language while preserving the intended message (Faridah et al., 2023; Pakaja et al., 2024). In EFL learning, translation helps students understand unfamiliar vocabulary, grammatical structures, and contextual meaning by connecting information from the source language to their native language (Ismayati et al., 2024; Memushaj & Sogutlu, 2025). Recent studies have also shown that translation remains an effective learning strategy in EFL classrooms, including technology-supported learning environments, as it enhances students' language comprehension and meaning transfer (Edelia & Maharsi, 2022; Hadi et al., 2025). Therefore, understanding how students apply translation during learning is important for improving translation instruction and supporting their English language development.

In junior high school contexts, narrative text is one of the most commonly taught text types in English classes. Narrative texts were selected in this study because they are part of the eighth-grade English curriculum and require students to comprehend vocabulary, grammatical structures, and contextual meaning in order to accurately transfer messages from English into Indonesian. Narrative texts are stories that aim to entertain readers while conveying moral values. According to (Suri et al., 2023), narrative texts generally consist of orientation, complication, and resolution. To translate narrative texts effectively, students need adequate vocabulary knowledge, grammatical competence, and contextual understanding. However, many students still experience difficulties in translating English narrative texts into Indonesian due to linguistic and contextual challenges (Rosyadi et al., 2023; Siahaan et al., 2025). These difficulties often result in translations that are inaccurate or unnatural and do not fully represent the meaning of the original text.

To overcome these challenges, students employ various translation strategies. Translation strategies refer to techniques or procedures used to solve problems encountered

during the translation process, including difficulties related to vocabulary, sentence structure, and meaning (Jupri et al., 2024; Rosalia, 2025; Rosyidy et al., 2025; Sinambela et al., 2024). Through these strategies, students attempt to produce more accurate and acceptable translations. Previous studies have identified several strategies commonly used by students, such as literal translation, idiomatic translation, omission, and addition (Anisah & Basri, 2023; Hidayanti et al., 2023). The choice of strategy often depends on students' language proficiency and the difficulties they encounter during translation tasks.

Several previous studies have investigated translation practices among EFL learners. Lisepung (2022) examined translation methods and found that free translation was the most dominant method used in translation activities. Meanwhile, Tasyakurna et al. (2023) focused on translation techniques and reported that students frequently employed techniques aimed at achieving meaning equivalence. In contrast, Rizki et al. (2024) investigated students' translation difficulties, revealing problems related to grammar, clarity, cohesion, and comprehension. Other studies have specifically explored translation strategies in narrative text translation, showing that students applied various strategies to overcome linguistic problems (Anisah & Basri, 2023; Hidayanti et al., 2023). Collectively, these studies provide valuable insights into translation methods, techniques, strategies, and difficulties among EFL learners.

Although these studies provide valuable insights into translation practices among EFL learners, they primarily examine translation methods, techniques, strategies, or students' translation difficulties as separate aspects. Few studies have comprehensively investigated the relationship between the translation strategies employed by students, the challenges they encounter during the translation process, and the resources they use to overcome those challenges. Furthermore, research focusing specifically on English–Indonesian narrative text translation among eighth-grade junior high school students remains scarce. Therefore, further investigation is needed to provide a more comprehensive understanding of students' translation practices in this context.

The novelty of this study lies in its comprehensive investigation of students' translation practices by examining not only the translation strategies they employ but also the challenges they encounter and the resources they use during the translation process. In addition, this study specifically focuses on English–Indonesian narrative text translation among eighth-grade junior high school students, providing a more comprehensive perspective on students' translation practices in this educational context.

Based on the identified research gap and the novelty of this study, the present study aims to identify the translation strategies employed by eighth-grade students in translating English narrative texts into Indonesian, determine the most frequently used translation strategy, and explore the challenges they encounter as well as the resources they use during the translation process.

METHOD

1. Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to investigate the translation strategies used by eighth-grade students in translating English narrative texts into Indonesian. A qualitative descriptive approach was considered appropriate because it aims to describe and interpret phenomena systematically based on participants' actual experiences (Adiningrat et al., 2025). Furthermore, qualitative research emphasizes understanding meaning from participants' perspectives and exploring phenomena within their natural context (Fahlefi & Ummah, 2024). Therefore, this research design was appropriate for exploring students' translation strategies, the challenges they encountered, and the resources they used during the translation process.

2. Participants / Subjects

The study was conducted at MTs Al-Hidayah, Bitung Jaya, involving 52 eighth-grade students aged approximately 13–14 years. The participants consisted of 31 male and 21 female students. According to the English teacher's assessment, the participants had relatively similar English proficiency levels appropriate for the eighth-grade curriculum. Purposive sampling was employed because all eighth-grade students had completed the narrative text unit as part of the English curriculum and had prior experience translating English narrative texts into Indonesian through classroom assignments. Therefore, they were considered suitable participants because they were able to provide relevant data to address the objectives of this study.

3. Instruments

Data were collected through translation tasks, classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews. The translation task served as the primary source of data and required students to translate an English narrative text into Indonesian. Classroom observations were conducted to examine students' translation behavior and strategy use during the translation process. In addition, semi-structured interviews consisting of eight questions were conducted to obtain deeper information regarding the challenges students encountered and the resources they used during the translation process. The observation checklist and interview guide were adapted from previous studies and validated by the research supervisor and an English teacher at MTs Al-Hidayah, Bitung Jaya, to ensure their relevance and appropriateness for addressing the research objectives. These data collection techniques are consistent with those employed in previous studies on students' translation strategies (Lisepung, 2022; Tasyakurna et al., 2023).

4. Data Collection Procedure

The data collection process was conducted in three stages. First, students completed a translation task by translating an English narrative text into Indonesian. During the translation activity, classroom observations were conducted to examine students' translation behavior and strategy use. After the translation task was completed, eight participants were purposively selected for semi-structured interviews based on the variation in the translation strategies they employed, their active participation during the translation process, and their ability to provide rich and relevant information related to the research objectives. The interviews, consisting of eight questions, were conducted to obtain more in-depth information about the challenges they encountered and the resources they used during the translation process.

5. Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles & Huberman (1994), which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. During the data reduction stage, students' translation outputs, observation notes, and interview responses were reviewed, coded, categorized, and organized according to the identified translation strategies, challenges, and resources. In the data display stage, the organized data were presented in tables and descriptive explanations to facilitate interpretation and identify emerging patterns. Finally, in the conclusion drawing stage, the findings from the three data sources were interpreted and compared to identify consistent patterns regarding students' translation strategies, the challenges they encountered, and the resources they used during the translation process.

6. Research Ethics

Prior to data collection, permission to conduct the study was obtained from the principal of MTs Al-Hidayah, Bitung Jaya. All participants were informed about the purpose and procedures of the study, and written informed consent was obtained before data collection. Participation was voluntary, and the confidentiality of the participants' identities was maintained throughout the study by using codes (e.g., Student 1, Student 2) instead of their real names in all research records and reports.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

Students' Translation Strategies (Observation Results)

The observation results showed that eighth-grade students employed four types of translation strategies in translating English narrative texts into Indonesian, namely literal

translation, idiomatic translation, omission, and addition. The frequency of each strategy is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Students' Translation Strategies

Translation Strategy	Frequency
Literal Translation	26
Addition	26
Idiomatic Translation	25
Omission	10

As shown in Table 1, literal translation and addition were the most frequently used strategies, with 26 occurrences each, followed by idiomatic translation (25 occurrences) and omission (10 occurrences). The total frequency exceeded the number of participants because individual students often employed more than one translation strategy during the translation process.

An example of literal translation was identified when students translated the sentence *"He usually went to sea to catch a fish"* into *"Dia biasanya pergi ke laut untuk menangkap ikan."*

An example of idiomatic translation was found when students translated *"The news ran fast in the town"* into *"Berita menyebar dengan sangat cepat di kota."*

An example of omission was observed when students translated *"A small village near the beach in West Sumatra"* into *"Desa kecil di Sumatra Barat,"* where the phrase *"near the beach"* was omitted.

An example of addition was identified when students translated *"Malin Kundang became wealthy"* into *"Malin Kundang menjadi kaya raya."*

Students' Challenges and Resources Used During the Translation Process (Interview Results)

The interview findings regarding students' challenges and the resources they used during the translation process are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Students' Challenges and Resources Used During the Translation Process

Findings	Interview Evidence
Limited vocabulary knowledge	Reported by Students 3 and 7
Grammatical confusion	Reported by Student 8
Difficulties in sentence construction	Reported by several participants
Dictionary	Used by Students 2 and 8
Google Translate	Used by Students 2
AI-based applications	Used by Students 8
Teacher	Consulted by several participants
Peers	Consulted by several participants

As presented in Table 2, students reported several challenges during the translation process, including limited vocabulary knowledge, grammatical confusion, and difficulties in sentence construction. They also reported using various resources, such as dictionaries, Google Translate, AI-based applications, teachers, and peers, to assist them in completing the translation task.

Regarding vocabulary, Student 3 stated, "*Saya menerjemahkan kata demi kata karena saya belum menguasai kosakata bahasa Inggris.*" Similarly, Student 7 explained, "*Kesulitannya ketika ada kosakata bahasa Inggris yang sulit ditemukan, dan dalam menyusun kalimat bahasa Inggris.*"

In terms of grammar, Student 8 stated, "*Biasanya saya suka keliru tentang verb 2 dan verb 3, karena saya hanya mengetahui tentang verb 1.*"

Regarding the resources used, Student 2 stated, "*Saya biasanya menggunakan kamus dan Google Translate untuk membantu menerjemahkan teks.*" Likewise, Student 8 explained, "*Biasanya saya melakukannya dengan menggunakan kamus besar bahasa Inggris ke Indonesia dan juga menggunakan AI.*" Several students also reported consulting their English teacher or discussing translation difficulties with classmates when they encountered unfamiliar vocabulary or grammatical problems.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that literal translation and addition were the most frequently employed translation strategies by eighth-grade students when translating English narrative texts into Indonesian. The predominance of literal translation suggests that students tended to rely on word-for-word translation to transfer meaning from the source language to the target language. This finding is supported by the interview results, which revealed that several students preferred translating word by word because of their limited vocabulary knowledge and grammatical competence. As junior high school EFL learners, the participants were still developing their English proficiency, making literal translation the most accessible strategy for understanding and transferring meaning. These findings are consistent with previous studies by (Anisah & Basri, 2023; Hidayanti et al., 2023), which reported that EFL learners commonly employ literal translation when they encounter linguistic difficulties. Similarly, (Shiddiq et al., 2023) found that students' limited vocabulary and grammatical competence often lead them to depend on literal translation strategies. In addition, the frequent use of the addition strategy indicates that students attempted to make their translations clearer and more natural for Indonesian readers by adding words or expressions that were not explicitly stated in the source text. This finding suggests that, despite their reliance on literal translation, some students also demonstrated an awareness of the need to improve the readability of the translated text.

The interview findings further revealed that students encountered several challenges during the translation process, particularly limited vocabulary knowledge, grammatical confusion, and difficulties in sentence construction. These challenges appear to explain why literal translation became the dominant strategy. Students with insufficient vocabulary often translated texts word for word because they were unable to identify more appropriate lexical or contextual equivalents. Likewise, grammatical difficulties, especially confusion regarding English verb forms, limited students' ability to produce accurate translations. These findings support those of (Rizki et al., 2024), who reported that junior high school students frequently experience problems related to grammar, comprehension, and sentence construction when translating English texts. Overall, these findings reinforce the view that learners' linguistic competence strongly influences the translation strategies they employ. Students with stronger vocabulary knowledge and grammatical awareness are more likely to use context-based translation strategies rather than relying primarily on literal translation.

Another important finding of this study is that students relied on various resources to overcome translation difficulties, including dictionaries, Google Translate, AI-based applications, teachers, and peers. The use of these resources indicates that students actively sought support when they encountered unfamiliar vocabulary or grammatical problems during the translation process. Digital tools, such as Google Translate and AI-based applications, helped students quickly identify word meanings and possible translations, while teachers and classmates provided additional explanations and feedback. These findings suggest that translation technologies can serve as valuable learning tools when used appropriately. However, students should be encouraged to evaluate and revise machine-generated translations critically because digital tools may produce translations that are linguistically accurate but contextually inappropriate. Therefore, teachers play an important role in guiding students to use Google Translate and AI as learning aids rather than as substitutes for their own translation skills.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that students' translation strategies are closely associated with the challenges they experience and the resources they use during the translation process. Limited vocabulary knowledge and grammatical competence encouraged students to rely primarily on literal translation, whereas dictionaries, digital translation tools, teachers, and peers served as important sources of support. From a pedagogical perspective, these findings imply that English teachers should provide explicit instruction on various translation strategies rather than relying solely on word-for-word translation activities. Classroom activities that emphasize vocabulary development, grammatical awareness, contextual meaning, and critical evaluation of machine-generated translations may help students develop more accurate, natural, and independent English–Indonesian translation skills. In addition, this study contributes to the development of

Translation Studies instruction by providing empirical evidence on how junior high school EFL students employ translation strategies, experience translation difficulties, and utilize technological as well as interpersonal resources during the translation process. These findings may serve as a reference for developing translation instruction that integrates linguistic competence, strategic translation skills, and responsible use of digital translation technologies.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the translation strategies employed by eighth-grade students in translating English narrative texts into Indonesian, as well as the challenges they encountered and the resources they used during the translation process. The findings indicate that students employed four translation strategies—literal translation, idiomatic translation, addition, and omission—with literal translation and addition being the most frequently used. Students also experienced challenges related to limited vocabulary knowledge, grammatical confusion, and sentence construction, while relying on dictionaries, Google Translate, AI-based applications, teachers, and peers to support their translation activities. Beyond identifying these findings, this study contributes to EFL learning and translation teaching by providing a more comprehensive understanding of students' translation practices. The findings highlight the importance of explicitly teaching translation strategies, strengthening students' vocabulary and grammatical competence, and guiding the appropriate use of digital translation technologies, such as Google Translate and AI-based applications, to support students' translation development.

This study has several limitations. It was conducted in a single junior high school with a limited number of participants and focused only on English–Indonesian narrative text translation. Therefore, the findings may not be generalizable to other educational contexts or text types. Future research is recommended to involve participants from different educational levels and institutions, investigate translation strategies across various text genres, and examine the effectiveness of instructional approaches or technology-assisted translation activities in improving students' translation competence.

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