

# Third-Year English Students' Learning Experience with Google Translate: A Qualitative Exploration

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## Abstract

This research explores the learning experiences of third-year English Study Program students in using Google Translate (GT) to support their academic language development, focusing on its practical use, impact on vocabulary and grammar, and related cognitive-emotional aspects. A qualitative approach was employed, using semi-structured interviews with ten participants. Thematic analysis revealed three key dimensions: engagement with the tool, academic development, and cognitive-emotional response. Participants reported that GT was highly practical, accessible, and useful for fostering independent learning. It contributed significantly to vocabulary learning and writing tasks, although grammar support was viewed with some caution. Students also showed awareness of GT's limitations and reflected critically on their dependence on the tool. The findings suggest that GT, when used wisely, enhances language learning and supports academic success. The research concludes that GT is a helpful supplementary tool, provided students maintain critical engagement and avoid overreliance. Future research may explore the long-term effects of GT use on language proficiency and student autonomy.

**Keywords:** Exploration; Google Translate; Learning Experience

## INTRODUCTION

The emergence of the Industrial Revolution 5.0 marks a transformative era where technological advancements increasingly shape educational practices. This shift also affects university students, including those in the English Research Program at Universitas Riau. As technology becomes more deeply embedded in education (Cancino & Panes, 2021), students are expected to engage with digital tools, such as Google Translate (GT), which now plays a prominent role in their academic lives. The integration of machine translation (MT) into language learning has modernized traditional instruction (Afiliani et al., 2024). MT tools, especially Google Translate, have become ubiquitous and easily accessible via browsers and mobile applications (Ducar & Schocket, 2018), allowing students to translate texts and messages instantly. According to Yanti & Martha Meka (2019) GT is one of the most widely used MT platforms and supports learners in reading comprehension, writing, and communication tasks (Stapleton & Leung Ka Kin, 2019). Despite its advantages, GT also has limitations, including mistranslations and a lack of sensitivity to linguistic nuance (Sutrisno, 2020).

GT's influence on students' learning experiences is multifaceted. On one hand, it offers academic support by improving grammatical accuracy, enriching vocabulary, and fostering independent learning (Anna, 2022; Handayani et al., 2022; Mohammed, 2023). On the other hand, concerns remain regarding overreliance, reduced creativity, and misinterpretation of idiomatic or cultural language (Moelyono et al., 2023). These dual effects make GT both a supportive and potentially problematic learning tool.

The concept of learning experience in this research encompasses how students interact with GT academically, cognitively, and emotionally. Escobar (2009) and Crombie (2006) emphasize that such experiences affect motivation and critical thinking. While GT can support autonomy and exploration, it may also challenge students when dealing with contextually rich language (Csizér, 2019; Matsumoto, 2007). Thus, exploring students' learning experiences with GT can provide valuable insights into how digital tools shape language development. Prior studies by (Afiliani et al., 2024; Anna, 2022; Krisdayanti, 2022; Nazmi, 2023; Nurhayati & Lahete, 2024) have examined GT's use in various educational contexts, mostly focusing on its benefits and challenges. However, there remains limited exploration of how GT specifically shapes the learning experiences of third-year English Research Program students at Universitas Riau. A preliminary survey conducted by the researcher found that these students frequently use GT to support their academic work, indicating the need to investigate its deeper impact on their learning journey.

Moreover, previous research on students' learning experiences with Google Translate (GT) has been conducted by Nazmi (2023), Afiliani et al. (2024), Krisdayanti (2022), Nurhayati & Lahete (2024), and Anna (2022). Nazmi's study discusses the dual role of GT in enhancing students' vocabulary and grammar while acknowledging its shortcomings in dealing with ambiguous or unclear translations. Afiliani et al. focus on GT's use in translation classes, stressing its practicality in completing assignments but also its weakness in capturing nuanced or cultural meanings. Krisdayanti highlights GT as a supplementary aid rather than a central tool, pointing to its role in supporting rather than shaping students' independent learning processes. Meanwhile, Nurhayati and Lahete explore students' perceptions of GT, finding it helpful for quick access and convenience, though limited in promoting deeper linguistic competence. Anna (2022) emphasizes GT's efficiency in saving time and producing fast translations but critiques its inability to handle idiomatic or contextual subtleties.

Despite these studies, the specific ways in which Google Translate shapes the learning experience of third-year students in English Study Programs at Universitas Riau remain underexplored. This study aims to address this gap by exploring the learning experience of the third-year English Study Program students at Universitas Riau in using Google Translate. This research, therefore, aims to explore how the learning experience of these students in using GT, focusing on their academic, behavioral, and engagement with the tool.

## METHOD

This research employed a qualitative research design, which allows for a deep exploration of individual experiences in a specific context. According to Gay et al. (2011), qualitative research involves collecting, analyzing, and interpreting narrative or visual data to develop insights into a phenomenon. In this case, the focus is on understanding the learning experiences of third-year English Research Program students at Universitas Riau in using Google Translate.

The primary instrument in this research was a semi-structured interview guide developed to explore students' academic, behavioral, and emotional experiences with Google Translate. The guide was structured around three key dimensions: Engagement with the Tool, Academic Development, and Cognitive and Emotional Response. Semi-structured interviews allowed for consistent questioning across participants while providing the flexibility to probe deeper into individual responses. Interviews were conducted with purposively selected sixth-semester students from the English Research Program at Universitas Riau, ensuring that participants had sufficient academic exposure to reflect meaningfully. Each interview lasted around 30–45 minutes, was recorded, transcribed verbatim, and followed by member checking to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the data.

Thematic analysis with a deductive coding approach was used to analyze the data, guided by the research framework. NVivo software supported the coding and organization of data, allowing the researcher to categorize responses under the three main dimensions and to identify recurring patterns. The software's features enabled better data visualization and triangulation, which helped the researcher uncover detailed insights into how students engaged with, benefited from, and reflected on their use of Google Translate in their academic experiences.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

This chapter presents the findings of the research, focusing on how third-year English Research Program students experienced the use of Google Translate (GT) in their academic routines. The data are organized into three main dimensions: Engagement with the Tool, Academic Development, and Cognitive & Emotional Responses. These dimensions emerged from thematic analysis of the interview data and are presented below with supporting participant quotes and visualized in tabular format for clarity.

#### Engagement with the Tool

Participants reported frequent use of GT in their daily academic activities. It was valued for its practicality in assisting with assignments, ease of access across devices, and role in fostering independent learning. Although GT was seen as a helpful tool, students showed varying levels of reliance and personal approaches to using it effectively.

**Table 1.** Coded Interview Data on Students' Engagement with Tool

Transcript Excerpt	Interpretation	Sub-Theme
"Aku gunain Google Translate untuk menerjemahkan teks panjang..." (P2)	GT helps in translating complex texts and understanding vocabulary.	Practical Use
"Langsung nyari artinya." (P6)	GT is used for quick vocabulary lookup during assignments.	Practical Use
"Langsung copy-paste aja ke Google Translate." (P5)	Students use GT for fast translation of difficult texts.	Practical Use
"Aksesnya yang paling mudah..." (P1)	GT is favored due to its easy and fast accessibility.	Ease of Access
"Cepat, easy to use..." (P4)	Students appreciate GT's user-friendly design.	Ease of Access
"Dengan adanya Wi-Fi... semudah itu mengakses Google Translate." (P5)	GT is accessible anytime with available devices and internet.	Ease of Access
"Aku lebih mandiri... tidak memerlukan bantuan orang lain." (P6)	GT supports autonomous learning.	Independent Learning
"Sendiri sih, karena... sangat mudah." (P2)	Students can use GT without external help.	Independent Learning
"Sempat bikin nggak mandiri, tapi juga bikin mandiri." (P4)	GT's convenience might reduce effort at first, but promotes independence over time.	Independent Learning

#### Academic Development

GT was found to significantly support vocabulary learning, provide limited grammar assistance, and serve as a useful drafting tool before revisions. Students often revised GT's output to improve accuracy, demonstrating language awareness and critical engagement with the tool.

**Table 2.** Coded Interview Data on Students' Academic Development

Transcript Excerpt	Interpretation	Sub-Theme
"Untuk belajar vocabulary..." (P1)	GT is a tool for expanding vocabulary knowledge.	Vocabulary Improvement

"Membantu menemukan arti dan sinonim kata." (P2)	GT helps students discover word meanings and synonyms.	Vocabulary Improvement
"Oh artinya ini ternyata." (P3)	GT supports vocabulary learning through immediate understanding.	Vocabulary Improvement
"Cara penggunaannya di kalimat juga." (P6)	GT helps with contextual usage of new vocabulary.	Vocabulary Improvement
"Entah itu tenses atau apa..." (P3)	GT helps with basic grammar understanding.	Grammar Support
"Translate ke Indonesia, lalu balik lagi ke Inggris." (P4)	GT assists in refining grammar through indirect translation practice.	Grammar Support
"Grammar biasa pakai Grammarly." (P5)	GT is not preferred for grammar checking.	Grammar Support
"Tidak... kadang juga suka keliru." (P10)	GT is seen as unreliable for accurate grammar correction.	Grammar Support
"Aku ubah supaya lebih alami." (P2)	Students edit GT output for natural-sounding results.	Editing Translation
"Ngeluarin... uncommon words." (P5)	Students adjust word choice from GT translations.	Editing Translation
"Cross-check lagi pakai Grammarly." (P3)	GT output is verified through other tools.	Editing Translation
"Diperhatikan dulu, benar nggak." (P10)	Students critically check structure and accuracy.	Editing Translation

### Cognitive & Emotional Responses

Students expressed a mix of trust, caution, and reflection regarding GT. They were aware of its limitations, found it useful for building confidence, and recognized the risk of over-dependence. Many reflected on their evolving reliance on the tool, indicating a conscious effort to balance its use with other strategies.

**Table 3.** Coded Interview Data on Students' Cognitive & Emotional Responses

Transcript Excerpt	Interpretation	Sub-Theme
"Banyak juga homonim yang salah diterjemahkan." (P1)	Students are aware of GT's mistranslations.	Awareness of Weakness
"Aku cek ulang per kalimat..." (P2)	Students double-check translations for accuracy.	Awareness of Weakness
"Keluar dari konteks... dikoreksi dosen." (P6)	GT outputs sometimes lack contextual fit.	Awareness of Weakness
"Susah untuk specifically what we want." (P10)	GT lacks precision in complex contexts.	Awareness of Weakness
"Lebih percaya diri untuk menggunakan kata-kata baru." (P1)	GT helps increase confidence in using English.	Motivation & Confidence
"Aku lebih semangat ngerjain tugas." (P2)	GT motivates students to engage with tasks.	Motivation & Confidence
"Membangun semangat aku." (P6)	GT's practicality boosts motivation.	Motivation & Confidence
"Nggak bikin takut adanya salah..." (P10)	GT reduces anxiety in language use.	Motivation & Confidence
"Berusaha untuk nggak terlalu tergantung." (P2)	Students try to manage reliance on GT.	Dependence & Reflection
"Sempat bikin nggak mandiri..." (P4)	GT caused initial dependence but led to more independence.	Dependence & Reflection
"Ingin memastikan... banyak kosa kata baru..." (P6)	Heavy GT use stems from wanting accuracy.	Dependence & Reflection
"Langsung full langsung enggak usah pakai." (P8)	Students stop using GT if it proves inaccurate.	Dependence & Reflection
"Kurang kepercayaannya... untuk hal-hal yang simple aja." (P1)	GT is used selectively based on task complexity.	Dependence & Reflection

## Discussion

The findings of this research highlight that Google Translate (GT) plays a pivotal role in shaping third-year English students' learning experiences by functioning as a practical, accessible, and self-directed tool. Students engaged with GT to support various academic tasks such as reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and writing assignments, reflecting a shift toward learner autonomy. These results align with Al-Mansouri (2024) and Bakonyi et al. (2017), who argue that digital tools empower students through user-friendly features and real-time assistance. GT's practicality also fostered independent learning, although some students initially experienced dependency before developing more strategic use over time. From an academic development perspective, GT contributed significantly to vocabulary enrichment and, to a lesser extent, grammar support. While students commonly relied on GT to understand and apply new vocabulary supporting Handayani et al. (2022) and Wirantaka & Fijanah (2022) their approach to grammar was more cautious, often involving back-and-forth translation and critical editing. Importantly, the act of revising GT output signals learners' critical language awareness, suggesting that GT functions best as a scaffold rather than a standalone solution. Emotionally and cognitively, students reported increased motivation and confidence due to GT's immediate support, yet also demonstrated awareness of its limitations. This reflective use echoes the need for balanced digital engagement as emphasized by Moelyono et al. (2023) and Fitriani & Prodjosantoso (2024).

## CONCLUSION

This research aimed to explore the learning experiences of third-year English Research Program students in using Google Translate (GT) as a language learning tool. The research revealed that GT plays a supportive role in students' academic activities, particularly in reading comprehension, vocabulary building, and writing. Students found GT highly practical, accessible, and efficient for completing assignments and understanding texts. Its user-friendly interface and immediate feedback promoted more independent and autonomous learning, fulfilling the dimension of engagement with the tool. In terms of academic development, GT was especially effective in enhancing students' vocabulary knowledge and, to some extent, grammar awareness. While many participants used GT to explore word meanings and improve sentence construction, they also demonstrated critical engagement by revising and refining GT's output, rather than relying on it passively. Cognitively and emotionally, students were aware of GT's limitations, particularly in handling idiomatic or context-sensitive language. Nonetheless, GT had a positive impact on their motivation and confidence, especially when completing complex tasks. Overall, the research successfully achieved its objective by uncovering the nuanced and multifaceted ways students engage with GT in their academic routines. It confirms that GT is a valuable tool when used thoughtfully and with awareness of its limitations. Future research may explore the long-term impact of GT use on language proficiency or compare GT use among students with different proficiency levels to further understand its role in digital-assisted language learning.

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