TEACHING TRANSLATION SKILLS TO EFL LEARNERS: CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

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Abstract

Translation is an essential skill for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, particularly in multilingual contexts where students frequently move between their first language and English. Despite its importance, teaching translation presents numerous challenges, including linguistic interference, limited vocabulary, insufficient cultural knowledge, and overreliance on machine translation tools. This study investigates the major difficulties encountered by EFL learners in translation courses and explores effective pedagogical solutions. A mixed-method approach was employed involving questionnaires, classroom observations, and translation tasks administered to undergraduate EFL students. The findings indicate that lexical and cultural translation issues represent the most common challenges. The study suggests that task-based translation activities, collaborative learning, authentic materials, and guided use of technology can significantly improve learners' translation competence. The findings contribute to translation pedagogy by offering practical recommendations for instructors seeking to enhance translation instruction in EFL settings.

Keywords: translation pedagogy, EFL learners, translation competence, translation challenges, translation teaching.

Аннотация

Перевод является важным навыком для изучающих английский язык как иностранный (EFL), особенно в многоязычной среде, где учащиеся регулярно переходят между родным и английским языками. Однако обучение переводу связано с рядом трудностей, включая языковую интерференцию, ограниченный словарный запас, недостаточные культурные знания и чрезмерную зависимость от машинного перевода. Цель данного исследования — выявить основные проблемы, с которыми сталкиваются студенты EFL, и определить эффективные педагогические решения. В исследовании использовался смешанный метод, включающий анкетирование, наблюдение и переводческие задания. Результаты показали, что лексические и культурные трудности являются наиболее распространенными. Исследование демонстрирует, что задания, основанные на коммуникативных задачах, совместное обучение, аутентичные материалы и грамотное использование технологий способствуют развитию переводческой компетенции.

Ключевые слова: педагогика перевода, студенты EFL, переводческая компетенция, трудности перевода, обучение переводу.

Annotatsiya

Tarjima ko'nikmasi ingliz tilini chet tili sifatida o'rganuvchilar (EFL) uchun muhim ahamiyatga ega, ayniqsa ko'p tilli muhitlarda talabalar ona tili va ingliz tili o'rtasida muntazam ravishda o'tib turadilar. Biroq tarjimani o'qitish lingvistik interferensiya, lug'at boyligining yetarli emasligi, madaniy bilimlarning cheklanganligi hamda mashina tarjimasiga haddan tashqari tayanish kabi muammolarni keltirib chiqaradi. Ushbu tadqiqot EFL talabalari duch keladigan asosiy qiyinchiliklarni aniqlash va

samarali pedagogik yechimlarni o‘rganishga qaratilgan. Tadqiqotda aralash metodologiya qo‘llanilib, so‘rovnomalar, sinf kuzatuvlari va tarjima topshiriqlari orqali ma’lumotlar to‘plandi. Natijalar leksik va madaniy tarjima muammolari eng ko‘p uchrashini ko‘rsatdi. Tadqiqot natijalari vazifaga asoslangan faoliyatlar, hamkorlikda o‘rganish, autentik materiallardan foydalanish va texnologiyalardan maqsadli foydalanish tarjima kompetensiyasini rivojlantirishini tasdiqladi.

Kalit so‘zlar: tarjima pedagogikasi, EFL talabalari, tarjima kompetensiyasi, tarjima muammolari, tarjimani o‘qitish.

Introduction

Translation has become an increasingly important component of foreign language education due to globalization, international communication, and the growing demand for multilingual professionals. In EFL contexts, translation serves not only as a linguistic exercise but also as a means of developing intercultural awareness and communicative competence. Many universities include translation courses in their language programs to prepare students for professional and academic communication. Despite its significance, translation instruction remains challenging. Students often struggle with grammatical structures, lexical equivalence, idiomatic expressions, and cultural references. Additionally, the widespread availability of machine translation tools has transformed the way students approach translation tasks. Therefore, understanding the difficulties faced by EFL learners and identifying effective instructional strategies are essential for improving translation education. This study aims to investigate the major challenges encountered by EFL learners in translation courses and propose practical solutions for enhancing translation instruction.

Literature Review

Translation competence has been widely discussed in translation studies and applied linguistics. According to Mildred Larson (1998), effective translation involves transferring meaning rather than simply replacing words from one language with another. This process requires linguistic, cultural, and communicative competence. Peter Newmark (1988) emphasized the importance of balancing semantic accuracy and communicative effectiveness. He argued that translators must consider both the linguistic structure and cultural context of the source text. Research by Juliane House (2015) highlights the role of cultural knowledge in translation quality. Students often experience difficulties when translating culture-specific items because equivalent concepts may not exist in the target language.

Several studies have identified common translation challenges among EFL learners. These include vocabulary limitations, grammatical interference from the first language, difficulties with idiomatic expressions, and lack of contextual understanding. Recent studies also note the influence of machine translation tools, which may improve efficiency but can reduce students’ critical engagement with language when used without guidance.

Modern translation pedagogy increasingly advocates communicative and task-based approaches. Collaborative translation projects, peer feedback, and authentic translation tasks have been shown to promote learner autonomy and professional competence.

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-method research design to gain a comprehensive understanding of the challenges EFL learners encounter when developing translation skills and to identify effective pedagogical solutions. The mixed-method approach was selected because it allowed the researcher to collect both quantitative and qualitative data, providing a more complete picture of learners’ experiences and performance in translation tasks. Quantitative data were gathered through questionnaires, while qualitative insights were obtained through classroom observations and analysis of students’ translation assignments.

The participants of the study consisted of 40 undergraduate students enrolled in an English Language and Translation course at a university in Uzbekistan. The participants were selected through

convenience sampling because they were readily available and actively engaged in translation-related coursework. According to institutional placement records, the students' English proficiency levels ranged from B1 to B2 on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The participants had previously completed several language skills courses but had limited experience with formal translation training.

Data collection was conducted over an eight-week period during a regular academic semester. At the beginning of the study, students completed a structured questionnaire designed to investigate their perceptions of translation difficulties, confidence levels, preferred learning strategies, and use of translation technologies. The questionnaire consisted of both closed-ended and open-ended items, allowing participants to provide detailed responses regarding their experiences with translation tasks.

In addition to the questionnaire, systematic classroom observations were carried out throughout the study period. The researcher observed students during individual and group translation activities, paying particular attention to their problem-solving strategies, interaction patterns, use of reference materials, and responses to feedback. Observation notes were recorded after each session and later analyzed to identify recurring themes related to translation learning.

Furthermore, students completed a series of English-Uzbek and Uzbek-English translation tasks involving authentic texts from educational, cultural, and everyday communication contexts. These tasks included short articles, dialogues, advertisements, and informational texts. The translation products were collected and analyzed to identify common errors and patterns of difficulty. Special attention was given to lexical choices, grammatical accuracy, cultural adaptation, idiomatic language, and overall communicative effectiveness.

The quantitative data obtained from questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques, including frequencies and percentages. The qualitative data collected through observations and translation tasks were analyzed through thematic analysis. Similar responses and recurring translation issues were grouped into categories, allowing the researcher to identify the most significant challenges faced by learners. By triangulating data from multiple sources, the study increased the reliability and validity of the findings and provided a more comprehensive understanding of translation learning in an EFL context.

Results

The findings of the study revealed that EFL learners experience a variety of difficulties when performing translation tasks, with lexical, cultural, grammatical, and technological factors emerging as the most significant challenges. Analysis of the questionnaire responses, classroom observations, and translation assignments demonstrated that these difficulties often occurred simultaneously and influenced the overall quality of students' translations.

One of the most frequently reported challenges was related to vocabulary and lexical equivalence. More than four-fifths of the participants indicated that they struggled to find appropriate target-language equivalents for specialized terms, phrasal verbs, idiomatic expressions, and context-dependent vocabulary items. Analysis of students' translation assignments confirmed these perceptions. Many students relied on literal translation strategies when they were unable to identify suitable lexical alternatives, which often resulted in unnatural or inaccurate translations. During classroom observations, students frequently consulted dictionaries and online translation tools but still experienced uncertainty when selecting the most appropriate translation option. These findings suggest that vocabulary knowledge plays a crucial role in translation competence and that lexical deficiencies significantly affect learners' performance.

Cultural translation difficulties represented another major challenge. Approximately three-quarters of the participants reported uncertainty when translating culture-specific references, traditions, social norms, and expressions that lacked direct equivalents in the target language. Translation task

analysis revealed that students often omitted cultural references or translated them literally, reducing the communicative effectiveness of the target text. Classroom observations further showed that students rarely considered the cultural expectations of target-language readers when making translation decisions. This finding highlights the importance of intercultural competence as an essential component of translation education.

Grammatical interference from the learners' first language also emerged as a significant issue. More than two-thirds of the participants demonstrated difficulties with sentence structure, word order, tense selection, and syntactic organization. Errors were particularly evident in translations from Uzbek into English, where students often transferred grammatical patterns from their native language. Such interference frequently resulted in awkward sentence constructions and reduced the naturalness of translated texts. Observation data indicated that students tended to focus primarily on individual words rather than on the overall grammatical structure and communicative purpose of the text.

The study additionally revealed a high level of dependence on machine translation technologies. A substantial proportion of participants reported using online translation tools regularly when completing translation assignments. While these technologies helped students complete tasks more quickly, classroom observations suggested that many learners accepted machine-generated translations without critically evaluating their accuracy or appropriateness. Analysis of student work showed that machine translation often produced errors involving context, idiomatic language, and cultural references, which students frequently overlooked. However, students who received guidance on post-editing and critical evaluation demonstrated greater awareness of translation quality and produced more accurate final texts.

The findings also highlighted several effective instructional practices. Students who participated in collaborative translation activities demonstrated stronger problem-solving skills and greater confidence in discussing translation alternatives. Peer interaction encouraged learners to justify their translation choices and consider multiple perspectives when addressing linguistic and cultural challenges. Similarly, authentic translation tasks were found to increase learner engagement and promote the application of translation strategies in realistic contexts. These activities helped students move beyond word-for-word translation and develop a more communicative approach to meaning transfer.

Overall, the results indicate that successful translation instruction requires attention to both linguistic and cultural dimensions of language learning. While vocabulary limitations and grammatical difficulties remain important obstacles, the findings suggest that carefully designed pedagogical interventions, including collaborative learning, authentic materials, and guided use of technology, can significantly improve EFL learners' translation competence and confidence.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide important insights into the challenges that EFL learners encounter when developing translation competence. The results indicate that translation is a multidimensional process requiring not only linguistic knowledge but also cultural awareness, critical thinking skills, and strategic decision-making abilities. The prevalence of lexical difficulties among participants suggests that vocabulary knowledge remains one of the most influential factors affecting translation performance. Students frequently struggled with phrasal verbs, idiomatic expressions, and specialized terminology, which supports previous research emphasizing the central role of lexical competence in successful translation. When learners lacked sufficient vocabulary knowledge, they often resorted to literal translation strategies, resulting in translations that were grammatically acceptable but semantically inaccurate or unnatural.

The findings also highlight the significant role of culture in translation. Translation is not merely the transfer of words from one language to another; rather, it involves transferring meaning across

different cultural contexts. The difficulties participants experienced with culture-specific references demonstrate that linguistic competence alone is insufficient for producing effective translations. Learners need opportunities to develop intercultural communicative competence so that they can recognize cultural nuances and make appropriate translation choices. These findings support the view that translation instruction should integrate cultural studies and authentic materials that expose learners to real-life language use and cultural diversity.

Another important finding concerns grammatical interference from the learners' first language. The analysis revealed that many students transferred syntactic patterns from Uzbek into English, particularly when translating complex sentences. Such interference is common among EFL learners and reflects the natural influence of the first language during second-language processing. However, excessive reliance on first-language structures can negatively affect translation quality and communicative effectiveness. Therefore, translation instructors should design activities that encourage learners to compare language structures, identify differences between source and target languages, and develop greater awareness of target-language conventions.

The growing influence of technology in translation education also emerged as a significant theme. Most participants reported regular use of machine translation tools such as Google Translate and artificial intelligence-based translation systems. While these tools provide immediate access to translation suggestions and can support learning when used appropriately, the findings indicate that many students rely on them uncritically. This dependence may hinder the development of independent translation skills and reduce learners' engagement with the translation process. At the same time, the study found that students who were trained in post-editing techniques and critical evaluation of machine-generated output produced more accurate translations. This finding suggests that technology should not be viewed as a threat to translation education but rather as a resource that requires careful pedagogical integration.

The effectiveness of collaborative translation activities observed during the study further supports learner-centered approaches to translation instruction. Students who worked in pairs or small groups demonstrated greater confidence, generated a wider range of translation solutions, and engaged in meaningful discussions about language choices. Such interaction encouraged reflective thinking and helped learners become more aware of the complexities involved in translation. These results align with social constructivist perspectives, which emphasize the role of collaboration and interaction in knowledge construction.

From a pedagogical perspective, the findings suggest several implications for translation educators. First, translation courses should incorporate authentic texts from diverse genres and contexts to expose learners to realistic translation challenges. Second, explicit instruction on translation strategies, cultural adaptation, and idiomatic language should be integrated into classroom practice. Third, collaborative learning opportunities should be expanded to encourage peer support and critical discussion. Finally, educators should provide training on the effective and ethical use of machine translation technologies, helping students develop post-editing and evaluation skills that are increasingly important in contemporary translation practice.

Conclusion

This study examined the major challenges faced by EFL learners in developing translation skills and explored potential solutions for improving translation instruction. The findings revealed that students experience difficulties in several interconnected areas, including lexical selection, cultural adaptation, grammatical accuracy, and the effective use of translation technologies. Among these challenges, vocabulary limitations and cultural translation issues emerged as the most significant factors affecting translation quality.

The study confirms that translation competence extends beyond linguistic knowledge and requires the integration of multiple competencies, including communicative, intercultural, strategic, and technological skills. Effective translation instruction should therefore adopt a holistic approach that addresses these various dimensions simultaneously. Traditional methods that focus primarily on word-for-word translation are insufficient for preparing learners to meet the demands of contemporary multilingual communication.

The findings further demonstrate the value of learner-centered instructional practices. Collaborative translation activities, authentic materials, and guided reflection encouraged students to engage more actively with the translation process and develop greater confidence in their abilities. Furthermore, the responsible integration of machine translation technologies can enhance learning outcomes when students are taught to critically evaluate and revise machine-generated translations rather than simply accepting them as accurate.

In today's globalized world, translation skills are increasingly important for academic, professional, and intercultural communication. Universities and language programs therefore have a responsibility to equip students with the competencies necessary to function effectively in multilingual environments. By adopting innovative teaching approaches and integrating technology thoughtfully, educators can help learners become more competent, confident, and reflective translators.

Although the present study contributes to the growing body of research on translation pedagogy, several limitations should be acknowledged. The study was conducted with a relatively small sample of students from a single university, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research could involve larger participant groups from different educational contexts and examine the long-term effects of specific translation teaching interventions. Additionally, further investigation into the role of artificial intelligence and machine translation technologies in translator training would provide valuable insights for both researchers and practitioners.

Overall, this study highlights the importance of developing comprehensive translation instruction that combines linguistic knowledge, cultural awareness, collaborative learning, and technological competence. Such an approach can significantly enhance EFL learners' translation abilities and better prepare them for the challenges of communication in an increasingly interconnected world.

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