

The use of google translate by secondary school ESL learners in English language learning

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Abstract: This study explores how secondary school learners of English as a Second Language (ESL) use Google Translate (GT) in their language learning. Although digital tools are widely used in education, most existing research focuses on university students. Less is known about how ESL learners in secondary education use translation tools, especially those who are still developing their language skills. This study addresses that gap by investigating the perceived benefits and challenges of GT among secondary school learners. A qualitative research design was employed, grounded in the Technology Acceptance Model by Davis. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with ten ESL learners aged 15 to 16 from a private secondary school in Kuala Selangor, Malaysia. The participants' English proficiency ranged from average to low. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed thematically using Yin's Five Phases of Data Analysis. Findings showed that learners used GT for its convenience and support in comprehension, particularly when reading or writing in English. However, participants also reported challenges related to accuracy, such as grammatical errors and mistranslations. Some learners developed an over-reliance on GT, using it without critical engagement. Despite these concerns, many participants demonstrated an awareness of its limitations and employed strategies such as cross-checking translations with other tools. These findings suggest that while GT can be a valuable resource, it should be used with guidance. Teachers play a key role in helping students apply it critically and responsibly. This study contributes practical insights for educators and adds to the growing body of research on technology-enhanced language learning, particularly for ESL learners in secondary education.

Keywords: *ESL learners, Google translate, Language learning strategies, Machine translation, Secondary education, Technology acceptance model.*

1. Introduction

Translation has long played a key role in language learning. The Grammar-Translation Method, for example, uses the learner's first language (L1) to support learning a second language (L2), helping with understanding and accuracy. Selvarajasingam, et al. [1] stressed that students' understanding in language learning are needed desperately so that the quality standard of reading comprehension improves. Similarly, Nair et al. advocate that students with average writing abilities and low writing abilities require effective methods to improve their writing. Today, digital technology has reshaped how languages are learned, with tools like Google Translate (GT) becoming widely used. GT offers quick access to translations, supports comprehension, and provides learners with practical help for reading and writing tasks. As part of the shift toward digital learning, GT is now common in many classrooms. Its popularity reflects broader trends in education, where students use online tools to support independent

learning. GT represents a modern form of translation assistance that is available across devices and platforms. It is especially appealing for learners who need immediate help with vocabulary or meaning. As such, GT has become a regular part of many students' language learning routines. This raises questions about how it is used and how it affects their learning.

1.1. Problem Statement

Most studies on GT in language learning focus on university students or adult learners. These studies highlight its role in supporting academic writing, vocabulary learning, and reading comprehension. However, there is limited understanding of how secondary school learners use GT. These learners are at a different stage of cognitive and language development. Their use of digital tools may differ from that of older learners. As GT becomes more common in classrooms, it is important to understand how it supports or challenges secondary school learners. This study explores the experiences of secondary school English as a Second Language (ESL) learners with GT, focusing on the benefits and challenges they face in using it for English language learning.

The purpose of this study is to explore and understand the experiences of secondary school level ESL learners in their use of GT in the English language learning process. The study will contribute to a deeper understanding of how secondary school ESL learners engage with GT in their language learning journey. By exploring the experiences of these learners, the study provides valuable insights into the role of machine-assisted translation tools in education. The findings of this study will assist educators and language practitioners to better adapt their teaching methods to the specific needs of secondary school ESL learners using GT. This study also contributes to the field of technology-enhanced language education by offering practical insights into the effective use of translation tools in the classroom.

1.2. Research Questions

Two research questions are formulated based on the purpose of the study:

RQ1 What benefits do secondary school ESL learners perceive of using GT in English language learning?

RQ2 What challenges do secondary school ESL learners face when using GT in English language learning?

2. Literature Review

The use of GT in language education has influenced how students learn, particularly ESL learners. This literature review examines previous studies on GT, focusing on its perceived benefits and challenges. It provides a foundation for understanding the role of GT in the learning experiences of secondary school ESL learners.

This study is based on the theory of Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) developed by Davis [2]. TAM explains how users come to accept and use technology. The model proposes that an individual's intention to use a technology is determined by two primary constructs:

- *Perceived Usefulness* (PU): The degree to which a person believes using a technology will enhance their performance or achieve a specific goal.
- *Perceived Ease of Use* (PEOU): The degree to which a person believes using a technology will be free from effort.

TAM [2] offers a valuable framework for examining ESL learners' experiences with GT by focusing on *Perceived Usefulness* (PU) and *Perceived Ease of Use* (PEOU). This dual focus helps identify both the benefits that encourage GT usage and the challenges that hinder its effective integration. Applying TAM [2] allows for a nuanced understanding of how ESL learners interact with GT.

2.1. Benefits of Google Translate in Language Learning

Studies across different educational contexts consistently show that learners perceive GT as highly beneficial for various aspects of English language learning. One key benefit is its convenience and accessibility. Lam [3] and Yuliani and Haura [4] found that students valued GT for its speed, availability across devices, and usefulness in completing assignments. Similarly, Ghorianfar, et al. [5] reported that 88% of Afghan students agreed GT saved time and provided fast translations. Pratiwi and Rakhmasari [6] highlighted that first-year university students favoured GT for its quick, direct translations in both basic comprehension and academic tasks. Supporting these findings, Margiana and Syafryadin [7] reported that third semester college students viewed GT positively because of its fast responses and ease of use, making it more appealing than traditional dictionaries.

Another common benefit is GT's role in vocabulary learning. Kai and Hua [8] in their study of rural Malaysian learners, found significant improvement in vocabulary test scores after GT use. Students reported similarities between English and their first language helped them remember new words. Habeeb and Muhammedb [9] and Samir, et al. [10] found that students used GT to understand unfamiliar words and expand vocabulary. Afiliani, et al. [11] further supported this view, noting that GT helped students to comprehend difficult texts and translate unfamiliar vocabulary.

GT also supports writing and grammar. In terms of writing and grammar. Several studies show that it helps learners to produce more accurate and complex sentences. Stapleton [12] found that GT-translated texts often had stronger vocabulary and fewer errors compared to students' original writing depending on context and editing. Alharbi [13] reported improved writing scores and sentence complexity among university students in Saudi Arabia using GT. Perdana and Arifani [14] found that first year university students in Indonesia improved in vocabulary and sentence construction. Van Nguyen [15] reported that GT helped Vietnamese students brainstorm and revise paragraphs more efficiently, although significant editing was still needed. Supporting these findings, Tsai [16] found that GT helped less proficient, non-English major students in China revise and enrich their writing, and they generally held more positive attitudes toward GT than their English major counterparts.

Another benefit is learner confidence and autonomy. GT allows students to feel more independent in their learning. Chompurach [17] observed that Thai EFL university students used GT to understand grammar structures and post-edited outputs, which gave them a sense of control. Similarly, Wirantaka and Fijanah [18] reported that GT enabled private university students from Yogyakarta to check spelling, pronunciation, and grammar without needing assistance from teacher. Boukhelef [19] reported that GT was particularly beneficial for lower proficiency undergraduates in Algeria, helping them complete tasks more independently. GT also contributes to learner confidence in Sun, et al. [20] who found GT improved translation quality and encouraged students to apply editing strategies.

These findings highlight how GT's perceived usefulness and ease of use align closely with the TAM [2] framework. Learners adopt GT because it enhances their performance across language skills, reduces anxiety, and supports independent learning.

2.2. Challenges of Google Translate in Language Learning

Despite its benefits, studies consistently report accuracy as a major challenge in the use of GT, particularly when translating complex grammar, context-dependent language and nuanced meanings. Pham, et al. [21] found that GT frequently produced errors in sentences with embedded grammatical structures and meaning-sensitive expressions. Similarly, Winiharti, et al. [22] reported that GT's literal translations failed to capture syntactic and semantic nuances, resulting in awkward or inaccurate outputs. These issues affect the quality and flow of translated texts, making GT less suitable for advanced academic writing.

Another challenge is GT's inconsistent performance across language tasks. Sun, et al. [20] found that 65% of GT errors were lexical and required major editing to ensure clarity. Errors were more common in idiomatic or complex language use. Boukhelef [19] and Chompurach [17] reported that students perceived GT as unreliable when translating idiomatic expressions and extended academic

texts, which often required manual correction. Van Nguyen [15] observed that 50% of students revised GT outputs due to grammatical and lexical inaccuracies. Similarly, Margiana and Syafriyadin [7] highlighted GT's grammatical limitations, emphasizing that it is not a reliable tool for advanced writing. They emphasised the need for accuracy checks and verification strategies.

Over-reliance on the translation tool is another concern. Some students depend heavily on GT instead of putting in effort to develop core language skills. Habeeb and Muhammedb [9] found that students often bypassed reading or using dictionary in favour of GT's instant results. Similarly, Ghorianfar, et al. [5] reported that over half of the students admitted GT made them "lazy" when it came to using traditional resources such as dictionaries. Both studies noted that this reliance had led to weaker vocabulary retention. While GT offers immediate answers, this convenience may hinder deeper learning, particularly when students fail to evaluate the accuracy of the output.

Tsai [16] noted that students who fully trusted GT outputs showed less effort in improving their self-written texts. Boukhelef [19] also found that GT was widely used by low-proficiency learners, who relied heavily on GT showed little use of other learning strategies. This led to more passive learning and less engagement with the language.

In addition, some studies also raised concerns about students submitting GT generated work with little or no editing. Alharbi [13] found that students sometimes submitted assignments based solely on GT output. Samir, et al. [10] reported similar patterns among students completing written assessments. These behaviours raise ethical concerns in academic contexts where originality and independent effort are expected.

Finally, several studies emphasise the need for training and guidance. While learners can benefit from GT, many lack the skills to use it critically. Afiliani, et al. [11] and Wirantaka and Fijanah [18] recommended teaching strategies such as pre-editing and post-editing. These help students review and refine GT outputs. Without such guidance, GT use may promote surface-level learning instead of real language development.

This literature review has examined the perceived benefits and challenges of using GT in English language learning. GT is valued for its convenience, vocabulary support, writing assistance, and contribution to learner confidence. These findings strongly align with TAM [2] highlighting that GT is widely adopted due to its usefulness and ease of use. However, challenges related to accuracy, over-reliance, ethical concerns, and lack of critical engagement suggest that GT should be used with caution, particularly in secondary school settings.

A key research gap in the current literature is the limited focus on secondary school ESL learners. While most existing studies explore university or adult learners, little is known about how younger students engage and navigate GT in the secondary school context. Given the cognitive and pedagogical differences at this level, further research is essential to understand their unique challenges and support needs. As such current study addresses this gap by exploring the experiences of secondary school ESL learners and how they perceive GT as part of their language learning journey.

3. Research Methodology

This study employed a descriptive research design to explore secondary school ESL learners' experiences with GT. Qualitative research is suitable for understanding complex issues and individual perspectives [23]. It allows for deeper insight into how learners use GT in their language learning.

A purposive sampling approach was employed to select the sample of the study. The sample comprised 10 ESL learners from a private secondary school in Kuala Selangor, Malaysia. The participants were aged between 15 to 16 years old and were regular users of GT. Their native language (L1) was Mandarin, and their English proficiency level ranged from average to low. Each participant has been learning English as a second language (L2) for at least four years.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which are effective for uncovering personal insights and context-specific issues [23]. This method provided flexibility to explore participants' experiences in-depth while maintaining a structured approach. Follow-up questions were used to probe

emerging topics as needed.

The interview questions centered on participants' experiences with GT, specifically exploring its benefits and challenges in language learning which aligned with the research aim. The questions were primarily open-ended, with a few closed-ended questions for clarification. To ensure uniformity in the research process, all the interviews were conducted in the school resource room during break or lunch and lasted approximately 10 to 15 minutes for each participant. They were conducted in simple informal English to ensure participants fully understood the questions, thereby reducing the risk of miscommunication. Participants' responses were recorded using a password-protected iPhone and transcribed using 'TurboScribe', an online AI transcription tool.

The data collected from the semi-structured interviews were analyzed using Yin [24] Five Phases of Data Analysis. First, all interview recordings were transcribed using 'TurboScribe' to ensure accurate documentation. Prior to coding, the transcribed scripts were manually cross-checked to enhance the dependability of the data. The transcripts were then manually coded to identify key ideas and meaningful segments. These codes were grouped into broader themes using thematic analysis, which helped reveal recurring patterns in the data. The themes were interpreted in relation to the research questions to generate insights aligned with the study's objectives. Finally, conclusions were drawn based on the main findings, offering a clear response to the research questions. This structured approach allowed for a thorough exploration of the data and led to valuable insights into learners' experiences with GT.

3.1. Reliability and Validity

To ensure the rigor of this qualitative study, strategies were implemented to strengthen both reliability and validity of the data. For reliability, the interview transcripts were manually cross-checked by the researcher against the original audio recordings after being transcribed by 'TurboScribe,' an AI transcription tool. This process helped to minimize transcription errors and improve the dependability of the data. For validity, member checking was used as a key strategy to ensure data credibility. Participants were invited to review and verify their responses. This ensured that their responses were accurately represented and strengthened the trustworthiness of the findings.

3.2. Ethical Considerations

Following research ethics, informed consent was obtained from both the school administration and the participants prior to the study. All participants were informed about the study's purpose, procedures and their right to withdraw at any time. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained throughout the study. Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant in numerical form (e.g. Participant 01) in all records and reports.

4. Findings

This section presents the findings organized by the two research questions, which explore the benefits and challenges of using Google Translate (GT). The findings are presented thematically, with each theme derived from the thematic analysis process.

4.1. Benefits of Using Google Translate

RQ1 What benefits do secondary school ESL learners perceive of using GT in English language learning?

The analysis identified three key themes perceived by ESL learners as benefits of using GT, namely

Convenience, Facilitates Comprehension and Language Learning Support. Figure 1 explains these themes and their associated categories.

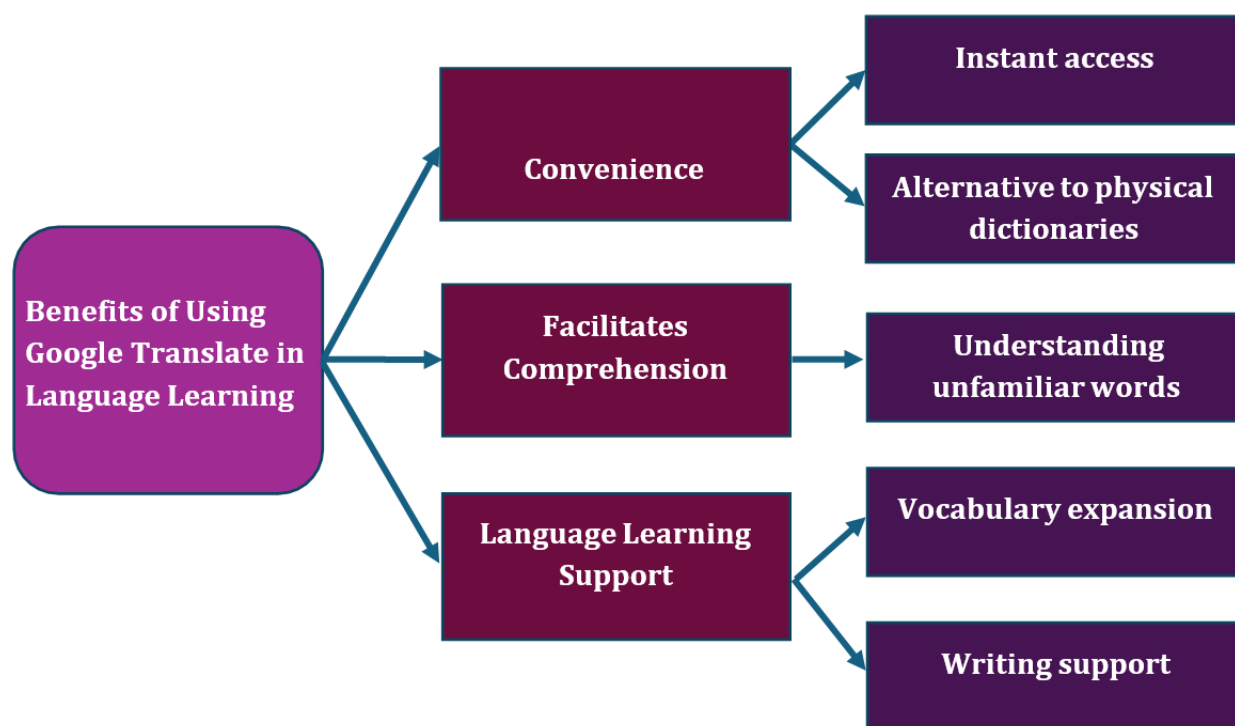


Figure 1.
Benefits of using Google Translate.

4.1.1. Theme 1: Convenience

Participants consistently viewed GT as a convenient tool that enables fast and easy access to translations. This theme is supported by two subcategories: *Instant Access* and *Alternative to Physical Dictionaries*.

4.1.1.1. Instant Access

GT was frequently praised for its ability to deliver quick translations, especially in time-sensitive tasks such as homework or in-class activities:

"GT is more suitable because you just click and then type." (Participant 03)

This response reflects how GT's user-friendly interface and immediate output contribute to its perceived usefulness in everyday academic tasks.

"Ah, yes, (Google Translate) save my time. Mm ... can do my work faster ah can help me do my homework more easily." (Participant 01)

Here, GT is seen as enhancing efficiency, as its quick translation feature enables participants to complete their assignments with less time and effort.

4.1.1.2. Alternative to Physical Dictionaries

Participants expressed a clear preference for GT over traditional physical dictionaries. Unlike physical dictionaries, which require scanning and flipping through pages, GT offers immediate access to information with minimal effort. Participants described physical dictionaries as cumbersome and outdated:

"Dictionary, very hard to use. So, GT will just be more convenient." (Participant 03)

"...use dictionary... it is so heavy...then have to turn the page." (Participant 09)

These responses highlight participants' dissatisfaction with physical dictionaries, which required time and effort to navigate. GT, in contrast, was fast, easily accessible and required minimal physical

effort.

Despite preferring GT for its convenience, participants also acknowledged its shortcomings:

"GT is not really good when the words have different meanings. And sometimes the answer is wrong. So, better use an online dictionary to check." (Participant 03)

This response shows that while GT is valued for its accessibility, participants remain cautious about its accuracy. They often verify translations using other tools. This suggests that online dictionaries still hold value for their precision in providing accurate translations compared to GT.

4.1.2. Theme 2: Facilitates Comprehension

In addition to convenience, GT was viewed as a tool that enhances understanding, particularly of unfamiliar vocabulary.

Understanding Unfamiliar Words

A common use of GT among participants was to translate unknown English words into their native language, Mandarin:

"If I don't know the (meaning of the) English words, then I type the English words, translate to Chinese." (Participant 01)

"I usually use like type in Mandarin convert to English." (Participant 03)

These responses demonstrate a common bilingual strategy in ESL learning, where learners leverage their L1 (Mandarin) to make sense of L2 (English) vocabulary. GT acts as a bridge between languages to support comprehension.

4.1.3. Theme 3: Language Learning Support

Participants perceived GT not only as a translation tool but also as a resource for essential language support in various language skills, particularly vocabulary and writing. This theme is supported by two subcategories: *Vocabulary Expansion* and *Writing Support*.

4.1.3.1. Vocabulary Expansion

GT was perceived as helpful in building vocabulary through exposure to new English words:

"GT can help me know, learn more about the words that I don't know." (Participant 10) This response illustrates how participants use GT actively to explore new vocabulary items and integrate them into their language learning process.

4.1.3.2. Writing Support

Participants also used GT to assist with writing tasks, particularly in essay writing. They used the tool to translate ideas from their native language into English:

"I type... like sentence, like Chinese sentence, then I type, then it will translate to English...then I read, then I write down." (Participant 01)

This response shows how GT serves as a scaffolding tool in writing, allowing participants to construct English sentences based on L1 ideas. However, this support is not without concern. Participants noted its limitations, particularly in accuracy. This leads into the following section on challenges.

4.2. Challenges of Using Google Translate

RQ2 What challenges do secondary school ESL learners face when using GT in English language learning?

While participants identified clear benefits, they also highlighted challenges that affected their trust and reliance on GT. Two key themes emerged: Accuracy Issues and Over-Reliance on the Translation Tool.

Figure 2 illustrates these themes and their associated categories.

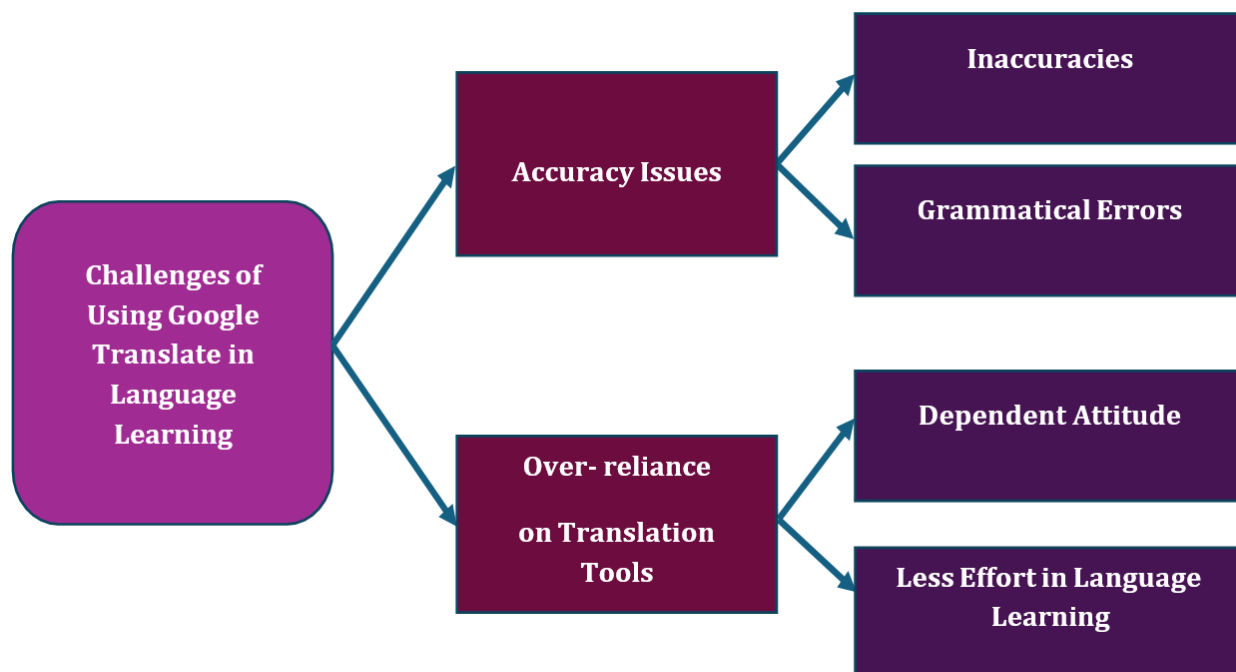


Figure 2.
Challenges of using Google Translate.

4.2.1. Theme 1: Accuracy Issues

Participants expressed concerns about GT's accuracy issues, particularly when translating words with multiple meanings or complex sentence structures. This theme is supported by two subcategories: *Inaccuracies* and *Grammatical Errors*.

4.2.2. Inaccuracies

Participants noted that GT often produced misleading or incorrect translations:

"The word has that meaning, and then GT gives me a different meaning."

(Participant 07)

Such inaccuracies, which cause confusion and misinterpretation, led participants to use GT selectively and only when necessary. For example, one participant mentioned using GT as a last resort when unable to recall the English equivalent of a word:

"I only use GT when I really, really can't think of the English word. Like, I know the word in Chinese, but not in English." (Participant 05)

Other participants described strategies to counter this issue by cross-checking GT's translations with online tools and comparing results:

"But I normally will double-check the word first. I just search Google also. I search the word, and then Google will give the meaning. So, I find, and then I compare other words." (Participant 05)

"Because GT can make mistakes—not really mistakes, but sometimes the word it gives is not suitable for our sentence. So, we need to be smart about it and change the words and not just use the ones GT provides." (Participant 10)

These responses show that participants are not passive users of GT. They are aware of its limitations, critically assess its output, and apply metalinguistic awareness to enhance accuracy.

4.2.3. Grammatical Errors

Several participants avoided using GT for full sentences due to frequent grammatical errors:

"I think GT makes grammar mistakes, so I don't usually use it for sentences ... I use other apps like Quillbot to check my grammar." (Participant 07)

"Also got some grammar mistakes... I just ask my friend ... see website."
(Participant 09)

These responses indicate that while GT may be useful for basic translation needs, its limitations in grammar accuracy reduce its effectiveness for more advanced writing tasks. To address this issue, participants used online tools or sought help from peers.

4.2.2. Theme 2: Over-Reliance on Translation Tool

Participants were aware that excessive dependence on GT might hinder long-term language learning progress. They also recognized that it led to putting in less effort to engage actively with the target language (L2). This theme is supported by two subcategories: *Dependent Attitude* and *Less Effort in Language Learning*.

4.2.3. Dependent Attitude

Some participants acknowledged that frequent use of GT could reduce their motivation to learn independently:

"GT do finish my work ... I don't need to do work already, mah." (Participant 08)

"GT make me reliable on it." (Participant 04)

"I think you can use GT but not like really use it every time. Like if you don't know, then you can ask the app to help you. But you cannot always like, I want to do this homework and then I always go GT to check." (Participant 03)

These responses suggest that dependency on the tool may limit the development of independent learning skills, which are essential for effective language acquisition. However, participants also showed awareness of this risk and demonstrated control in their use of GT. This was evident in the response of Participant 03, who consciously limited her use of the tool. This response indicates a selective and reflective approach to avoid over-reliance.

4.2.4. Less Effort in Language Learning

Participants also pointed out that over-reliance on GT might lead to passive learning behaviours. The convenience of the tool could encourage shortcuts in the language learning process, as evident below:

"It can make you lazy. You just type and copy only." (Participant 01)

"Always go GT ... you can't learn anything." (Participant 03)

These responses reflect concern that excessive use of GT may reduce active engagement with English, limiting opportunities for problem-solving and long-term language retention.

4.3. Summary of Findings

This study found that secondary school ESL learners perceived GT as beneficial in supporting their learning of English. They valued its convenience, particularly in providing quick access to translations, enhancing comprehension, and supporting vocabulary development and writing. These features made GT a practical tool for completing academic tasks. At the same time, participants expressed concerns about GT's accuracy. Inaccurate translations, grammatical errors, and the risk of over-reliance were frequently mentioned. Rather than using GT indiscriminately, learners demonstrated cautious use by cross-checking outputs and regulating their reliance on the tool. This suggests a thoughtful and strategic approach to GT use and reflects digital literacy and self-regulation among secondary school ESL learners.

5. Discussion

Results of the current study indicate that ESL learners use GT because it convenience, facilitates

comprehension and it is a language learning support.

5.1.1. Convenience

Participants consistently described GT as a convenient tool that supported them in completing school tasks more efficiently. A key aspect of this convenience was its ability to provide instant access to translations, especially during time-sensitive situations such as classroom tasks or homework. This immediate access reduced the time and effort required to understand unfamiliar words or phrases, aligning with the *Perceived Ease of Use* construct in TAM [2]. Similar findings were reported by Lam [3]; Yuliani and Haura [4] and Pratiwi and Rakhmasari [6] who noted that learners are more likely to adopt digital tools that are fast and easy to use for completing their tasks.

Findings by Margiana and Syafryadin [7] also indicate that secondary school learners increasingly favour digital tools for their speed and accessibility. The preference for GT over physical dictionaries reinforces the argument that perceived convenience is not only about user friendly interface, but also about how effectively the tool fits into learners' existing routines and expectations for immediate support. In addition to valuing instant translations, participants expressed a strong preference for GT over traditional physical dictionaries. They viewed paper-based dictionaries as cumbersome, outdated,

5.1.2. Comprehension

Another key benefit identified by participants was GT's role in facilitating comprehension, particularly when encountering unfamiliar English vocabulary. Learners commonly used GT to translate unknown words from English into their native language, Mandarin. This translation process enabled them to understand instructions, classroom materials, and reading texts more effectively.

This finding aligns with the *Perceived Usefulness* aspect of TAM [2] as participants clearly viewed GT as a tool that helped them achieve meaningful learning outcomes. It also supports earlier studies by Samir, et al. [10] and Afiliani, et al. [11] who found that GT served as a bridge for ESL students to access and make sense of English content. In particular, comprehension through translation was not just passive decoding but a part of an active meaning-making process. By making English content easy to process through translation, GT functioned as a supportive tool that enabled learners to engage more confidently with academic tasks.

5.1.3. Language Learning Support

Participants also described GT as a helpful tool for supporting their language development, particularly in vocabulary acquisition and writing. Many reported that translating unfamiliar words from English into Mandarin helped them learn new vocabulary. Repeated exposure to translated terms increased their recognition and usage of English words over time. This supports findings by Habeeb and Muhammedb [9] and Kai and Hua [8] who found that GT use contributes to vocabulary growth in their learners. In this context, GT is not only a tool for quick reference but a mechanism through which learners engage in language development.

Beyond vocabulary, GT was used as a writing aid. Some participants translated full sentences from Mandarin to English when preparing written work such as essays. This practice enabled them to express ideas they struggled to formulate independently in English by effectively using GT as a scaffold for written production. Like Tsai [16] and Alharbi [13] findings, this highlights GT's role in supporting output skills, especially for learners with limited productive vocabulary. However, unlike earlier studies that focused on university students, the present study shows that even secondary school learners are using GT not only to translate but to plan, evaluate, and construct written text and often with an awareness of the tool's limitations.

These benefits reflect both *Perceived Usefulness* and *Perceived Ease of Use* in TAM [2]. GT was seen as practical for supporting key learning activities, yet its effectiveness was enhanced by learners' active engagement and willingness to verify its output. This suggests that GT, when used strategically, can contribute positively to learners' language development.

5.1.4. Accuracy Issues

Although participants found GT useful for basic tasks, many raised concerns about its reliability. A common issue was the incorrect translation of words with multiple meanings and the frequent production of grammatically inaccurate sentences. Participants shared that these errors sometimes caused confusion, especially when trying to understand complex ideas. This finding supports earlier research by Pham, et al. [21] and Winiharti, et al. [22] who found that GT often failed to convey correct meaning due to its literal translation of syntax and limited grasp of context. To cope with these issues, participants reported using strategies such as checking GT output against online dictionaries or other translation tools. This mirrors the findings of Margiana and Syafryadin [7] who highlighted the importance of verification strategies when using GT. Such practices reflect a more critical and selective use of technology, where learners do not depend entirely on one tool but combine it with others to ensure accuracy. This behaviour also indicates a level of digital literacy, as students evaluate the reliability of machine-generated text rather than accepting it at face value.

Many participants also highlighted GT's poor performance in sentence-level grammar. They stated that GT often produced awkward or ungrammatical sentences, especially when used to translate full paragraphs. As a result, they preferred using grammar-focused tools like Quillbot for sentence construction. This reflects concerns raised in the literature by Van Nguyen [15] who observed that many learners revised GT output due to grammar and vocabulary errors. Similarly, Sun, et al. [20] noted that while GT can improve word choice, it still requires substantial editing to produce accurate and coherent writing. From the perspective of TAM [2] these reliability concerns directly affect *Perceived Usefulness*. While GT offers convenience, its limited accuracy weakens its value for more advanced language tasks. The participants' choice to use GT selectively or switch to other tools shows that *Perceived Ease of Use* does not necessarily ensure complete acceptance or trust of the tool. As seen in studies by Chompurach [17] and Boukhelef [19] learners often rely on GT for initial support but remain cautious about its output, especially when it comes to translating idiomatic expressions and extended academic texts. This gap between ease and dependability highlights the need for more guided and critical use of GT in classroom settings.

5.1.5. Over-Reliance on the Translation Tool

Another challenge reported by participants was the risk of becoming too dependent on GT. While they appreciated its convenience and support, several participants recognised that excessive use could negatively affect their learning, particularly their ability to engage actively with English. Participants in this study also acknowledged that GT's convenience occasionally led them to take shortcuts. Instead of thinking through grammar or sentence structure, some admitted that GT made them “lazy” and led them to copy outputs directly. This behaviour reflects a more passive approach to learning, where the focus shifts from understanding to simply completing tasks. These findings support Tsai [16] and Boukhelef [19] who noted that students sometimes depend on GT in ways that limit meaningful engagement with the target language. Similarly, Habeeb and Muhammedb [9] and Ghorianfar, et al. [5] observed that frequent GT users were less likely to consult dictionaries or learn through context, which affected their vocabulary retention over time. However, the findings of this study present a notable contrast. Participants demonstrated greater awareness of GT's limitations, including the potential negative effects of over-dependence. Rather than relying on GT for all tasks, they employed self-regulating strategies and used the tool selectively. This suggests a more reflective and controlled approach to using translation tools in their language learning.

In relation to TAM [2] this finding complicates the relationship between *Perceived Ease of Use* and actual learning outcomes. While GT is easy to use, its constant availability may discourage independent effort, reducing opportunities for language development. The participants' reflections suggest that ease of use, while appealing, does not always lead to effective or meaningful learning.

In addressing both research questions, this study found that secondary school ESL learners perceived GT as beneficial in supporting their learning of English. They valued its convenience,

particularly in providing quick access to translations, enhancing comprehension, and assisting with vocabulary development and writing. These features made GT a practical tool for completing academic tasks. At the same time, the findings align with those from higher education settings in terms of the challenges identified, including issues of inaccuracy, grammatical errors, and the risk of over-reliance. A key distinction in this study, however, is that the secondary school ESL learners actively employed strategies to address these limitations, such as cross checking with other online tools or peers and selective use of GT. This demonstrates a thoughtful and strategic approach to GT use, reflecting digital literacy and self-regulation.

6. Conclusion

The findings of this study reinforce the relevance of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) in understanding how ESL learners engage with GT. Participants found GT both useful and easy to use, reflecting TAM's key constructs. They valued GT for supporting comprehension, vocabulary learning, and writing. Its speed and ease of access were especially helpful during time-limited tasks. These perceptions support TAM's view that ease of use contributes to perceived usefulness and tool acceptance. However, the findings also point to limitations in the TAM framework. Although GT is easy to use, its usefulness was reduced by translation errors and grammar issues. Participants were aware of these problems and often checked GT results against dictionaries or other tools. This shows that digital literacy and user strategies influence learning outcomes. In this context, usefulness depends not just on ease but also on accuracy and user judgment. These findings suggest that TAM could be expanded to include factors such as content reliability, context relevance and learners' critical use strategies. Adding these elements would give a more complete understanding of how language learners adopt and manage digital tools like GT in real learning situations.

This study extends the understanding of GT's role in English language learning among secondary school ESL learners. While learners value GT for its convenience and ease of use, challenges remain, particularly in translation accuracy and the risk of over-reliance. These findings highlight the complex nature of using AI tools in language learning contexts. Educators should recognise GT's dual function: it can support comprehension and vocabulary development, but it also has limitations in managing complex grammar and sentence construction tasks. Therefore, it is recommended that GT be used as a supplementary tool, rather than a primary learning source. Educators should guide students in using GT critically and encourage them to explore other learning resources for grammar and sentence construction. A balanced approach can help learners stay actively engaged and reduce dependence on automated tools. It also promotes better understanding of language structure and use. By integrating GT with appropriate teacher support, this can lead to more effective and responsible use of translation tools in the ESL classroom. While the study provides valuable insights, it has several limitations. The sample size was relatively small, and the study was conducted in a specific educational context, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data may introduce response bias. Future research could explore how GT use affects long-term language development and how teacher-led strategies influence students' digital tool habits in varied classroom settings.

Transparency:

The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

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