

ASSESSING EFL STUDENTS' TRANSLATION COMPETENCE IN ARGUMENTATIVE TEXTS: AN ANALYSIS OF ACCURACY, ACCEPTABILITY, AND READABILITY

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Abstract

This study investigates the translation competence of third-semester students in the English Education Program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Makassar, focusing on the translation of argumentative texts from English into Indonesian. While previous research has mainly examined narrative or descriptive genres, studies on argumentative texts remain limited, despite their prominence in academic contexts and their demanding linguistic and cognitive features. This study addresses the lack of empirical work on argumentative translation and contributes practical strategies for EFL teachers. A quantitative descriptive design was employed to evaluate students' translation performance across three key dimensions: accuracy, acceptability, and readability. Data were collected through a performance-based translation test and assessed using a rubric adapted from Nababan (2012). Findings revealed that although most students produced translations that were acceptable and readable, accuracy emerged as the most problematic dimension. Only 53.3% of the students achieved fully accurate translations, compared with stronger performance in acceptability (66.7%) and moderate results in readability (40%). These outcomes indicate that while students demonstrated cultural and linguistic fluency, they struggled with semantic precision and logical coherence. The results highlight the pedagogical need for integrating genre-based translation tasks into EFL curricula and providing explicit instruction in strategies such as managing logical flow, coherence, and stylistic alignment.

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INTRODUCTION

Translation plays an indispensable role in the domain of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, particularly within non-native contexts where English dominates academic, professional, and cultural discourse. Translating texts from English into local languages provides students with access to global knowledge while fostering language development and enhancing cross-cultural competence. Translation activities are recognized not only as linguistic exercises but also as pedagogical tools that cultivate analytical thinking, grammatical awareness, and intercultural sensitivity. According to Liu (2020), incorporating translation methodologies into EFL instruction enhances both teaching effectiveness and student engagement by promoting deeper understanding of language structures and content. In academic environments where students are routinely exposed to complex texts—such as

scholarly articles, research papers, and argumentative essays—the ability to translate effectively becomes an essential academic competency.

Several studies emphasize the cognitive and educational value of translation within EFL learning. Mahboudi (2019) demonstrated that translation supports comprehension and clarity, especially in academic assessments. This reinforces the notion that translation serves dual functions in EFL contexts: facilitating both language learning and academic performance. Al-Ma'ani & Al-Kindi (2018) similarly argue that translation acts as a bridge between learners' native linguistic frameworks and English, enabling them to decode culturally unfamiliar concepts. Payne & Contreras (2019) further found that EFL learners rely on translation as a cognitive strategy to improve comprehension and academic outcomes. More recently, Wu and Shafait (2024) highlighted translation's role in promoting intercultural competence, while Rahmawati (2023) stressed the importance of cross-cultural understanding in EFL classrooms. These findings collectively underscore translation's integrative function in linguistic acquisition, higher-order thinking, and intercultural literacy.

Translation of academic genres such as argumentative texts strengthens essential academic skills. Huang (2022) notes that translation encourages learners to critically dissect textual components, improving comprehension and expression in both source and target languages. Maghsoudi and Mirzaeian (2020) reported that translation-based reading tasks improve students' academic performance, reinforcing analytical abilities alongside language proficiency. However, argumentative texts pose greater challenges compared to narrative or descriptive genres. As observed by Ghanbari and Salari (2022) and (Simanjuntak et al., 2024), students often struggle with coherence, logical structure, and rhetorical intent, leading to translations that fail to capture the essence of the original. Sheng et al. (2018) also emphasized the importance of conjunctive elements in argumentative coherence, while Sibuea et al. (2023) documented difficulties in translating idiomatic and culturally loaded expressions. These studies collectively suggest that the genre-specific demands of argumentative texts remain underexplored and require targeted pedagogical attention.

Over the past few decades, several theoretical frameworks for translation competence have been proposed. Larson (1998), for instance, described translation as a cognitive process that balances semantic accuracy with pragmatic clarity. Similarly, Palumbo (2009) outlined translation competence as consisting of linguistic, thematic, and procedural knowledge that can be systematically taught. Building on these earlier models, more recent studies emphasize sociocultural and competence-based perspectives, reflecting real-world translation demands (e.g., Dung, 2024; Nhan, 2022). In the Southeast Asian context, Abdullah et al. (2021) stressed the importance of critical thinking in translation pedagogy, while Gunawan et al. (2022) and Sumiati et al. (2020) highlighted the integration of cultural awareness and digital literacy. Collectively, these regional contributions affirm the need to align translation training with international standards while also addressing local linguistic complexities.

Despite these contributions, a notable gap persists in empirical studies focusing on EFL students' competence in translating argumentative texts. While prior research has largely addressed narrative and descriptive texts, studies examining argumentative translation remain scarce, even though such texts are central to academic success. As Ahmed (2019) observes, translating argumentative discourse requires a specialized skill set that combines linguistic precision, logical reasoning, and cultural literacy. This study responds to that gap by evaluating students' competence in translating argumentative texts from English into Indonesian, focusing on three key dimensions: accuracy, acceptability, and readability. To address this research gap, the study is guided by the following research questions:

1. *To what extent are EFL students able to produce accurate translations of argumentative texts?*

2. *How acceptable are their translations in terms of linguistic naturalness and cultural appropriateness?*
3. *What level of readability is achieved in their translated texts?*

By examining these questions through a quantitative descriptive approach, this study seeks to provide practical insights for translation pedagogy and curriculum development, particularly in non-native English-speaking contexts where translation competence is essential for academic achievement and intercultural communication. The novelty of this research lies in its genre-specific approach and its emphasis on empirical evaluation, grounded in established theoretical models of translation competence. The findings are expected to offer practical insights for translation pedagogy and curriculum development, particularly in non-native English-speaking contexts where such competencies are essential for academic success and intercultural communication.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study employed a quantitative descriptive research method. This method was selected to objectively assess the translation competence of third-semester EFL students in translating argumentative texts from English into Indonesian. It aimed to measure students' performance using numerical data that could be analyzed statistically. The method focuses on describing specific phenomena in this case, translation performance without examining causal relationships between variables. Quantitative descriptive research is advantageous for language studies because it generates measurable and replicable data. This approach allows researchers to identify strengths and weaknesses in students' translation outputs based on standardized evaluation criteria such as accuracy, acceptability, and readability.

Research Design

This research employed a quantitative descriptive research design to systematically assess the translation competence of third-semester students enrolled in the English Education Program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Makassar. The study aimed to objectively evaluate students' proficiency in translating argumentative texts from English into Indonesian, focusing specifically on three main assessment criteria: accuracy, acceptability, and readability. The choice of this methodological approach was grounded in the necessity to obtain objective, reliable, and generalizable data regarding students' translation performance.

Quantitative descriptive research has been widely applied in language and translation studies due to its capacity to yield measurable and replicable data (Sugiyono, 2020). This methodology is particularly appropriate for evaluating defined competencies across a sample population without attempting to infer causal relationships or predictive models. The primary objective of descriptive quantitative research is to describe the state of specific variables without comparing them or linking them with other variables. In the context of translation studies, this allows researchers to establish benchmarks of competence and identify prevalent strengths and weaknesses among learners.

The relevance and utility of quantitative descriptive research in translation competence assessment are further supported by Widajati and Mahmudah (2023), who underscore the method's strength in delivering objective evaluations. Numerical data derived from translation performance assessments are considered less prone to subjective bias, thereby enhancing the reliability of the findings. In the present study, quantitative methods facilitated the structured evaluation of translation outputs, enabling the researchers to categorize and interpret the performance of students using standardized metrics. As Nation and Muller (2023) point out, this approach often lacks the depth necessary to explore the cognitive and contextual dimensions of translation. Complex processes such as cultural adaptation and pragmatic interpretation may be overlooked when confined to numerical analysis. Ferdiansyah (2022)

echoes this concern by cautioning against the oversimplification of translation phenomena through quantification alone.

Research Participants

The participants of this study were 15 third-semester students enrolled in the English Education Program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Makassar, consisting of 8 females and 7 males, aged between 19 and 21 years. A random sampling technique was employed, ensuring that each student in the population had an equal chance of being selected. This procedure was chosen to guarantee representativeness and to minimize selection bias, thereby allowing the findings to more accurately reflect the general population of EFL learners in the program. The participants also came from diverse linguistic and educational backgrounds, which provided a richer context for interpreting the data.

As noted by Utami and Utami (2023), random sampling even in small-scale studies contributes to internal validity and supports the generalizability of findings, provided that the sample adequately represents the population's characteristics. In this study, the use of random sampling was particularly significant, given the varied backgrounds of the students. Such methodological rigor strengthens the reliability of the study's conclusions and enhances the applicability of its recommendations to similar educational contexts.

Instruments

Data were collected using a performance-based translation test specifically designed for this study. Students were required to translate an argumentative text from English into Indonesian. To assess translation quality, the study employed an established assessment rubric adapted from Nababan (2012), which evaluates three critical dimensions: Accuracy: How accurately the original meaning was preserved; Acceptability: The naturalness and cultural appropriateness of the translated text; and Readability: The ease with which the translation could be understood by native speakers of the target language.

Data Analysis

To evaluate translation quality, the study utilized a structured rubric adapted from Nababan (2012), focusing on three key aspects: accuracy, acceptability, and readability. Each criterion was assessed using a three-point scale, with descriptors guiding evaluators in determining performance levels. The rubric for accuracy assessed whether the meaning from the source language was fully preserved in the target text. Acceptability measured the naturalness and cultural appropriateness of the translation, while readability gauged the ease with which the translation could be understood by native speakers of the target language.

The use of Nababan's rubric is well-documented in translation studies. According to Rahmawati (2023), the rubric provides clear, measurable standards that support consistent evaluation. Its structured nature aligns with the formative assessment approach, which emphasizes continuous feedback and the identification of areas for improvement. Rahmawati (2023), further notes that the rubric enables educators to offer precise feedback on specific translation components, making it a valuable tool for both instruction and assessment.

Table. 1
Criteria of Accuracy

Scale	Category	Description
3	Accurate	The translation accurately reflects the message of the source language with no loss or change in meaning.
2	Less Accurate	The intended meaning of the source sentence is inadequately rendered in the target language, resulting in partial misinterpretation or semantic distortion.
1	Inaccurate	The translation does not properly reflect the original meaning; instead, key components of the message have been deleted or left out.

Table. 2
Criteria of Acceptability

Scale	Category	Description
3	Acceptable	The translated text reads smoothly and naturally, using widely recognized technical terminology. Its sentence structures align with the grammatical and stylistic conventions of the target language.
2	Less Acceptable	The translated text is mostly natural and readable, but it contains a few inconsistencies in terminology or slight deviations from source language.
1	Unacceptable	The translation is unnatural, imprecise, and extremely similar to the original. It is not culturally or grammatically acceptable.

Table. 3
Criteria of Readability

Scale	Category	Description
3	Readability	The translated content is presented in a way that ensures effortless understanding across all levels of language use.
2	Less Readability	Most of the translated text is clear, but there are portions where meaning becomes unclear without re-reading.
1	Unreadability	The translation is difficult to fully understand.

Nababan (2012)

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Research Findings

Data Interpretation of Students' Ability in Translating Text

The findings from the translation test administered to students in translating argumentative texts from English into Indonesian provided insightful observations regarding their competencies across three critical dimensions: accuracy, acceptability, and readability. It can be seen by figure below:

Accuracy of Students' Translation

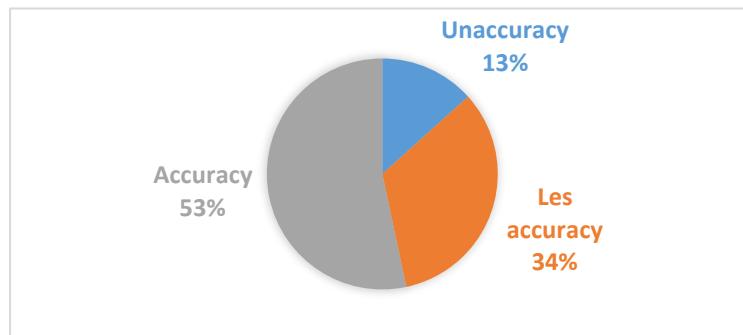


Figure 1. Accuracy of the Students Competence in translating Argumentative text

The data reveals that 53.3% of the students produced accurate translations, demonstrating that a majority were able to retain the original meaning effectively. However, 33.3% of the students produced translations that were categorized as less accurate, suggesting that while they understood the core message, their translations contained errors or omissions that affected clarity. Additionally, 13.3% of the students produced inaccurate translations, indicating significant challenges in conveying the intended meaning. This distribution highlights that while many students grasped the essence of the original text, there remains a considerable gap in ensuring complete accuracy, pointing to areas for improvement in their translation skills.

Acceptability of Students' Translations

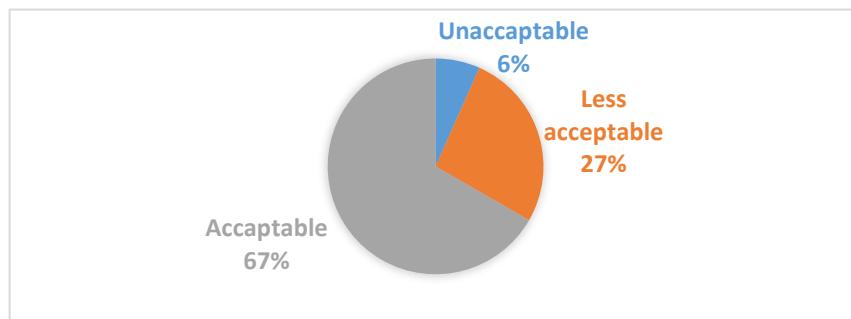


Figure 2. Acceptability of Students Competence in translating Argumentative text

Acceptability emerged as the strongest aspect of the translations, with 66.7% of students producing translations that were both natural and culturally appropriate, effectively maintaining the flow and tone of the original text. However, 26.7% of the translations were categorized as less acceptable, meaning they were somewhat awkward or did not fully align with cultural norms, making them less fluent or contextually accurate. Additionally, 6.6% of the translations were considered unacceptable, indicating more significant issues with linguistic or cultural consistency, where the translations failed to capture the intended meaning or were culturally inappropriate. This suggests that while most students excelled in this area, further refinement is needed for others.

Readability of Students' Translations

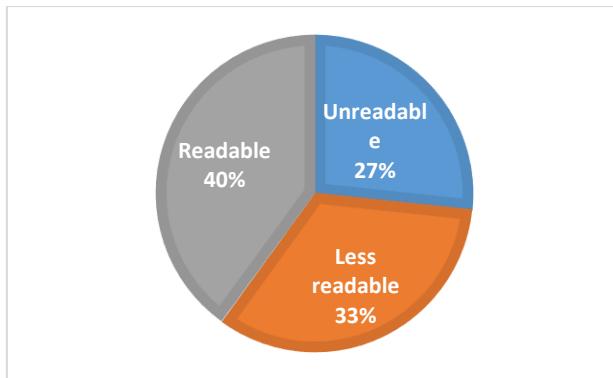


Figure 3. Readability of Students Competence in translating Argumentative text

The readability of the translations varied greatly among the students, reflecting diverse levels of proficiency in conveying meaning clearly. 40% of the translations were deemed clear and easy to read, which allowed for smooth comprehension. These translations were marked by well-structured sentences, appropriate vocabulary, and accurate rendering of the original text's meaning, making them accessible to the reader. On the other hand, 33.3% of the translations fell into the category of less readable. These translations were affected by awkward phrasing or structural problems, which occasionally disrupted the flow and clarity. While the intended meaning was generally preserved, the writing lacked the smoothness needed for easy understanding. The remaining 26.7% of translations were considered unreadable. These were riddled with significant errors, such as poor sentence structure, incorrect word choices, or inaccurate translation of key concepts, which made it difficult for the reader to comprehend the text as a whole. This variation in readability highlights the challenges students face in producing fluent, coherent translations.

Mean Score of the students from the 3 aspects (accuracy, acceptability and readability) in Translating English Argumentative text

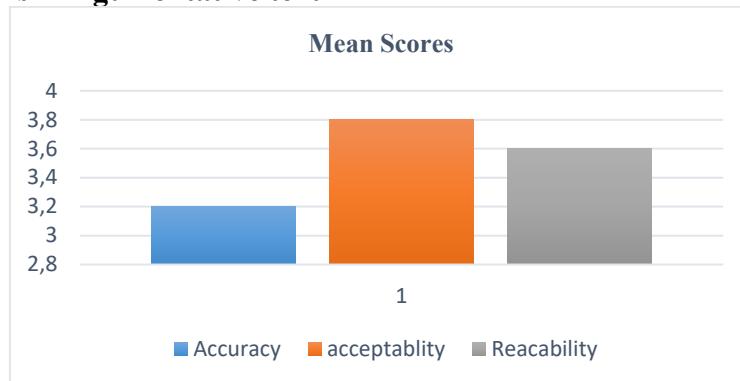


Figure 4. The Mean score of Three aspects in Translating English Argumentative text

Among the three dimensions evaluated, acceptability received the highest average score of 3.8, indicating that most students were able to produce translations that were culturally appropriate and natural-sounding. Readability followed closely with an average score of 3.6, suggesting that while many students ensured their translations were clear and easy to follow, there were still some issues with fluency and coherence. Accuracy, however, received the lowest average score of 3.2, pointing to difficulties in fully capturing the meaning and nuances of the source text. This highlights the need for further training and practice to enhance students' ability to produce faithful, accurate translations.

Discussion

This study examined the translation competence of third-semester students in an English Education Program, focusing on the key aspects of accuracy, acceptability, and readability in translating argumentative texts from English into Indonesian. The findings highlight both the strengths and the persistent challenges in students' translation performance, emphasizing the importance of developing a comprehensive translation pedagogy that addresses linguistic, cognitive, and cultural dimensions. In particular, the study provides significant insights into how students navigate the complexities of translating argumentative discourse, a task that requires precision, coherence, and cultural sensitivity. This discussion will elaborate on the findings, discuss their implications for translation pedagogy, and suggest strategies for improving translation competence in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context.

Accuracy emerged as the weakest dimension in students' translation performance, with only 53.3% of students achieving accurate translations. In contrast, 46.6% of the translations were less accurate or even inaccurate. This finding underlines the critical importance of accuracy in the translation of argumentative texts, where maintaining the original meaning and logic is essential for effective communication. As Larson (1998) emphasized, translation is not simply a word-for-word process; it is a complex task that involves reconstructing meaning while ensuring that the message is faithfully conveyed across languages. In the case of argumentative texts, accuracy becomes even more important because these texts require not only the transfer of factual information but also the preservation of logical coherence, persuasive techniques, and rhetorical structures.

The challenges related to accuracy observed in this study may stem from the cognitive demands involved in processing argumentative discourse. Translating such texts often requires teachers to not only preserve factual content but also maintain a logical structure that aligns with the source text's persuasive strategies (Freitag et al., 2021). For some students, the complexity of these tasks could overwhelm their cognitive abilities, especially when faced with unfamiliar or intricate argumentative structures. To address this challenge, translation

instructors should focus on providing explicit instruction in translation strategies such as expansion, reduction, and modulation (Aresta, 2018). These strategies help students maintain accuracy while adapting the translation to the target language's structure and idiomatic expressions. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of providing structured feedback to students. Regular and targeted feedback can help students recognize errors and refine their translation practices, gradually improving their accuracy over time (Zhou, 2023).

Acceptability was the strongest dimension of the study, with 66.7% of translations rated as acceptable. This suggests that a significant number of students were able to produce translations that were culturally appropriate and fluent, adhering to the linguistic and stylistic norms of Indonesian. In contrast, 33.3% of translations were categorized as less acceptable or unacceptable, indicating that some students faced difficulties with stylistic refinement and consistency. As Palumbo (2009) argued, translation competence extends beyond linguistic accuracy to encompass a nuanced understanding of style, register, and cultural norms. This dimension of translation is crucial, particularly in the case of argumentative texts, where the translation must not only be accurate but also effective in communicating the persuasive intent of the original text in a way that resonates with the target culture.

The challenges in producing culturally acceptable translations observed in this study may be attributed to the students' struggles with navigating cultural differences and stylistic conventions between English and Indonesian. While English often employs a more direct and assertive style in argumentative discourse, Indonesian may prefer a more indirect approach, which can lead to discrepancies in tone and style when translating persuasive texts. To address these challenges, translation instruction should encourage students to balance linguistic fidelity with stylistic coherence. One potential strategy is the use of peer review and collaborative editing, where students can receive feedback from their peers and learn to adjust their translations to better align with cultural and stylistic expectations. Moreover, explicit teaching on register and style, including contrastive analysis of argumentative texts in both languages, can help students develop a more refined understanding of these nuances (Palumbo, 2009).

In terms of readability, the results were mixed, with 40% of translations deemed readable, while 60% showed reduced readability. Of these, 26.7% were categorized as unreadable, indicating significant issues with fluency and coherence in a substantial portion of the students' translations. Readability is closely linked to sentence structure, vocabulary choice, and logical flow. Previous research has shown that syntactic complexity, such as long or convoluted sentence structures, can reduce comprehensibility (Yeung et al., 2018). The readability challenges observed in this study may stem from difficulties in constructing clear and concise sentences that maintain the coherence of the original argumentative text. Additionally, research has demonstrated that clarity and coherence are essential for effective communication, especially in persuasive texts (Rossetti & Van Waes, 2022). The struggle to ensure readability in these translations suggests that students may benefit from focused instruction on text cohesion and coherence.

To address the readability challenges, pedagogical strategies should focus on improving students' awareness of structural choices and the role of syntax in enhancing clarity. One approach could involve incorporating activities that specifically target sentence structure, such as sentence-combining exercises or text reorganization tasks. Moreover, students should be trained in the use of transitional devices and connectors, which help establish logical flow and coherence in the target text (Matricciani, 2023). Additionally, providing students with tools such as readability analysis software or guided practice in revising drafts can help them identify areas where readability can be improved.

Beyond linguistic challenges, cultural and cognitive factors also play a significant role in translation performance. As Krimpas (2015) noted, translation is a cultural act shaped by rhetorical traditions and audience expectations. This is particularly relevant when translating

argumentative texts, which are often shaped by cultural norms and persuasive devices that may differ across languages. For instance, students may struggle to reproduce persuasive strategies common in English argumentative texts but less conventional in Indonesian discourse. Understanding these cultural differences is essential for producing translations that are both accurate and culturally resonant.

From a cognitive perspective, translating argumentative texts imposes heavy demands on working memory and decision-making, especially when students need to make complex decisions regarding how to convey meaning while maintaining coherence. Shreve and Angelone (2010) highlighted that cognitive load is a significant factor in translation, particularly when processing complex texts. The findings of this study support this view, as the cognitive demands of translating argumentative texts may have contributed to the struggles with accuracy and readability. Recent studies have shown that contextual instruction can help reduce learners' cognitive burden during translation tasks (Khalaf et al., 2025). Similarly, Wei (2022) demonstrated that metrics such as text entropy can predict cognitive effort in translation tasks. These insights suggest that educators should integrate cognitive scaffolding strategies, such as chunking information or providing clear guidelines for translation tasks, to reduce cognitive strain and improve students' performance.

The findings of this study have significant implications for translation pedagogy, particularly in the EFL context. First, the study underscores the importance of adopting a holistic approach to translation education that combines explicit instruction on translation strategies, feedback mechanisms, intercultural awareness, and cognitive training. Instructors should focus on developing students' ability to navigate the complexities of translating argumentative texts by providing structured opportunities for practice and reflection. This may include activities such as contrastive analysis of argumentative texts, peer review sessions, and the use of translation technologies, which can enhance students' awareness of both linguistic and cultural nuances (Ducar & Schocket, 2018).

Moreover, the study highlights the need for translation instruction to address both linguistic accuracy and cultural sensitivity. By fostering a balance between these two aspects, educators can prepare students to become not only skilled linguists but also effective intercultural communicators. To achieve this, translation curricula should integrate strategy training, iterative feedback, and opportunities for reflective practice. Such an approach will empower learners to produce translations that are accurate, acceptable, readable, and culturally resonant, strengthening their competence in handling complex argumentative texts. This study illustrates the multidimensional nature of translation competence, emphasizing the importance of linguistic accuracy, acceptability, and readability in producing high-quality translations. The findings suggest that students' translation competence can be enhanced through focused instruction on translation strategies, cognitive training, and intercultural awareness. By adopting a holistic approach that integrates these elements, educators can help students navigate the complexities of translating argumentative texts and develop the skills necessary to succeed in translation tasks across different contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the translation competence of third-semester students in an EFL context, with the specific objective of evaluating their ability to translate argumentative texts from English into Indonesian across three critical dimensions: accuracy, acceptability, and readability, based on Nababan's (2012) rubric. The findings confirmed that while students demonstrated relative strength in producing translations that were acceptable and readable, accuracy remained the most challenging dimension, with only 53.3% of translations deemed fully accurate. By revisiting the research objectives, it is evident that the study has successfully highlighted both the strengths and weaknesses of students' translation performance, thereby addressing its initial aim of identifying genre-specific challenges in argumentative translation.

The results underscore the necessity for instructional interventions that emphasize precision and fidelity to source meaning while also supporting fluency and naturalness in the target language. The relatively high performance in acceptability and readability reflects students' developing fluency and adaptability, yet the persistent gap between linguistic fluency and semantic accuracy reveals the need for pedagogical approaches that integrate metalinguistic awareness, explicit strategy training, and feedback mechanisms. In doing so, translation instruction can better prepare learners to handle the dual demands of linguistic precision and cultural appropriateness.

For future research, it is recommended to adopt longitudinal designs that trace the development of translation competence over time, particularly as students' progress through successive stages of their academic training. Mixed-methods studies that combine performance-based assessments with qualitative insights into students' cognitive and cultural strategies would also deepen our understanding of how translation competence is formed and sustained. Additionally, research should examine the role of digital translation tools not only as aids but also as potential obstacles to competence development, especially when dealing with complex genres such as argumentative discourse. Such investigations would enrich the field of translation pedagogy and inform more effective, evidence-based instructional practices.

FUNDING

This study was conducted without any external funding. All aspects of the research, including data collection, analysis, and report writing, were carried out using personal resources. Despite the lack of funding, the study was completed successfully, relying on available tools and a cost-effective approach to gather and analyze the necessary data.

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. By consenting to participate, individuals confirm that they have been informed about the study's objectives, procedures, potential risks, and benefits. They also understand that their identities will remain confidential, and any information they provide will be used exclusively for research purposes.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data utilized in this study cannot be made publicly available due to strict adherence to privacy concerns and ethical obligations that safeguard participant confidentiality. This ensures compliance with ethical research standards and data protection regulations.

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