



NON ENGLISH-MAJORED STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF USING L1 TRANSLATION IN VOCABULARY LEARNING

Nguyen Thi My Hoa¹,
Luong Vo Nhat Quang,
Lam Ky Nhan

Lecturer,
Nam Can Tho University,
Vietnam

Abstract:

This study investigates non-English-majored students' perceptions of using L1 translation in vocabulary learning in an EFL context. A mixed-methods design was employed, involving a questionnaire administered to 374 students and semi-structured interviews with selected participants. The study explored four dimensions: perceived usefulness of L1 translation, its effectiveness compared to other vocabulary learning strategies, its cognitive and affective benefits, and its perceived limitations. The quantitative findings revealed that students held highly positive perceptions of L1 translation. Participants strongly agreed that translation facilitated vocabulary comprehension, improved retention, and supported more efficient learning. They also perceived it as more effective than strategies such as memorization and contextual guessing. In addition, students reported that L1 translation provided cognitive and affective benefits, including increased confidence, reduced anxiety, improved concentration, and greater classroom participation. However, moderate agreement was found regarding its limitations, particularly overdependence, reduced exposure to English input, and possible interference with communicative fluency. The qualitative findings supported these results, showing that students used translation to quickly understand unfamiliar vocabulary and link new words with prior knowledge, while also acknowledging potential drawbacks when it is overused. Overall, the study suggests that L1 translation is perceived as a valuable vocabulary learning strategy among non-English-majored students, functioning as both a cognitive and affective support. The findings highlight the importance of balanced use of translation alongside other vocabulary learning strategies in EFL instruction.

Keywords: L1 translation, vocabulary learning, EFL learners, learner perceptions

¹ Correspondence: email ntmhoa@nctu.edu.vn

1. Introduction

Vocabulary knowledge is widely recognized as a fundamental component of second language acquisition, as it directly affects learners' ability to comprehend and produce language. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, vocabulary learning is often challenging, particularly for non-English-majored students who have limited exposure to English outside the classroom. As a result, learners frequently employ various vocabulary learning strategies, among which first language (L1) translation remains one of the most commonly used approaches.

The role of L1 translation in language learning has long been debated. While traditional communicative approaches have discouraged the use of the mother tongue due to concerns about reduced exposure to the target language, recent studies have challenged this view and highlighted the pedagogical value of strategic L1 use. In particular, translation has been recognized as a cognitive tool that facilitates form-meaning connections, supports vocabulary acquisition, and reduces learning difficulties. The research has generally reported positive learner perceptions of L1 translation. Studies by Tian and Hennebry-Leung (2016), Yu and Liu (2022), and Chen *et al.* (2023) found that learners view translation as useful for understanding and retaining vocabulary due to its ability to provide immediate access to meaning and connect new words with prior knowledge. In addition, translation has been shown to enhance learners' confidence and reduce learning difficulties, particularly among lower-proficiency EFL learners (Fatimah *et al.*, 2018; Phan, 2022). However, some studies also highlight concerns regarding overreliance on L1 and reduced engagement with the target language (Tian & Hennebry-Leung, 2016; Chen *et al.*, 2023), suggesting a need for balanced use.

Despite these insights, several gaps remain in the literature. First, limited research has focused specifically on Vietnamese non-English-majored students, a group who frequently rely on translation but remain underexplored. Second, most previous studies have examined either instructional effectiveness or general attitudes, with less attention to multidimensional perceptions, including usefulness, comparative effectiveness, cognitive and affective benefits, and limitations. Third, few studies have employed a mixed-methods design to triangulate quantitative and qualitative data for a more comprehensive understanding.

Therefore, the present study investigates non-English-majored students' perceptions of using L1 translation in vocabulary learning. It focuses on four key dimensions: perceived usefulness, comparative effectiveness, cognitive and affective benefits, and perceived limitations. By examining these aspects in the Vietnamese EFL context, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of L1 translation in vocabulary learning and offers implications for vocabulary instruction in higher education.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Vocabulary Learning in EFL Contexts

2.1.1 Definition of Vocabulary

Vocabulary is widely regarded as a fundamental component of language competence and an essential element in foreign language learning. It encompasses not only the meanings of words but also knowledge of their forms, pronunciation, usage, collocations, word families, and contextual appropriateness. Researchers emphasize that vocabulary knowledge serves as the foundation for language comprehension and production, enabling learners to communicate effectively in various contexts (Neary-Sundquist, 2015; Khodaparast & Keshmirshekan, 2021; Gaballa & Al-Khayri, 2014). According to Nation's (2022) framework, knowing a word involves multiple dimensions, including its form, meaning, and use, as well as its associations with other lexical items. This multidimensional perspective highlights that vocabulary learning extends beyond simple form–meaning connections and requires learners to develop deeper lexical knowledge (Neary-Sundquist, 2015). In EFL contexts, vocabulary is therefore viewed as a crucial resource that supports learners' ability to understand, interpret, and express meaning effectively in the target language (Neary-Sundquist, 2015; Khodaparast & Keshmirshekan, 2021; Othman, 2024).

2.1.2 Importance of Vocabulary Learning

Vocabulary learning plays a central role in second and foreign language acquisition because vocabulary knowledge is closely associated with learners' overall language proficiency and communicative competence. A strong vocabulary base enables learners to comprehend written and spoken texts, participate in conversations, and express their ideas accurately and fluently (Neary-Sundquist, 2015; Khodaparast & Keshmirshekan, 2021). Numerous scholars argue that vocabulary is the foundation upon which other language skills are built, reinforcing the well-known assertion that meaningful communication cannot occur without adequate vocabulary knowledge (Gaballa & Al-Khayri, 2014; Othman, 2024). Furthermore, research indicates that effective vocabulary learning strategies and explicit vocabulary instruction contribute significantly to learners' retention, recall, and long-term acquisition of words (Zhang & Liang, 2024; Khodaparast & Keshmirshekan, 2021; Othman, 2024). Consequently, vocabulary learning remains a key concern in EFL education, particularly for learners who have limited exposure to English outside the classroom.

2.1.3 Challenges in Vocabulary Learning among EFL Learners

Despite its importance, vocabulary learning presents considerable challenges for EFL learners. Acquiring vocabulary involves not only memorizing word meanings but also understanding pronunciation, grammatical functions, collocations, and contextual usage. Learners often struggle with retaining a large number of lexical items and applying them appropriately in different communicative situations (Neary-Sundquist, 2015;

Khodaparast & Keshmirshekan, 2021). In addition, differences between learners' first language (L1) and English may create difficulties in understanding and remembering vocabulary, particularly when words have no direct equivalents or differ significantly in form and usage (Khodaparast & Keshmirshekan, 2021; Indriyani & Sugirin, 2019; Ismaiel & Asmari, 2017). Research also suggests that relying solely on incidental learning is often insufficient for developing robust vocabulary knowledge, making explicit instruction and effective learning strategies necessary (Neary-Sundquist, 2015). To address these challenges, educators increasingly encourage learners to employ various vocabulary learning strategies that facilitate comprehension, retention, and retrieval of new words (Somjai & Soontornwipast, 2020; Chowdhury & Ara, 2021; Alharthi *et al.*, 2020; Al-Malki, 2022).

2.2 Theoretical Framework

2.2.1 Dual Coding Theory

Dual Coding Theory (Paivio, 1991) proposes that information is processed through both verbal and non-verbal cognitive systems, and learning is enhanced when multiple representations are activated. In vocabulary learning, L1 translation provides an additional verbal representation that helps learners establish meaningful links between unfamiliar English words and their existing knowledge. These multiple connections facilitate vocabulary comprehension, retention, and recall (Bosma *et al.*, 2022; Gyllstad *et al.*, 2023; Rice & Tokowicz, 2020). Therefore, the theory supports the use of L1 translation as a cognitive aid in vocabulary learning.

2.2.2 Affective Filter Hypothesis

According to Krashen's (1989) Affective Filter Hypothesis, language acquisition is influenced by learners' emotional states, including anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence. L1 translation can lower learners' anxiety by making unfamiliar vocabulary more comprehensible, thereby increasing confidence and encouraging engagement in learning activities (Khoshnood & Kafipour, 2023; Rice & Tokowicz, 2020). However, excessive reliance on translation may reduce learners' opportunities to develop independent vocabulary learning skills. This theory helps explain how students' perceptions of L1 translation are shaped by both its emotional benefits and potential drawbacks.

2.2.3 Vocabulary Learning Strategy Theory

Schmitt's (1997) Vocabulary Learning Strategy Theory classifies translation as a cognitive and memory strategy that supports vocabulary acquisition by linking new words with learners' first-language knowledge. The theory suggests that the effectiveness of translation depends on learners' characteristics and learning contexts, and it should be used alongside other vocabulary learning strategies (Čarapić, 2022; Rivera Pérez *et al.*, 2019). In the present study, this framework provides a basis for examining how non-

English-majored students perceive the usefulness, benefits, and limitations of L1 translation in vocabulary learning.

2.3 Students' Perceptions of Using L1 Translation in Vocabulary Learning

2.3.2 Perceived Usefulness of L1 Translation in Vocabulary Learning

L1 translation is widely perceived by learners as a useful strategy for facilitating vocabulary learning, particularly in terms of comprehension, retention, and meaning clarification. One of its primary advantages is that it enables learners to understand unfamiliar English words quickly and accurately by providing direct access to their meanings in the first language (Laufer & Girsai, 2008). This support is especially valuable for learners with limited English proficiency, as it reduces the cognitive effort required to infer meanings from context and allows them to focus on understanding learning materials. Previous studies have also shown that learners regard translation as an efficient tool for overcoming comprehension difficulties, particularly when combined with contextual clues, glosses, or other learning resources (Fatimah *et al.*, 2018; Phan, 2022; Shi, 2024; Yu & Liu, 2022).

Beyond comprehension, learners often perceive L1 translation as beneficial for vocabulary retention. By linking unfamiliar English words with existing first-language knowledge, translation helps establish meaningful form–meaning associations that facilitate memory and recall (Paivio, 1991). Many learners report using translation when reviewing vocabulary because it increases their confidence in remembering previously learned words, especially when combined with strategies such as repetition, note-taking, or flashcards (Čarapić, 2022; Goodrich & Lonigan, 2018; Laufer & Girsai, 2008). Translation is also considered useful for clarifying multiple meanings, abstract vocabulary, and culture-specific expressions that may not be easily understood through English-only explanations, thereby reducing uncertainty and supporting more accurate vocabulary learning (Gyllstad *et al.*, 2023; Kida, 2022; Rice & Tokowicz, 2020).

2.3.3 Effectiveness of L1 Translation Compared to Other Vocabulary Learning Strategies

Previous studies have compared L1 translation with other vocabulary learning strategies, including contextual guessing, L2 definitions, visual aids, and rote memorization. Overall, learners generally perceive L1 translation as a faster and more reliable strategy for understanding unfamiliar vocabulary, particularly those with lower English proficiency (Fatimah *et al.*, 2018; Gyllstad *et al.*, 2023; Shi, 2024; Yu & Liu, 2022). Compared with contextual guessing and L2 definitions, translation provides immediate access to word meanings, reduces uncertainty, and facilitates comprehension. However, many learners also recognize that contextual guessing and L2 explanations promote deeper language processing and greater learner autonomy. Rather than viewing these strategies as mutually exclusive, students often consider them complementary, with translation supporting initial comprehension and other strategies fostering long-term vocabulary development (Beinborn *et al.*, 2014; Tormo *et al.*, 2021; Yıldız, 2023).

Similarly, learners tend to perceive L1 translation as more effective when combined with visual aids and active vocabulary learning strategies rather than used in isolation. The integration of translation with pictures, examples, or multimedia resources strengthens learners' understanding and retention by providing multiple representations of word meanings (Boers *et al.*, 2017; Dziemianko, 2022; Wang & Pellicer-Sánchez, 2022). In contrast to rote memorization, translation is often viewed as a more meaningful strategy because it helps learners establish form–meaning connections instead of merely memorizing word forms (Goodrich & Lonigan, 2018). Moreover, learners frequently report that appropriate use of L1 translation reduces anxiety and increases confidence and motivation, contributing to a more supportive vocabulary learning environment (Phan, 2022; Tran, 2024). These findings suggest that learners generally regard L1 translation as most effective when integrated with other vocabulary learning strategies rather than used as a standalone approach.

2.3.4 Cognitive and Affective Benefits of L1 Translation

Learners generally perceive L1 translation as providing significant cognitive benefits in vocabulary learning. Previous studies suggest that translation facilitates vocabulary comprehension, strengthens form–meaning associations, and enhances vocabulary retention by linking unfamiliar English words with learners' existing first-language knowledge (Fatimah *et al.*, 2018; Gyllstad *et al.*, 2023; Kida, 2022; Yu & Liu, 2022). In addition, learners often report that direct access to L1 meanings reduces the cognitive effort required to understand unfamiliar vocabulary, allowing them to devote greater attention to pronunciation, usage, and contextual application (Chen *et al.*, 2023; Rice & Tokowicz, 2020). These findings indicate that students commonly regard L1 translation as an effective cognitive support, particularly during the early stages of vocabulary acquisition.

Beyond its cognitive advantages, L1 translation is also perceived as offering important affective benefits. Learners frequently report that translation reduces anxiety, increases confidence, and enhances motivation by making unfamiliar vocabulary more accessible and reducing uncertainty during learning (Gyllstad *et al.*, 2023; Khoshnood & Kafipour, 2023). Positive experiences with translation can also foster more favorable attitudes toward vocabulary learning and encourage greater participation in classroom activities (Chen *et al.*, 2023; Qu, 2023). These perceived cognitive and affective benefits suggest that L1 translation is valued not only as a learning strategy but also as a source of emotional support that promotes learners' engagement and persistence in vocabulary learning.

2.3.5 Limitations and Risks of Using L1 Translation

Despite its perceived benefits, learners also recognize several limitations associated with the use of L1 translation in vocabulary learning. A common concern is the risk of overdependence, as excessive reliance on translation may discourage learners from developing independent vocabulary learning strategies such as contextual guessing or

using English-language resources (Karafil & İLBAY, 2023; Morata & Coyle, 2012; Tran, 2024). Learners also perceive that frequent translation may reduce their exposure to authentic English input, limiting opportunities to process vocabulary directly in the target language and potentially slowing the development of language fluency.

Another perceived limitation is that direct translation does not always capture the full meaning, usage, or cultural nuances of English vocabulary. Learners may experience misunderstandings arising from false cognates, multiple meanings, collocational differences, or culture-specific expressions when relying solely on L1 equivalents (Bogulski *et al.*, 2019; Kida, 2022; Wang & Pellicer-Sánchez, 2022). Some students also believe that habitual mental translation may hinder spontaneous communication in English, although others regard translation as a useful scaffold when integrated appropriately into communicative learning activities. Overall, the literature suggests that learners generally perceive L1 translation as most beneficial when it is used selectively and in combination with other vocabulary learning strategies rather than as the sole approach to vocabulary acquisition.

2.4 Related Studies

Previous studies have examined learners' and teachers' perceptions of using the first language (L1) in English language learning, particularly in vocabulary instruction. Overall, the findings indicate that learners generally hold positive attitudes toward L1 translation because it facilitates vocabulary comprehension, enhances retention, and reduces learning difficulties. For example, Tian and Hennebry-Leung (2016) found that Chinese university students appreciated both English and Chinese lexical explanations, although they tended to prefer L1 support for immediate comprehension while acknowledging the need to avoid excessive dependence on translation. Similarly, Rakab (2021) reported that both teachers and students viewed L1 use positively, particularly as a means of supporting vocabulary learning and scaffolding learners with lower levels of English proficiency.

Evidence from the Vietnamese EFL context also supports the pedagogical value of L1 translation. Phan (2022) found that non-English-majored students who participated in translation-based activities demonstrated more accurate and frequent use of newly learned vocabulary than those who learned without translation. The study further suggested that translation can create meaningful learning opportunities and assist teachers in monitoring students' progress when integrated appropriately into classroom instruction.

Although previous research has highlighted the educational value of L1 translation, several gaps remain. Many studies have focused on teachers' beliefs, the instructional effectiveness of translation, or the general use of L1 in language classrooms rather than learners' perceptions of L1 translation specifically for vocabulary learning. Moreover, relatively few studies have investigated this issue among non-English-majored university students in the Vietnamese EFL context. Therefore, the present study

seeks to address this gap by exploring non-English-majored students' perceptions of using L1 translation in vocabulary learning.

3. Methods

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods research design to investigate non-English-majored students' perceptions of using L1 translation in vocabulary learning. A questionnaire survey was first administered to examine students' perceptions of the usefulness, effectiveness, cognitive and affective benefits, and limitations of L1 translation. Semi-structured interviews were subsequently conducted to gain deeper insights into students' experiences and to explain the quantitative findings. The integration of quantitative and qualitative data enabled a more comprehensive understanding of the research topic through methodological triangulation.

3.2 Participants

The study was conducted at a Vietnamese university where English is a compulsory subject for non-English-majored students. A total of 374 students from different academic disciplines participated in the questionnaire survey. Participants were selected through convenience sampling based on their availability and willingness to participate. To complement the survey data, several students were invited to participate in semi-structured interviews, providing more detailed perspectives on their experiences of using L1 translation in vocabulary learning.

3.3 Instruments and Data Collection

Data were collected using two instruments, namely a structured questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire consisted of items measuring students' perceptions of the usefulness, effectiveness, cognitive and affective benefits, and limitations of L1 translation in vocabulary learning using a five-point Likert scale. Following the survey, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected participants to explore their views and experiences in greater depth. The interviews also served to clarify and enrich the quantitative findings.

3.4 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, to summarize students' perceptions. Qualitative interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis, in which participants' responses were coded, categorized, and organized into recurring themes. Findings from both datasets were then integrated to provide a comprehensive interpretation of students' perceptions of using L1 translation in vocabulary learning.

4. Results

4.1 Quantitative Results

4.1.1 Students' Perceptions of Usefulness of L1 Translation in Vocabulary Learning

Table 4.1 presents the descriptive statistics for students' perceptions of the usefulness of L1 translation in vocabulary learning. The mean scores of all ten items ranged from 4.10 to 4.40, indicating that the participants generally agreed or strongly agreed with the positive statements regarding the usefulness of L1 translation. This finding suggests that non-English-majored students perceived L1 translation as a valuable and supportive strategy for learning English vocabulary.

Table 4.1: Descriptive statistics for perceived usefulness of L1 translation in vocabulary learning

Items	Min	Max	Mean	SD
1. L1 translation helps me understand new vocabulary more easily.	1	5	4.40	1.05
2. Using L1 translation improves my ability to remember word meanings.	1	5	4.40	1.00
3. Translation makes it easier for me to learn abstract or difficult terms.	1	5	4.19	1.14
4. L1 translation reduces confusion when I encounter unfamiliar words.	1	5	4.31	1.12
5. I find bilingual dictionaries effective for vocabulary learning.	1	5	4.34	1.05
6. Translation helps me connect new vocabulary to my prior knowledge.	1	5	4.31	1.10
7. I learn faster when teachers provide L1 translations.	1	5	4.32	1.10
8. Translation helps me perform better on vocabulary tests.	1	5	4.32	1.06
9. I prefer learning vocabulary through translation compared to guessing from context.	1	5	4.10	1.11
10. Translation is especially useful for me as a non-English major student.	1	5	4.34	1.08

Among the ten items measuring the perceived usefulness of L1 translation, all received mean scores above 4.00, indicating that participants generally agreed that L1 translation is a useful strategy for vocabulary learning. The overall mean score was 4.3, reflecting a highly positive perception.

The highest-rated items were Item 1 (L1 translation helps me understand new vocabulary more easily) and Item 2 (Using L1 translation improves my ability to remember word meanings), both with a mean score of 4.40. These findings suggest that students primarily valued L1 translation for facilitating vocabulary comprehension and improving vocabulary retention. Other highly rated items included the effectiveness of bilingual dictionaries and the usefulness of translation for non-English-majored students (both $M = 4.34$), as well as its role in reducing confusion, connecting new vocabulary with prior knowledge, and improving learning efficiency (means ranging from 4.31 to 4.32).

In contrast, the lowest mean score was recorded for Item 9 (I prefer learning vocabulary through translation compared to guessing from context) ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 1.11$). Although participants generally agreed with this statement, the comparatively lower score suggests that some students also recognized the value of contextual guessing as a complementary vocabulary learning strategy. Overall, the findings indicate that non-English-majored students held positive perceptions of the usefulness of L1 translation, particularly for enhancing vocabulary comprehension, retention, and learning efficiency,

while acknowledging that it should be used alongside other vocabulary learning strategies.

4.2 Students' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of L1 Translation Compared to Other Vocabulary Learning Strategies

Table 4.2 presents the descriptive statistics regarding students' perceptions of the effectiveness of L1 translation compared to other vocabulary learning strategies. The mean scores of the ten items ranged from 3.94 to 4.29, indicating that participants generally agreed that L1 translation is an effective strategy for vocabulary learning. These findings suggest that non-English-majored students viewed translation as a valuable approach that can facilitate vocabulary acquisition and, in many cases, outperform alternative learning strategies.

Table 4.2: Descriptive statistics for effectiveness of L1 translation compared to other strategies

Items	Min	Max	Mean	SD
1. Translation is more effective than memorization for learning vocabulary.	1	5	4.04	1.14
2. I can recall words better after translation tasks than after reading-only tasks.	1	5	4.16	1.11
3. Translation helps me learn vocabulary more efficiently than synonym exercises.	1	5	4.22	1.12
4. Translation is more effective than inferencing from context for short-term recall.	1	5	4.11	1.13
5. Translation helps me retain vocabulary longer compared to rote learning.	1	5	4.29	1.13
6. I find translation more effective than using visual aids or pictures.	1	5	3.94	1.21
7. Translation tasks make me focus more deeply than reading definitions in English.	1	5	4.15	1.15
8. Translation provides more immediate results than extensive reading.	1	5	3.98	1.19
9. Compared to contextual guessing, translation improves my test scores.	1	5	4.05	1.14
10. Translation is the most reliable vocabulary learning strategy for me.	1	5	4.12	1.16

Among the ten items measuring the perceived effectiveness of L1 translation compared with other vocabulary learning strategies, the overall mean score was 4.11, indicating that participants generally viewed L1 translation as an effective approach to vocabulary learning. The highest-rated item was Item 5 (Translation helps me retain vocabulary longer compared to rote learning) ($M = 4.29$, $SD = 1.13$), suggesting that students believed translation promoted better vocabulary retention than simple memorization. High ratings were also observed for Item 3 (Translation helps me learn vocabulary more efficiently than synonym exercises) ($M = 4.22$) and Item 2 (I can recall words better after translation tasks than after reading-only tasks) ($M = 4.16$), indicating that learners perceived translation as more effective than several commonly used vocabulary learning strategies.

In contrast, the lowest mean scores were found for Item 6 (I find translation more effective than using visual aids or pictures) ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 1.21$) and Item 8 (Translation

provides more immediate results than extensive reading) ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 1.19$). Although participants generally agreed with these statements, the comparatively lower ratings suggest that some students also recognized the effectiveness of visual aids and extensive reading in vocabulary learning. Overall, the findings indicate that non-English-majored students perceived L1 translation as an effective vocabulary learning strategy, particularly for improving vocabulary retention and recall, while acknowledging that other strategies can also play complementary roles in vocabulary development.

4.3 Students' Perceptions of the Cognitive and Affective Benefits of L1 Translation in Vocabulary Learning

Table 4.3 presents the descriptive statistics regarding students' perceptions of the cognitive and affective benefits of L1 translation in vocabulary learning. The mean scores of the ten items ranged from 4.05 to 4.26, indicating that participants generally agreed that L1 translation provides both cognitive and emotional support during the vocabulary learning process. These findings suggest that translation not only facilitates comprehension but also contributes positively to learners' confidence, motivation, concentration, and overall learning experience.

Table 4.3: Descriptive statistics for cognitive and affective benefits of L1 translation

Items	Min	Max	Mean	SD
1. Translation reduces my anxiety when learning new vocabulary.	1	5	4.13	1.14
2. I feel more confident in vocabulary learning when translation is used.	1	5	4.26	1.06
3. Translation motivates me to learn more new words.	1	5	4.18	1.12
4. Translation helps me focus better during vocabulary learning tasks.	1	5	4.18	1.11
5. Translation makes vocabulary learning less stressful.	1	5	4.22	1.11
6. Translation improves my classroom participation in vocabulary activities.	1	5	4.21	1.09
7. Translation increases my willingness to use English outside class.	1	5	4.05	1.22
8. Translation makes vocabulary exercises more enjoyable.	1	5	4.15	1.14
9. Translation enhances my concentration when learning difficult words.	1	5	4.21	1.11
10. Translation helps me develop a positive attitude toward vocabulary learning.	1	5	4.21	1.11

Among the ten items measuring the perceived cognitive and affective benefits of L1 translation, the overall mean score was 4.18, indicating that participants generally held positive perceptions of its cognitive and emotional support in vocabulary learning. The highest-rated item was Item 2 (I feel more confident in vocabulary learning when translation is used) ($M = 4.26$, $SD = 1.06$), suggesting that students perceived L1 translation as an effective means of increasing their confidence during vocabulary learning. Other highly rated items included reducing learning stress (Item 5, $M = 4.22$) and improving classroom participation, concentration, and positive attitudes toward vocabulary learning (Items 6, 9, and 10, all $M = 4.21$). Participants also agreed that

translation enhanced their motivation and focus during vocabulary learning activities (both Items 3 and 4, $M = 4.18$).

The lowest mean score was recorded for Item 7 (Translation increases my willingness to use English outside class) ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 1.22$). Although participants generally agreed with this statement, the comparatively lower rating suggests that they were less certain about the influence of translation on their willingness to use English beyond the classroom. Overall, the findings indicate that non-English-majored students perceived L1 translation as providing substantial cognitive and affective benefits, particularly by enhancing confidence, motivation, concentration, classroom engagement, and positive attitudes while reducing learning-related anxiety and stress.

4.4 Students' Perceptions of the Limitations and Risks Associated with Using L1 Translation in Vocabulary Learning

Table 4.4 presents the descriptive statistics regarding students' perceptions of the limitations and risks associated with using L1 translation in vocabulary learning. The mean scores of the ten items ranged from 3.33 to 3.73, indicating that participants generally expressed a moderate level of agreement regarding the potential drawbacks of translation. Compared with the previous clusters, which received consistently high levels of agreement, this cluster obtained noticeably lower mean scores, suggesting that although students recognized certain limitations of translation, they were less convinced about its negative effects than its benefits.

Table 4.4: Descriptive statistics for limitations and risks of using L1 translation

Items	Min	Max	Mean	SD
1. Overusing translation prevents me from thinking directly in English.	1	5	3.67	1.25
2. Translation slows me down when trying to communicate fluently in English.	1	5	3.51	1.30
3. I sometimes produce unidiomatic sentences because I rely on L1 translation.	1	5	3.68	1.27
4. Translation may cause me to misunderstand the nuances of English words.	1	5	3.73	1.29
5. Depending too much on translation makes me less independent in learning.	1	5	3.65	1.30
6. Translation limits my exposure to authentic English input.	1	5	3.61	1.29
7. I rely on translation instead of developing strategies like guessing from context.	1	5	3.55	1.34
8. Translation becomes less useful as my English proficiency improves.	1	5	3.33	1.41
9. Using translation makes me less motivated to use English directly.	1	5	3.34	1.40
10. Translation can hinder my fluency development in the long term.	1	5	3.48	1.34

Among the ten items measuring the perceived limitations and risks of L1 translation, the overall mean score was 3.56, indicating a moderate level of agreement. The highest-rated item was Item 4 (Translation may cause me to misunderstand the nuances of English words) ($M = 3.73$, $SD = 1.29$), suggesting that participants recognized that direct

translation may not always accurately convey subtle meanings or contextual uses of English vocabulary. Other relatively highly rated items included the production of unidiomatic sentences due to reliance on L1 translation (Item 3, $M = 3.68$), difficulty thinking directly in English (Item 1, $M = 3.67$), and reduced learner independence (Item 5, $M = 3.65$). These findings indicate that students were aware of the potential drawbacks associated with excessive reliance on translation.

The lowest mean scores were recorded for Item 8 (Translation becomes less useful as my English proficiency improves) ($M = 3.33$, $SD = 1.41$) and Item 9 (Using translation makes me less motivated to use English directly) ($M = 3.34$, $SD = 1.40$). These comparatively lower ratings suggest that participants were less certain whether the usefulness of translation decreases as proficiency develops or whether it negatively affects their motivation to use English. Overall, the findings indicate that although non-English-majored students acknowledged several limitations of L1 translation, their responses reflected only moderate agreement, suggesting that they viewed these drawbacks as concerns to be managed rather than reasons to avoid using translation altogether.

4.2 Qualitative Results

Theme 1: Perceived Usefulness of L1 Translation in Vocabulary Learning

Most interviewees perceived L1 translation as a useful strategy for vocabulary learning because it enabled them to understand unfamiliar words more quickly and accurately. Participants explained that translating English words into Vietnamese helped them clarify meanings, connect new vocabulary with their existing knowledge, and remember words more easily. One participant commented:

"Whenever I learn a new English word, I usually translate it into Vietnamese first. If I only read the English explanation, I sometimes still do not understand it completely. However, when I know the Vietnamese meaning, I can understand the word immediately and remember it more easily later." (Participant 3)

Similarly, another participant reported that translation was particularly helpful when encountering unfamiliar vocabulary in reading passages, as it reduced confusion and allowed them to continue learning more efficiently:

"As a non-English major student, I do not have a large vocabulary. When I meet difficult words in reading passages, I often cannot guess the meaning from context. Translation helps me understand the words quickly and continue reading without spending too much time feeling confused." (Participant 7)

Overall, these interview findings indicate that participants regarded L1 translation as a practical learning strategy that supports vocabulary comprehension and retention, particularly for learners with limited English proficiency. This theme is consistent with

the quantitative findings, which showed that perceived usefulness was the highest-rated dimension of students' perceptions.

Theme 2: Effectiveness of L1 Translation Compared with Other Strategies

Most interviewees perceived L1 translation as more effective than several alternative vocabulary learning strategies, particularly rote memorization and contextual guessing. Participants explained that translation provided clearer and more accurate meanings, helping them establish stronger connections between English words and their existing knowledge, which in turn improved vocabulary retention. One participant noted:

"I have tried different methods such as memorizing English definitions, looking at pictures, and guessing from context. However, I usually remember vocabulary better when I translate the words into Vietnamese. Translation allows me to connect the English word with a meaning that I already know, so it stays in my memory longer." (Participant 5)

Another participant emphasized that translation was more reliable than contextual guessing, particularly when encountering unfamiliar vocabulary:

"Guessing from context is sometimes useful, but there are many situations where I guess incorrectly. Translation gives me a direct and reliable meaning. Because of this, I can learn vocabulary faster and perform better in vocabulary quizzes and classroom tests." (Participant 9)

Overall, the interview findings suggest that participants regarded L1 translation as a reliable and efficient vocabulary learning strategy, particularly for improving comprehension and recall. At the same time, some participants acknowledged that other strategies, such as contextual guessing, could also be useful in certain learning situations. These findings support the quantitative results, which indicated that students generally perceived L1 translation as more effective than several alternative vocabulary learning strategies.

Theme 3: Cognitive and Affective Benefits of L1 Translation

Interview participants reported that L1 translation provided not only cognitive support but also important affective benefits during vocabulary learning. Many explained that translation reduced anxiety, increased confidence, and made vocabulary learning more manageable, particularly when they encountered unfamiliar words. One participant shared:

"When I encounter too many unfamiliar words, I often feel nervous and discouraged because I cannot understand the lesson. However, when the teacher provides Vietnamese translations, I feel much more comfortable. I become less worried about making mistakes and more willing to participate in classroom activities." (Participant 2)

Another participant emphasized that translation increased confidence and motivation by helping them understand vocabulary more clearly:

"Translation makes me feel more confident because I know exactly what the vocabulary means. When I understand the meaning clearly, I can answer questions, complete exercises, and communicate with my classmates more confidently. It also motivates me to learn more words because the learning process becomes easier." (Participant 6)

Overall, participants perceived L1 translation as an important source of cognitive and emotional support. They reported that translation enhanced their confidence, motivation, and classroom engagement while reducing anxiety associated with learning unfamiliar vocabulary. These qualitative findings are consistent with the survey results, which showed high levels of agreement regarding the cognitive and affective benefits of L1 translation in vocabulary learning.

Theme 4: Perceived Limitations and Risks of L1 Translation

Although interview participants generally viewed L1 translation positively, they also acknowledged several limitations associated with its overuse. A common concern was that excessive reliance on translation could discourage learners from thinking directly in English and reduce communicative fluency. One participant explained:

"Sometimes I depend on translation too much. Whenever I see an English word, I automatically think of the Vietnamese equivalent first. Because of this habit, I find it difficult to think directly in English or respond quickly when speaking. I feel that translation can slow down my communication." (Participant 10)

Another participant pointed out that translation does not always convey the full meaning or appropriate use of English vocabulary:

"Translation is useful, but it is not always accurate. Some English words have meanings that cannot be translated perfectly into Vietnamese. Sometimes I understand the basic meaning of a word, but I still do not know how to use it naturally in different situations." (Participant 4)

Overall, participants recognized that while L1 translation is an effective vocabulary learning strategy, excessive dependence on it may limit the development of direct thinking in English and a deeper understanding of vocabulary use. These qualitative findings complement the survey results, which showed moderate agreement regarding the perceived limitations and risks of L1 translation, suggesting that students generally favored its balanced use alongside other vocabulary learning strategies.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that non-English-majored students held highly positive perceptions of L1 translation in vocabulary learning. Overall, translation was perceived as a useful cognitive and affective tool that facilitated vocabulary comprehension, retention, and learning efficiency. Students reported that translation helped them quickly understand unfamiliar words by linking new vocabulary with prior knowledge, which in turn reduced learning difficulty and supported memory retention. These findings can be explained by Dual Coding Theory (Paivio, 1991) and Schmitt's Vocabulary Learning Strategy Theory (1997). Translation appears to create stronger form-meaning associations by providing an additional linguistic representation in the learners' L1, thereby enhancing cognitive processing and recall. In addition, translation functions as a cognitive and memory strategy that supports efficient vocabulary acquisition, particularly for learners with limited English proficiency.

The results are consistent with previous studies (Tian & Hennebry-Leung, 2016; Rakab, 2021; Phan, 2022), which similarly reported that learners perceive L1 use as beneficial for vocabulary learning due to its role in improving comprehension and learning effectiveness. The present study extends these findings in the Vietnamese EFL context by showing that non-English-majored students not only value translation for comprehension but also perceive it as more effective than several alternative vocabulary learning strategies.

In addition to cognitive benefits, participants also reported strong affective advantages, including increased confidence, reduced anxiety, and greater classroom engagement. These findings align with Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1989), which posits that lower anxiety and higher confidence facilitate language acquisition. Translation appears to reduce learners' affective barriers by providing immediate meaning access, thereby creating a more supportive learning environment.

However, the findings also reveal perceived limitations of L1 translation. Students acknowledged that excessive reliance on translation may hinder direct thinking in English, produce unidiomatic language use, and limit exposure to authentic input. These concerns suggest that while translation is highly valued, learners are also aware of its potential drawbacks when overused. This supports Schmitt's (1997) argument that translation should be used as one of several vocabulary learning strategies rather than the sole approach.

Overall, the study suggests that L1 translation functions as a dual-purpose strategy, serving both cognitive and affective roles in vocabulary learning. However, its effectiveness depends on balanced use alongside other strategies such as contextual learning, extensive reading, and communicative practice. The findings highlight the pedagogical importance of integrating L1 translation strategically rather than avoiding or overusing it in EFL vocabulary instruction.

6. Conclusion

This study investigated non-English-majored students' perceptions of using L1 translation in vocabulary learning using a mixed-methods design, including questionnaire data from 374 students and semi-structured interviews. The findings indicate that students generally held highly positive perceptions of L1 translation across all dimensions examined.

Overall, participants perceived L1 translation as a useful strategy for vocabulary learning, particularly in facilitating comprehension, improving retention, and supporting efficient learning. They also considered it more effective than several alternative strategies, such as memorization, contextual guessing, and English-only definitions, mainly because it provided immediate and reliable access to word meanings and helped connect new vocabulary with prior knowledge. In addition, students reported that L1 translation contributed to cognitive and affective benefits, including increased confidence, reduced anxiety, and greater classroom engagement.

Despite these advantages, participants also recognized potential limitations of L1 translation, particularly when it is overused. These included reduced opportunities for direct thinking in English, limited exposure to authentic input, and possible difficulties in developing independent vocabulary learning strategies. However, these limitations were generally viewed as manageable rather than critical drawbacks, provided that translation is used appropriately and in combination with other learning strategies.

The findings support Dual Coding Theory (Paivio, 1991), the Affective Filter Hypothesis (Krashen, 1989), and Vocabulary Learning Strategy Theory (Schmitt, 1997), suggesting that L1 translation functions as both a cognitive and affective support in vocabulary acquisition. It strengthens form–meaning connections, reduces affective barriers, and serves as an effective memory strategy, particularly for learners with limited English exposure.

In conclusion, L1 translation remains a valuable pedagogical tool in EFL vocabulary learning. Rather than excluding it from classroom practice, educators should integrate it strategically alongside other vocabulary learning strategies to ensure both effective vocabulary acquisition and balanced language development.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

About the Author(s)

Nguyen Thi My Hoa is an English lecturer at Nam Can Tho University, Vietnam. Her research interests include Writing, Speaking and TBLT.

Luong Vo Nhat Quang is an English lecturer at Nam Can Tho University, Vietnam. His primary research interests encompass learning media, critical thinking, creativity and innovation, as well as teaching and learning methodologies.

Lam Ky Nhan is a lecturer in the Faculty of Foreign Languages at Nam Can Tho University, Vietnam. His research interests include English language teaching, online language learning, teacher and learner motivation, language testing and assessment, and the integration of emerging technologies into language education.

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