

The Impact of Google Translate on English as a Foreign Language for Adults.

El Impacto del uso de Traductor de Google en inglés como Lengua Extranjera en adultos.

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Resumen

Las herramientas digitales continúan transformando la adquisición de lenguas en el mundo globalizado actual, siendo el Traductor de Google un recurso de uso frecuente y de fácil acceso para los estudiantes adultos. Esta herramienta se ha consolidado como un apoyo clave para mejorar la competencia lingüística en el aprendizaje del inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) dentro del aula. El presente estudio analiza la influencia del Traductor de Google en el proceso de aprendizaje del inglés por parte de adultos, con énfasis en su impacto sobre la comprensión y el desarrollo de habilidades lingüísticas. A través de diversas síntesis de investigaciones, se examina cómo la dependencia de esta herramienta afecta la capacidad de los aprendices para comprender, utilizar y retener eficazmente la lengua meta. Los estudios revisados señalan que, si bien el Traductor de Google puede favorecer la comprensión al ofrecer traducciones inmediatas, su uso excesivo podría obstaculizar el desarrollo de destrezas productivas, como la expresión oral y escrita, debido a la falta de precisión en aspectos como la ortografía y la pronunciación. La investigación subraya la necesidad de equilibrar el uso de herramientas digitales con estrategias pedagógicas tradicionales, con el fin de optimizar el desarrollo lingüístico de los estudiantes adultos de inglés como lengua extranjera.

Palabras clave: inglés como lengua extranjera; Traductor de Google; herramienta automática; traducción

Abstract

Digital tools continue to shape language acquisition in today's globalized world, which is why Google Translate has become a widely used and easily accessible resource for adult learners, supporting the development of their language proficiency in English classrooms. This study explores the influence of Google Translate on the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning process for adults, focusing particularly on its impact on comprehension and skill development. Drawing on various research syntheses, the study aims to investigate how reliance on Google Translate affects learners' ability to understand, use, and retain the target language effectively. Previous studies suggest that while Google Translate can enhance comprehension by providing immediate translations, excessive use may hinder the development of certain productive skills, such as speaking and writing, due to its tendency to prioritize speed over accuracy in spelling and pronunciation. The research underscores the importance of balancing digital tools with traditional learning strategies to optimize language development among adult EFL learners.

Keywords: EFL; Google Translator; influence; automatic tool; translation



Introduction

Translation has been extensively studied over the years. According to Catford (1965), translation refers to the act of rendering a text or speech in another language through equivalent textual material. This highlights the essential role of translation in today's interconnected world, as it facilitates communication by overcoming language barriers. Thus, translation is not only a linguistic skill but also a fundamental tool for global interaction.

Spinak (2023) explains that open-access digital tools—such as Google Translate—have been developed to assist users in quickly translating unfamiliar content. The rise of such tools has influenced English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, particularly among adults. However, as noted by Myer (2024), both machine and human translation have benefits and limitations, as languages operate within distinct grammatical and cultural systems.

Amilia and Yuwono (2020) argue that Google Translate frequently produces translations that are overly general and mechanical, lacking semantic and grammatical precision. This raises questions such as: How does the use of online translators affect the performance of second language learners in classroom and real-world contexts? Can they be effectively leveraged to support learning? (Myer, 2024). Pearson (2024) points out that adult EFL learners often juggle multiple responsibilities, and tools like Google Translate can serve as efficient, time-saving aids in their learning journey.

Although the use of digital tools in EFL education has been examined globally, there is limited research focused on the Ecuadorian adult EFL context. Most existing studies have taken place in regions with broader access to technology or have focused on younger learners. In Ecuador, where English proficiency remains a challenge in both urban and rural areas (De Angelis, 2022), understanding how adults use translation tools can provide valuable insights into how technology intersects with traditional learning methods.

Additionally, the increasing availability of internet and mobile technology in Ecuador underscores the need to explore how digital tools can support adult learners and contribute to more effective language instruction. This literature review aims to analyze how the use of Google Translate affects not only comprehension but also the broader language acquisition process among adult EFL learners.



An important pedagogical consideration in using Google Translate is learner autonomy. Benson (2011) states that promoting autonomy empowers learners to take control of their own learning process. In this context, Google Translate allows learners—especially those in self-directed or informal learning settings—to instantly access meanings and support their understanding. Adult learners who may lack consistent access to formal instruction often rely on such tools for vocabulary building, reading comprehension, and writing support.

The integration of Google Translate into classroom instruction requires a balanced approach. While some educators caution against its use due to concerns about accuracy and academic integrity, others advocate for its guided use as a supplementary resource. García and Peña (2011) suggest that digital translation tools should not replace human translation in language acquisition, but they can be effectively incorporated into task-based activities. For example, learners can compare machine-generated outputs with human translations to explore meaning differences and build metalinguistic awareness.

Google Translate aligns with some principles of the Grammar Translation Method (GTM), a traditional approach to language learning. According to Huong (2024), GTM has been criticized for neglecting communicative competence and impeding fluency. Nonetheless, elements of GTM persist, especially in contexts where digital translation tools are used. Google Translate can be seen as a modern extension of this method—providing immediate translation but raising questions about its long-term impact on learners' linguistic development.

Spinak (2023) cautions that immediate translations are not always effective for interpreting idiomatic expressions, cultural references, or complex syntactic structures, all of which are essential for deeper language comprehension. Within frameworks like the Global Scale of English (GSE), which assess reading, writing, listening, and speaking, balanced skill development is vital. Although Google Translate can assist with comprehension, its overuse may lead to passive learning habits that hinder long-term language growth.

Carreres, Muñoz-Calvo, and Noriega-Sánchez (2018) emphasize that technology can enhance learner engagement and autonomy, particularly in low-exposure environments. However, educators must ensure that digital tools complement—not replace—active

strategies such as speaking and writing practice, which are crucial for productive language use.

In Ecuador, the dual demands of work and study often affect adult learners. While Google Translate appears helpful, it is crucial to evaluate its broader impact on essential skill development (Spinak, 2023). Tools like Google Translate provide immediate solutions but may compromise learners' ability to acquire and retain meaningful vocabulary and syntactic knowledge over time (Afiliani et al., 2024).

As Oskoui and Mirzaeian (2023) argue, integrating updated digital tools into the classroom can motivate students and modernize second language education. Google Translate is often praised for its ease of use, speed, and accessibility. Phuong Anh and Thanh Loan T. (2021) add that technological advancements have simplified translation tasks. Similarly, Ducar and Schocket (2018) recognize Google Translate's utility in supporting written and spoken activities.

Dahmash (2020) highlights the need to critically examine the effects of Google Translate on comprehension and skill development. In this review, studies by researchers such as Wei (2021), Habeeb (2020), López and Pinzón (2023), Cancino and Panes (2021), and others offer insights into how learners perceive and use Google Translate and how it affects their learning outcomes.

This literature review synthesizes these perspectives to better understand the pedagogical, cognitive, and practical implications of using Google Translate in the adult EFL learning context—especially within Ecuador—considering its potential benefits, drawbacks, and relevance for fostering autonomy, comprehension, and skill development

Materials and Methods

This study was conducted using a qualitative approach through a narrative literature review design. The objective was to examine recent empirical studies that address the role of Google Translate (GT) in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning process, particularly for adult learners. This methodology allowed for a comprehensive exploration of diverse

findings and perspectives to better understand both the benefits and limitations of GT in educational contexts.

The selection process involved an extensive bibliographic review of peer-reviewed articles published between 2018 and 2024. The databases consulted included ERIC, Scopus, Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, and ResearchGate. Search terms used were: “Google Translate in EFL learning”, “machine translation in second language acquisition”, “digital tools for English learners”, and “adult EFL learners and translation tools”. Boolean operators (AND/OR) were used to refine the searches and ensure relevant results. The inclusion criteria were as follows: (a) empirical or theoretical studies focused on the integration of GT in EFL contexts, (b) studies involving adult or university-level learners, (c) articles published in English, and (d) studies published within the last seven years. Exclusion criteria included studies that only referenced translation tools without empirical data or those focused exclusively on other machine translation software not including GT. A total of 20 articles were selected based on relevance and methodological rigor. These studies were organized in a synthesized matrix to compare authors, year, country, main focus, and key findings. A thematic analysis was conducted to identify emerging categories, including the perceived advantages of GT, its impact on writing, vocabulary acquisition, learner autonomy, and the challenges associated with its overuse or misuse. The review considered works from a variety of geographical contexts, with a special emphasis on identifying existing research gaps in Latin American EFL settings, where fewer studies have been conducted. This comparative perspective helped highlight regional trends and areas in need of further exploration.

To further contextualize the scope of the literature reviewed, the selected articles were classified according to their country of origin. This geographical breakdown not only highlights the global relevance of the topic but also reveals research gaps in certain regions, such as Latin America. Table 1 summarizes the distribution of the reviewed studies by country.

Table 1. Geographical Distribution of Reviewed Articles

Country	Number of Articles	Authors
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USA	2	Ducar & Schocket (2018); Bogachenko & Burke (2024)
Chile	1	Cancino & Panes (2021)
Colombia	1	López & Pinzón (2023)
Indonesia	2	Afiliani et al. (2024); Susatyo (2023)
Iran	2	Mirzaeian & Oskoui (2023); Oskoui & Mirzaeian (2023)
Vietnam	2	Phan Thi Tuyet Van et al. (2021); Phan et al. (2021)
Saudi Arabia	1	Alhaisoni & Alhaysony (2017)
Iraq	1	Habeeb (2020)
Algeria	1	Laiche & Nemouchi (2021)
Yemen	1	Amin (2020)
Thailand	1	Tsai (2019)
Turkey	1	Arslan (2018)
Philippines	1	Bin Dahmash (2019)
Multinational*	3	Channia (2023); Ammade et al. (2023); Wei (2021)
Total	20	

Note: “Multinational” includes studies that do not specify a country or involved multiple regions.

Results

Based on the analysis of twenty empirical studies, a shared perspective emerges regarding the use of Google Translate (GT) as a support tool in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. The findings reveal that GT is widely appreciated for its accessibility, speed, and usefulness in supporting reading comprehension, writing, and vocabulary acquisition. Several studies highlight GT’s positive contribution to the development of writing skills. For instance, Cancino and Panes (2021) observed that Chilean EFL students were able to produce more coherent and extended written texts when using GT. Similarly, Laiche and Nemouchi (2021) reported improvements in lexical choices and sentence structuring among learners who employed GT for academic purposes. Additionally, research by Channia (2023) and

Arslan (2018) confirmed that GT aids in expanding learners' vocabulary and fostering grammatical awareness, even though it does not explicitly teach grammar rules. GT was also recognized for its ability to foster learner autonomy, especially in contexts with limited access to educational resources. In this regard, Wei (2021) and Habeeb (2020) noted that learners frequently resorted to GT to resolve immediate doubts, enabling them to progress more independently in their language acquisition process. This perception was supported by findings from Bin Dahmash (2019) and Phan et al. (2021), who indicated that GT allows students to verify meanings and model sentence constructions swiftly and conveniently.

Nonetheless, several studies pointed out notable limitations. A recurring concern involves GT's inaccuracy in translating idiomatic expressions, context-dependent phrases, and complex grammatical structures. López and Pinzón (2023), as well as Bogachenko and Burke (2024), found that overreliance on GT may result in awkward or incorrect translations, which could hinder learners' linguistic development and lead to misunderstandings. Furthermore, Mirzaeian and Oskoui (2023) emphasized that excessive dependence on the tool may discourage critical thinking and reduce learners' motivation to internalize the target language. Other investigations, such as those by Tsai (2019) and Susatyo (2023), compared GT to traditional methods like the Grammar Translation Method (GTM). While GT was praised for its speed and efficiency, GTM was seen as fostering deeper cognitive engagement. As a result, it is evident that GT can be a valuable educational aid when used under proper guidance and with clear pedagogical strategies. However, if employed without awareness of its limitations, it may promote passive learning habits and hinder learners' long-term language development.

A summary of the main studies reviewed is presented in Table 2, which synthesizes key information about authorship, publication year, research focus, and main findings. This matrix offers a comparative overview that supports the patterns and conclusions discussed throughout this section and helps visualize the diversity and convergence of perspectives on the role of Google Translate in the EFL learning process.

Table 2. Synthesized Studies Matrix



Author(s)	Year	Main Focus	Main Findings
Laiche & Nemouchi	2021	Impact on academic writing	GT improved vocabulary and structure in EFL writing tasks.
Cancino & Panes	2021	Writing quality in secondary education	Students wrote longer, more coherent texts using GT under guidance.
Afiliani, Tanasale & Rijoly	2024	Perceptions in translation class	Learners had positive views on GT but noted its mechanical output.
Ducar & Schocket	2018	Drafting and writing revisions	GT was used for early drafts, but students lacked critical evaluation skills.
Mirzaeian & Oskoui	2023	Systematic review on GT in language learning	GT promotes autonomy but needs structured integration to avoid misuse.
Tsai	2019	University students' perceptions	Students found GT helpful for reading and vocabulary but risky for complex grammar.
Alhaisoni & Alhaysony	2017	Student attitudes toward GT	GT was favored for convenience, though not always reliable.
Bin Dahmash	2019	Digital dependency and autonomy	GT supports comprehension but

			leads to passive learning if overused.
Phan Thi Tuyet Van et al.	2021	Impact on overall learning process	GT helped with comprehension but reduced engagement in active tasks.
Bogachenko & Burke	2024	GT in forced migration contexts	GT enabled communication in crisis, but produced cultural misinterpretations.
Susatyo	2023	Comparison between GT and GTM	GT outperformed GTM in speed but lacked deep language engagement.
Oskoui & Mirzaeian	2023	Synthesis of benefits and risks	Effective when supervised; unstructured use risks learning dependency.
Amin	2020	Perception of autonomous use	Students felt empowered using GT for self-directed learning.
Phan, Van, Tram & Khang	2021	Relation between GT use and EFL outcomes	Frequent users saw faster vocabulary recognition but poor grammar control.
Arslan	2018	Grammar awareness through GT	GT raised awareness of errors but didn't teach grammatical rules.

Wei	2021	Frequent use and student perception	GT widely used and trusted by students for basic tasks.
Habeeb	2020	Ease vs. lexical and grammatical errors	GT use led to reading ease but frequent grammar mistakes.
López & Pinzón	2023	Productive skills and real-life contexts	GT assisted task completion, but idiomatic expression translation was weak.
Channia	2023	GT as support for adult writing	GT supported vocabulary building but limited syntactic development.
Ammade et al.	2023	GT as support outside the classroom	Useful for spontaneous conversation, but not for complex communication.

Note. This table was developed by the author based on the literature reviewed for this study.

Discussion

The findings of this literature review highlight the complex role that Google Translate (GT) plays in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction for adult learners. The reviewed studies converge on the idea that GT serves as a valuable support tool, especially for vocabulary acquisition, writing assistance, and reading comprehension. Learners across different regions have reported positive perceptions of GT, largely attributed to its accessibility, immediacy, and ease of use.

Nevertheless, the analysis also reveals significant limitations and concerns regarding the overuse of GT. While the tool provides quick translations, it often lacks grammatical accuracy and contextual understanding, especially in idiomatic and culturally nuanced language. Several researchers have emphasized that relying excessively on GT may hinder the development of productive skills, such as speaking and writing, and reduce students'



motivation for active learning. Furthermore, the tool's inability to foster deeper cognitive engagement may result in superficial language acquisition.

Importantly, the review underscores the need for guided use of GT in EFL classrooms. When integrated with other pedagogical strategies and supervised by instructors, GT can contribute to learner autonomy and support language learning effectively. However, without structured implementation, it may promote passive habits that limit long-term proficiency. This suggests a pedagogical imperative to educate learners on the appropriate use of GT, balancing its strengths with strategies that promote critical thinking and communicative competence.

Conclusions

This literature review has demonstrated that Google Translate can serve as a useful technological tool in the EFL learning process for adults, offering benefits such as improved vocabulary acquisition, enhanced writing outcomes, and support for autonomous learning. However, it also brings limitations related to grammar accuracy, syntactic coherence, and the risk of fostering dependency if used without guidance.

The review reveals a disparity in the geographical distribution of research, with limited studies conducted in Latin America. This gap underscores the need for further region-specific investigations to understand the cultural and pedagogical dynamics that influence how GT is used in EFL contexts. Educators should approach GT as a complementary tool rather than a replacement for traditional methods, promoting balanced and critical use that enhances learners' language competence and autonomy.

Future research could explore best practices for integrating GT into adult EFL classrooms, with a focus on combining digital resources with communicative and task-based methodologies to maximize learning outcomes.

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