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Google Translate in EFL Freshmen's Writing Assignments: Uses, Awareness of Benefits and Drawbacks, and Perceived Reliance

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Abstract

Although technology use is inevitable among language learners, using Machine Translation (MT), such as Google Translate (GT), remains controversial in language learning. Despite its advances, it may be detrimental to L2 learning when used excessively, especially for those with more limited linguistic resources. This research investigates first-year EFL students' autonomous utilization of GT in writing assignments, explores their awareness of GT's advantages and disadvantages, and assesses their perceived relative reliance on the technology. As many as 85 Indonesian EFL first-year students participated in this study by completing questionnaires consisting of closed-ended and open-ended questions. Even though most students recognized GT's potential negative impacts on language learning, this study reveals how various factors have contributed to its notably significant usage among them. While most participants reported using GT only occasionally and mainly at the word level, their use for translating longer texts was significantly higher than in previous research involving students at different English competence levels. Additionally, boosting confidence, convenience, and serving as language scaffolding were identified as GT's main benefits, leading to students' reliance on the technology. Most expressed potential difficulty working without GT. Recommendations were made to support less-proficient students, given the growing prevalence of MT in language education.

Introduction

With its various affordances, Machine Translation (MT) is popular among language learners. Despite the emergence of technology like ChatGPT, which provides idea generation and composition features, MT, such as Google Translate (GT), continues to play a crucial role when language learners need assistance in reading or generating their own ideas and require translation support from their first language (L1). Although research has shown that MT may impede language learning (Harris, 2010; Musk, 2014), students continue using the technology to aid them in their language assignments. With MT's AI advancements and

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inevitable application among students, recent research has explored its potential integration into language learning for optimal student benefits in the classroom (Ahn & Chung, 2020; Kol et al., 2018; S. M. Lee, 2020; Tsai, 2019). However, students often work on their writing assignments without direct supervision. They may use GT in ways that may impact their language learning negatively. Consequently, examining their independent uses is imperative to provide students with well-informed guidelines for their integration into a broader context of language learning. As less proficient learners have been inclined to be more susceptible to MT's drawbacks (Garcia & Pena, 2011; Musk, 2014), the present study focuses on first-year English as a Foreign Language (EFL) undergraduate students, concentrating on their GT use, beliefs of its impacts on their language learning, and perceived reliance on the technology in completing their writing assignments.

According to previous research findings, using MT, such as GT, in language learning has several benefits. GT has been reported to promote students' vocabulary learning (Bahri & Mahadi, 2016; Bin Dahmash, 2020), reduce anxieties, and foster confidence during language learning activities (Bahri & Mahadi, 2016; Karimian & Talebinejad, 2013). Additionally, the technology may assist students in identifying and correcting grammatical errors (Asnas et al., 2023; S. M. Lee, 2020). Engaging in comparing texts in two languages through translation has been found to enhance students' consciousness of grammatical structures (Murtisari et al., 2020). Furthermore, GT's outputs may also be used as L2 models for language learners (S. M. Lee,

2020; Tsai, 2019), which may heighten students' awareness of various aspects of differences between L1 and L2 through translation.

Despite the advantages, earlier studies have highlighted MT's potential to disrupt the learning process, leading to caveats against its use in language classrooms (e.g., Harris, 2010). The main criticism against MT use among language learners has been its "inaccuracies" and "poor translation" quality for a long time. However, Google Translate (GT), one of the most widely used MT tools, has recently made significant advancements by implementing a new artificial intelligence (AI) system, namely NMT (Neural Machine Translation), which has successfully improved the translation quality (Ducar & Schocket, 2018). As a result, the focus of the argument regarding the use of MT among language learners has shifted from "quality issues" (Harris, 2010) to pedagogical issues, such as academic dishonesty, learners' overreliance on MT, and less engagement with the target language.

GT's improved translation quality may have a more profound impact on students' language learning. While academic dishonesty has been a well-known issue associated with MT, its effects on language acquisition may extend further through students' increasing reliance on the technology. One of the main concerns is diminishing contact with the target language, which was highlighted earlier by Harris (2010) concerning this technology. In line with this, Musk (2014) mentioned the issue of target language avoidance, in which students may rely on the convenience and ability of GT to translate texts so that they do not have to engage directly with the target language.

Dependence on GT is another concern, as students may become overly reliant on the technology during their learning process (Mundt & Groves, 2016; Murtisari et al., 2019). Kazemzadeh and Kashani (2014, p. 40, as cited in Ducar & Schocket, 2018) described this as an unhealthy reliance where language learners rely excessively on GT for their learning. This dependence can become problematic if GT is inaccessible or limits students' engagement with the target language, which is critical in language acquisition. Given the limited exposure to the target language in EFL contexts, this problem could significantly disadvantage EFL language learners. Therefore, while GT (MT) can offer benefits, it is crucial to regulate students' use of the technology to ensure its optimal utilization.

With MT's inevitable use in language learning, several studies have focused on implementing the technology in writing classes. Incorporating GT into students' writing processes in a longitudinal study, Fredholm (2019) discovered that participants who utilized GT exhibited greater lexical diversity than those who relied on printed dictionaries. This study focused on 31 Swedish upper secondary school students writing in Spanish as a foreign language. However, the observed impact diminished once the technology was no longer utilized, leading the author to conclude that "GT itself may not have a lasting influence on the development of foreign language vocabulary" (p. 16). These findings suggest that utilizing GT should be considered beyond enhancing students' writing skills.

Additionally, Garcia and Pena (2011) conducted a pilot study to examine how MT usage might affect students' writing performance. The study involved Spanish foreign language learners and compared two groups: one group composed their writing directly in the target language, while the other group used MT. The findings showed that MT significantly improved the writing quality of beginner learners, enhancing their communication skills. However, students who used MT showed less effort and engagement with the target language during the writing process than those who wrote directly in the target language.

Involving Chinese EFL students, Tsai (2019) implemented GT in the writing classroom to help the participants generate L2 models they could compare with their interlanguage. First, they wrote a text in L1. Then, they produced a corresponding version in their second language (L2), the self-written (SW) version. Next, the students utilized GT to translate their L1 version into L2. Lastly, they compared their SW version with the GT translation, aiming to identify any issues in expressing themselves accurately in the SW form.

Similarly, S. M. Lee (2020) investigated how MT could assist Korean university students in their writing courses. The participants initially wrote directly in the target language, and then, using MT, they composed another writing task. By comparing their initial writing piece with the one written using MT, the learners could identify and revise their errors, improving their writing skills. Promoting students' active involvement with MT's translation, Tsai's and S. M. Lee's study effectively addressed the issues of reduced effort and engagement that emerged in the pilot study by Garcia and Pena (2011).

However, it is crucial to consider that students typically do not use Machine Translation (MT) in a controlled writing activity. In real-world scenarios outside the classroom,

learners use MT without supervision, giving them the freedom to make their own choices regarding its usage, which may not always be conducive to their language learning. An example of this is highlighted in a study by Alhaisoni and Alhaysony (2017), where EFL university students in an Arabic context frequently resorted to utilizing GT to complete their assignments. Unfortunately, this heavy reliance on MT negatively affected their learning habits. They heavily relied on GT, neglecting to read English texts and unable to retrieve or guess the meanings of unknown words.

Similarly, a study by Murtisari et al. (2019) among EFL university students across different years of study in an Indonesian context showed that most participants utilized GT for general and academic purposes, including writing and reading assignments. While most participants reported using GT for word-level translations, a concerning trend was observed, with around one-third of the participants translating whole paragraphs. The study also indicated that many students who translated entire essays or articles using GT lacked the proficiency to execute such tasks effectively. Consequently, less competent EFL students are more susceptible to the negative effects of the technology.

Based on the above findings, this study examines how Indonesian first-year EFL students use Google Translate (GT) in L2 writing, their awareness of the technology's impacts on their language learning, and its general role as a means of scaffolding. The freshmen are in the early stages of developing their English skills, which is common in Indonesian EFL programs. As these students are expected to progress to CEFR post-intermediate levels within a four-year timeframe, it is crucial to ensure that their use of technology enhances their language learning rather than hinders it. By understanding how learners employ GT and its relevant aspects, this study aims to provide valuable insights that can reveal the pedagogical practices for machine translation use in language learning.

Method

Research Design

This research strove to provide an overview of various aspects of utilizing GT among a relatively large sample of participants. A descriptive qualitative study was conducted using a survey design to achieve this. To enhance the depth of the study, the survey was designed to collect quantitative and verbal data. By utilizing this survey design to gather both types of data, the study aimed to address the pedagogical concerns associated with GT by exploring the answers to the following research questions: (1) How do Indonesian freshmen EFL students use Google Translate in their writing assignments? (2) What are the students' perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of GT for language learning? (3) What is their perceived reliance on the technology in doing their writing assignments?

The study was conducted in the English Language Education and English Literature programs of a private university in Central Java, Indonesia. These programs cover a four-year undergraduate study and include several writing courses in the curriculum. While GT is permitted in writing courses, its use at the discourse level is not encouraged. English serves as the main language of instruction, except in grammar courses. However, in informal communication outside academic

settings, students commonly rely on Indonesian or their local language(s).

Study Participants

The study employed non-probability convenience sampling because it was conducted within a specific timeframe, focusing on gaining in-depth insights from a readily available group of participants. The sample comprised 85 Indonesian first-year EFL students (57 females, 28 males, aged 18-23 years), selected from a pool of 90 freshmen in the faculty. With its descriptive nature, the study was not aimed to generalize the findings. Their proficiencies ranged approximately from the elementary (A1) to intermediate (B1) CEFR

levels. When the data was collected, they were studying in their third trimester and had completed at least one writing course in the program. They had diverse ranges of GPAs, which may serve as relative indicators of their English competence in this context, as the program devoted the first two years mostly to language skills. As shown in Table 1, most participants (35 students) had low GPAs, which likely indicated that they were at the elementary (A1 CEFR) level. Additionally, 25 students had medium GPAs, while the remaining had high GPAs. These two groups of students could be expected to have language proficiency levels ranging from A2 to B1 CEFR levels.

Table 1

Students' GPAs

GPA level	GPA sub-level	Range	No.	No.
High		3.75 and higher	25	25
Medium	Upper	3.50 – 3.74	25	17
	Lower	3.00 – 3.49		8
Low	Upper	2.50 – 2.99	35	16
	Lower	lower than 2.5		19

Instrument of the Study

To collect the data, a questionnaire was developed based on previous studies (Alhaisoni & Alhaysony, 2017; Garcia & Pena, 2011; S. M. Lee, 2020; Murtisari et al., 2019; Niño, 2009), as well as the first author's personal experience with the technology as a student. It consisted of three main parts (A, B, and C), each devoted to answering one research question. The instrument included closed-ended and open-ended questions, requiring students to provide detailed responses for certain parts.

Data Collection

After the questionnaire was piloted and revised, it was employed online through Google Forms and administered in Indonesian to ensure clarity and prevent potential confusion. The student participants consented to participate in the research, with their data confidentiality protected. It is important to mention that the data was gathered during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021. This period underscored the need for students to work independently. Ne vertheless, this context aligns with the study's objective of examining

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the students' autonomous use of GT in completing their writing assignments.

Data Analysis

The present research employed two analytical methods to gain insights and address the research questions effectively. A descriptive quantitative analysis was utilized to examine the data collected from the closed-ended questionnaire items. These items were carefully recorded and coded in Microsoft Excel. Subsequently, they were transformed into percentages to enable a more profound analysis and interpretation. Concurrently, a content analysis, valuable for analyzing "trends and patterns" within extensive datasets (Stemler, 2001), was employed to categorize emerging themes from the open-ended responses through multiple readings. The resulting themes were later quantified to

establish patterns to explain the issues under study.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

The findings of the present study will be discussed in the following section. The section will be divided into three main parts, which will discuss (1) the students' use of GT in their writing assignments, (2) their beliefs about the advantages and disadvantages of using GT for writing assignments, and (3) their perceived reliance on GT in doing their writing assignments.

Students' Use of GT in Doing Writing Assignments

a. **General Use**

Figure 1

Students' Frequency in Using GT to Complete Writing Assignments
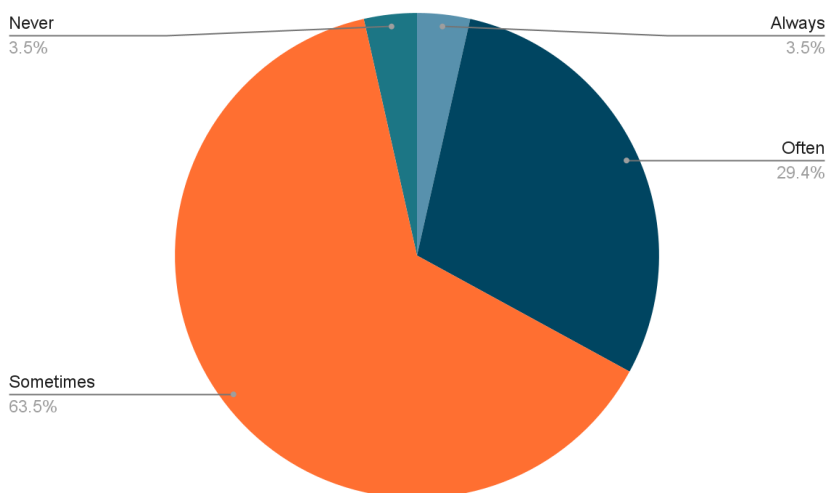
Regarding the general frequency, the study revealed that more than half of the participants

(54 out of 85 students, 63.53%) reported using GT "sometimes" when completing their writing

assignments. Additionally, a significant proportion of the participants (25 students, 29.41%) mentioned utilizing GT "often". Moreover, a few students (3 students, 3.53%) reported using GT for every occasion they had to complete their writing assignments. Similarly, only a small number of students (3 students, 3.53%) stated that they never used GT for their writing assignments. In total, almost 82 students used GT except for these three students. These findings indicate that many students use GT relatively frequently, with most participants utilizing it occasionally for their writing assignments.

b. More Specific Uses of GT

A set of Likert-scale questions was administered to explore how students utilized GT for their writing assignments. The eighty-two students who reported using GT were asked to indicate the frequency of GT use on a five-point Likert scale (*always/often/sometimes/rarely/never*). The findings showed that students primarily relied on GT for basic translation tasks, specifically for words and phrases and as a dictionary. While its application in translating sentences and discourse was less common, it still held some significance in their writing.

Figure 2
The Common Uses of GT by Students
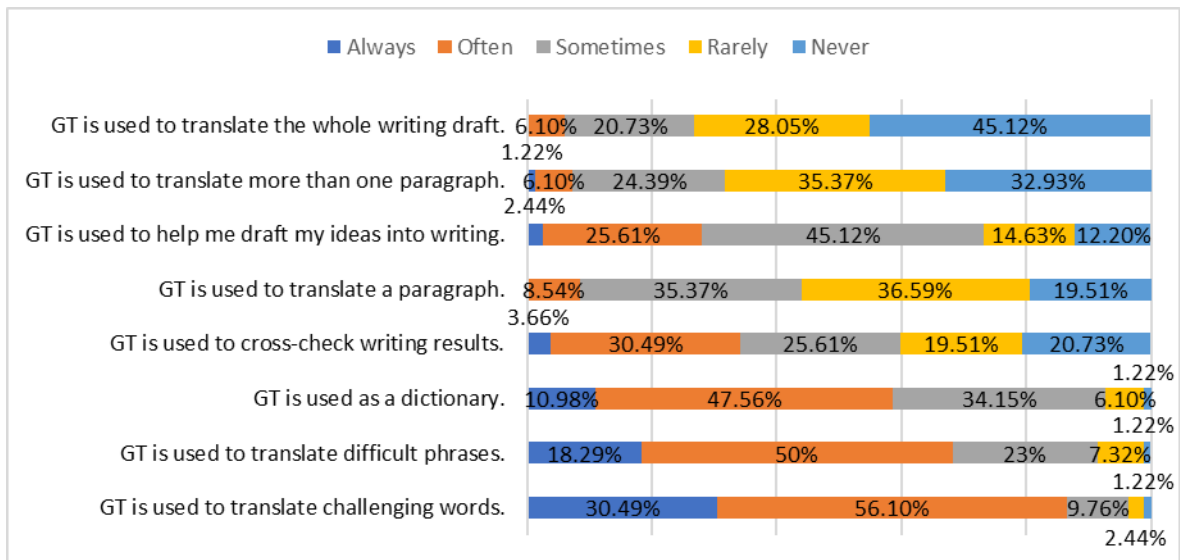
The analysis of GT use frequency by students (presented in Figure 2) reveals that the most common application of GT is for translating difficult words (always = 30.49%, often = 56.10%, sometimes = 9.76%) and phrases (always = 18.29%, often = 50.00%, sometimes = 23.00%), as well as serving as a dictionary (always = 10.98%, often = 47.56%, sometimes = 34.12%). This discovery is consistent with previous findings where language students utilized GT as a dictionary (Chandra & Yuyun, 2018; Murtisari et al., 2019). As GT may provide convenient access to synonyms, it is unsurprising that students

preferred using GT over conventional dictionaries (Jin & Deifell, 2013).

Another notable use is cross-checking the texts they had composed, which is significantly utilized by students (always = 3.66%, often = 30.49%, sometimes = 25.61%). Using this strategy, students can translate their L2 composition into L1 to check its meaning or use its L2 translation as a language model to evaluate their interlanguage. Additionally, many students reported using GT to draft their ideas into their writing (always = 2.44%, often = 25.61%, sometimes = 45.12%). This indicates that the freshmen students still heavily relied on their first language as a dominant cognitive tool in making English compositions.

The use of GT for translating texts at the discourse level was found to be less frequent, with a noticeable decrease in usage as the length of the texts increased. However, the study's findings indicated significant utilization of GT, with approximately a quarter to a third of the participants often or sometimes employing the technology to translate paragraphs or longer passages. Specifically, the data showed that 19.5% of the students reported never using GT to translate a single paragraph, and 32.9% never used it for translating one paragraph or more. Interestingly, one student (1.22%) consistently relied on GT to translate more than one paragraph. These findings highlight the varied usage patterns among the participants.

When asked about the level of text they typically worked on, most students (66 out of 82 students, 80.49%) used GT to translate at the word level in composing their writings (Figure 3). Meanwhile, the present study also found that 15 students (18.29%) were using GT to translate sentences. One student, however, reported mainly utilizing GT for translating a paragraph or more when completing the writing assignments, which is consistent with the previously mentioned findings.

Figure 3
Students' Main Uses of GT in Completing Writing Assignments
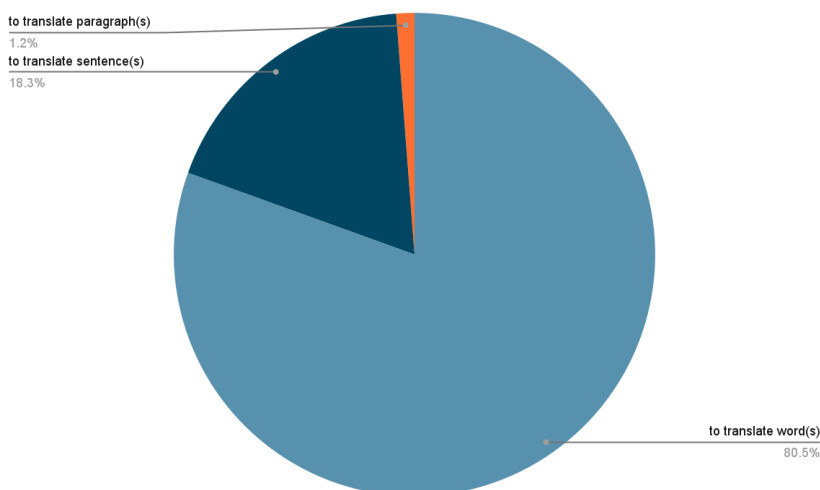
The 16 students who mentioned that they mainly used GT to translate at the sentence or paragraph levels were given a set of multiple-response questions to figure out their reasons for using the MT technology to translate longer texts. Interestingly, these students came from diverse ranges of GPAs (high, medium, and low). On the one hand, this may highlight the attitudinal nature of technology use in language learning. On the other hand, it is worth noting that based on their responses, those from the highest group of GPAs also cited their relative need for linguistic scaffolding while writing. After all, the participants were mostly at a lower level of English proficiency. GT can offer significantly improved English compared to what they could produce independently, particularly with the current NMT system. Table 2 shows the categories of students' responses.

Table 2

Students' Reasons for Using GT to Translate at Sentence and Paragraph Levels

Categories	Frequency	Percentage (out of 16 students)
GT's translation is better than my English.	11	68.75%
I use GT to save time.	10	62.50%
I am not confident with my English ability.	9	56.25%
I am not confident with my writing skills.	8	50.00%
GT provides more vocabulary options.	8	50.00%
GT enables me to translate my writing, which I have written in *Bahasa Indonesia* (Indonesian/L1), rather than writing directly in English.	8	50.00%
It is easier to compose my writing with GT than writing directly in the target language.	8	50.00%
GT can help me with my grammar.	5	31.25%
GT has good translation quality.	3	18.75%
I feel that I cannot complete my writing assignments without using GT.	3	18.75%
I use GT to improve my grades.	3	18.75%
Others (please specify your answer).	0	0.00%

Note. The percentages (%) only apply within the group of participants who used GT for longer texts (N=16).

The categories from Table 2 above may be further classified into three major benefits, highlighting crucial aspects of higher reliance on GT among the predominantly lower-level EFL students:

a) Boosting Students' Confidence

The most prevalent reason mentioned by the freshmen students for relying on GT to translate sentences and paragraphs was their lack of confidence in writing. Most of them

(68.75%) believed that the GT translation was superior to their English proficiency, which could encourage less proficient language students with different levels of competence to employ the technology. According to the participants, they felt their writings would be better if they were composed with the technology's assistance. In line with this finding, a significant portion of students (56.25%) reported a lack of confidence in their English. In comparison, half of the students (50%) lacked confidence in their writing skills. These results support Musk's finding that low confidence in L2 may lead to significant use of GT.

b) *Convenience*

The findings also highlight the convenience offered by GT as a common reason for students to engage in translating sentences and paragraphs. More than half of the students (62.50%) opted for the practical use of GT to translate longer texts to save time when completing writing assignments. Additionally, half of the participants (50%) mentioned the ease of employing GT to translate their writing tasks, which they had initially composed in *Bahasa Indonesia* (Indonesian/L1), and the feasibility of using GT's translated texts instead of attempting to write directly in the target language. This result confirms convenience as a recurring factor driving students to use the technology (Jin & Deifell, 2013; Murtisari et al., 2019; Niño, 2009; Stapleton et al., 2019; Xu & Wang, 2011).

c) *A Means of Language Scaffolding*

Another reason for students to rely on GT for translating sentences and paragraphs was the belief that it could help enhance the final product of their writing assignments. Half of the participants (50%) saw translating at the sentence and paragraph level as providing them with more vocabulary options. Additionally, some students (31.25%) mentioned that GT could assist them with grammar in their writing, aligning with the findings of Ahn and Chung (2020), who reported that most low-proficiency learners used GT to check their grammar. While such use may improve less competent students' writing, an overreliance on GT to write sentences may disrupt language learning by reducing their interlanguage practice. However, it is worth noting that research is necessary to investigate how they use MT to support their grammar and examine the impacts on their grammar acquisition.

Students' Awareness of GT's Advantages and Disadvantages for Language Learning

The participants were asked two open-ended questions to collect more nuanced data on students' awareness of the benefits and drawbacks of GT usage for their language learning. Overall, the findings show that most students were aware of the potential negative impacts of technology on their language acquisition. However, many students did not seem to understand this issue or clearly understand what language learning entails.

The first question, asking whether using GT in completing their assignments can benefit their language learning, elicited positive responses from 54 out of 85 students (63.53%). To support their answers, these students cited GT's advantages, namely expanding their vocabulary (35 students), being convenient and time-saving in the writing process (19 students), improving their writing quality (4 students), enabling them to cross-check or post-edit their

writing with GT's translations (4 students), and boosting their confidence (1 student). However, citing the convenience and time-saving feature, some students seemed to have confused GT's affordances with language learning. Additionally, improved writing quality would not likely lead to language learning without adequate engagement. In other words, the students did not fully understand what is needed to learn a language.

Nevertheless, most of the remaining students (29 participants, 34.12% of 85) appeared to be more critical of the technology by responding negatively or opted to be neutral, while two students had miscellaneous answers. Here, as many as 11 of these students disagreed that GT positively influences their language learning. They argued that the technology had quality issues (4 students) and could make them dependent (2 students) or lazy (1 student). On the other hand, the other 18 students (21.18%) opted to be neutral, mostly arguing that whether or not GT would benefit them would depend on whether or not it is used appropriately (11 students) and/or that GT may lead to dependency (7 students), and/or that the technology still has inaccuracy issues.

Furthermore, in responding to the second question, 58 students (68.23% of 85) expressed their critical awareness of the impact of GT on their language learning. As many as 46 students agreed that using GT for writing assignments may disrupt their language learning. The main concerns raised were the potential overreliance on GT (20 students), the tendency to become "lazy" or prioritize convenience (19 students), and the issue of inaccuracy or low quality of GT's translations (13 students). Some of the

other drawbacks mentioned included decreased confidence in their own writing skills (6 students), a more product-oriented approach to writing (2 students), and avoidance of the target language (2 students). On the other hand, the other 12 students expressed a middle-ground stance in response to whether GT may disrupt language learning. Ten of them argued that whether GT helps language learning or not would depend on how it is used, but some tended to be more critical of the technology by citing that GT has inaccuracy issues (3 students) which might lead to dependency (2 students), and might make them lazy (2 students). All the cited reasons of this major group of students indicate that they had critical attitudes towards the technology, which is crucial amidst the rise of many CALL advancements that have benefits and drawbacks for language learning. Such knowledge of the technology may assist students in navigating its use.

Despite this, many other participants (22 students) disagreed that GT could disadvantage them in language acquisition, while 5 students had miscellaneous views. The most common reasons they cited for their disagreement were the technology facilitated their writing process (12 students), expanded their vocabulary (4 students), and could be used appropriately (5 students). These reasons indicate a lack of awareness among the freshmen regarding GT's potential risks, except for the last reason mentioned.

### *Students' Perceived Reliance on GT in Doing Their Writing Assignments*

a. **Students' Preferred Scenarios of Completing Their Writing Assignments Concerning GT**

To assess the freshmen participants' perceived reliance on GT, they were asked to select one of three scenarios representing their preferred situations for completing their assignments. The first option involved having ample time to compose their writings. Still, it required them to write directly in the target language without GT's assistance. Conversely, the second option entailed a shorter time frame for writing. Still, the students could use GT to translate from *Bahasa Indonesia*. The third option allowed students to define their preferred situation for completing their writing assignments if they were dissatisfied with the first two options.

In general, the survey suggested that most students still considered time more essential than the notion of GT being absent from their process of completing writing assignments. As shown in Figure 4, most students (57.65%, 49 out of 85 students) preferred to be given more time to finish their writing tasks without using GT. When asked to provide their reasons (Table 3), they stated that they saw this as a challenge to develop their writing skills (34.33%) and to prevent them from becoming dependent on the technology (11.9%). They also believed that more time would allow them to maximize their efforts and produce better writings (31.34%). Some students mentioned alternative resources like printed dictionaries and thesauruses that could assist them (7.46%).

Figure 4

Students' Preferred Learning Situation in Completing Their Writing Assignments
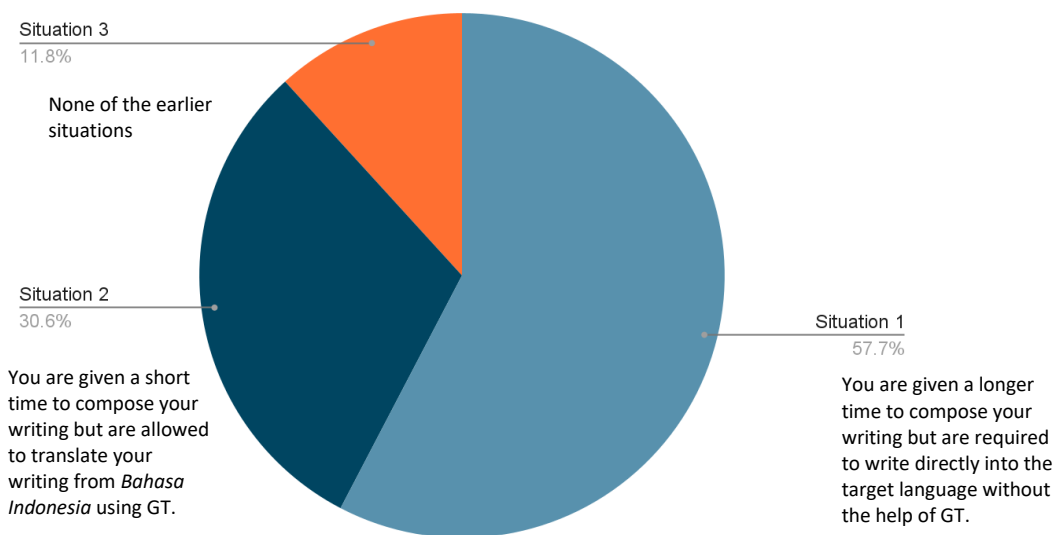
On the other hand, as many as 30.59% of them (26 out of 85 students) chose to be allowed to use GT but had less time to complete their assignments, which suggested their reliance on the technology. The finding indicates that convenience was a significant factor (38.46%) leading to more use of GT, which confirms the concern of Murtisari et al. (2019). Apart from this, some students believed that GT helped them in their writing process (11.5%), enhanced their confidence (7.69%), and made them feel comfortable (7.69%) when writing with GT's assistance. A few preferred to write in L1 (*Bahasa Indonesia*) first and then

used GT for translation (3.85%). These reasons highlighted GT's role as a means of scaffolding and affective support, which aligns with Y. J. Lee's (2021) finding.

A small number of students (11.76%, 10 out of 85 students) expressed that none of the provided options suited their preferences. However, most of them (90%) explained that their ideal situation would involve using GT with a flexible amount of time to complete their assignments, suggesting their reliance on the technology. No reason for this was elicited from this group of students, but this may suggest that they needed more scaffolding in writing.

Table 3

Students' Preferred Learning Situations in Completing Writing Assignments

| Situation 1 Completing writing assignments by being given a longer time to write, but without the help of GT (49 students, 57.65%)	Situation 2 Completing writing assignments by being given a shorter time to write but allowed to use GT in the writing process (26 students, 30.59%)	Situation 3 Choosing none of the learning situations provided (required to describe their own situational preferences) (10 students, 11.76%)
Can learn more without the help of GT (**34.33%**)	More convenient (**38.46%**)	More flexibility with the time given to finish the writing assignments and allowed to use GT when writing (**90%**)
Given more time (**31.34%**)	GT is helpful in writing (**11.5%**)	Miscellaneous (**10%**)
Train themselves not to be dependent on GT (**11.9%**)	More confident in writing with the help of GT (**7.69%**)	
Have more confidence in their own writing skills (**7.46%**)	More comfortable to complete writing assignments with GT's help (**7.69%**)	
There are still other alternatives than GT to help with writing (**7.46%**)	Might be difficult to write without the help of GT (**7.69%**)	
GT is only a tool (not significant in the learning process) (**1.49%**)	Prefer to write in L1 (Indonesian) first (**3.85%**)	
GT still has inaccuracy/ translation issues (**1.49%**)	Miscellaneous (**23%**)	
Miscellaneous (**4.48%**)		

b. Students' Views on Completing Writing Assignments without Using GT

To further probe into students' perceived reliance on GT, the participants were asked to choose one of three options on how they would feel if they had to complete writing assignments without the technology.

As shown in Figure 5, while none of the students chose the view that completing writing assignments without GT would be very difficult for them, the majority (56 out of 85 students, 65.88%) viewed that completing their writing assignments without any assistance from GT might be difficult. This suggests that GT played a crucial role in assisting the first-year students to complete their essays, with students generally having moderately significant reliance. When asked for their reasons (Table 6), they mainly cited limited vocabulary (47.89%) and a dependence on GT for vocabulary assistance (12.68%) as reasons for their perceptions. Some mentioned that GT helped boost their confidence (8.45%), save time (7.04%), and improve the quality of their writing (7.04%).

Figure 5

Students' Views on Completing Writing Assignments without Using GT
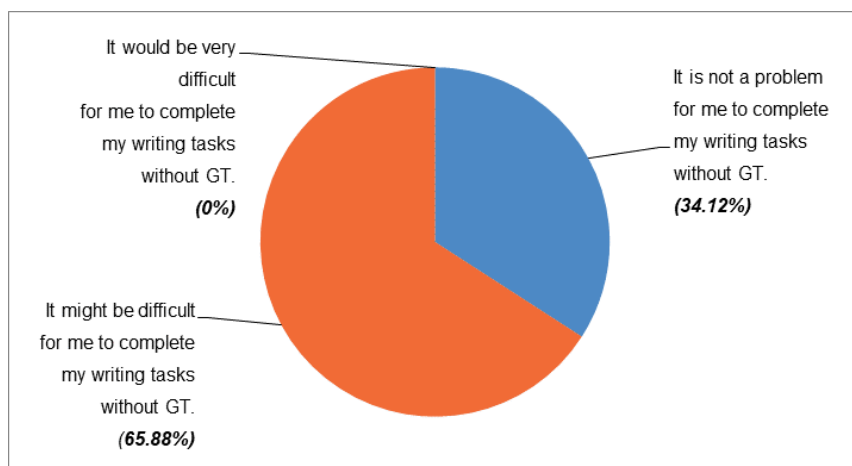
In contrast, a minority of students (34.12%, 29 out of 85 students) viewed completing their assignments without GT as not a problem. They mostly mentioned relying on other resources like printed dictionaries and thesauruses (29.73%) and being confident in their writing skills (27.03%) as reasons for their perspective. Additionally, a few students indicated they did not feel dependent on GT (13.5%) and did not typically use it for writing assignments (8.11%). Most of these reasons primarily confirm Musk's (2014) finding that students' language competence and confidence have a crucial impact on their use of GT. Additionally, several students considered completing their writing tasks without GT an opportunity to enhance their writing skills (10.81%) and practice reducing their reliance on GT in their writing (5.41%). These last two reasons indicate that language learning awareness may positively contribute to their regulated GT usage.

Table 4
Students' Reasons for Their Views on Completing Writing Assignments without Using GT

It might be difficult for me to complete my writing assignments without the help of GT. (56 students, 65.88%)	It is not a problem for me to complete my writing assignments without the help of GT. (29 students, 34.12%)
I have limited vocabulary. (**47.89%**)	There are still other alternatives to help me with writing my assignments. (**29.73%**)
I am dependent on GT. (**12.68%**)	I can still write with my own writing skills. (**27.03%**)
GT is helpful in writing. (**11.27%**)	I am not dependent on GT. (**13.51%**)
I am not confident in my own writing skills. (**8.45%**)	I can improve my writing skills without the help of GT. (**10.81%**)
It would take me a longer time to write without the help of GT. (**7.04%**)	I do not use GT in completing my writing assignments. (**8.11%**)
GT helps me improve my writing quality. (**4.23%**)	It gives me the opportunity to train myself not to become dependent on GT. (**5.41%**)
I use it for convenience. (**1.41%**)	Miscellaneous. (**5.41%**)
Miscellaneous. (**7.04%**)	

Discussion

In summary, the study highlights the dynamic role of GT in English language learning among EFL freshmen at lower proficiency levels (A1 to B1 CEFR). Most reported using GT mainly at the word level in L2 writing, which aligns with previous studies (Chandra & Yuyun, 2018; Murtisari et al., 2019). However, while most indicated that they employed the technology only occasionally, GT appeared to be an inseparable part of most participants' writing activities.

While the relative frequencies of GT use at the discourse level were significantly lower than those for shorter linguistic units, it is crucial to recognize the significance of students' usage patterns at the paragraph level and beyond. This is particularly important for the first-year EFL students of the faculty, as they primarily focus on paragraph-level writing and typically only have three compositions assigned per semester. Despite being relatively infrequent, the usage of GT by these students was significant in the context of their writing tasks. Additionally, other factors primarily contributing to the students' substantial use of GT were to enhance their confidence (see Bahri & Mahadi, 2016), provide convenience, and serve as language support. These highlight the role of technology as a pivotal crutch for lower-level EFL students to function in L2 writing. It is crucial to consider the factors when helping such learners regulate their MT use. When assisting such learners in regulating their use of MT, it is crucial to consider these factors.

Compared to a study by Murtisari et al. (2019), which examined tertiary EFL students across different academic years, the trends for discourse use observed in this study were significantly stronger. The total percentages of

students using GT to translate a paragraph (80.5%) and entire essays (54.88%) were notably higher in this study than in the previous research (41.5% and 36%, respectively). Furthermore, Murtisari et al. (2019) also reported that approximately 10% to nearly 30% of the study participants often or sometimes used GT to translate at discourse levels. In contrast, the current study, which focused on EFL freshmen who generally had lower levels of English competence, revealed even higher usage trends. Specifically, the percentages of participants using GT at the same frequencies (often or sometimes) were 26.83% for translating the entire essay, 31.7% for translating more than one paragraph, and 44.24% for translating a single paragraph (Figure 2). These results align with previous studies, which suggested that language proficiency is a factor in employing GT at the discourse level (Murtisari et al., 2019; Musk, 2014). However, it is important to acknowledge that the heightened trends observed in this study may have been influenced by the unique circumstances of the pandemic.

Notably, a small but significant number of students (18.3%) reported primarily using GT to translate sentences (Figure 3). It is crucial to be mindful that translating at the sentence level does not necessarily mean that they translated less using the technology. In the authors' informal observations of students, such behavior could indicate a lack of confidence in constructing sentences. It may also suggest a preference to concentrate on smaller writing units or a lack of confidence in the tool's accuracy when dealing with lengthier passages. Nevertheless, translating shorter texts, such as individual words and phrases, remains more

positive. It may engage students more in sentence construction and facilitate a closer comparison between their first and target languages, potentially enhancing language awareness. The present study was limited as it did not elicit further details on how the participants used GT at the sentence level, including the more specific frequencies of its utilization. Further research is required to thoroughly explore this engagement issue at the sentence level or below, as well as at discourse levels.

Another notable finding indicating freshmen students' reliance on GT is their use of technology to translate their composition drafts in L1 into L2, with 73.17% of them always, often, or sometimes using this strategy (Figure 2). However, such behavior has also been observed among advanced students. Niño (2009) found that some of her advanced Spanish student participants also used MT to start their writing drafts. As drafting ideas may require more cognitive efforts, students may opt for such a strategy due to "a cognitive overload" (Bruen & Kelly, 2017, p. 14), which has been observed to lead students to use translation to ease their psychological burdens. Nevertheless, when the translation is done by MT and not by the students themselves, factors such as convenience and time saving may likely play a role, resulting in less engagement with the target language.

Besides students' use of GT to help construct their writing in L2, they also significantly used the technology to cross-check their writing (always = 3.66%, often = 30.49%, sometimes = 25.61%), which could be in terms of its L1 meaning or L2 form. This finding aligns with Tsai (2019), in that students may have a

"second audience" by using GT in writing (p. 11). Instead of asking their teacher, who normally acts as their sole audience, they can consult the tool for "initial advice on word usage and sentence structures for further reference and revision in their English writing" (p. 11).

In terms of students' awareness of GT's downsides, although most participants demonstrated some level of awareness of GT's potential negative impacts on their language acquisition, many students did not understand the implications of over-relying on the technology. This observation aligns with the findings of Murtisari et al. (2019), where nearly 30% of the participants exhibited a lack of criticality towards its usage. Rather than understanding how MT may aid their language learning, these students in the present study focused on the practical benefits of GT. This finding aligns with the relatively high reliance on GT among the study's participants. With this in mind, educators must play a crucial role in guiding students toward informed technology use and fostering a comprehensive understanding of what contributes to language learning.

The findings related to students' perceived reliance on GT as a form of MT in completing their writing assignments provide valuable insights into their preferences and attitudes toward using the technology. Utilizing three scenarios to assess students' preferred situations for completing their assignments, the study highlights the complex interplay between time, convenience, and students' language proficiency in shaping their perceived reliance on GT for completing writing assignments. While most students still considered time more essential

than using GT, around one-third of the participants, appeared reluctant to get rid of GT and preferred to have less time with the help of the technology, mainly because it was convenient for them. With most students believing it might be difficult not to use GT when writing in L2, GT appeared to be an integral aspect of their language study.

Conclusion

This study examined the various ways first-year EFL university students use GT for their writing assignments, their views, and their beliefs toward the benefits and drawbacks of using the technology, and whether the use of GT might lead them to dependency or language avoidance. In today's multilingual EFL classrooms and practices, particularly writing, MT should be seen as a supportive tool instead of a taboo (Cancino & Panes, 2021; Y. J. Lee, 2021; Rowe, 2022). However, amidst the increasing use of MT, this study confirms that lower-level students are more susceptible to relying on the technology, which may adversely impact their language learning. The findings reveal the crucial role of GT in lower-level language learners' L2 writing and how various factors contributed to its substantial usage among the participants. While most of them used GT occasionally and mainly for individual words, they relied on it much more for translating longer texts than previous research involving students with different levels of English proficiency.

Furthermore, the main benefits of GT, such as boosting confidence, offering convenience, and serving as language scaffolding, were identified as reasons for students to depend on the technology. Additionally, the majority of the

participants expressed concerns about working without GT. Still, most were also aware of its potential negative impacts on their language learning. Nevertheless, many students were focused on its benefits.

With the above findings in mind, lower-level students should be more aware of what it takes for successful language learning. Guidelines should be provided for learners to encourage them to address GT's potential negative impacts when used excessively and, as Y. J. Lee (2021) noted, to be agentive in their writing and critically respond to the output generated by GT. Besides that, more scaffolding—particularly related to grammar and vocabulary—should be offered for less proficient learners. In addition, a more supportive environment should be given for writing, particularly in-class writing, so that learners will not be too reliant on GT. Learners might be given more time to do the assignments, and writing might focus more on the process rather than the product. Lastly, feedback from the teacher and peers (Y. J. Lee, 2021) might also add to the supportive environment of a GT-integrated writing class.

Regarding the study's constraints, it was conducted using a survey approach, primarily relying on students' self-reports, and the data was gathered solely from a single university. Besides that, the study had the data collected during the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic, which may have heightened the use of GT. Students may have been getting lower-quality language learning experiences with fewer face-to-face interactions in an EFL context. Such an emergency remote learning context might have limited opportunities to use English for communication. In terms of future research, a larger scope of participants can be

measured at lower language levels in different contexts to provide more insights into less-competent students' use of GT as a form of MT in completing their writing tasks. Investigating more empirical evidence on how such students use GT in writing will also be imperative for gaining a comprehensive understanding of their use of the technology.

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