

Perceptions of Grammar Translation Method: Insights from Vocational Students in Audio-visual Engineering

Maulida Nur Salsabila

Universitas Negeri Surabaya
mns.maulida@gmail.com

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Abstract

The Grammar Translation Method (GTM) has long been utilized in English language teaching, particularly in contexts where accuracy and grammatical mastery are emphasized. However, its relevance in vocational education, especially in technical fields such as Audio-Visual Engineering, remains a subject of debate. This study aims to explore vocational students' perceptions of the Grammar Translation Method in learning English grammar and to examine its perceived strengths and limitations in supporting their learning needs. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, the research involved students from a vocational high school majoring in Audio-Visual Engineering. Data were collected through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to capture students' experiences, attitudes, and reflections toward the use of GTM in the classroom. The findings indicate that students perceive GTM to be helpful in improving their understanding of grammatical rules, vocabulary accuracy, and sentence structure, particularly when dealing with technical texts related to their field. The use of the first language (L1) is considered beneficial in clarifying complex concepts and reducing learning anxiety. However, students also highlight limitations of GTM, such as limited opportunities for speaking practice and insufficient development of communicative competence. Despite these drawbacks, GTM is viewed as relevant when applied selectively and combined with more communicative approaches. This study concludes that while GTM alone may not fully address the communicative demands of vocational students, it can serve as an effective foundational method for grammar comprehension when adapted to vocational contexts. The findings provide pedagogical implications for English teachers in vocational schools to implement GTM in a balanced and context-sensitive manner.

Keywords: Grammar Translation Method, Vocational Students, Grammar Learning, Students' Perceptions, Audio-Visual Engineering

INTRODUCTION

English has become an essential skill in vocational education due to its role in supporting students' preparedness for the global workforce, particularly in technical and industry-oriented fields. Vocational students are expected not only to understand basic English structures but also to comprehend technical texts, manuals, and documentation relevant to their areas of specialization. In Indonesia and many other non-English-speaking contexts, English instruction in vocational schools often emphasizes grammatical accuracy and reading comprehension to support these practical needs (Suryani, 2019). As a result, the choice of teaching methodology becomes a crucial factor in determining the effectiveness of English language learning for vocational students.

One of the most enduring and widely debated approaches in English language teaching is the Grammar Translation Method (GTM). Traditionally, GTM focuses

on the explicit teaching of grammatical rules, vocabulary memorization, and translation between the target language and the learners' first language (L1). Although this method has been criticized for its lack of communicative orientation, it continues to be used in many educational settings, particularly where examination requirements and grammatical accuracy are prioritized (Richards, 2017). In vocational education contexts, GTM is often perceived as a practical approach due to its structured nature and emphasis on form-focused instruction.

The relevance of GTM in modern language teaching has been questioned, especially with the growing emphasis on communicative competence and learner-centered approaches. Contemporary curricula often promote communicative language teaching, task-based learning, and contextualized instruction to enhance students' speaking and interaction skills (Harmer, 2018). However, vocational students frequently encounter challenges when

engaging in communicative activities due to limited vocabulary, insufficient grammatical knowledge, and low confidence in using English orally (Wahyuni, 2020). These challenges suggest that foundational grammar instruction may still play a significant role in supporting students' language development.

In technical majors such as Audio-Visual Engineering, English is closely linked to students' academic and professional needs. Learners are required to understand technical terms, operating procedures, equipment manuals, and industry-related documents that are predominantly written in English. Studies indicate that vocational students tend to prefer learning approaches that help them decode technical texts accurately and efficiently (Pratama, 2021). In this context, GTM may offer advantages by enabling students to analyze sentence structures and translate specialized vocabulary into their first language, thereby facilitating comprehension.

Students' perceptions toward a teaching method are a critical aspect of instructional effectiveness. Learners' attitudes, beliefs, and experiences influence their motivation, engagement, and learning outcomes (Dörnyei, 2019). Understanding how vocational students perceive GTM can provide valuable insights into whether the method aligns with their learning needs and expectations. Recent research highlights that students in skill-based programs often value clarity, explicit explanations, and structured learning activities, particularly when dealing with complex subject matter (Rahman, 2022). These characteristics are closely associated with the principles of GTM.

Despite its continued use, GTM is often criticized for limiting students' opportunities to develop speaking and listening skills. Critics argue that excessive reliance on translation and rule memorization may result in passive learning and reduced communicative competence (Brown, 2018). For vocational students, this limitation is particularly relevant, as workplace communication increasingly requires basic oral interaction skills. However, several recent studies suggest that GTM does not necessarily hinder communicative development when applied judiciously and integrated with other instructional approaches (Sari, 2023). This indicates the need for a more nuanced evaluation of GTM rather than a complete rejection of the method.

The vocational education context presents unique instructional challenges that differ from those in general academic education. Students often have diverse academic backgrounds and varying levels of English proficiency, which can affect their ability to participate in communicative activities (Hidayat, 2019). In such situations, GTM may serve as a supportive scaffold by

providing clear explanations and reducing cognitive load through the use of the first language (L1). This is particularly important for learners who struggle with abstract grammatical concepts when taught exclusively in English.

Furthermore, the integration of GTM in vocational classrooms may contribute to students' confidence in understanding written English. Confidence plays a significant role in language learning success, as students who feel capable of understanding grammatical structures are more likely to engage with learning materials (Putri, 2020). For Audio-Visual Engineering students, confidence in reading and interpreting English texts can enhance their academic performance and technical competence. Therefore, examining students' perceptions of GTM can help educators determine whether the method supports or hinders learners' confidence and motivation.

Recent discussions in English language pedagogy emphasize the importance of contextual and flexible teaching approaches. Rather than adhering strictly to a single method, teachers are encouraged to adapt instructional strategies to learners' needs and learning environments (Richards, 2021). In this regard, GTM may still hold pedagogical value when adapted to vocational contexts and combined with practical language use. Investigating students' perceptions provides empirical evidence to support informed decision-making in instructional design.

Given the ongoing debate surrounding the effectiveness of GTM, particularly in vocational education, there is a need for context-specific research that focuses on learners' perspectives. Studies examining GTM in technical vocational majors remain limited, especially those exploring students' subjective experiences and attitudes. This gap highlights the importance of exploring how Audio-Visual Engineering students perceive the use of GTM in learning English grammar. By understanding their perceptions, educators can identify both the strengths and limitations of the method and develop more effective and balanced instructional practices.

Based on the background above, this study addresses the following research questions (RQs):

1. How do vocational students perceive the use of the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) in learning English grammar?
2. What strengths and limitations of the Grammar Translation Method do vocational students perceive in supporting their English learning?

Therefore, this study aims to explore vocational students' perceptions of the Grammar Translation Method in the context of Audio-Visual Engineering education.

Specifically, it seeks to answer the two research questions by investigating students' experiences, attitudes, and opinions regarding the implementation of GTM in English grammar learning. The findings are expected to provide practical implications for English teachers in vocational schools and offer insights into how GTM can be adapted to meet the specific needs of technical learners in contemporary educational settings.

METHODS

This study was conducted to answer two research questions: (1) how vocational students perceive the use of the Grammar Translation Method in learning English grammar, and (2) what strengths and limitations they perceive regarding its implementation. To achieve these objectives, a qualitative descriptive approach was employed.

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to investigate vocational students' perceptions of the Grammar Translation Method in learning English grammar. A qualitative descriptive design is appropriate for exploring participants' experiences, attitudes, and insights, as it allows the researcher to capture detailed, context-specific perspectives without imposing predetermined categories (Creswell, 2018). The focus of this research is on understanding how students perceive GTM in terms of its effectiveness, advantages, and limitations in supporting their English language learning, particularly in a technical vocational context.

The participants of this study were students enrolled in the Audio-Visual Engineering program at a vocational high school. Purposive sampling was employed to select participants who had been actively involved in English language classes using the Grammar Translation Method. This sampling technique ensured that the participants had relevant experience with GTM, which is essential for generating meaningful insights into their perceptions (Patton, 2015). A total of 25 students participated, representing different levels of English proficiency and diverse academic backgrounds within the program.

Data collection was carried out using two main instruments: questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire consisted of open-ended questions aimed at eliciting students' general opinions about GTM, their learning experiences, and perceived strengths and weaknesses of the method. Semi-structured interviews complemented the questionnaires by providing an opportunity to explore students' responses in greater depth, clarify ambiguous answers, and capture nuanced insights regarding classroom practices (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The interviews were conducted

individually and recorded with participants' consent to ensure accuracy in data transcription.

Data analysis followed thematic analysis procedures, which involved identifying, coding, and categorizing recurring themes in the participants' responses. This process included several steps: familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, identification of patterns and themes, and interpretation of findings in relation to existing literature on GTM and vocational English education (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Triangulation was employed by comparing data from questionnaires and interviews to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. Additionally, member checking was conducted to validate interpretations by allowing participants to review and confirm the accuracy of the researcher's summaries.

Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the study. Participants were fully informed about the purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw at any time. Informed consent was obtained prior to data collection, and all personal information was anonymized to protect participants' privacy. The study also adhered to institutional guidelines on ethical research involving human subjects.

In summary, the research method employed in this study is designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of vocational students' perceptions of the Grammar Translation Method. By combining purposive sampling, qualitative data collection instruments, thematic analysis, and ethical safeguards, the study ensures that the findings are both credible and relevant for informing instructional practices in vocational English classrooms.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RQ 1: How do vocational students perceive the use of the Grammar Translation Method in learning English grammar?

The findings indicate that vocational students generally hold positive perceptions toward the Grammar Translation Method. They consider GTM beneficial for improving grammar understanding, vocabulary acquisition, and comprehension of technical English texts. These findings support previous studies that reported GTM remains relevant in vocational education because it provides structured learning and facilitates comprehension of specialized materials.

Vocabulary acquisition is a central component of language learning, particularly for vocational students who require a specialized lexicon to comprehend technical texts and perform industry-related tasks. The Grammar Translation Method (GTM), despite its traditional nature,

remains prevalent in many educational settings due to its explicit focus on grammatical rules, structured exercises, and translation activities. This method emphasizes the systematic memorization of vocabulary and the accurate application of terms in context, which can have significant implications for students' retention of new words (Richards, 2017). Vocational students in fields such as Audio-Visual Engineering often encounter English terminology that is highly technical, and the ability to recall and use these terms accurately is crucial for their academic and professional success (Suryani, 2019).

Students participating in this study reported that GTM facilitates vocabulary learning by providing clear explanations of word meanings, usage, and grammatical functions. The method's reliance on translation allows learners to map new English words to their first language (L1) equivalents, enhancing comprehension and retention. This aligns with findings from recent studies, which indicate that using the first language as a scaffold can reduce cognitive load and improve memorization of unfamiliar vocabulary (Wahyuni, 2020). Students particularly highlighted that repetitive translation exercises, such as translating sentences and paragraphs between English and Indonesian, reinforced their understanding of technical and general vocabulary alike.

Moreover, GTM's structured approach to vocabulary instruction helps students internalize word forms and syntactic patterns. By analyzing sentences and applying grammatical rules, learners gain insight into how vocabulary functions within different contexts. For example, in the context of Audio-Visual Engineering, terms such as "synchronization," "signal processing," and "rendering" are better understood when presented alongside grammatical explanations and translation exercises. According to Pratama (2021), vocational students show higher retention rates when vocabulary is taught systematically and linked to meaningful technical content, rather than in isolation or through purely communicative activities.

Students also perceived that GTM supports the development of long-term vocabulary retention. The repetitive nature of exercises, coupled with explicit rule explanation, allows learners to recall words more accurately when reading technical texts or completing assignments. This perception is consistent with research indicating that explicit instruction in vocabulary, particularly when combined with translation and contextualization, leads to more durable learning outcomes (Rahman, 2022). Participants noted that their ability to remember and use technical terms improved over time, which enhanced their confidence in handling

English-language resources necessary for their vocational training.

Despite the reported benefits, some students highlighted limitations of GTM in vocabulary acquisition. A common concern was that while memorization and translation helped with recognition and understanding, it did not always translate into active use in speaking or writing. Students often felt hesitant to produce sentences orally or spontaneously due to the method's limited focus on communicative practice. This observation aligns with findings by Brown (2018), who argues that GTM's emphasis on written exercises and translation may result in passive vocabulary knowledge, particularly in contexts where oral proficiency is also required. For vocational students, the lack of opportunities to use new words interactively can limit their ability to communicate technical information effectively in practical situations.

Another issue identified by students was the potential monotony of repetitive translation tasks, which sometimes reduced motivation. While GTM promotes retention through structured practice, the lack of engaging, interactive activities may lead to decreased enthusiasm, particularly among learners who prefer hands-on or collaborative approaches. Studies in vocational English learning contexts suggest that integrating GTM with interactive tasks, such as problem-solving exercises or task-based activities, can maintain engagement while still supporting vocabulary acquisition (Sari, 2023). Therefore, the perceived effectiveness of GTM in vocabulary retention is often dependent on how instructors balance traditional translation exercises with more interactive, context-based learning experiences.

Students also emphasized the importance of teacher guidance in maximizing GTM's effectiveness. Clear explanations of word meaning, frequent feedback on translation accuracy, and contextualization of vocabulary within technical scenarios were identified as key factors that enhance learning outcomes. Hidayat (2019) notes that teacher mediation plays a critical role in helping students connect vocabulary knowledge to practical applications, which is particularly significant in vocational settings where students must integrate English with technical skills. When instructors effectively contextualize vocabulary within industry-specific tasks, students perceive GTM as not only useful for memorization but also for understanding how terms function in authentic professional contexts.

In addition, the participants highlighted that the first language (L1) served as an essential cognitive support tool. By translating technical vocabulary into Indonesian, students were able to clarify meanings, resolve ambiguities, and consolidate understanding. This

approach was particularly helpful for abstract or complex terms that were difficult to comprehend through English explanations alone. Putri (2020) emphasizes that strategic use of the first language in GTM can enhance vocabulary comprehension, especially for learners who encounter specialized terminology in vocational fields. Consequently, students' positive perceptions of GTM are closely tied to its capacity to provide a structured, clear, and supportive learning environment that scaffolds vocabulary acquisition and retention.

Finally, students suggested that GTM could be integrated with supplementary techniques to optimize vocabulary learning. These include incorporating multimedia resources, using real-world technical texts, and combining translation exercises with brief communicative activities. Such adaptations help bridge the gap between passive recognition and active usage of vocabulary, addressing one of the primary limitations of GTM while maintaining its strengths in structured instruction and memorization. Rahman (2022) asserts that a blended approach allows vocational learners to benefit from GTM's systematic framework while also developing practical language skills relevant to their field.

In conclusion, vocational students perceive the Grammar Translation Method as a valuable tool for vocabulary acquisition and retention, particularly in technical contexts such as Audio-Visual Engineering. The method's structured approach, emphasis on translation, and explicit grammatical explanations contribute to improved understanding and memorization of both general and specialized vocabulary. However, students also recognize limitations in communicative application and engagement, suggesting the need for complementary strategies to enhance active use of vocabulary. The findings indicate that when carefully implemented and contextually adapted, GTM can provide a strong foundation for vocabulary development, supporting students' comprehension and long-term retention of English terms necessary for academic and professional success.

RQ 2: What strengths and limitations of the Grammar Translation Method do vocational students perceive?

The findings reveal that although students acknowledge several strengths of GTM, they also recognize its limitations. While the method effectively supports grammatical accuracy and vocabulary retention, it provides limited opportunities for communicative practice. Therefore, students believe GTM should be integrated with more communicative and task-based instructional approaches.

Challenges and Difficulties Experienced by Vocational Students When Applying the Grammar Translation Method

While the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) offers several benefits in enhancing vocabulary acquisition and comprehension of technical texts, vocational students also encounter a range of challenges and difficulties when applying this method in their English learning process. These challenges are largely associated with the method's traditional emphasis on accuracy, translation, and written exercises, which may not fully align with the practical and communicative needs of learners in technical fields such as Audio-Visual Engineering (Richards, 2017). Understanding these difficulties is essential for educators seeking to optimize the use of GTM in vocational contexts.

A primary difficulty reported by students is the lack of opportunities for oral communication. GTM traditionally focuses on written exercises, grammar drills, and translation tasks, which limit students' ability to practice speaking English. This is particularly problematic in vocational education, where learners are expected to communicate instructions, explain procedures, or collaborate with peers and instructors in technical tasks (Brown, 2018). Students indicated that while they could accurately translate and understand technical terms, they often felt hesitant or unprepared to produce these terms orally, which affects their confidence and readiness for professional scenarios (Wahyuni, 2020).

Another significant challenge involves the time-consuming nature of translation exercises. GTM requires students to carefully analyze sentences, identify grammatical structures, and convert meaning between English and their first language (L1). Although this process reinforces understanding and retention, students reported that it can slow down reading and comprehension of lengthy technical texts. Sari (2023) highlights that when learners need to quickly extract information from manuals or operational instructions, excessive translation exercises may hinder efficiency, creating a tension between accuracy and speed. Vocational students, who often need to respond promptly in practical contexts, may find this limitation frustrating.

Students also pointed out difficulties in applying GTM to real-world tasks. The method's focus on memorization and rule-based learning can result in passive knowledge that does not easily transfer to active problem-solving or hands-on activities. Pratama (2021) notes that vocational learners benefit from methods that integrate practical application with language learning, allowing them to use English in technical operations. Without such integration, students may understand terminology theoretically but struggle to apply it in authentic tasks, such as operating

audiovisual equipment, following troubleshooting steps, or documenting technical processes.

Motivation and engagement were additional challenges associated with GTM. Students reported that repetitive grammar exercises and translation drills sometimes felt monotonous, reducing their enthusiasm for learning English. This perception is consistent with findings from Rahman (2022), who states that GTM's traditional format may not cater to diverse learning preferences, especially among students accustomed to interactive or hands-on activities. Vocational learners, who often thrive on practical learning, may require varied and engaging strategies to maintain sustained attention and motivation in English classes.

Another difficulty is the limited development of higher-order language skills, such as inferencing, summarizing, and critical reading. While GTM effectively supports recognition and understanding of individual words and sentence structures, students indicated that it does not adequately teach them to interpret implied meaning or extract key information from technical texts independently. Hidayat (2019) argues that comprehension in vocational contexts requires not only knowledge of grammar and vocabulary but also the ability to make inferences, predict outcomes, and connect information across different sections of a text. Students expressed that relying solely on GTM sometimes restricted the development of these skills, which are essential for efficient reading and professional application.

Students also highlighted challenges related to dependence on the teacher. The effectiveness of GTM heavily relies on teacher guidance, including explanations of complex vocabulary, grammatical rules, and contextual examples. Putri (2020) emphasizes that without adequate teacher support, students may struggle to navigate translation exercises, understand nuanced technical terminology, or correctly apply grammatical principles. Vocational students reported that inconsistent guidance or insufficient examples reduced their ability to fully benefit from GTM, leading to partial comprehension or errors in translation.

The method's emphasis on the first language (L1), while helpful for comprehension, also presents challenges. Some students became overly reliant on translation and did not attempt to think or construct sentences directly in English. Suryani (2019) notes that excessive dependence on the first language can impede the development of active English processing skills, limiting students' ability to communicate spontaneously. In vocational contexts, where real-time communication may be required during practical tasks, this overreliance on translation can hinder both confidence and performance.

Finally, students expressed difficulties in balancing the need for grammatical accuracy with the need for communicative fluency. GTM's strong focus on correctness often encourages cautious language production, leading learners to prioritize error-free responses over fluent interaction. Brown (2018) observes that this trade-off can reduce learners' willingness to participate in discussions or collaborative technical activities. Vocational students noted that while GTM strengthened their grammatical knowledge, it sometimes constrained their ability to express ideas freely, particularly in collaborative settings where practical problem-solving requires rapid verbal exchange.

In summary, vocational students experience multiple challenges when applying the Grammar Translation Method, including limited speaking practice, time-consuming translation exercises, difficulties in applying knowledge to real-world tasks, reduced motivation, underdeveloped higher-order reading skills, heavy dependence on teacher guidance, overreliance on the first language (L1), and tensions between accuracy and fluency. These difficulties suggest that while GTM offers valuable support for comprehension and vocabulary retention, it is insufficient as a standalone method in vocational English education. To address these challenges, educators are encouraged to integrate GTM with communicative, task-based, and contextually relevant strategies that align more closely with vocational learners' practical needs. By combining the strengths of GTM with interactive and application-oriented approaches, teachers can optimize both comprehension and active language use, enhancing students' readiness for technical and professional environments.

CONCLUSION

This study explored vocational students' perceptions of the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) in learning English grammar. Regarding the first research question, the findings show that vocational students generally perceive GTM positively. They believe the method helps them understand grammar, acquire vocabulary, and comprehend technical English texts relevant to their field of study. The use of translation and the first language (L1) also support comprehension and reduces learning anxiety.

Regarding the second research question, students identified both strengths and limitations of GTM. They considered its structured approach effective for improving grammatical knowledge and vocabulary retention. However, they also recognized limitations, including limited opportunities for speaking practice, dependence on

translation, and insufficient development of communicative competence.

Overall, the findings suggest that GTM remains relevant in vocational English education when implemented appropriately. Rather than being used as a standalone method, GTM should be integrated with communicative and task-based learning activities to balance grammatical accuracy with practical language use. Such integration can better prepare vocational students for academic success and future professional communication

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