

Enhancing Students' Basic Grammar Mastery Through Translation Tests: A Classroom Action Research Study

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ABSTRACT

Understanding grammar is fundamental for effective communication and language proficiency. However, many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students continue to face difficulties in mastering basic grammar rules. This study aims to improve third-semester students' grammar mastery through the implementation of translation tests within a Classroom Action Research (CAR) framework. The participants consisted of 26 English Education students from Universitas PGRI Yogyakarta. The research was conducted in two cycles involving planning, acting, observing, and reflecting stages. Data were collected through pre-tests, post-tests, questionnaires, and interviews. The findings revealed a significant improvement in students' grammatical competence after the implementation of translation-based activities. The use of translation techniques, particularly the *established equivalent*, increased substantially—from 45.34% in the pre-test to 89.89% in post-test II. Moreover, students who passed the minimum passing grade rose from 11.54% in the pre-test to 100% in post-test II. These results indicate that translation tests not only enhance students' understanding of grammar but also foster better analytical and linguistic awareness. The study concludes that integrating translation tasks into grammar instruction is an effective pedagogical approach to developing students' grammatical accuracy and confidence in English learning.

Keywords: Classroom Action Research, EFL students, Grammar mastery, Translation tests, Translation techniques,

1. INTRODUCTION

Grammar serves as the structural foundation of language and plays a crucial role in effective communication, both spoken and written. Mastery of grammar enables learners to convey meaning accurately, construct coherent messages, and achieve communicative competence (Rositter, 2020; Dalil, 2013). In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, grammar is not only a linguistic component but also a vital skill that supports academic achievement and professional communication (Katz Bourns & Watzinger-Tharp, 2008). Despite its importance, many EFL students continue to struggle with basic grammatical

concepts such as tenses, prepositions, singular and plural forms, and passive voice. These difficulties hinder students from expressing ideas fluently and accurately.

Preliminary observations conducted in the third semester of the English Education Program at Universitas PGRI Yogyakarta (UPY) revealed that students encountered persistent problems in grammar learning. They often produced translations that followed Indonesian sentence structures, demonstrating limited awareness of English grammatical rules. Their challenges included incorrect diction, tense selection, and prepositional use, as well as limited vocabulary mastery. Consequently, their translations were often inaccurate and ungrammatical. These findings indicate a need for innovative pedagogical strategies to enhance grammar instruction and student engagement.

Previous studies have introduced various strategies to improve grammar learning, such as communicative language teaching, flipped classrooms, and grammar-based games (Khansir & Pakdel, 2016; Murtisari et al., 2020). While these methods have proven beneficial, few studies have explored the use of translation tests as a tool to enhance grammar understanding. Translation provides learners with opportunities to analyze linguistic structures, compare grammatical systems, and apply rules contextually (Nandar, 2011). In this sense, translation activities serve not only as an assessment tool but also as a pedagogical approach that integrates grammar practice within meaningful language use.

To address the identified learning gaps, this study proposes the use of translation tests as an innovative approach to improve students' basic grammar mastery. The method enables students to identify grammatical patterns through translation tasks and receive structured feedback on their performance. Implemented through the Classroom Action Research (CAR) model, this approach follows a cyclical process of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting to ensure continuous improvement in teaching and learning outcomes (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988).

This research is significant for three main reasons. First, it contributes to the development of effective grammar learning strategies within EFL higher education. Second, it offers empirical evidence on how translation-based assessment can enhance grammatical competence. Finally, it provides practical implications for language teachers seeking to integrate translation activities into their instructional design. The innovation of this study lies in combining translation tests with the CAR framework to create an interactive, reflective, and data-driven method for improving grammar understanding among EFL students.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design to address students' difficulties in mastering basic grammar. CAR was selected because it allows educators to identify classroom problems, implement targeted interventions, and evaluate improvements through continuous reflection. According to Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), CAR is a cyclical process that includes four key stages: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. Each cycle aims to refine teaching practices and enhance students' learning outcomes. In this study, two action cycles were conducted to improve third-semester students' grammar mastery through translation tests.

2.2. Research Procedure

The study followed a structured CAR sequence:

1. Planning:

The researcher collaborated with the grammar course lecturer to identify students' grammatical difficulties based on classroom observation and preliminary assessment. Lesson plans, translation test instruments, and evaluation criteria were developed. The materials were adapted from English grammar textbooks and aligned with the course syllabus for the third semester.

2. Acting:

During the first cycle, students completed a pre-test translation task from Indonesian to English to identify their initial grammar competence. Instructional sessions were then conducted, focusing on grammar components frequently misused in translation—such as tenses, prepositions, plural forms, and passive voice. Translation techniques from Molina and Albir (2002) were introduced to help students produce accurate English structures.

3. Observing:

The researcher recorded students' performance, classroom interactions, and learning behaviors during the activities. Observations included both quantitative data (test scores) and qualitative notes (participation, engagement, and problem-solving behavior). The improvement in grammar use and translation accuracy was measured at the end of each cycle through post-tests.

4. Reflecting:

Results from the first cycle were analyzed to identify strengths and weaknesses in the instructional process. Feedback was used to revise teaching materials and translation tasks for the second cycle. The second cycle repeated the same steps but with refined materials and focused exercises. Continuous reflection ensured progressive improvement in students' grammar mastery.

2.3. Participants and Setting

The participants were 26 third-semester students enrolled in the English Education Study Program at Universitas PGRI Yogyakarta during the 2024 academic year. The research took place in a grammar course class, with both the researcher and the course lecturer participating as facilitators. Students were chosen through purposive sampling, as they represented the intermediate level of EFL proficiency suitable for translation-based grammar instruction.

2.4. Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through:

- 1) Tests: Pre-test and post-tests were administered to measure students' grammar improvement.
- 2) Questionnaires: Distributed to gather students' perceptions of translation tests as a learning tool.
- 3) Interviews: Conducted with the grammar lecturer to obtain qualitative insights on classroom changes.
- 4) Observation and Documentation: Class activities were observed and documented through field notes and photographs for triangulation purposes.

The translation test items were validated by the supervising lecturer to ensure reliability and relevance to grammatical content. Each student's response was analyzed using translation technique classification adapted from Molina and Albir (2002).

2.5. Data Analysis Procedure

The collected data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman (1994) model, which includes three concurrent activities:

1. Data Reduction – selecting and simplifying relevant data from tests and observations.
2. Data Display – organizing data in descriptive tables and summaries to show improvement trends.

3. Conclusion Drawing and Verification – interpreting results and confirming findings through triangulation.

Triangulation was applied to validate data from multiple sources (tests, interviews, and observations), ensuring research credibility (Heale & Forbes, 2013; Thurmond, 2001). Quantitative results from the tests were compared between cycles, while qualitative data provided deeper understanding of students' learning behavior.

3. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

3.1. Translation Techniques Used by Students

The implementation of translation tests provided valuable insights into the students' grammatical understanding and the translation strategies they employed. During the pre-test, students primarily relied on *established equivalent* and *literal translation* techniques, showing limited awareness of contextual and syntactic accuracy. As instruction progressed, the distribution of translation techniques shifted significantly.

- 1) Pre-Test: Established Equivalent (45.34%), Literal Translation (33.49%), Modulation (6.77%), Pure Borrowing (6.04%), Explication (4.59%), Generalization (2.53%), Amplification (1.20%).
- 2) Post-Test I: Established Equivalent (74.33%), Literal Translation (22.65%), Pure Borrowing (1.75%), Amplification (0.70%), Explication (0.49%), Neutral Borrowing (0.07%).
- 3) Post-Test II: Established Equivalent (89.89%), Literal Translation (7.38%), Pure Borrowing (1.72%), Amplification (0.73%), Explication (0.27%).

These results indicate a clear trend: students gradually moved from literal, word-for-word translation to more contextually appropriate and communicative translation strategies. The increased use of the *established equivalent* technique demonstrates students' improved ability to choose natural English expressions that accurately represent Indonesian meanings. This change reflects enhanced grammatical awareness and linguistic competence fostered through guided translation practice.

The decline in the use of *literal translation* from 33.49% to 7.38% suggests that students became more flexible and accurate in applying grammar rules in context. Supporting studies (Molina & Albir, 2002; Murtisari et al., 2020) emphasize that translation-based instruction encourages learners to focus on grammatical correspondence and meaning equivalence, thus promoting deeper linguistic understanding.

3.2. Improvement of Students' Grammar Achievement

Quantitative data from the pre-test, post-test I, and post-test II demonstrated substantial improvement in students' grammar mastery. Initially, only 3 students (11.54%) achieved the Minimum Passing Grade (MPG = 60) in the pre-test. After the first cycle, 7 students (26.92%) passed, while in the second cycle, all 26 students (100%) met or exceeded the passing grade. The average scores increased progressively across the tests, indicating the effectiveness of the CAR-based intervention. It can be summarized as follows:

- 1) Pre-Test: Most students scored below the passing grade, showing limited understanding of grammar in translation tasks.
- 2) Post-Test I: Slight improvement after the first intervention, though several grammar components (particularly tenses and prepositions) remained problematic.
- 3) Post-Test II: Substantial improvement across all grammar areas, especially in tense accuracy, subject–verb agreement, and passive constructions.

This progressive development suggests that the translation test approach, supported by the CAR model, effectively guided students to identify, analyze, and correct grammatical errors through iterative practice and feedback.

3.3. Effectiveness of Translation Tests in Grammar Learning

The integration of translation tests in grammar instruction proved to be a powerful pedagogical strategy. The process encouraged students to engage actively with grammar rules, compare linguistic structures, and reflect on their usage. The CAR framework facilitated this improvement through continuous feedback and reflection.

The findings support previous research emphasizing the value of translation in language learning. Nandar (2011) and Murtisari et al. (2020) assert that translation activities help learners internalize grammar patterns while enhancing analytical thinking. By analyzing their translation output, students in this study became more aware of grammatical nuances and avoided common errors such as literal structure transfer from Indonesian to English.

Students' questionnaire responses also revealed positive perceptions of the translation-based learning process. Most participants agreed that translation tests helped them recognize grammatical errors more easily and apply grammar rules in meaningful contexts. However, some noted challenges in handling cultural differences and idiomatic expressions, suggesting the need for additional contextual exposure.

4. Discussion

The results confirm that translation tests, when applied within the CAR framework, can significantly enhance grammar mastery in EFL contexts. The improvement in students' grammar scores and translation accuracy aligns with the theoretical framework of *learning by doing*—where learners construct understanding through repeated application and reflection (Lewin, 1946; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988).

The success of this study can be attributed to three pedagogical factors:

1. Active Learning Process: Translation tests encouraged analytical engagement rather than rote memorization.
2. Continuous Reflection: The CAR method provided structured cycles for identifying weaknesses and refining teaching strategies.
3. Practical Application: Students learned grammar through authentic linguistic tasks, reinforcing transfer from theory to practice.

Overall, the study demonstrates that translation-based grammar instruction not only strengthens grammatical accuracy but also cultivates students' confidence and autonomy in language use. This supports the broader pedagogical view that translation, when applied systematically, remains a relevant and effective strategy in contemporary EFL classrooms

4. CONCLUSION

The main objective of this study, as stated in the introduction, was to enhance students' basic grammar mastery through the implementation of translation tests using a Classroom Action Research (CAR) approach. The research successfully achieved this goal. The findings revealed that translation-based learning activities significantly improved students' grammatical understanding, translation accuracy, and overall language competence. Through the cyclical process of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting, students demonstrated noticeable progress in applying correct grammatical structures, as indicated by the consistent increase in post-test scores and the shift toward more accurate translation techniques.

The application of translation tests not only strengthened students' awareness of English grammatical rules but also encouraged analytical and reflective learning. The improvement from 11.54% to 100% student achievement over two CAR cycles confirms that the combination of translation practice and structured reflection is an effective method

for grammar instruction in EFL contexts. This result aligns with the expectation presented in the introduction that translation activities could serve as both pedagogical tools and assessment instruments to improve grammar proficiency.

The study contributes to the field of English language teaching by demonstrating that translation can be integrated innovatively into grammar courses to foster deeper understanding and learner autonomy. Future research may explore the extension of this approach to different linguistic levels—such as advanced grammar, writing courses, or discourse analysis—to examine its long-term impact on language accuracy and fluency. Additionally, the integration of digital translation tools and collaborative peer feedback systems could be investigated to enhance engagement and learning outcomes.

In summary, the research confirmed that translation-based grammar instruction, supported by reflective CAR methodology, is a practical, innovative, and scientifically grounded approach to improving EFL students' grammatical competence and language performance.

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