

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the background of the research, research questions, objectives of the research, significance of the research, conceptual framework, and contributions of the study.

1.1 Background of the Research

Writing is widely recognized as one of the most complex and demanding skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning. It requires learners to integrate multiple linguistic components simultaneously, including vocabulary, grammar, sentence construction, and the organization of ideas (Hyland, 2003; Richards & Renandya, 2002). In EFL contexts such as Indonesia, where exposure to English outside the classroom is limited, students often struggle to develop adequate writing proficiency. This challenge is particularly relevant under the current *Kurikulum Merdeka*, in which descriptive text is introduced as one of the foundational genres that seventh-grade students are expected to master, requiring them to describe people, places, or things accurately using simple present tense and appropriate descriptive language (Kemendikbud, 2022). Meeting this curricular demand requires not only conceptual understanding of the genre but also a level of linguistic accuracy that many young EFL learners have yet to develop.

Based on preliminary observations conducted in a junior high school setting, several recurring problems in students' writing were identified. Many students demonstrated limited vocabulary, resulting in repetitive word use and difficulty expressing ideas clearly. In addition, students frequently experienced confusion in constructing English sentences, particularly in distinguishing between nominal and verbal sentence patterns. This confusion often led to grammatical inaccuracies, such as missing linking verbs, incorrect verb forms, and incomplete sentence structures. These findings suggest that students encounter difficulties not only in generating ideas but also in transferring those ideas into grammatically appropriate English expressions.

These challenges are closely related to the structural differences between Indonesian and English. As noted by Widiati and Cahyono (2006), Indonesian learners often omit essential grammatical elements in English due to the absence of equivalent structures in their first language. Consequently, students may produce texts that convey meaning at a conceptual level but lack grammatical accuracy and clarity. This indicates that writing difficulties in EFL contexts are not merely related to content development but also to learners' limited linguistic awareness.

Traditional approaches to teaching writing often emphasize exposure to model texts and the production of final written outputs. While such approaches may help students recognize text structures, they often provide limited support for understanding how language works across different linguistic systems (Nunan, 1999; Hyland, 2003). As a result, students may rely on memorization rather than developing a deeper understanding of language use.

In response to these challenges, the role of the first language (L1) in language learning has been increasingly reconsidered. Rather than being viewed as interference, L1 is now recognized as a valuable cognitive resource that can facilitate language learning (Cook, 2001; Hall & Cook, 2012). One instructional approach that systematically integrates L1 into language learning is pedagogical translation. According to Leonardi (2010), pedagogical translation is a structured learning activity that encourages learners to compare languages, reflect on linguistic differences, and develop greater awareness of meaning and form.

Pedagogical translation is particularly relevant for writing instruction, as it allows learners to generate ideas in their first language and then transform them into the target language. This process helps reduce cognitive load and enables learners to focus on both meaning and linguistic accuracy (Sweller, 1988). Moreover, translation activities can enhance vocabulary development, grammatical awareness, and sentence construction, all of which are essential components of writing.

A growing body of empirical research lends support to the potential benefits of pedagogical translation in language learning. Lee (2018), for example, found that structured translation tasks produced significant improvements in writing quality, syntactic complexity, and lexical accuracy among low-proficiency EFL learners,

while Mbeudeu (2017) reported comparable gains in structural precision and grammatical control among learners in a similarly L1-dominant context. Within the Indonesian setting specifically, Gunawan (2020) found that using L1 as a reference point during translation tasks helped university-level learners manage cognitive load and produce more coherent English texts, offering direct contextual support for the linguistic setting of the present study. In terms of learners' attitudes, Akter et al. (2019) found that junior secondary students held strongly positive perceptions of translation as a strategy for developing their writing skills, a finding echoed by Jubran and Arabiat (2021), who reported that learners viewed translation as a cognitive bridge that reduced writing anxiety and facilitated the generation of ideas.

Despite these encouraging findings, a clear gap remains in the existing literature. Most of the studies that directly measured writing performance, including Lee (2018) and Gunawan (2020), were conducted with adult or university-level learners, whose cognitive maturity and language-learning experience differ considerably from those of junior high school students. The two studies identified in this review that focused specifically on junior secondary learners, Akter et al. (2019) and Jubran and Arabiat (2021), examined only learners' attitudes and perceptions, without measuring writing performance through an objective, rubric-based assessment. Consequently, it remains unclear whether the positive perceptions reported among younger learners are actually accompanied by measurable improvement in their writing achievement. In addition, none of the studies reviewed examined the application of pedagogical translation specifically to descriptive text, the genre introduced early in the *Kurikulum Merdeka* English syllabus for seventh-grade students, leaving a gap between the demands of the current curriculum and what the existing pedagogical translation literature has empirically tested. This combination of an underexamined age group, an underexamined text genre, and the limited integration of performance-based and perception-based data constitutes the central gap that the present study seeks to address.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the impact of pedagogical translation on junior high school students' writing skills and to explore their

perceptions of its use in learning writing. By combining quantitative performance data from a quasi-experimental writing test with perception data from a questionnaire, this study is expected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the role of pedagogical translation in EFL writing instruction at the junior high school level, an understanding that remains limited in the studies reviewed above.

1.2 Research Questions

This study is conducted to investigate the effectiveness of pedagogical translation in improving students' writing skills as well as to explore students' perceptions toward its implementation in the classroom. In line with the objectives of the study, the research questions are formulated to examine both the impact of the instructional strategy and students' responses to it. The research questions of this study are as follows:

1. To what extent do students' descriptive writing skills improve after being taught using pedagogical translation?
2. To what extent do the descriptive writing skills of students taught using pedagogical translation differ from those of students taught using conventional methods?
3. What are students' perceptions of the use of pedagogical translation in learning descriptive writing?

The first research question aims to address the issue of whether pedagogical translation can effectively improve students' writing skills. This question is important because many students face difficulties in developing their writing ability, particularly in organizing ideas and constructing grammatically correct sentences. By examining the improvement before and after the treatment, this question helps determine the effectiveness of the instructional strategy.

The second research question focuses on comparing the effectiveness of pedagogical translation with conventional teaching methods. This comparison is necessary to identify whether the use of pedagogical translation provides a significantly better outcome than traditional approaches. It addresses the need to justify the use of an alternative teaching strategy in the classroom.

The third research question is intended to explore students' perceptions toward the use of pedagogical translation. This question is important because students' attitudes and responses can influence their engagement and learning outcomes. Understanding their perceptions provides additional insights into the practicality and acceptability of the instructional strategy beyond its measurable effectiveness.

1.3 Objectives of the Research

This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of pedagogical translation in improving students' writing skills and to explore students' perceptions toward its implementation in the classroom. Based on the research questions, the objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To examine the extent to which students' descriptive writing skills improve after being taught using pedagogical translation.
2. To examine the extent to which the descriptive writing skills of students taught using pedagogical translation differ from those of students taught using conventional methods.
3. To explore students' perceptions of the use of pedagogical translation to develop their descriptive writing skills.

1.4 Significance of the Research

1.4.1 Theoretical Significance

Theoretically, this study contributes to the field of EFL writing instruction by providing empirical evidence on the effectiveness of pedagogical translation as an instructional strategy. It extends existing literature by examining both writing performance and students' perceptions, thereby offering a more comprehensive understanding of how pedagogical translation functions in language learning. Furthermore, the study reinforces the theoretical perspective that learners' first language can serve as a valuable cognitive resource in developing second language writing skills.

1.4.2 Practical Significance

Practically, this study provides insights for English teachers regarding the implementation of pedagogical translation in writing classrooms. The findings may

serve as a reference for selecting instructional strategies that support students' writing development. In addition, the study offers practical implications for curriculum developers and teacher educators by highlighting the potential of integrating translation-based activities into EFL instruction. For students, this study may help improve their writing skills while also enhancing their confidence and engagement in learning English.

1.5 Conceptual Framework

This study focuses on two main variables: pedagogical translation as the independent variable and students' EFL writing skill as the dependent variable. The conceptual framework is supported by relevant theoretical perspectives, particularly Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory, Sweller's (1988) Cognitive Load Theory, and Schmidt's (1990) Noticing Hypothesis.

Pedagogical translation is the independent variable in this study. It refers to the purposeful and structured use of translation as a classroom activity to support language learning. Following Leonardi (2010), pedagogical translation involves stages of pre-translation, translation, and post-translation. Through these activities, students compare their first language (L1), Indonesian, with English (L2), develop awareness of linguistic differences, organize ideas, and revise their English output. Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory supports this use of L1 as a mediational and scaffolding resource in learning. In addition, Schmidt's (1990) Noticing Hypothesis explains how comparing L1 and L2 may direct students' attention to linguistic forms and differences.

The dependent variable is students' EFL writing skill, particularly their ability to produce descriptive texts in English. Writing performance is assessed based on five components proposed by Brown (2004): content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. Descriptive writing requires students to develop and organize ideas and express relevant characteristics using appropriate vocabulary and grammatical structures. Therefore, students' writing scores provide the measurable outcome for examining the effectiveness of pedagogical translation.

The conceptual relationship between the two variables is therefore:

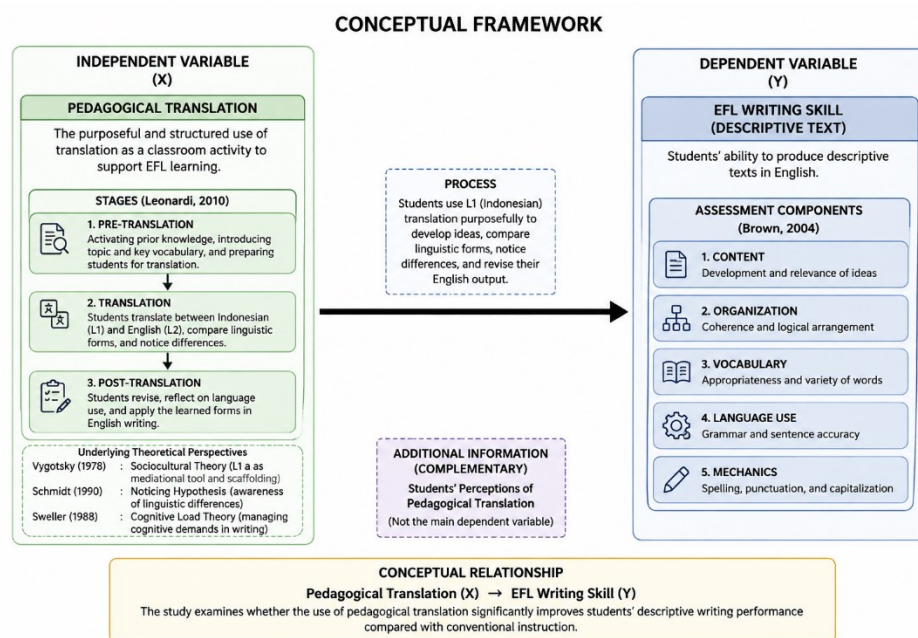


Figure 1.1 Conceptual Framework of the Study

The study examines whether the use of pedagogical translation produces a significant improvement in students' descriptive writing performance compared with conventional instruction. Students' perceptions of pedagogical translation are treated as complementary information, rather than as the main dependent variable, to provide additional insight into students' experiences with the instructional approach.

1.6 Contributions of the Study

This study contributes to the field of English language education by providing empirical evidence on the use of pedagogical translation in EFL writing instruction. Although translation has received renewed attention as a potentially useful pedagogical resource in language teaching, empirical investigation of pedagogical translation, particularly its effects on learners' measurable language performance, remains relatively limited. Existing discussions have provided important theoretical arguments regarding the pedagogical value of translation, while previous empirical studies have been conducted in different educational contexts and with different learner populations. Therefore, further empirical evidence is needed to strengthen

the understanding of whether and how pedagogical translation can contribute to EFL learning.

The primary contribution of this study is therefore empirical. Rather than discussing pedagogical translation only from a theoretical or conceptual perspective, this study provides quantitative evidence based on students' actual writing performance. Through a quasi-experimental design, the study examines changes in students' descriptive writing performance following instruction using pedagogical translation and compares the performance of students receiving pedagogical translation with that of students receiving the comparison instructional approach. The results consequently provide measurable evidence regarding the potential effectiveness of pedagogical translation for EFL writing instruction.

A further contribution concerns the learner and educational context. Much of the existing discussion and research on translation in language education has involved adult or university-level learners, whereas empirical evidence concerning pedagogical translation among junior high school EFL learners remains comparatively limited. This study addresses this gap by examining seventh-grade students in an Indonesian junior high school context. In doing so, it extends the empirical discussion of pedagogical translation to younger EFL learners and provides evidence from an Indonesian educational setting.

The study also contributes empirical evidence concerning the application of pedagogical translation to writing, particularly descriptive writing. Writing requires learners to coordinate ideas, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics simultaneously. The present study therefore provides evidence of whether a structured translation-based instructional process can support students in developing these aspects of written English. The findings from the writing assessment demonstrate measurable improvement following the treatment, providing evidence that complements previous theoretical arguments regarding the potential role of translation in language learning. The findings also extend previous empirical evidence by demonstrating improvement among junior high school learners in the Indonesian EFL context.

In addition to writing performance, this study contributes empirical information about students' perceptions of pedagogical translation. The questionnaire findings indicate that students generally perceived the strategy positively, particularly in relation to cognitive support and idea development. These findings provide complementary evidence concerning students' experiences with pedagogical translation and help explain how learners perceive the instructional process beyond the measurable changes in their writing scores.

Thus, the main contribution of this study is not the introduction of a completely new translation method, but the provision of additional empirical evidence for pedagogical translation as an instructional approach in EFL writing. By examining junior high school learners, descriptive writing, and students' perceptions within an Indonesian context, this study helps address an empirical gap in the existing literature and provides evidence that can be used to further evaluate the role of translation in contemporary EFL instruction.

