

# **FACTORS INFLUENCING MARITIME VOCATIONAL STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES IN TRANSLATING ENGLISH VOCABULARY: A CASE STUDY AT SMK PELAYARAN LINTAS NUSANTARA BARRU**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The ability to translate vocabulary is an important component in English language learning, especially for vocational school students who are preparing for international professional fields such as maritime studies. However, many students still face obstacles in translating both general and technical vocabulary. The purpose of this study is to analyze the factors related to students' difficulties in translating vocabulary at SMK Pelayaran Lintas Nusantara Barru and to identify the dominant factors that influence these difficulties. This research method uses a quantitative descriptive approach involving 60 students from grades X, XI, and XII at SMK Pelayaran Lintas Nusantara Barru, which was collected through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, then analyzed statistically and using Pearson's correlation test. The results showed that students' difficulties in translating vocabulary were very high, with an average score of 3.67. Both internal and external factors showed a positive and significant correlation with students' translation difficulties, with language ability ( $r = 0.68$ ) and learning strategies ( $r = 0.63$ ) being the most dominant factors. Meanwhile, the learning environment showed the weakest relationship ( $r = 0.38$ ). The results of this study indicate that students' difficulties in translating English vocabulary are mainly caused by low language proficiency and the use of ineffective learning strategies. This study concludes that improving vocabulary translation skills requires a comprehensive approach that includes the use of context-based teaching methods, consistent use of teaching materials relevant to the maritime world, and active synergy between language teachers and experts in related fields. To broaden understanding of this issue, further research is recommended in other vocational fields to formulate more comprehensive pedagogical strategies.

**Keywords:** Language Ability, Language Proficiency, Learning Strategies, Translation Difficulties, Vocabulary Translation

## **INTRODUCTION**

Proficiency in English has become increasingly important in today's globalized world, especially in sectors that demand international communication, such as maritime, aviation, and trade. English functions as a lingua franca, bridging communication gaps across nations, industries, and cultures (Jenkins & Panero, 2024; Pitzl, 2021). In the maritime sectors, effective English communication is vital not only for operational effectiveness but also

crucial for maintaining safety and avoiding accidents at sea. According to the International Maritime Organization (IMO), more than 80% of maritime accidents are caused by communication failures, many of which result from inadequate English language proficiency among crew members. This situation emphasizes the urgent need for future seafarers to master Maritime English, a specialized form of English that includes technical vocabulary, standardized phraseology, and context-specific communication (Baloch et al., 2022; Cole & Trenkner, 2011).

In Indonesia, this need is especially relevant in vocational education, particularly at maritime vocational high schools (Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan, or SMK), which are expected to produce internationally competitive graduates. Although English has been integrated across all vocational levels of the national curriculum, the evidence indicates that students frequently struggle to translate both general and technical English vocabulary into Bahasa Indonesia. These translation challenges impede students' ability to comprehend instructional materials, interpret technical documents, and participate effectively in multilingual maritime operations (Suryani & Putra, 2023; Utami, 2022).

Several empirical studies have confirmed the persistence of language difficulties among Indonesian vocational students, especially those enrolled in maritime-related programs. According to Laufer's (1997) Vocabulary Threshold Hypothesis, a minimum vocabulary size is necessary for students to understand academic or technical texts effectively. However, maritime students often lack familiarity with technical terms used in real-world contexts. Adnyani and Putra (2022) found that many students failed to accurately translate core maritime terms such as "rudder," "anchor," "lifeboat," and "starboard," often resorting to literal, word-for-word translation that led to semantic errors. This indicates not only a superficial level of comprehension but also limited higher-order lexical inferencing abilities (Nation, 2020). Such linguistic struggles can negatively affect students' confidence, motivation to learn, and understanding of the content, potentially leading to academic disengagement.

Moreover, Fitriani and Nuraini (2021) argue that the absence of practical vocabulary-learning strategies such as inferencing, morphemic analysis, and mnemonic techniques, combined with limited exposure to authentic Maritime English materials, significantly contributes to poor translation skills. Hidayat (2019) further highlights the roles of low motivation, inadequate use of multimedia resources, and weak instructional design in worsening students' vocabulary acquisition. Although national education reforms have promoted the integration of digital and task-based learning models in vocational education (Wulandari & Fahcrudin, 2020), the implementation of these innovations remains inconsistent, particularly in geographically remote and under-resourced regions like South Sulawesi.

While the number of studies focusing on English language learning in vocational settings is growing, research exploring the interaction between internal (e.g., vocabulary knowledge, learning motivation, and strategies) and external factors (e.g., teaching practices, learning environment, and instructional resources) in Maritime English translation remains limited. Most existing literature focuses on general English skills or reading comprehension, leaving theoretical and empirical gaps in the domain of English for Specific Purposes (ESP),

especially in technical translation relevant to the maritime context. For instance, Ariyanti and Sari (2020) explore the benefits of contextual vocabulary teaching in vocational schools but do not evaluate how students' cognitive and affective factors influence translation outcomes. Similarly, Sari & Sari (2020) conducted a needs analysis for Maritime English but failed to explore how pedagogical techniques interact with students' background knowledge to shape translation competence.

From a theoretical standpoint, Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller, 1988) suggests that students encounter greater challenges when processing complex technical vocabulary in the absence of well-developed schemata or structured instructional scaffolding. Furthermore, The BICS-CALP distinction by Cummins (Cummins, 1979; Suryanto, 2021) emphasizes the complexity of acquiring academic and technical vocabulary. It revealed that although students may grasp conversational English with relative ease, they tend to struggle with specialized, field-specific vocabulary essential for technical tasks, particularly in disciplines such as maritime operations. According to schema theory, understanding and translating language specific to a particular field will be difficult to achieve if learners do not first access background knowledge relevant to the topic (Alharthi, 2020; Erten & Razi, 2019).

In the local context, SMK Pelayaran Lintas Nusantara Barru, a vocational maritime school in South Sulawesi, is one such institution tasked with preparing professional seafarers. The school's curriculum emphasizes Maritime English as a core component of students' vocational competence. However, based on preliminary observations and informal interviews with English teachers at the school, many students continue to face significant difficulties in translating vocabulary, both general and maritime-specific. These issues impair their comprehension of course content and limit their ability to communicate effectively in English. The challenges are multifaceted and may stem from several sources, including limited vocabulary knowledge, low motivation, suboptimal learning strategies, and an unsupportive learning environment. In addition, linguistic differences between English and Bahasa Indonesia, especially in grammatical structures, may lead students to adopt literal translation practices, which often yield inaccurate and misleading results.

This condition reveals that vocabulary translation is not merely a standalone linguistic skill, but a complex process influenced by both internal and external factors. Therefore, it is imperative to investigate the underlying causes of vocabulary translation difficulties among maritime vocational students. By focusing on this issue at SMK Pelayaran Lintas Nusantara Barru, this study aims to explore the contributing factors, ranging from learners' intrinsic competencies to extrinsic pedagogical conditions, that affect vocabulary translation outcomes.

Specifically, this study aims to answer the following research questions: (1) What internal and external factors are associated with students' difficulty in translating vocabulary at SMK Pelayaran Lintas Nusantara Barru? and (2) Which of these factors most significantly influence students' translation performance? By applying the descriptive quantitative method, this study offers an original perspective by systematically analyzing how various factors influence vocabulary translation difficulties, aiming to pinpoint the most dominant contributing element. The results of this study are expected to provide valuable insights for developing pedagogical interventions tailored to ESP learners in maritime

education, and ultimately to support the advancement of English instruction in vocational settings in line with international maritime communication standards.

## **METHODS**

This study employs a quantitative descriptive method to examine how internal and external variables relate to the challenges students face in translating English vocabulary at SMK Pelayaran Lintas Nusantara Barru. The rationale for selecting this method lies in its ability to quantify relationships among variables in an objective and organized manner using statistical data (Yolifi et al., 2025). The descriptive framework aligns with the study's intention to capture real-world student experiences through pre-established indicators, without applying experimental manipulation. The study took place at SMK Pelayaran Lintas Nusantara Barru, located in South Sulawesi, and was conducted over two months from August to September 2025. The target population comprised all students in grades X, XI, and XII who had completed at least 2 semesters of English lessons. A total of 60 participants were chosen through purposive sampling, proportionally representing each grade level. Data were gathered through structured questionnaires, classroom-based observations, and brief interviews with English teachers to enrich contextual insights.

The survey instrument was constructed around seven main variables: linguistic competence (X1), students' learning motivation (X2), interest and learning strategies (X3), teaching practices (X4), the use of educational media (X5), the learning setting (X6), and vocabulary translation difficulties serving as the dependent variable (Y). To ensure the instrument's accuracy and consistency, Pearson's correlation coefficient and Cronbach's Alpha were used to assess validity and reliability. Analytical procedures involved computing descriptive statistics such as averages, standard deviations, and frequency distributions for each variable. Furthermore, Pearson's correlation was applied to assess the strength of the relationship between the variables, ranging from very weak to very strong. The significance of these relationships was evaluated using t-tests, and statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS. The analytical framework mirrors that of Arroyyani & Maryani (2025), who effectively examined the determinants of English learning obstacles among vocational high school students through a similar quantitative lens.

In this study, the data were analyzed using descriptive and correlational analyses. The analysis process included the following steps:

### ***Descriptive Statistical Analysis***

This analysis aimed to describe the level of difficulty experienced by students and the average score for each factor studied. The average was obtained by dividing the total score by the number of respondents who participated. This process enabled researchers to summarize the general patterns of difficulty in translating vocabulary encountered by participants.

### ***Pearson Correlation Analysis***

To assess how strongly and in what direction the independent variable (X) is related to the dependent variable (Y), which in this case is the level of difficulty in translating vocabulary, a correlation analysis was conducted. The resulting correlation coefficient was categorized based on a conventional interpretation scale, ranging from very weak to very strong. The t-test was used to verify the statistical significance of these relationships, confirming that the observed correlations were not solely due to random variation.

## **RESULTS**

### ***Descriptive Analysis***

Descriptive analysis was used to describe the level of difficulty students encountered when translating vocabulary, as well as the average scores of internal and external factors that influenced them. A 1-5 Likert-scale questionnaire was distributed to 60 students at SMK Pelayaran Lintas Nusantara Barru to collect data.

*Table 1. Average internal factor scores of students*

Internal Factors	Mean ( $\bar{X}$ )	Standard Deviation ( SD )	Category
English Language Ability	3.10	0.71	fair
Learning Motivation	3.45	0.66	good
Interest in English	3.25	0.69	fair
Vocabulary Learning Strategy	2.95	0.64	poor
Overall average	3.19	0.67	fair

Based on Table 1 shows that students' challenges in translating vocabulary seem to be mainly caused by internal variables, with the lowest average score found in vocabulary learning strategies (M = 2.95, SD = 0.64), which places it in the "poor" category. Meanwhile, their English language proficiency (M = 3.10, SD = 0.71) and interest in the subject (M = 3.25, SD = 0.69) were rated as "fair." Learning motivation, however, showed relatively better performance (M = 3.45, SD = 0.66), falling into the "good" category. When averaged overall, the internal factor score reached 3.19 (SD ≈ 0.67), indicating a moderate deficiency in basic skills and student engagement.

*Table 2. Average scores of external factors*

External Factors	Mean ( $\bar{X}$ )	Standard Deviation ( SD )	Category
Teaching Method	3.60	0.58	good
Learning Media	3.45	0.60	good
Learning Environment	3.50	0.62	good
Rata-rata Keseluruhan	3.52	0.60	good

Conversely, all external factors were rated as "good," with an overall average score of 3.52 (SD ≈ 0.60). This suggests that the external conditions at SMK Pelayaran Lintas

Nusantara Barru already facilitate the English language learning process through methods, media, and the learning environment.

Regarding learning media (mean = 3.45, SD = 0.60), respondents reported that teachers were beginning to use digital and interactive visual media, such as instructional films, PowerPoint presentations, and maritime simulations, to clarify technical terms. These media were chosen to help students better understand the context of maritime language more concretely and engagingly.

Meanwhile, the learning environment (mean = 3.50, SD = 0.62) had positive results. Students felt supported in their English practice by their peers and teacher, both in class and through extracurricular activities such as the English Club. The school environment, which began incorporating basic English communication (for example, the use of simple maritime terms in conversation), enhanced students' confidence in translating and comprehending technical vocabulary.

*Table 3. Average scores of translation difficulty level*

Aspect of Difficulty	Mean ( $\bar{X}$ )	Standard Deviation ( SD )	Category
Word meaning errors	3.80	0.50	High
Difficulty in understanding context	3.55	0.53	High
Technical Terms Errors	3.65	0.57	High
Overall Average	3.67	0.54	High

According to *Table 3*, students' level of difficulty in translating vocabulary remained high (mean = 3.67, SD = 0.54). This implies that, despite the outstanding media and learning environment support, students still struggled due to restricted vocabulary and inadequate learning practices. The biggest problem related to understanding the meaning of words (M = 3.80, SD = 0.50), followed by difficulties with technical terms (M = 3.65, SD = 0.57) and difficulty in understanding context (M = 3.55, SD = 0.53). The average total score for translation difficulties was 3.67 (SD = 0.54), indicating that even in a supportive external learning environment, students still face significant linguistic barriers. These findings highlight the urgent need to improve students' internal capabilities, particularly in developing structured vocabulary acquisition strategies, which are currently the least developed but have a significant impact on their performance.

### ***Pearson Analysis Correlation***

The Pearson product-moment correlation test was used to assess the relationship between internal and external factors and the difficulty of translating terminology.

*Table 4. Pearson correlation test*

Factor	Correlation Value (r)	Strength Relationship	Significance (p)
Language Ability (X1)	0.68	Strong	0.001
Learning Motivation (X2)	0.59	Moderate	0.004
Learning Interest (X3)	0.42	Moderate	0.012
Learning Strategy (X4)	0.63	Strong	0.002

Teaching Method (X5)	0.47	Moderate	0.009
Learning Media (X6)	0.52	Moderate-Strong	0.006
Learning Environment (X7)	0.49	Moderate	0.008

The correlation test results indicated a positive and significant association between all parameters and translation difficulties ( $p < 0.05$ ). The strongest indicators remain language ability ( $r = 0.68$ ) and learning strategies ( $r = 0.63$ ), demonstrating that linguistic skills and learning approaches are the most important predictors of translation effectiveness. However, the influence of learning media ( $r = 0.52$ ) and learning environment ( $r = 0.49$ ) both fell into the moderate-strong category, indicating good advancement in external support aspects of the learning process.

The t-test indicates that all independent factors have a significant effect on the dependent variable at a 95% confidence level ( $p < 0.05$ ). Thus, the research hypothesis is accepted: there is a positive and significant relationship between internal and external factors and students' difficulty in translating English vocabulary.

## DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that students' difficulties in translating English vocabulary at SMK Pelayaran Lintas Nusantara Barru are influenced by internal and external factors. The overall level of difficulty is high (mean = 3.67), particularly in word-meaning errors and context understanding. This indicates that translation skills depend not only on vocabulary acquisition but also on grammar and comprehension of context. Sweller (1988), through his Cognitive Load Theory, suggests that when learners lack an adequate cognitive framework or prior knowledge, they tend to feel overwhelmed when faced with complex vocabulary especially in specialized disciplines such as maritime education.

Internal factors, particularly language ability ( $r = 0.68$ ) and learning strategies ( $r = 0.63$ ), were found to have the most decisive influence. This could be due to the fundamental role that linguistic competence plays in allowing pupils to decode, infer, and restate meaning across languages. Students with lower language ability tended to translate literally, confirming Duff's (1989) argument that structural and lexical differences are the main obstacles in translation. This study also supports Nation's (2020) claim that the depth of word knowledge is just as important as the breadth of vocabulary in terms of translation competence. In contrast to Fitriani and Nuraini's (2021) research, which emphasized the importance of strategic approaches, this study demonstrates that without a strong basis in language abilities, strategic efforts alone may fall short of providing effective translation outputs. Although affective elements such as Learning motivation ( $r = 0.59$ ) and interest ( $r = 0.42$ ) contributed positively to student performance, the moderate correlation between the two indicates that emotional engagement alone cannot compensate for deficiencies in core language skills. This aligns with Gardner's (1985) view that motivation is a key factor

in language acquisition. In addition, Learning strategies have been proven to play an important role in the translation process, in line with the findings of Adnyani and Putra (2022). However, this study offers a more in-depth perspective by highlighting that many students lack sufficient metacognitive awareness in choosing or applying these strategies effectively. Most of them have never been introduced to technical approaches such as semantic mapping or morpheme analysis, which can actually significantly improve vocabulary comprehension.

On the external factors, although teaching methods, learning media, and learning environments each make significant contributions, their influence was secondary. Although the integration of digital resources and contextual teaching has proven to be beneficial, neither is sufficient to replace the absence of systematic and individualized language teaching. This supports Nuraini's (2021) finding that a media-rich environment can increase student engagement, but is not sufficient to ensure vocabulary mastery without a focused pedagogical approach. Interestingly, the relatively limited effects of the learning environment observed in this study contradicted the conclusions of Hidayat (2019), which showed that even a conducive atmosphere can be ineffective if learners do not have adequate internal preparation.

Overall, these findings confirm that internal cognitive readiness particularly in terms of language proficiency and strategic awareness plays the most crucial role in determining translation success. External support remains important, but it will only be effective if learners already have the basic ability to understand and apply the meaning of vocabulary in context. Therefore, future learning approaches need to focus more on strengthening basic language skills combined with interactive and context-based methods, in order to bridge the gap between vocabulary recognition and its application in technical translation tasks.

## CONCLUSION

This study identified that students at SMK Pelayaran Lintas Nusantara Barru faced considerable challenges in translating English vocabulary, particularly in understanding word meanings, mastering contextual usage, and handling specialized maritime terminology. The data showed that internal factors, namely students' English language proficiency and their use of learning strategies, played the most decisive role in these difficulties. Although external aspects such as teachers' teaching methods and available media also contributed, their influence was more complementary. The significant and positive relationship between these internal and external factors and students' translation difficulties reinforced the need to prioritize the development of language skills and strategic competencies in vocational English teaching.

From a theoretical perspective, this study supports existing models that consider language proficiency a basic requirement for technical translation. Furthermore, it highlights

the need for metacognitive engagement in vocabulary learning, emphasizing that awareness of one's own learning processes is crucial for success. Practically, this study emphasized the importance of implementing teaching approaches rooted in real-world applications, such as contextual learning, simulations, and project-based tasks. At a broader level, these findings urge systemic support through better access to learning infrastructure and professional development for teachers in implementing strategic and technology-based pedagogy.

For teachers and curriculum designers, these results emphasize the importance of integrating responsive and differentiated language teaching in a vocational context. Teachers must be equipped to facilitate active learning through real-world tasks that reflect maritime communication scenarios, while curriculum designers must ensure that vocabulary teaching is aligned with the specific demands of the industry.

Additionally, ongoing training is necessary to enable teachers to integrate metacognitive techniques and develop relevant and engaging teaching materials. One limitation of this study is its narrow focus, restricted to a single vocational institution and reliant on a quantitative framework, which may not fully reflect the personal experiences and nuances encountered by students in translation tasks.

Therefore, it is recommended that future research adopt a mixed method design and involve multiple schools to generate broader insights. Such studies could also investigate the impact of targeted teaching strategies on improving students' technical vocabulary mastery, providing a deeper understanding of effective approaches in vocational language education.

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