

Translation as Multilingual Mediation in Local Islamic Higher Education: Evidence from Pre- and Post-Test Translation Tasks

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Abstract

English Medium Instruction is widely associated with internationalization and wider access to academic knowledge, yet much less is understood about how students in local higher education contexts negotiate disciplinary meaning when academic content presented in English is mediated into Indonesian as the target language. This study explores that issue through translation practices in a local Islamic higher education setting. Drawing on pretest and posttest translation data, the analysis considers how students moved toward or away from meaning in terms of accuracy, acceptability, and comprehensibility. The findings suggest that improvement in translation quality varied across the data. In several cases, posttest versions conveyed academic ideas more clearly and rendered them in Indonesian in ways that were more natural and accessible. In other cases, however, revision did not substantially improve the translation, particularly when students were dealing with dense academic wording and complexity in phrases and clauses. These patterns suggest that the main challenge in this context is not simply vocabulary deficiency, but the mediation of disciplinary meaning across languages. Rather than viewing translation as evidence of weakness in English Medium Instruction, this study argues that it works as an intercultural bridge through which students connect English academic discourse with locally meaningful forms of understanding.

Keywords: Translation Pedagogy; Multilingual Mediation; Indonesian EFL; Islamic Higher Education; Academic Meaning-Making

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INTRODUCTION

English Medium Instruction has become one of the most visible features of higher education internationalisation. Across diverse settings, universities have expanded programmes taught through English in the hope of increasing global competitiveness, widening access to international research, supporting academic mobility, and strengthening graduate preparedness for transnational professional environments (Dearden, 2016; Macaro et al., 2018;

Rose et al., 2023). Within this institutional narrative, English is often positioned as a pathway to knowledge circulation and academic prestige. At the same time, as Macaro et al. (2018) and Rose et al. (2023) have shown, the expansion of English Medium Instruction has also generated a long-standing debate about what it means pedagogically, linguistically, and socially when complex disciplinary content is taught through a language that is not the primary language of most students and, in many cases, not the primary language of lecturers either.

This debate matters because the growth of English Medium Instruction has often outpaced the development of pedagogical models that can adequately support meaning-making in multilingual classrooms. In this study, multilingual classrooms refer broadly to educational spaces where multiple languages coexist among students and lecturers. Translanguaging, however, refers more specifically to the dynamic process through which learners mobilise their full linguistic repertoires to negotiate meaning and access disciplinary knowledge across languages (Cenoz & Gorter, 2022). Within EMI practices, translanguaging therefore functions not merely as the presence of multiple languages, but as an active pedagogical and epistemic process of meaning-making. A key insight from the field is that the adoption of English does not automatically guarantee epistemic access. Students may be formally included in English Medium Instruction programmes while still struggling to understand key concepts, participate fully in classroom interaction, or express disciplinary knowledge with confidence and precision. In this regard, Bolton et al. (2023) note that the internationalising promise of EMI cannot be separated from persistent concerns about language-related barriers and uneven learning outcomes. Likewise, Macaro et al. (2018) suggest that content learning itself may be compromised when linguistic mediation is weak.

These concerns are especially relevant in Indonesia, where English functions within a highly multilingual ecology. Rather than operating in isolation, English coexists with Indonesian and local languages in ways that are dynamic, layered, and often uneven. Students therefore learn through repertoires shaped by national language policy, regional linguistic diversity, prior schooling, and unequal access to English. In the Indonesian higher education context, Bolton et al. (2023) showed that EMI implementation is shaped not only by institutional prestige and policy aspirations, but also by the practical realities of teaching and learning in a non-Anglophone environment. At the same time, Dewi (2017) reminds us that the meanings attached to English in higher education are never purely instrumental; they also intersect with questions of identity, cultural positioning, and the relationship between English and local academic life.

For this reason, it is increasingly difficult to sustain an English-only understanding of English Medium Instruction. Even when English is the formal medium, actual learning frequently depends on multilingual practices through which teachers and students clarify concepts, reformulate explanations, and connect new knowledge to more familiar linguistic resources. As Rose et al. (2023) argue, English Medium Instruction is not a single, uniform phenomenon across institutions and countries, and its definition must be understood with greater contextual sensitivity. This has encouraged a shift away from viewing success in EMI simply in terms of maximal use of English and toward examining how knowledge is mediated in practice. From this perspective, the more productive question is not whether other languages appear in EMI settings, but what pedagogical and epistemic work those languages do. This

point is also reinforced by [Tai \(2022\)](#), who shows that multilingual mediation can be central to disciplinary understanding. Nevertheless, this position is not without criticism. Some EMI scholars argue that extensive reliance on multilingual practices or translanguaging may reduce students' exposure to English and potentially limit opportunities for developing academic English proficiency. From this perspective, EMI is expected to maximise English input in order to strengthen students' communicative competence in global academic contexts. Critics also caution that excessive dependence on local languages may unintentionally weaken the institutional goals of EMI as an internationalisation strategy. However, proponents of translanguaging argue that meaningful disciplinary understanding should not be sacrificed for English-only exposure, particularly in contexts where students engage with conceptually dense academic content through an additional language.

Within this broader shift, translanguaging has become one of the most influential frameworks for understanding multilingual meaning-making in education. Translanguaging scholarship challenges the assumption that languages in the classroom must remain rigidly separated. Instead, it emphasises how learners mobilise their full linguistic repertoires to construct understanding, participate in interaction, and access curricular knowledge. In educational settings, this perspective has opened new ways of thinking about inclusive pedagogy, particularly in contexts where students encounter disciplinary content through a language that is not equally accessible to all. For example, [Cenoz and Gorter \(2022\)](#) argue that pedagogical translanguaging can support both language development and content learning by allowing learners to draw purposefully on the whole of their linguistic resources. Similarly, [Tai \(2022\)](#) demonstrates that translanguaging practices in English Medium Instruction classrooms can play an important role in making disciplinary knowledge more accessible for linguistically and culturally diverse students.

Within this multilingual perspective, translation deserves a more central place in discussions of higher education learning than it has usually received. Although EMI scholarship has often focused on policy, language proficiency, and classroom practice, translation has more often been treated as a supporting strategy rather than as a central site of learning and knowledge mediation, as noted by [Macaro et al. \(2018\)](#). Such a view is too narrow for understanding how students actually work through academic discourse in multilingual settings. Translation is not simply a matter of transferring linguistic forms from one language to another. Rather, [Liddicoat \(2016\)](#) conceptualises translation as a process of intercultural mediation through which learners interpret disciplinary discourse, reorganise meaning, and render unfamiliar academic content into more locally intelligible expression. When students translate, they work not only with words, but also with conceptual relationships, sentence structure, register, and the logic of disciplinary communication. In this regard, recent work on translanguaging and transknowledging in EMI suggests that translation and related multilingual practices can support access to knowledge by helping learners connect academic discourse with the linguistic and cultural resources available to them ([Heugh et al., 2022](#); [Tai, 2022](#)). Seen in this way, translation offers a valuable analytical lens for examining how students move toward or away from understanding, and where difficulties emerge across vocabulary, phrase construction, clause relations, and broader processes of academic meaning-making.

This perspective is further strengthened by research linking multilingualism, translanguaging, and transknowledging in higher education. According to [Heugh et al. \(2022\)](#), multilingual practices in EMI settings are deeply connected to knowledge exchange across languages and epistemic traditions. Their discussion is especially useful here because it invites us to see mediation not merely as a classroom convenience, but as part of how knowledge itself is made accessible, negotiated, and recontextualised. From this perspective, translation becomes both a pedagogical and an intercultural practice. It enables students to engage with English academic discourse while also rearticulating that discourse in forms that resonate with local intellectual and linguistic worlds. This is particularly important in settings where academic learning is shaped by more than one institutional language and by more than one knowledge tradition.

The context of local Islamic higher education makes these issues especially significant. In Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia, English enters an already complex linguistic and epistemic environment. Indonesian remains central to academic communication, while Arabic may also carry important institutional, religious, and textual authority. Students therefore do not encounter English simply as a foreign language added to a neutral academic space. Instead, they encounter it within an environment structured by local language practices, disciplinary study, and religious intellectual traditions. Recent research by [Monica et al. \(2025\)](#) shows that EMI implementation in Islamic higher education in Indonesia involves distinctive challenges related to lecturer readiness, linguistic diversity, and the coexistence of English with other significant languages in institutional life. This makes local Islamic higher education an important site for examining how language, culture, and knowledge are mediated in layered and locally grounded ways.

Despite the rapid growth of EMI research, an important gap remains. Much of the literature has focused on policy, attitudes, teacher readiness, language proficiency, or classroom practice in broad terms. While these studies have made valuable contributions, [Macaro et al. \(2018\)](#) and [Bolton et al. \(2023\)](#) also leave room for more fine-grained attention to the processes through which students actually negotiate disciplinary meaning across languages. Even where multilingual practices are acknowledged, translation itself is rarely treated as a central analytic site for examining how students interpret dense academic discourse and attempt to render it in culturally and linguistically meaningful ways. The gap is even more evident in local Islamic higher education, where, as [Monica et al. \(2025\)](#) indicate, research has only recently begun to map the specific challenges of EMI and where the mediating role of translation in students' disciplinary meaning-making remains largely underexamined.

This study responds to that gap by examining translation as a multilingual and intercultural form of mediation in a local Islamic higher education context. It does so through pre-test and post-test translation data analysed in terms of accuracy, acceptability, and comprehensibility. These dimensions allow the analysis to move beyond a narrow focus on correctness and toward a fuller account of how disciplinary meaning is mediated across languages. Attention to recurring difficulties at the level of nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, phrases, and clauses also helps identify where students experience the greatest difficulty when academic English is carried into Indonesian. Such an approach is important because it captures

not only whether students improve, but also how that improvement occurs and where it remains partial or uneven.

The study is grounded in the view that translation should not be treated as evidence of failure. Rather, translation can be understood as a multilingual and intercultural resource through which students connect English academic discourse with locally meaningful forms of understanding. This claim matters both theoretically and pedagogically. Theoretically, the study contributes to current efforts to rethink EMI as a mediated multilingual practice rather than a monolingual delivery model. Pedagogically, it suggests that supporting translation and other forms of multilingual mediation may strengthen epistemic access by helping students engage more deeply with disciplinary meaning. In this sense, the article contributes to a broader reorientation in research on language and higher education, one that places meaning-making, rather than English alone, at the centre of analysis. More specifically, this article asks how students' translation performance changes from pre-test to post-test when examined through the lenses of accuracy, acceptability, and comprehensibility, and what those patterns reveal about the role of translation in mediating disciplinary knowledge in local Islamic higher education. By addressing these questions, the article argues that translation is not simply an auxiliary skill surrounding English academic learning. It is one of the practices through which academic discourse becomes educationally meaningful. In a context where students must navigate English, Indonesian, and locally grounded academic and cultural frameworks at the same time, translation emerges as a bridge between language and knowledge, between global discourse and local intelligibility, and between formal access to instruction and actual access to understanding.

METHOD

Design

This study employed a qualitative interpretive design to examine how students engaged with academic translation over time. The purpose of the study was not to measure achievement statistically, but to understand how students negotiated meaning, made lexical choices, and handled academic discourse across different stages of learning. In this sense, the study was aligned with what [Creswell and Poth \(2018\)](#) describe as qualitative inquiry, namely an approach used to explore how participants interpret a phenomenon within a particular context. In a similar way, [Merriam and Tisdell \(2016\)](#) emphasise that qualitative research is concerned with meaning, process, and interpretation. These principles fit the present study because the data were students' translation texts produced before and after a structured instructional period.

The study was also interpretive in orientation. As noted by [Denzin and Lincoln \(2018\)](#), interpretive qualitative research starts from the assumption that human action and experience are socially situated and therefore need to be understood contextually. In the present study, the students' translations were not treated simply as correct or incorrect products. Instead, they were read as traces of how students attempted to mediate disciplinary meaning, organise sentence structure, and reconstruct academic discourse in the target language. This design made it possible to examine translation learning as a developing process rather than as a single score or fixed outcome.

Research setting

The study was conducted at an Islamic university in Central Java, Indonesia. It took place in the English Language Education Program, particularly in a translation class attended by students who had chosen translation as their area of specialisation. This setting was important because translation was not used only as an additional classroom exercise. Rather, it formed part of a more focused pedagogical pathway within the programme.

According to [Creswell and Poth \(2018\)](#), qualitative research benefits from settings in which the phenomenon under study occurs naturally and meaningfully. That was the case in this study. The translation classroom provided an authentic context for observing how students worked with academic texts and how they mediated meaning between English and Indonesian. The setting was also relevant because English functioned as a learned language, not as the main language of everyday academic communication. For that reason, the classroom reflected the realities of multilingual learning in local higher education.

Participants

The participants were 20 students from the English Language Education Program who enrolled in the translation class as their specialisation. They were selected because they were directly involved in translation learning and could therefore provide relevant evidence of how academic translation developed during the instructional period. In qualitative research, participant selection is guided more by relevance than by statistical representativeness. [Creswell and Poth \(2018\)](#) refer to this as purposeful selection, while [Merriam and Tisdell \(2016\)](#) similarly argue that participants should be chosen because they can offer rich and meaningful information about the phenomenon being studied. In the present study, the participants met that criterion because they were not general English learners with only limited exposure to translation. Instead, they were students already positioned within a translation-focused academic pathway.

The participants were recruited through flyers distributed on campus. Students who showed interest through email or WhatsApp were then contacted and checked for eligibility before joining the study. This process helped ensure that participation was both purposeful and voluntary. The participants were recruited through flyers distributed on campus. Students who showed interest through email or WhatsApp were then contacted and checked for eligibility before joining the study. This process helped ensure that participation was both purposeful and voluntary. Before participating in the study, all participants received an information sheet explaining the purpose and procedures of the research and signed informed consent forms. Participation was entirely voluntary, and students were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequences.

Procedure

The study followed a three-stage procedure, namely pre-translation, translation instruction, and post-translation. This structure was used to capture translation learning as a developmental process. At the beginning of the study, the participants completed a pre-test in which they translated the abstract of a journal article from English into Indonesian. This task provided an initial snapshot of how students approached dense academic discourse before the instructional phase began.

After the pre-test, the participants joined a 10-week SDL training period. This stage formed the pedagogical core of the study because it gave students sustained engagement with translation-related practice over time. Rather than treating translation as a one-time task, the study allowed students to work through academic language in a more extended and structured way. As [Creswell and Poth \(2018\)](#) remind us, qualitative inquiry often becomes more meaningful when attention is given to sequence and process rather than only to outcome. At the end of the instructional period, the participants completed a post-test. In this stage, they were again asked to translate the abstract of a journal article into Indonesian. The post-test provided a second set of translation texts that could be read in relation to the pre-test. The comparison was not intended to produce statistical proof of improvement. Instead, it was used to interpret how students' translation choices changed across the instructional period, especially in relation to meaning, clarity, and the handling of academic discourse.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were central to the study because the researcher occupied an insider position as both lecturer and researcher within the same educational setting, which required careful attention to power relations and voluntary participation. This dual role required careful attention so that students clearly understood the difference between participating in the course and participating in the research. As [Creswell and Poth \(2018\)](#) note, qualitative research depends on informed consent, participant autonomy, and respectful researcher-participant relationships. [Denzin and Lincoln \(2018\)](#) also stress that ethics should not be treated merely as procedural formality, but as an ongoing responsibility throughout the research process.

Before the study began, all participants received an information sheet and signed a consent form. During the first session, the researcher explained the aims of the study, the procedures involved, and the voluntary nature of participation. Students were informed that they could withdraw from the research at any time without negative consequences. In line with what [Merriam and Tisdell \(2016\)](#) describe, this was important in reducing the possibility that students might feel pressured to participate because of classroom hierarchy. Confidentiality was also maintained throughout the study. Participants' identities were anonymised through the use of pseudonyms in research records and analytic files. The data were stored securely in computer folders and backed up digitally. These procedures were intended to protect participant privacy and to ensure responsible handling of research materials.

Data collection

The main data source consisted of paired pre-test and post-test translation texts produced by the 20 participants. In both tasks, the students translated the abstract of a journal article from English into Indonesian. Journal abstracts were chosen because they represent condensed academic discourse. They require students to deal with disciplinary vocabulary, dense sentence structure, and tightly packed meaning relations in a relatively short text. These translation texts were approached as qualitative data rather than merely as performance outputs. In the view of [Denzin and Lincoln \(2018\)](#), qualitative data may include written documents that reflect participants' interpretations and actions. In the present study, the translated texts were read as evidence of how students interpreted academic meaning and attempted to reconstruct that meaning in the target language. This made the texts useful not only for identifying improvement, but also for tracing persistent difficulty across the instructional period.

Because the study used paired texts, it was possible to compare students' translation choices across two stages of learning. As [Merriam and Tisdell \(2016\)](#) suggest, such a process-oriented structure is one of the strengths of qualitative inquiry, since it allows the researcher to move beyond a single snapshot and to examine development more contextually.

Data analysis

The data were analysed through qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis, with the support of NVivo 12. The analysis focused on three dimensions of translation quality: accuracy, acceptability, and comprehensibility. In this study, accuracy referred to the extent to which the target text preserved the meaning of the source text. Acceptability referred to the naturalness and appropriateness of the translation in Indonesian academic discourse. Comprehensibility, meanwhile, referred to how clearly and easily the translated text could be understood.

In the first stage of analysis, qualitative content analysis was used to classify recurring patterns of difficulty and improvement across the paired translation texts. As explained by [Hsieh and Shannon \(2005\)](#), qualitative content analysis is useful for identifying patterns of meaning in textual data while remaining close to the content itself. In the present study, this stage helped identify how students handled specific linguistic features such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, phrases, and clauses. The aim here was not only to identify errors, but also to see where meaning was successfully mediated and where it remained unstable from pre-test to post-test.

In the second stage, the researcher used thematic analysis to interpret broader tendencies across the dataset. Following [Braun and Clarke \(2006\)](#), thematic analysis was useful for identifying repeated patterns across participants' translation development. Through this stage, the researcher could trace areas of stronger improvement, continuing literalness, and persistent difficulty in dealing with dense academic phrasing and clause relations. In other words, the thematic reading helped move the analysis beyond isolated examples toward a more coherent understanding of how students negotiated academic meaning over time.

To support these processes, NVivo 12 was used for coding, organising, retrieving, and comparing the data systematically. As [Jackson and Bazeley \(2019\)](#) explain, qualitative software does not do the interpretation by itself, but it can strengthen transparency by helping the researcher manage and compare coded data more systematically. In this study, NVivo 12 was used to manage the pre-test and post-test texts, support coding across analytical categories, and facilitate comparison across participants and across stages of learning. Overall, this analytical design provided a more focused basis for understanding how students engaged with academic translation and how their translation choices developed throughout the instructional period.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Overall pattern of development

The data revealed a mixed but meaningful pattern across the three dimensions used in this study, namely accuracy, acceptability, and comprehensibility. Some post-test translations became semantically clearer, more acceptable in Indonesian academic discourse, and easier to understand than their pre-test counterparts. At the same time, other translations remained weak

even after revision. In several cases, students still struggled when they had to deal with dense academic expressions, compressed phrasing, and sentence structures that could not be handled through direct lexical replacement alone. In other words, the findings indicate that development did occur, but it was uneven across participants and across parts of the text.

This unevenness is important because it suggests that the main difficulty was not simply a matter of vocabulary shortage. Rather, the challenge lay in how students mediated academic meaning across languages and across levels of discourse, especially at the level of phrases and clauses. This point resonates with broader discussion in EMI research. As Macaro et al. (2018) have argued, exposure to English does not automatically guarantee access to disciplinary knowledge. In a similar vein, Rose et al. (2023) encourages researchers to move away from English-only assumptions and to pay closer attention to how meaning is actually negotiated in practice. The present findings contribute to that discussion by showing, through students' translation work, where disciplinary meaning could be more successfully mediated and where it continued to break down.

Improvement in meaning transfer from pre-test to post-test

One of the clearest patterns in the dataset is the movement from partial or awkward rendering toward more successful meaning transfer in some post-test translations. This can be seen in the stronger examples classified as very accurate. In the pre-test, one student wrote, "*Berdasarkan permasalahan tersebut, penelitian ini berfokus pada konsep dari Translation Technological Thinking Competence (TTTC) dan maknanya*" ["Based on the problem, this study focuses on the concept of Translation Technological Thinking Competence (TTTC) and its meaning"]. In the post-test, this became, "*Untuk mengatasi masalah ini, penelitian ini berfokus pada konsep kompetensi berpikir teknologi penerjemahan (TTTC) dan signifikansinya*" ["To address this issue, this study focuses on the concept of translation technological thinking competence (TTTC) and its significance"]. The improvement here is not only lexical. The student moved from keeping the term in English and using the relatively weak word *maknanya* to a more conceptually appropriate rendering in Indonesian and a more accurate expression of rhetorical significance. This suggests a better grasp of how the source text organises academic meaning.

A similar pattern appears in the example involving the research design sentence. The pre-test version, "*untuk menjawab pertanyaan-pertanyaan tersebut Quasi-eksperimental/studi empiris telah mengkondisikan dengan dua kelompok diambil dari contoh siswa-siswa penerjemah*" ["to answer those questions a quasi-experimental or empirical study had conditioned with two groups taken from sample translation students"], shows clear difficulty in handling passive structure and participant description. In the post-test, however, the same student wrote, "*untuk menjawab pertanyaan-pertanyaan tersebut Quasi-eksperimental/studi empiris dilakukan dengan dua kelompok mahasiswa penerjemahan yang sebanding*" ["to answer those questions, a quasi-experimental or empirical study was conducted with two comparable groups of translation students"]. Here, the shift from *telah mengkondisikan* to *dilakukan*, and from *contoh siswa-siswa penerjemah* to *mahasiswa penerjemahan yang sebanding*, shows a more accurate reconstruction of the source meaning. The post-test is stronger not because it sounds more formal, but because it more successfully reflects the informational structure of the original sentence.

Improvement was also visible in examples related to acceptability and comprehensibility. In one case, the pre-test ended at *“Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa 1) KATC adalah pendekatan yang efektif untuk mengembangkan kompetensi TTTC siswa”* [“The results show that KATC is an effective approach for developing students’ TTTC competence”], leaving out the important phrase explaining how that competence was assessed. The post-test version expanded the sentence into *“Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa 1) KATC adalah pendekatan yang efektif untuk mengembangkan kompetensi TTTC mahasiswa diukur dengan penilaian pada pemecahan masalah teknologi terjemahan di kehidupan nyata”* [“The results show that KATC is an effective approach for developing students’ TTTC, measured through assessment in solving real life translation technology problems”]. Although still somewhat compressed, the later version carries more of the source meaning and therefore supports academic understanding more effectively. This improvement is particularly meaningful within the context of Islamic higher education, where students frequently engage with academic knowledge across multiple linguistic and epistemic traditions. In this setting, translation does not function merely as language transfer, but also as a process of connecting English academic discourse with locally meaningful forms of understanding through Indonesian. The findings therefore suggest that multilingual mediation plays an important role in supporting students’ disciplinary comprehension within EMI-oriented learning environments in Islamic higher education.

From a multilingual pedagogy perspective, such gains matter because they show that translation can become a space where learners actively work through disciplinary meaning rather than simply receive it. [Tai \(2022\)](#) demonstrates that translanguaging can support access to complex knowledge when students draw on their full linguistic repertoires. Relatedly, [Heugh et al. \(2022\)](#) show that multilingual mediation can support the rearticulation of academic knowledge across languages and epistemic systems. The present findings support that view. Where post-test translations improved, students were not merely replacing English words with Indonesian words. They were reorganising academic discourse into forms that were more intelligible and more meaningful in the local language.

Persistent literalness and structural awkwardness

At the same time, the data do not support a simple narrative of continuous progress. Several translations remained weak even after revision. The less accurate and low comprehensibility examples are particularly revealing because the post-test versions were almost unchanged. In both cases, the student wrote, *“Untuk menjawab pertanyaan tersebut, penelitian kuasi-eksperimental/ penelitian empiris dijalankan dalam dua kelompok dari perbandingan dua siswa penerjemah, kelompok satu melibatkan pengajaran berbasis KATC”* [“To answer the question, a quasi-experimental or empirical study was run in two groups from the comparison of two translation students, one group involving KATC based teaching”]. This formulation remains semantically unstable and structurally awkward. The phrase *dalam dua kelompok dari perbandingan dua siswa penerjemah* does not successfully convey the idea of two comparable groups of translation students, while *melibatkan pengajaran berbasis KATC* does not clearly represent the teaching intervention described in the source text. In this case, revision did not produce stronger mediation. The source meaning remained trapped in a literal and unstable structure.

The less acceptable category shows a similar problem. Both the pre-test and post-test read, “*Untuk mengatasi masalah ini, pembelajaran ini agar memfokuskan pada konsep kompetensi teknologi berpikir penerjemahan (TTTC) dan signifikasi*” [“To address this issue, this learning to focus on the concept of translation technology thinking competence and significance”]. Although the sentence is not fully opaque, it does not sound natural in Indonesian academic prose. The phrase *pembelajaran ini agar memfokuskan* is grammatically awkward, and *signifikasi* remains a weak lexical choice in this context. This suggests that the problem was not always a failure to recognise vocabulary, but often a difficulty in producing target-language formulations that sounded academically legitimate. From the perspective of translanguaging theory, this finding also demonstrates that multilingual mediation does not automatically guarantee successful meaning construction. Although students were able to draw on multiple linguistic resources, the technological and translation-related task still required them to reorganise disciplinary meaning across languages and academic structures. In this sense, translanguaging should not be viewed as effortless language mixing, but as a cognitively demanding process involving negotiation between English academic discourse and locally meaningful expression in Indonesian. The awkwardness found in several translations therefore reflects partial mediation rather than complete failure, particularly when students engaged with dense technological terminology and complex academic phrasing.

Even the acceptable examples show that progress could be partial rather than complete. In one case, the student retained the phrase “*menjadi berpikir secara teknologi dengan high TTTC*” [“become thinking technologically with high TTTC”] from pre-test to post-test. Some surrounding elements were improved, but the conceptual centre remained awkward and partly untranslated. This indicates that development was sometimes local rather than holistic. Students could repair one part of the sentence while leaving another part only partially mediated. Such a pattern helps explain why post-test improvement should not be interpreted too simply. Development was real, but it was also uneven, layered, and incomplete.

This finding also strengthens the argument that linguistic difficulty in higher education cannot be reduced to isolated vocabulary gaps. Bolton et al. (2023) show that the realities of language use in Indonesian higher education are shaped by practical and pedagogical complexity, not by language policy alone. Likewise, Macaro et al. (2018) suggest that students’ difficulty in English-medium contexts is often tied to access, participation, and meaning-making. The present data reflect that point. Students did not struggle only because they lacked individual words. They often struggled because they had difficulty unpacking academic structure and rebuilding it in linguistically appropriate forms.

Lexical and grammatical areas of difficulty

The error patterns make this point more visible. Students’ difficulties appeared across nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, noun phrases, verb phrases, adjective phrases, noun clauses, and verb clauses. At the lexical level, one recurring noun problem was the continued borrowing of English technical terms, such as *Translation Technological Thinking Competence*, without sufficient localisation in Indonesian. This suggests incomplete conceptual mediation rather than simple lexical absence.

At the verb level, examples such as “*Penelitian ini membuat konstribusi penting bagi tes bahasa lokal*” [“This study makes an important contribution to local language testing”]

were understandable, but still awkward in Indonesian academic discourse because *membuat kontribusi* is not a natural collocation in that register. Similarly, the adjective example “*Banyak umpan balik mencakup refleksi pada pembelajaran masa lalu*” [“Much feedback involved reflection on past learning”] simplified the phrase *past learning history* and reduced some of its experiential nuance.

Problems at the phrase level were also common. The expression “*Ketiga, grup kohesi meningkat secara besar sebagai hasil dari menyelesaikan tugas video dubbing*” [“Third, group cohesion increased in a big way as a result of completing video dubbing tasks”] shows that the student recognised the semantic direction of the source, but *secara besar* is not idiomatic in Indonesian academic writing. Similarly, “*Menyelidiki pengaruh penugasan video-dubbing terhadap pembelajaran bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa asing (EFL)*” remains understandable but still shows instability in phrase packaging. The phrase *dapat dioperasionalkan* is closer to the technical meaning of the source text, but it also reflects the strain of dealing with specialised academic expression.

The most serious problems appeared at the clause level. The phrase “*identifikasi dua variabel moderator signifikan yang memuaskan*” [“the identification of two satisfying significant moderator variables”] adds *yang memuaskan*, which is absent from the source and changes the meaning of *statistically significant*. In another case, “*Hasilnya mengindikasikan bahwa umpan balik diri mahasiswa sudah menjangkau target dan menunjukkan berbagai hasil*” [“The results indicate that students’ self-feedback has reached the target and shown various results”] does not adequately capture the idea of *far-reaching and multifaceted*. The verb clause example, “*Banyak penelitian telah mengkaji mengenai dampak penerapan teknologi pendidikan*” [“Many researchers have been investigated regarding the effects of educational technology applications”], is even more revealing because it reverses the agency of the original sentence and distorts the proposition at a deeper level.

These examples suggest that students struggled not only with vocabulary, but also with clause relations, rhetorical compression, and epistemic stance. This pattern fits well with Liddicoat’s (2016) view that translation should be understood as intercultural mediation rather than simple transfer. In other words, translation difficulty here does not merely show linguistic weakness. It also reveals where academic knowledge itself has not yet been fully mediated across languages.

Translation as multilingual mediation in local higher education

Taken together, the findings suggest that translation can function as an important pedagogical resource in multilingual higher education. The strongest post-test examples show that when students translated more accurately, more acceptably, and more comprehensibly, they also moved closer to disciplinary understanding. Translation, in this sense, was not peripheral to learning. It was one of the sites where learning became visible. Students had to decide how concepts were related, how arguments were organised, and how those relations could be reconstructed in Indonesian.

At the same time, the data also suggest that translation functions as more than a technical classroom skill. In local Islamic higher education, students work not only between English and Indonesian, but also within a broader environment shaped by local academic expectations and culturally grounded ways of understanding knowledge. As [Monica et al.](#)

(2025) show, English in Islamic higher education in Indonesia enters an already layered institutional setting marked by linguistic diversity and multiple knowledge traditions. In that context, the movement from *translation technological thinking competence* to *kompetensi berpikir teknologi penerjemahan* is not simply a linguistic substitution. It also reflects a movement toward local intelligibility. Conversely, when students remained trapped in literal and awkward formulations, the difficulty was not only formal. It also suggested incomplete mediation between global academic discourse and local academic sense-making.

For this reason, the findings challenge a monolingual understanding of academic language learning. They do not suggest that English is unimportant, nor do they argue that English-medium initiatives should be dismissed. Rather, they indicate that academic meaning is often built through multilingual mediation. In that sense, the findings are consistent with work by Rose et al. (2023), Tai (2022), and Heugh et al. (2022), all of whom emphasise that access to knowledge in multilingual educational settings depends not only on exposure to English, but also on the ways learners mobilise other linguistic resources to make meaning. The present study therefore suggests that translation should be recognised less as a remedial crutch and more as a pedagogical and intercultural resource. Where students improved, translation supported movement from partial recognition to fuller conceptual mediation. Where they struggled, translation made visible the exact points at which academic meaning remained difficult to unpack and reconstruct.

CONCLUSION

This study showed that translation functioned as a meaningful, although uneven, form of mediation in students' engagement with academic English in local Islamic higher education. Some post-test translations became more accurate, more acceptable in Indonesian academic discourse, and easier to understand, suggesting that students were increasingly able to reconstruct disciplinary meaning in clearer and more appropriate ways. At the same time, other translations remained literal, awkward, or only partially comprehensible, especially when students had to deal with dense academic expressions, compressed phrasing, and complex clause relations. These findings indicate that the main challenge was not simply limited vocabulary, but the broader work of mediating meaning across languages, discourse structures, and academic conventions. These findings support the multilingual and translanguaging-oriented framework underpinning this study. The data suggest that students' understanding developed not through English-only processing, but through multilingual mediation between English and Indonesian as they negotiated disciplinary meaning across linguistic and academic structures. From this perspective, translation functioned as part of a broader meaning-making process in which students mobilised available linguistic resources to access, reinterpret, and reconstruct academic knowledge within the context of Islamic higher education.

Seen from this perspective, translation should not be treated as evidence of deficiency. Rather, it should be understood as a pedagogical and multilingual resource through which students work toward disciplinary understanding. In the context of local Islamic higher education, where English operates alongside Indonesian and other locally grounded ways of knowing, translation helps students connect academic discourse with more meaningful and intelligible forms of learning. The study therefore suggests that translation deserves greater

Istiqomah, L.

Translation as multilingual mediation in local Islamic higher education: Evidence from pre- and post-test translation tasks

recognition in higher education language practices, not as a secondary support mechanism, but as one of the processes through which academic meaning becomes accessible.

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