Benefits And Challenges Of Online Collaborative Translation: EFL Translators'-To-Be Perceptions

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ABSTRACT

Online collaborative learning has widely become one of the trends in the pedagogical context, especially in tertiary education, but it still has advantages and drawbacks. Thus, this research introduced online collaborative learning in the course of a translation to explore its benefits and challenges from the perceptions of EFL translators'-to-be. The study employed the descriptive research with the semi-structured interview and a 35-item questionnaire used to collect data from 156 participants majoring in English Translation and Interpretation. The findings showed that online collaborative translation gave students opportunities (1) to develop hard skills related to translation competence, knowledge, and self-direct learning; (2) to improve soft skills such as abilities for operating a computer or laptop, information searching skills as well as communication skills; and (3) to study from home and save money and time for traveling. However, poor time management and technical problems such as unstable Internet connection were seen as common challenges. Besides, in this study, two new challenges were recognized, namely members' idiosyncrasy giving rise to an argument among students, and the overuse of the computer-assisted translation, Google Translate. By and large, during the process of collaborative translation in the online environment, benefits outweighed challenges, and students had positive outlooks on this activity.

Keywords: online collaborative translation, ELF translators, perceptions.

INTRODUCTION

Translation is a process in which a written text is rendered from the target language into the source language. Those who decipher a written material from one language into another language and still keep the main core or meaning of original words are called translators. Translators are not only proficient in a foreign language, but also have a flair for their mother tongue. According to Fitzpatrick (2019), a good translation is a process of many stages. It means that those who are trained to be a translator need to work a lot, practice frequently, and strive to acquire both language skills and translation competence in source and target languages. Traditionally, students-translators just work with pens and paper by themselves to make translations, however, Hartono (2015) states that students express their boredom with this traditional method. Newmark (1987) claims that

'translation as a profession has to be seen as a collaborative process between translators, revisers, terminologists, often writers and clients', displaying those translations are not made without collaboration between several parties. Thus, in translation classes, students are physically required to work together to make translations. During the process of collaboration, they could foster their faculties for translation and communication skills. Moreover, they have a chance to cultivate their abilities for autonomous learning as well as other soft skills (Ali, 2021).

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic has been having adverse impacts on the educational system worldwide. Donnelly, Patrinos, and Gresham (2021) point out that the closures of schools were imposed in 45 countries and territories of Europe and Central Asia at the peak of the pandemic in order to prevent the

spread of the virus. The switch from traditional classes to remote ones places more pressure on teachers who were unprepared for this transition. Also, learners face a huge of challenges with personal interaction between them and teachers and fellows. It is unforeseen changes that bring both advantages and drawbacks to student translators.

In Viet Nam, technology has been widely applied in tertiary education, especially in translation courses. The application not only accelerates students' learning but also provides them opportunities to collaborate with their peers to learn something together by using online available tools. The online collaborative translation is believed to be an effective method to promote students' translation abilities. Thus, many researchers have conducted investigations into the advantages as well as drawbacks of collaborative learning in general and online collaborative translation in particular. Besides, a number of studies explored students' awareness of using online tools to work with others in order to practice translating. However, a paucity of studies has been done to examine what advantages as well as disadvantages of online collaborative translation from translators'-to-be viewpoints in the Mekong Delta. Therefore, this study was designed to fill the gap by investigating the perceptions of translators-to-be at Can Tho university about the benefits and challenges of online collaborative translation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Online collaborative translation is seen as a new concept in translation studies because it is firmly linked to the second generation of the Internet, namely Web 2.0 which allows users to contact, communicate, and collaborate with each other through available software (Zwischenberger, 2022). Kiraly, Rüth, and Wiedmann (2015) discovered four useful dimensions of translation online learning as follows: advancement of group work, peer review, sense of autonomy, and responsibilities among students.

Regarding benefits of online collaborative translation, students could develop skills and competence which are requirements of the job market. By engaging in a team to complete translation-based projects, student translators could cultivate their translation skills (Huang et al., 2020; Sudrajat & Purnawarman, 2019; Al-Jarf, 2017; Ahmad & Elsayed, 2021; Paradowska, 2021). Moreover, translators-to-be are likely to take on various roles of translators, editors, quality checkers, or leaders as involved in the activity (Tsai, 2020). Such working experience helps students build up their confidence and facilitate them in the competitive job market (Pavlovic & Hadziahmetovic, 2019). Additionally, Al-Jarf (2017) indicated that student translators could raise their motivation to work in a team, and they freely and independently work with each other without teachers' intervention (Khoury et al., 2021). In the same fashion, a study by Aldossary (2021) unveiled that students' self-directed learning developed through working in a team was recognized by both lecturers and learners, and students are likely to be active and responsible participants throughout the collaboration process. According to Paradowska (2021), those who engaged in collaborative learning in online collaborative translation, tend to build up their oral communication skills as well as teamwork skills. Thus, for this reason, they have found it relaxing (Pavlovic and Hadziahmetovic, 2019), and comfortable to complete translation tasks (Huang et al., 2020). Learning in an online group has supported students in saving their time and money (Zboun & Farrah, 2021), and sharing responsibilities among group members (Bui et al., 2021).

Likewise, in the online environment, students would develop their faculty for utilizing computers. There have been a number of online tools giving users assistance with useful and available features. For instance, the use of Google Docs in collaborative translation has received many positive responses from participants (Sudrajat & Purnawarman, 2019). In another study, Tsai (2020) confirmed that TermSoup was a convenient and effective tool to do translation tasks compared with Microsoft Word. Besides, Microsoft Team and Moodle were seen as promising tools for online education since students had chances to freely share, consult with others and produce their own translations (Khoury et al., 2021). Tsai (2020) claimed that it is effective and conducive for translator trainees to engage in collaborative translation in the online environment because they could store and reuse translation data, give and receive immediate feedback, and save time for editing. During the activity, peers' feedback and response could support learners in enhancing their translation skills and broadening knowledge (Sudrajat & Purnawarman, 2019), identifying translation-related problems such as grammatical, and spelling errors, and solving them (Ahmad & Elsayed, 2021).

Nonetheless, students have encountered challenges when working in a group online. The study by Bui and her colleagues (2021) exhibited that students had difficulties with technological problems and lacked feedback from their partners. Collaboration in the online environment made students deal with abrupt power outages (Omodan and Ige, 2021) and a

poor Internet connection (Zboun & Farrah, 2021; Muuro et al., 2014). Also, when using smartphones to take part in the activity, students realized that some features are limited. According to Alaskari (2017), students using e-Learning tools in translation classes have said that they are embarrassed to utilize a new online tool to learn. Furthermore, students found it challenging to arrange their time to collaborate with others on online platforms, so they work either synchronously or asynchronously (Alaskari, 2017; Bui et al., 2021; Pavlovic & Hadziahmetovic, 2019; Muuro et al., 2014). Moreover, Khoury and partners (2021) uncovered that collaborative learning in an online environment does not help students promote their teamwork skills. According to Hilliard, Kear, Donelan, and Heaney (2020), students have appeared to get nervous about negative feedback or judgment from their peers, and they are afraid that their comments may be misunderstood now and again. In another study whose purpose is to investigate learners' attitudes towards online language learning in the midst of the Covid-19 outbreak, Zboun and Farrah (2021) discussed that negative reflections exceed positive ones, and their participants are in favor of traditional classes.

Additionally, affective experience and feelings were negatively noted in the study by Ali (2021). Participants have displayed that the use of Google Docs to foster involvement was not only boring and a waste of time, but also made them worried. Several researchers emphasized that collaborating with non-active and irresponsible peers in a virtual environment is an incredible challenge for students (Paradowska, 2021; Dal et al., 2021; Bui et al., 2021). Besides that, working in a team, learners think that workload is one of the tough and sensitive problems because not all group members do the same work or take the same responsibilities for the given tasks which lead to cause inequalities in sharing the workload between all members according to Muuro et al. (2014). Octaberlina and Muslimin (2020) claimed that students' eyes are under considerable strain and short-sighted as they only fasten their eyes on the screen. Students have been negatively affected by social media and external factors (Bui et al., 2021), showing that they usually check their social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, e-mail, and so on during the online class.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a mixed-method design in which the data were both quantitative and qualitative aiming at exploring the benefits and challenges of collaborative translation from students' perceptions. A total of 156 junior and senior students, majoring in English Translation and Interpretation in the School of Foreign Languages at Can Tho University, participated in this study. Particularly, 67 junior and 89 senior students have had online collaborative translation experiences. The sample was selected based on the systematic sampling method. Quantitative data were collected through a five-point Likert scale questionnaire with 35 items and two open-ended questions. Ten participants were willing to take part in semi-structured interviews to obtain in-depth information about the research issues. Prior to delivering the official version of the questionnaire and doing interviews, both research instruments were piloted meticulously and adjusted. Raw data collected from questionnaires were initially input into Microsoft Excel, then imported into SPSS version 26 software to discover trends in benefits and challenges of collaborative learning in the course of translation. The qualitative data were coded, sorted, and thematically analyzed into certain groups based on thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998). These responses were then divided into six categories as follows: (1) preference, (2) hard skills, (3) soft skills, (4) convenience, (5) personal-aspect-related difficulties, and (6) Internet problems.

FINDINGS

The purposes of this study were to learn about the benefits and challenges when translators-to-be experience online collaborative translation in practice-based classes. Raw data collected from the questionnaire were tested its reliability, and Cronbach's alpha score of the test was at the level of acceptable with ($\alpha = .702$). In detail, the results were classified into three main clusters including (1) EFL translators'-to-be preference, (2) benefits of online collaborative translation, and (3) challenges of online collaborative translation.

Student responses to cluster one provide indicators of their preferences for online collaborative translation, but they were still undecided whether they would like to collaborate with their peers in the online environment or in the real world. Table 1 shows that students did not consider it a monotonous activity, and they found it self-confident when working in a group. Besides, the over three-fourths of them did not long to work with irresponsible and inactive peers

Table 1. The proportion of EFL translators'-to-be preferences

Items	Disagreement	Neutral	Agreement
1. I prefer to participate in online collaborative translation.	9 6.6%	32 23.7%	94 69.7%
2. I prefer online collaborative translation to face-to-face collaborative translation.	39 28.9%	56 41.5%	40 29.6%
16. I believe that online collaborative translation gives me a feeling of confidence.	5 3.7%	32 23.7%	98 72.6%
17. I feel free to question when I collaborate with my peers to translate given documents.	2 1.5%	24 17.8%	109 80.7%
25. I believe that online collaborative translation is a boring activity.	105 77.8%	20 14.8%	10 7.4%
26. I feel anxious about collaborating with peers while practicing online collaborative translation.	92 68.1%	24 17.8%	19 14.1%
27. I am afraid of collaborating with inactive peers.	18 13.3%	18 13.3%	99 73.4%
28. I am afraid of collaborating with irresponsible peers.	10 7.4%	15 11.1%	110 81.5%

Ten interviewees shared that they had positive outlooks on online collaborative translation because of its advantages amid the pandemic.
Interviewee 1: "I like to take part in online collaborative translation because of its convenience in the pandemic context."
Interviewee 2: "I love online collaborative translation."
Interviewee 3: "Currently, I really enjoy online collaborative translation."
Interviewee 6: "Personally, I extremely like the online collaborative translation"

Regarding students' perceptions about hard skills development, Table 2 shows generally EFL translators-to-be agreed that the virtual collaboration activity helped them enhance their hard skills. In particular, they were able to distinguish their peers' translations and theirs so as to collect good translated content and correct errors. Also, students' translation skills and background knowledge could be developed based on feedback they received from their peers. By engaging in this activity, student translators have equipped with skills as well as roles for their future jobs such as translators, editors, reviewers, and so on.

Table 2. The proportion of EFL translators'-to-be perceptions of hard skills developments

Items	Disagreement	Neutral	Agreement
5. I believe that online collaborative translation will develop my language skills.	20 14.8%	38 28.2%	77 59%
9. I believe that online collaborative translation assists me to develop my translation skills.	1 0.7%	29 21.5%	105 77.8%
10. Feedback from my peers is useful in improving my translation skills.	0 0%	9 6.9%	126 93.3%
11. I believe that online collaborative translation allows me to gain knowledge.	4 3%	35 25.9%	96 71.7%
12. I believe that I learn a lot from discussions and feedback received from my peers when translating collaboratively on online platforms.	0 0%	15 11.1%	120 88.9%
13. I believe that online collaborative translation gives me a chance in comparing and perceiving	0 0%	6 4.4%	129 95.6%

Items	Disagreement	Neutral	Agreement
the strengths and weaknesses of my peers' translations and mine.			
14. I believe that online collaborative translation helps me prepare myself for roles as a translator, an editor, a quality checker, a project manager, etc.	6 4.4%	28 20.7%	101 74.8%

Besides, it was a chance that students could better their translation skills. In particular, when working with others, students needed to exchange experiences and express their opinions, so they learn how to choose the meanings of a word in the target language. By doing so, their translation competence was upgraded day by day. Furthermore, they improved their vocabulary, terminology as well as knowledge.

Interviewee 4: "Such a collaborative translation helps me learn more ways to make a good translation from my peers, for instance, how to choose words and phrases in the target language to make translations sound more natural."

Interviewee 5: "I can learn more new vocabulary from my peers because every single member in

my group has their own certain set of vocabulary in their mind."

As shown in Table 3, participants had a tendency to agree that online collaborative translation could aid them to foster their soft skills. Computer skills, teamwork skills, and communication abilities were highly motivated during the process. One of the most noticeable features of the category was that over half of participants (55.5%) were in disagreement about Item 19 as "I believe that online collaboration does not promote my autonomous learning." It means that online collaborative translation gave them a faculty for learning by themselves.

Table 3. The proportion of EFL translators'-to-be perceptions of soft skills developments

Items	Disagreement	Neutral	Agreement
3. I believe that online collaborative translation motivates me to work in a group.	14 10.4%	30 22.2%	91 67.4%
4. I believe that online collaborative translation enhances my communication skills.	20 20.7%	30 22.2%	77 57.1%
18. I believe that online collaborative translation helps me apply my computer skills to translating activities better.	0 0%	13 9.6%	122 90.4%
19. I believe that online collaborative translation does not promote my autonomous learning.	75 55.5%	36 26.7%	24 17.8%
20. I believe that practicing online collaborative translation enhances peer feedback.	5 3.7%	27 20%	103 76.3%

Moreover, they revealed that their teamwork skills and abilities to search for information and use a computer were built up. Critical thinking, a sense of autonomous learning, and interpersonal skills were also seen as benefits of online collaborative translation.

Interviewee 1: "I learn how to make expressions easy on the ear."
Interviewee 10: "I acquire teamwork skills."

Interviewee 5: "Through this activity, I learn one skill and I think it is important to me. That is searching for keywords."
Interviewee 6: "I develop my searching skills and abilities to look up words."
Interviewee 9: "I learn about the way of searching for information."
Interviewee 2: "Translations can be automatically saved on the online platforms, so it seems easy to follow."

In terms of convenience, Table 4 displays that saving time and cost were seen as major advantages of online collaborative translation. Students also claimed that this activity made them feel relaxing and brought them the convenience of studying from home and collaborating with others.

Table 4. The proportion of EFL translators'-to-be perceptions of convenience

Items	Disagreement	Neutral	Agreement
6. I believe that online collaborative translation is time-saving.	8	19	108
	5.9%	14.1%	80%
7. I believe that online collaborative translation is cost-saving.	4	9	122
	3%	6.7%	90.3%
8. I believe that online collaborative translation brings me convenience.	0	10	125
	0%	7.4%	92.6%
15. I believe that online collaborative translation is relaxing	11	26	98
	8.2%	19.3%	72.6%

Additionally, this activity not only brought convenience to students but also helped them ease the burden of economics and save time amid the Covid-19 pandemic. By holding virtual meetings, they could discuss, share screens, search for information and translate at once, as well as record the whole meeting.

Interviewee 1: "…it helps us share translations with others, and group members can edit simultaneously, there is no need to move."
Interviewee 2: "It saves time. Easy to connect with others."
Interviewee 10: "It is convenient for me since I can reduce travel costs."

Interviewee 3: "Group members can share the tasks together in an online environment, and it makes us less pressured."

Concerning challenges of online collaborative translation, Table 5 shows that a choice of disagreement was more dominant than others. It illustrated that students did not face many difficulties when they used online tools to collaborate with others and do translation assignments. However, students claimed that they still found it tough to avoid conflicting or debating among their group, experiencing physical conditions, and facing issues related to technique and the Internet.

Table 5. The proportion of students' perceptions of challenges

Items	Disagreement	Neutral	Agreement
21. I find it difficult to coordinate my time to practice online collaborative translation.	54	44	37
	40%	32.6%	27.4%
22. I struggle with technical problems (network transmission, etc.) when participating in online collaborative translation.	36	41	58
	26.7%	30.4%	42.9%
23. I experience conflicting ideas with my peers during online collaborative translation.	30	47	58
	22.2%	34.8%	43%
24. I fail to exchange and contribute to my peers' translations.	116	14	5
	86%	10.4%	3.7%
29. I cannot pay attention to tasks while translating collaboratively in a virtual environment.	90	31	14
	66.7%	23%	10.3%
30. I think that the team's workload is divided unfairly.	76	44	15
	56.3%	32.6%	11.1%
31. I fear receiving negative feedback or error corrective feedback while participating in online collaborative translation.	86	33	16
	63.7%	24.4%	11.9%

32. I find it difficult to use online collaborative tools to translate documents (such as Google Docs, Zoom, Google Meet, etc.)	96 71.1%	25 18.5%	14 10.4%
33. I feel uncomfortable doing the online collaborative translation.	95 70.3%	21 15.6%	19 14.1%
34. I encounter problems when participating in online collaborative translation activities on the mobile phone.	37 27.4%	38 28.1%	60 44.5%
35. I experience eye problems while translating collaboratively in a virtual environment.	28 20.8%	23 17%	84 62.2%

Interviewees saw that time management and differences in translating styles were the most challenging. When working with electronic devices such as laptops, computers, or smartphones for a long time, they could have health problems such as eye diseases and backache. Besides, data from the open-ended questions pointed out that participants had a tendency to overuse computer-assisted translation software like Google Translate. Lacking real experiences and face-to-face interaction also made them feel negative. Furthermore, they expressed that Internet connection, limitations of devices, additional expenses for 3G or 4G, and power outages caused them trouble.

> Interviewee 3: "My eyes are so tired."
> Interviewee 7: "It is difficult to have time to spare for cross-checking."
> Interviewee 9: "It is challenging to set a time for all group members to check translations again."
> Interviewee 4: "Every member has their own idiosyncrasy of translating. And, this is sometimes the reason for debating."

As can be seen from the findings above, the data from the questionnaire were reviewed by category or cluster and processed using frequency analysis for the three scales "Disagreement", "Neutral", and "Agreement" to determine the extent to which participants agree to the research issues. In addition, the open-ended questions were used to gather opinions differently from closed-ended questions. From there, the research would ensure reliability and validity. The collected interview data were then identified simultaneously with the data from the questionnaire, of course, according to each classified category or cluster. This analysis helps to show the compatibility of the data obtained from the two tools, thereby increasing the reliability of the collected data. The research results would be discussed in terms of their significance in the following section.

DISCUSSION

With regard to the first aim of this study, the benefits of online collaborative translation, many positive responses were noted. Although online collaborative learning is a new learning method in the research context, it could be a promising approach to promote collaboration and translation competence among students. From the research findings, it has been evident that when working in a group, students needed to know how to collaborate with others in order to make better translations. The finding was in line with that of studies done by Huang et al., (2020) and Sudrajat and Purnawarman (2019) who pointed out that novice translators develop their techniques and skills related to a field of translation by joining a team and sharing the workload with each other. It was also noticed that feedback received from peers helps them in editing, reviewing, and correcting their translations as well as comparing their work with that of others. These findings were also supported by Ahmad and Elsayed (2021) who stated that students could notice errors, solve translation issues and enhance their translation quality through collaborative translation. During the process of collaboration, students had to exchange their experiences, and share their ideas, so that they could complement others well. The finding was also compatible with Sudrajat and Purnawarman's (2019) study. Moreover, in this activity, electronic devices like computers or smartphones were a must for connecting to others, so students could develop their abilities to operate computers and this was similar to the findings of Tsai (2020). In this study, searching skills for information were believed as a new discovery, showing that students learned how to look up information in a quick and intelligent way on the Web. Moreover, this activity might be seen as a student-centered learning approach, and students' autonomous learning could be enhanced as a matter of fact. It means that they become

active and responsible for what they learn and how they work. Finally, students highly realized that online collaborative translation eliminates the time and financial borders and makes them relaxing, showing that now learners have opportunities to connect with others anywhere and anytime. The results were in line with that of the study by Bui et al. (2021).

Apart from the advantages that students-translators could gain from online collaborative translation, they also encountered challenges. Although saving time was one of the benefits for students, poor time management was a real challenge in online collaborative translation activities, showing that it is challenging for student translators to find the same free time to collaborate with each other synchronously. The finding was compatible with the studies by Alaskari (2017), Bui et al. (2021), and Muuro et al. (2014). The results revealed that translating style-related difficulty and the overuse of computer-assisted translation tools like Google Translate are seen as novel challenges for student translators. It implied that the idiosyncrasy of translating might lead to a debate between group members, and when working on the Internet, students tended to use Google Translate to translate given texts instead of doing it by themselves. Students' faculties for translating in general and their creativity, in particular, could be corroded if they usually used this software to translate texts. In addition, it was obvious that the Internet connection is the thorniest issue for student translators, showing that students face unstable Internet connections when using online available tools. In particular, according to the study by Zboun and Farrah (2021) and Muuro et al. (2014), the poor Internet connection negatively affected students' learning and collaboration.

CONCLUSIONS

It is evident that online collaboration is an effective activity in translation classes. During the process of online collaborative translation, developing translation competence, expanding both specialized and background knowledge, having abilities to evaluate translation versions, and developing their autonomous learning are recognized as benefits that students can gain. Moreover, the improvement of soft skills, especially abilities for searching information, teamwork skills, and computer skills, attributes to students' meaningful collaboration. Besides that, it is convenient for learners to collaborate with their peers to do translation assignments since they can save time and money traveling. In spite of its benefits, the activity has its own disadvantages, such as poor internet

connection, physical conditions, and time management. Every group member has their own idiosyncrasy, so debate between them is inevitable. Online tools are extremely useful for translators to work; however, they are likely to rely on computer-assisted translation tools. Furthermore, participants had a very positive attitude towards online collaborative translation. To put it briefly, in the study, the benefits outweighed the challenges.

LIMITATIONS

Although the researcher made an effort to reach qualified research, limitations seem inevitable. The study just investigates students' perceptions of online collaborative translation, and instructors' awareness was absent.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The researcher has several proposals for future studies. First, researchers need to conduct experimental research following a comparison group design, in which control group and experimental group. Moreover, studies should involve teachers' perceptions, and solutions to deal with challenges. Lastly, future studies should explore which online platforms are used the most in the activity.

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