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Exploring the use of manga in translation practice: Insights from Vietnamese tertiary-level EFL lecturers

Le Thanh Thao^{1*} and Pham Trut Thuy²

¹Methods and Principles in Teaching English as a Foreign Language, School of Foreign Languages Can Tho University, 3/2 Street, Xuan Khanh, Ninh Kieu, Can Tho, Vietnam
²Methods and Principles in Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Faculty of Foreign Languages Nam Can Tho University, Nguyen Van Cu Street, An Binh, Ninh Kieu, Can Tho, Vietnam

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explores the perceptions of Vietnamese tertiary-level English as a Foreign Language (EFL) lecturers regarding the use of manga in translation practice. With the growing interest in innovative language teaching methodologies, this research aims to provide insights into how manga, a popular Japanese graphic novel genre, can be integrated into language education to enhance learning experiences. The study involved semi-structured interviews with nine Vietnamese EFL teachers across different career stages, including three novice, three midcareer, and three near-end career teachers, from two educational institutions in Vietnam. A thematic analysis of the interview data revealed three key themes: enhanced engagement and motivation among students when using manga for translation exercises, challenges in maintaining academic rigor, and varied cultural perceptions and receptivity towards manga as a translation tool. Findings indicate that manga can significantly enhance student engagement and motivation, offering a culturally rich and visually appealing medium for language learning. However, challenges in aligning manga content with academic standards and maintaining language accuracy were noted. The study also highlighted diverse cultural attitudes toward the use of manga in educational settings, influenced by generational and pedagogical perspectives. This study contributes to the field of language education by providing empirical insights into the use of manga in translation practice, underscoring the importance of cultural sensitivity and pedagogical balance in incorporating innovative materials in language curriculums. It offers valuable guidance for educators and curriculum designers seeking to enhance language learning experiences through engaging and diverse educational resources.

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INTRODUCTION

In the realm of language education, the incorporation of diverse literary forms has been recognized for its substantial impact on learning and skill development (Belli, 2018; Munna & Kalam, 2021; Zein et al., 2020). This study ventures into the realm of manga, a unique genre of Japanese comics and graphic novels, investigating its application in the practice of translating from English to Vietnamese. Manga, characterized by its distinct combination of visual art and text, offers a dynamic

and engaging medium for storytelling, which can be particularly beneficial in educational settings. The focus is particularly placed on the perceptions of Vietnamese tertiary-level English as a Foreign Language (EFL) lecturers regarding this innovative approach. The Vietnamese EFL context, particularly in this study, refers to the environment in which English is taught as a foreign language at the university level in Vietnam, where students and educators face unique linguistic and cultural challenges. Manga, with its rich interplay of visual imagery and textual elements, offers a multifaceted medium for translation activities. Translation practice, in this context, involves the process of converting written text from one language to another, emphasizing the accurate conveyance of meaning, tone, and cultural nuances. This blend of visuals and text not only enhances the appeal of translation exercises but also aids in grasping the subtleties of language through contextual cues (Rohan et al., 2021; Wada, 2023). By providing visual context, manga helps learners understand idiomatic expressions, cultural references, and emotional tones that might be difficult to interpret from text alone. In this context, the study aims to scrutinize both the potential benefits and challenges that arise from the integration of manga into translation practices in the Vietnamese EFL setting.

By probing into the experiences and viewpoints of tertiary EFL lecturers, the research questions seek to illuminate how manga can be harnessed as an effective tool in translation exercises, contributing to the development of language competencies and cultural acumen. The specific research question guiding this study is: How do Vietnamese tertiary-level EFL lecturers perceive the use of manga in translation exercises? This investigation is particularly pertinent in an educational landscape that increasingly values diverse, engaging, and culturally rich learning resources. This study, therefore, endeavors to shed light on an under-explored facet of language pedagogy. It aims to contribute to the broader discourse on innovative teaching methodologies in language education, specifically examining the role of manga in enhancing translation practices. Ultimately, this research aspires to provide insights that could enrich the field of language education, especially in the context of Vietnamese tertiary learning environments.

Translation has long been a subject of debate in language pedagogy. Initially regarded as a traditional and less effective method, its value has been reassessed in recent years. Scholars like Coyle and Meyer (2021) and Tursunovich (2022) argued for the inclusion of translation as a tool for deepening linguistic understanding and cultural awareness. Research by López (2020) and Karlgren et al. (2020) emphasized that translation exercises enhance cognitive skills, such as problem-solving and critical thinking, essential for language learners.

The use of literary forms in language education is a well-established practice. Ochoa and McDonald (2020) highlighted the role of literature in fostering cultural literacy and empathy among language learners. Febriani et al. (2022) and de Oliveira et al. (2023) proposed a 'language-based approach' to teaching literature, suggesting that literary texts can be a rich source of authentic language input. More recently, studies like those by Sentürk and Kahraman (2020) and Wong et al. (2020) have explored the motivational aspects of using literature, including novels and short stories, in the language classroom. Manga's role in education has gained attention, particularly in language learning contexts. Alsubaie and Alabbad (2020) and Galante (2021) discussed the potential of manga as a tool for engaging students and enhancing their language acquisition process. More specifically, in the realm of translation studies, Gyogi and Lee (2022) and Ivanova (2021) explored manga as a resource for translation students, noting its ability to present language in context, accompanied by visual cues.

Building on the general use of manga in education, a few studies have specifically examined its use in translation practice. Here, manga is seen not only as a cultural product but also as a pedagogical tool. Perry et al., (2023) argued that manga can effectively bridge cultural and linguistic gaps, making it a valuable resource for translation exercises. Le et al. (2024) provided a case study in a Vietnamese context, highlighting how manga translation can improve students' linguistic and cultural competencies. Finally, the literature review addresses the specific context of Vietnamese tertiary-level EFL education. Studies by Tri et al. (2021) and Duong and Nguyen (2021) discussed the challenges and opportunities in language education in Vietnam, emphasizing the need for innovative approaches to engage students and enhance their language skills. In short, one of the distinctive features of manga that makes it particularly suitable for translation exercises is its combination of visual and textual elements. Unlike traditional literary forms that rely solely on text, manga's visual context might help convey meaning and cultural nuances that might be challenging to grasp through words alone. This visual support can be especially beneficial in understanding idiomatic expressions, cultural references, and emotional tones, which are crucial in translation practice. Furthermore, manga often presents dialogues in a colloquial and contemporary language, providing learners with exposure to natural language use and modern vocabulary, which is less common in classical literature.

This literature review establishes a foundation for understanding the potential role of manga in translation practice within the Vietnamese EFL context. By drawing from diverse strands of research, it provides a comprehensive backdrop against which the study's findings can be analyzed and understood. The review underscores the evolving nature of language pedagogy and highlights the need for continual exploration of novel and culturally relevant teaching resources, such as manga, in language education.

METHOD

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology, primarily employing semi-structured interviews to gather in-depth insights into the perceptions of Vietnamese tertiary-level EFL lecturers regarding the use of manga in translation practice. The choice of a qualitative approach is guided by the study's aim to explore the nuanced, subjective experiences and attitudes of educators, which quantitative methods might not fully capture (Jackson & Mazzei, 2022).

The theoretical underpinnings of this study are anchored in two primary frameworks, each contributing a unique perspective to the exploration of using manga in language translation practices. The first framework is the Socio-Cultural Theory (SCT) articulated by Vygotsky (1978), which offers a comprehensive lens for examining the social and cultural facets inherent in language learning and translation. Central to SCT is the premise that learning is inherently a social process, profoundly shaped by the cultural context in which it occurs. This perspective is particularly relevant to this study as it provides a foundation for understanding how manga, a culturally rich and socially significant medium, can be integrated into language learning and translation activities. By viewing manga as a cultural artifact within the SCT framework, the study aims to explore how its use in translation practice interacts with and is influenced by the cultural and social dynamics of language learning.

Complementing SCT is the second theoretical framework employed in this study: Constructivist theories of learning (Adams, 2006; Bowers, 2005; Chuang, 2021). These theories underscore the importance of the learner's active role in constructing knowledge through their experiences. This perspective aligns seamlessly with the nature of manga, which is inherently interactive and engaging. Manga's combination of visual and textual elements creates a rich, immersive learning experience that encourages active participation and interpretation. Through the lens of Constructivist theories, this study investigates how engaging with manga in translation exercises facilitates an active learning process, where learners construct their understanding and knowledge of language. This theoretical approach supports the exploration of the dynamic, experiential aspects of learning that occur when students engage in translation practices using manga as a resource.

Together, these two theoretical frameworks provide a robust and multi-dimensional approach to this study. Socio-Cultural Theory offers insights into the cultural and social aspects of using manga in educational settings, while Constructivist theories focus on the learner-centered, experiential process of knowledge acquisition through manga-based translation activities. This combination allows for a comprehensive exploration of how manga can be utilized effectively in language translation practices, particularly in the context of Vietnamese tertiary EFL education.

Participants

The participant group in this study comprises nine Vietnamese EFL teachers, selected from two distinct educational institutions in Vietnam. This diverse cohort is intentionally structured to include a range of teaching experiences: three novice teachers, at the beginning of their careers; three mid-career teachers, who have accumulated a substantial amount of professional experience; and three near-end career teachers, who possess extensive experience and are approaching the later stages of their careers. This stratification ensures a comprehensive perspective on the use of manga in translation practices across different stages of teaching careers, providing insights into how experience and longevity in the profession might influence perceptions and pedagogical approaches. The chosen sample size of nine teachers is deemed sufficient for achieving data saturation, as it allows for a diverse yet manageable range of perspectives while ensuring in-depth qualitative analysis. Data saturation is anticipated to be reached with this number because it strikes a balance between breadth and depth of insights, capturing a wide spectrum of experiences without becoming unwieldy for thorough examination.

Addressing ethical issues is a paramount concern in this study. Prior to participation, all teachers were informed of the study's purpose, the nature of their involvement, and the confidentiality measures in place to protect their identities and responses. Informed consent was obtained from each participant, ensuring they were fully aware of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without any adverse consequences. To uphold confidentiality, any identifiable information obtained during the interviews has been anonymized in the study's findings. Furthermore, the study adheres to ethical guidelines regarding respect for the participants, ensuring that their contributions are represented accurately and sensitively in the research. The ethical considerations are not only

fundamental to the integrity of the research but also crucial in maintaining the trust and cooperation of the participants, thereby enriching the quality and reliability of the data collected.

Data Collection

The main data collection approach used in this study was semi-structured interviews, selected for their capacity to generate detailed, comprehensive responses and provide participants the freedom to share their thoughts and experiences. To guarantee the interview process's effectiveness, an initial pilot study was conducted. This preliminary phase involved a small subset of participants and served to test and refine the interview questions and procedures. Based on feedback and observations from the pilot study, necessary revisions were made to the interview questions to enhance clarity, relevance, and the ability to provoke thoughtful responses.

Some of the revised interview questions included inquiries such as: "How do you perceive the use of manga as a tool for translation practice in your EFL classes?" and "Can you describe any specific experiences or observations you have had while using manga in translation exercises?" These questions were designed to explore both the general perceptions of using manga in language education and specific instances or experiences that could illustrate these perceptions.

The interviews took place in locations that were convenient and comfortable for the participants, typically within their own institutions or at a nearby site of their preference. Each session lasted around 45 to 60 minutes, allowing sufficient time for participants to discuss their experiences and viewpoints in detail. То facilitate clear and communication precise responses, the interviews were conducted in Vietnamese, the participants' native language. This decision was essential for capturing the subtle nuances of their perspectives and ensuring that participants felt comfortable throughout the conversation.

In cases where participants were not comfortable expressing certain technical terms or concepts in Vietnamese, they were encouraged to use English or a mix of both languages. This bilingual approach ensured that the participants could fully articulate their thoughts without language barriers. The interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants, and the recordings were subsequently transcribed for analysis. During transcription, special attention was given to instances of code-switching between Vietnamese and English to ensure that the intended meaning was accurately captured. The transcriptions were reviewed by bilingual experts to verify the accuracy of the translations and to address any ambiguities arising from the use of both languages. The transcriptions were then carefully reviewed to ensure accuracy and to prepare them for the subsequent stages of data analysis.

To mitigate potential interviewer bias during the semi-structured interviews, the interviewers underwent comprehensive training focused on maintaining neutrality and objectivity. Protocols were established to guide the interview process, including the use of standardized questions and follow-up prompts designed to minimize leading or suggestive language. Additionally, peer reviews of the interview recordings and transcriptions were conducted to identify and address any inadvertent bias, ensuring that the data collected was as objective and reliable as possible. This meticulous approach to data collection was fundamental to gathering rich, detailed, and authentic insights into the perceptions and experiences of the Vietnamese EFL teachers regarding the use of manga in translation practices.

Data Analysis

The information gathered from the semi-structured interviews was subjected to a comprehensive thematic analysis, which is highly effective for identifying, examining, and presenting patterns or themes within qualitative data (Braun et al., 2023). This process started with a careful transcription of the recorded interviews, ensuring that all details were accurately documented. After transcription, the data was repeatedly reviewed to gain a thorough and deep understanding of the content. This detailed engagement with the data was essential for forming an initial set of concepts regarding potential themes and patterns.

The next phase involved systematically coding the data, where segments of text were labeled with codes that succinctly captured the essence of the content. These codes were generated inductively, emerging directly from the participants' responses rather than being predetermined. This coding process was both iterative and reflexive, requiring constant comparison of data segments, codes, and emerging themes to ensure consistency and coherence. As the coding progressed, patterns and interconnections between codes became apparent, leading to the development of broader themes. These themes represented the core concepts and ideas that were repeatedly evident across the dataset. The thematic framework was continuously reviewed and refined, with themes being merged, subdivided, or redefined as needed to best represent the data.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, a rigorous process of checking and rechecking the themes against the dataset was undertaken. This involved revisiting the original data multiple times to verify that the themes accurately reflected the participants' perspectives and experiences. The analysis also included searching for deviant or contradictory data, which is crucial for understanding the complexity and diversity of the participants' experiences. The final stage of the analysis involved defining and naming the themes, ensuring they clearly represented the underlying data. These themes were then used to construct a rich, detailed narrative of the findings, weaving together the participants' experiences and perspectives into a coherent story. This thematic analysis provided a deep and nuanced understanding of the Vietnamese EFL teachers' perceptions and experiences of using manga in translation practice, offering valuable insights for the field of language education.

FINDINGS

Enhanced Engagement and Motivation

A prominent theme that emerged from the thematic analysis was the enhanced engagement and motivation among students when manga was used in translation exercises. This finding was mentioned by all three novice teachers, two mid-career teachers, and two near-end career teachers, indicating its significance across different teaching experiences.

One novice teacher highlighted the visual appeal of manga, noting, "My students seemed more enthusiastic and involved when we used manga. The colorful illustrations and storylines capture their attention in ways that traditional texts do not." This observation aligns with the SCT, which emphasizes the role of cultural artifacts in learning. Manga, as a visually rich and culturally embedded medium, resonates with students, making the learning process and culturally more engaging relevant. Constructivist theories also support this finding, as the engaging nature of manga encourages students to actively construct their understanding of language and culture through an interactive medium.

A mid-career teacher reflected on the contextual learning provided by manga, stating, "Manga provides context to words and phrases that are often lost in traditional translation exercises. It helps students grasp the meaning and use of language in real-life scenarios." This comment underscores the SCT's assertion that learning is deeply influenced by context. Manga offers a contextual backdrop that aids in understanding language use within cultural narratives. From a

Constructivist perspective, this context-rich environment facilitates experiential learning, where students actively engage with and interpret the language in meaningful ways.

Lastly, a near-end career teacher discussed the role of manga in fostering cultural understanding, observing, "*Through manga, students not only learn language but also gain insights into Japanese culture, which is crucial for effective translation.*" This perspective is supported by SCT, which posits that language learning is intertwined with cultural understanding. Manga serves as a gateway to cultural exploration, enriching the translation process. Constructivist theories further illuminate this finding by highlighting how students construct knowledge not just linguistically but also culturally, through active engagement with manga's cultural content.

Challenges in Maintaining Academic Rigor

Another significant theme that emerged from the interviews was the challenge in maintaining academic rigor when integrating manga into translation practices. This concern was raised by two novice teachers, all three mid-career teachers, and one near-end career teacher, indicating a widespread awareness of the need to balance engagement with educational substance.

A novice teacher expressed concerns about the depth of learning, stating, "While students are more engaged with manga, I sometimes worry that the content might be too simplistic and not challenge them enough." This observation touches on a critical aspect of SCT, which emphasizes the importance of learning within one's zone of proximal development (ZPD). The concern here is that manga, while engaging, may not always provide the optimal level of challenge necessary for advancing students' language skills. From a Constructivist viewpoint, the challenge lies in ensuring that the learning experiences with manga are sufficiently complex to facilitate deeper processing cognitive and knowledge construction.

A mid-career teacher discussed the difficulty in aligning manga content with curriculum objectives: *"Finding manga that fits our curriculum goals and is suitable for academic purposes can be challenging.*" This reflects the SCT perspective on the importance of aligning learning materials with cultural and educational norms and standards. It also resonates with Constructivist theories, which emphasize the need for learning materials to be relevant and meaningful to the learners' own experiences and educational objectives.

Lastly, a near-end career teacher mentioned the potential for manga to distract from language

accuracy, noting, "Sometimes, students get so caught up in the story and visuals of manga that they pay less attention to the accuracy of their translation." This comment aligns with SCT, highlighting the tension between engaging with cultural artifacts and maintaining focus on language learning objectives. From a Constructivist standpoint, this suggests the need for structured guidance to help students navigate the balance between enjoying the narrative and focusing on the linguistic and translational aspects of the task.

Varied Cultural Perceptions and Receptivity

The third significant insight that surfaced from the interviews concerns the diverse cultural perceptions and acceptance of manga as a translation tool among Vietnamese EFL teachers. This theme was highlighted by two novice teachers, all three mid-career teachers, and two near-end career teachers, showcasing a range of perspectives shaped by cultural and generational influences.

One novice teacher observed, "Some of my older colleagues are skeptical about using manga, seeing it as too informal or entertainment-focused for serious academic work." This highlights a cultural perception influenced by traditional views of educational materials, as explained by SCT, which emphasizes the influence of cultural context on learning. From a Constructivist viewpoint, this skepticism can be seen as a reluctance to embrace new, active forms of learning that diverge from established norms.

In contrast, a mid-career teacher provided a different perspective: "I find manga to be a refreshing change from conventional texts. It resonates well with the students and brings a new cultural dimension to the classroom." This response underscores the SCT's assertion that exposure to diverse cultural artifacts, like manga, can enrich the learning experience. Constructivism supports this finding by highlighting the role of engaging, relevant materials in constructing meaningful learning experiences.

A near-end career teacher shared a nuanced view: "While I appreciate the cultural richness manga brings, it is important to balance it with materials that reflect the students' own cultural context." This statement reflects an understanding of the SCT's emphasis on the relevance of cultural context in education. It also aligns with Constructivist theories, which advocate for the diverse incorporation of experiences and perspectives to facilitate comprehensive and contextual learning.

DISCUSSION

The discussion of the findings from this study reveals significant insights when contrasted with existing literature, particularly in the domains of enhanced engagement and motivation, the balance of academic rigor, and the varied cultural perceptions and receptivity towards manga in translation practices. These findings echo some aspects of previous research but also offer distinct contributions to the field of language education and translation practice.

The theme of enhanced engagement and motivation aligns with earlier studies that recognized the potential of engaging materials like manga in language learning (e.g., Shintaku, 2022; York, 2023; Zhang et al., 2021). However, this study uniquely highlights how this engagement is perceived across various teaching experiences, from novice to near-end career teachers. It extends the conversation by illustrating how manga not only captivates but also actively involves students in constructing language and cultural knowledge, offering a nuanced understanding through the lenses of SCT and Constructivism.

Addressing the challenges in maintaining academic rigor, this study contributes new perspectives on the apprehensions related to using manga in translation exercises. While previous research has discussed the general use of literature in language education (Alsubaie & Alabbad, 2020; Galante, 2021; Gyogi & Lee, 2022; Ivanova, 2021), this study delves into specific concerns regarding manga's complexity and its alignment with educational objectives. The findings emphasize the importance of selecting materials that balance educational engagement with substance, а perspective enriched by applying SCT and Constructivist theories. This approach highlights the need for materials that challenge students intellectually while being relevant and engaging.

Furthermore, the study sheds light on the diverse attitudes toward manga in educational settings, a topic less explored in existing literature. This research uncovers the cultural and generational factors influencing teachers' receptivity to manga, illustrating a spectrum of views. The application of SCT explains the impact of cultural context on these perceptions, while Constructivist theories advocate for the incorporation of diverse, culturally sensitive materials in learning. This aspect of the study contributes significantly to the field by underscoring the importance of considering cultural sensitivity when integrating innovative materials like manga into language education.

CONCLUSION

This research embarked on an exploratory mission to grasp the perceptions of Vietnamese tertiary-level EFL lecturers about using manga in translation practice, an area not extensively covered in language education research. Utilizing a qualitative research design, the study conducted semistructured interviews with nine EFL teachers from Vietnamese institutions, representing a two spectrum of teaching experiences from novice to near-retirement. The collected data was meticulously analyzed thematically, revealing valuable insights into the lecturers' viewpoints and experiences.

The findings revealed three key themes: enhanced engagement and motivation among students when using manga for translation exercises, challenges in maintaining academic rigor, and varied cultural perceptions and receptivity towards manga as a translation tool. These themes highlighted the complexity of integrating manga into translation practices, balancing the need for engagement with educational substance, and navigating diverse cultural and generational attitudes.

The implications of this study are multifaceted. Firstly, it underscores the potential of manga as a culturally rich and engaging tool in language education, capable of enhancing student motivation and involvement. This finding suggests that educators and curriculum developers should consider incorporating manga and similar mediums into language learning materials, recognizing their value in creating an interactive and stimulating learning environment. However, the study also cautions about the necessity to maintain academic rigor. It points towards the need for careful selection and integration of manga materials to ensure that they align with curricular objectives and provide the appropriate level of challenge for students. Finally, the varied cultural perceptions and receptivity towards manga indicate the importance of considering the cultural and generational context of both teachers and students when introducing educational materials. Specific innovative recommendations to address cultural and generational differences include conducting cultural sensitivity workshops for educators to help them understand and appreciate the diverse backgrounds of their students. Engaging students in discussions about their cultural perspectives on manga and other educational materials can also foster a more environment. inclusive learning Moreover, incorporating a mix of traditional and contemporary manga can cater to different generational preferences, making the material more accessible and appealing to a broader range of students.

Moreover, to effectively integrate manga into language education curricula, educators can start by selecting manga that is relevant to the students' cultural context and language proficiency level. For instance. choosing manga that includes contemporary and relatable themes can enhance students' interest and engagement. Additionally, educators should create structured translation activities that encourage critical thinking and language analysis. These activities could involve translating dialogue, analyzing character speech patterns, and comparing translations to understand different linguistic nuances. Curriculum developers can provide guidelines and resources for teachers, such as annotated manga texts that highlight key linguistic features and cultural references. Workshops and training sessions can be organized to familiarize teachers with manga and its educational potential, offering strategies for effective implementation in the classroom. Furthermore, incorporating feedback mechanisms, where students can reflect on their learning experiences with manga, can help in continually refining the approach to better meet educational goals.

In summary, this study adds to the growing field of language education by presenting empirical insights into the application of manga in translation practice. It delivers a nuanced perspective on the opportunities and challenges of this innovative approach, emphasizing the need for cultural sensitivity and pedagogical balance in language teaching. As the discipline continues to progress, the findings from this research provide valuable recommendations for educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers aiming to improve language learning experiences with diverse and engaging educational resources.

Limitations and Recommendations for Further Studies

This study, while providing valuable insights, is not without its limitations. Firstly, the scope of the research was confined to a relatively small sample of nine EFL teachers from only two educational institutions in Vietnam. This limited sample size and the specific cultural context may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the study focused solely on the perceptions of teachers, without incorporating the viewpoints of students, who are the primary beneficiaries of manga in translation practice. This exclusion could mean that the findings do not fully represent the impact of manga on the actual learning experiences of

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students. Furthermore, the study was qualitative in nature, which, while offering depth in understanding, does not provide the quantitative data necessary to measure the extent of manga's effectiveness in translation practice.

Given these limitations, future research could expand on several fronts. A broader study encompassing a larger and more diverse sample of teachers and institutions across different regions would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the use of manga in translation practice and its applicability in varied contexts. Incorporating the perspectives of students in future research would also be invaluable, as it would offer a more holistic view of the effectiveness and reception of manga as a teaching tool. Quantitative studies, perhaps in the form of experimental designs, could complement the qualitative insights of this research by measuring the impact of manga on specific learning outcomes, such as language proficiency or translation accuracy. Additionally, comparative studies examining the use of different literary forms, not just manga, in translation practice could provide further insights into the most effective methods and materials for language education.

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