

STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON THE THEORY-PRACTICE GAP IN TRANSLATION PEDAGOGY

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Abstrak - Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji perspektif mahasiswa terhadap kesenjangan teori dan praktik dalam pedagogi penerjemahan, khususnya terkait bagaimana pengetahuan teoretis dipahami, diterapkan, dan diintegrasikan dalam konteks pembelajaran di kelas. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan mixed-method dengan melibatkan 60 mahasiswa program studi penerjemahan melalui kuesioner dan wawancara semi-terstruktur. Hasil kuantitatif menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa mengakui pentingnya teori, namun mengalami kesulitan dalam penerapannya pada tugas penerjemahan nyata. Tingkat integrasi, kepercayaan diri, dan motivasi berada pada kategori sedang, yang menunjukkan bahwa efektivitas pembelajaran sangat bergantung pada sejauh mana teori diimplementasikan dalam praktik. Selain itu, sistem asesmen dinilai belum selaras dengan kompetensi praktis. Temuan kualitatif mengungkap bahwa sifat teori yang abstrak, keterbatasan tugas autentik, serta penilaian yang berorientasi pada hasil akhir menjadi faktor utama yang memperkuat kesenjangan tersebut. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa diperlukan pendekatan pembelajaran yang lebih integratif, berbasis pengalaman, dan berorientasi pada kompetensi untuk menjembatani kesenjangan teori dan praktik.

Kata kunci: Pedagogi penerjemahan, kesenjangan teori-praktik, perspektif mahasiswa, kompetensi penerjemahan, pembelajaran eksperiensial.

Abstract - This study investigates students' perspectives on the theory–practice gap in translation pedagogy, focusing on how theoretical knowledge is perceived, applied, and integrated within classroom contexts. Employing a mixed-methods design, data were collected from 60 undergraduate translation students through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The quantitative findings indicate that while students highly value theoretical frameworks, they experience difficulties in applying them to real-world translation tasks. Moderate levels of perceived integration, confidence, and motivation suggest that the effectiveness of learning is closely tied to how theory is embedded in practice. Additionally, assessment practices were perceived as misaligned with practical competence. Qualitative findings further reveal that abstract theoretical instruction, limited exposure to authentic tasks, and product-oriented assessment contribute to the persistence of the gap. The study concludes that bridging the theory–practice gap requires more integrative, experiential, and competence-based pedagogical approaches. These findings provide important implications for curriculum development, teaching strategies, and assessment design in translation education.

Keywords: Translation pedagogy, theory–practice gap, student perspectives, translation competence, experiential learning.

1. INTRODUCTION

Within the field of translation pedagogy, a persistent challenge lies in reconciling theoretical knowledge with practical application. Ideally, higher education programs are designed to foster both conceptual understanding and the ability to respond effectively to real-world translation tasks. However, in many academic contexts including universities in North Africa such as Morocco translation instruction remains largely theory-oriented, often limiting students' opportunities for hands-on practice and experiential learning (Ngoc et al., 2025; Liu & Yang, 2025; Bielykh & Charikova, 2024). This imbalance frequently results in students'

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inability to translate abstract theoretical principles into concrete translation decisions, giving rise to what is commonly described as the “theory-practice gap” (Skopeczková, 2024).

From a theoretical standpoint, frameworks such as functionalist approaches, equivalence paradigms, and strategic models provide a critical foundation for understanding translation processes (Abdelhalim et al., 2025; Torky & Ahmed, 2025). Nonetheless, effective translation practice requires the integration of multiple competencies, including linguistic accuracy, cultural awareness, strategic thinking, and technological proficiency, particularly in complex and dynamic real-world contexts (Alfarisy, 2022; Abadou, 2024; Cui, 2025). In classroom environments, however, students are often exposed to simplified texts, controlled tasks, and assessment methods that prioritize surface-level correctness rather than deeper cognitive processes such as decision-making and strategic justification (Black & William, 2019; Santos et al., 2024).

Ideally, translation pedagogy should promote a dynamic interplay between theory and practice, where theoretical insights inform practical action, and practical experiences, in turn, refine theoretical understanding (Nygård, 2024; Robinson, 2019; Zhao et al., 2024). In such a model, students actively engage in authentic translation tasks, reflect critically on their decisions, and progressively develop professional competence. Yet, when instructional practices remain heavily theory-driven, students may experience confusion, reduced confidence, and a lack of preparedness for professional translation settings.

Previous studies have proposed several pedagogical approaches to bridge this divide. Mutanga (2024) highlights the importance of project-based and collaborative learning, placing students in realistic translation scenarios. Luthfiyyah et al. (2021) advocates for competence-based pedagogy that integrates theory, practice, and professional ethics. Similarly, Larsari et al. (2024) emphasizes the role of situated and collaborative learning environments in enhancing applied translation skills. Despite these theoretical contributions, empirical research that captures students’ own perspectives and lived experiences of the theory-practice gap particularly in underexplored regional contexts remains limited.

In response to this gap, the present study, *Students’ Perspectives on the Theory-Practice Gap in Translation Pedagogy*, aims to: (1) examine how students perceive the relationship between theoretical knowledge and practical application; (2) identify the key challenges they encounter in applying theoretical concepts; and (3) explore how this perceived gap affects their motivation, confidence, and readiness for professional practice.

By foregrounding students’ perspectives, this study seeks to provide deeper insight into the practical implications of curriculum design and pedagogical approaches, thereby informing more effective educational practices. The study is grounded in Kolb’s Experiential Learning Theory, which conceptualizes learning as a cyclical process of experience, reflection, conceptualization, and experimentation, as well as the PACTE Translation Competence Model, which underscores the importance of strategic, instrumental, and linguistic competencies in achieving professional translation proficiency.

2. METHOD

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design to generate a comprehensive understanding of how students perceive and experience the theory–practice gap in translation pedagogy (Neuman, 2019; Sugiyono, 2021; Fraenkel et al., 2014). By integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches, the study was able to capture both measurable patterns and

nuanced, experience-based insights. The participants comprised 60 undergraduate students enrolled in translation programs at Mohamed I University, representing both English and French translation tracks. Their ages ranged from 19 to 24 years. A purposive sampling strategy was employed, particularly for the qualitative phase, to ensure variation in gender, language specialization, and academic performance, thereby enabling a more representative exploration of student perspectives.

2.1 Study Design and Rationale

The selection of a mixed-methods approach was grounded in its capacity to combine breadth and depth of analysis. Quantitative data, collected through structured surveys, enabled the measurement of students' perceptions regarding the integration of theory and practice (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). In contrast, qualitative data obtained from semi-structured interviews provided deeper insight into students' lived experiences, including the challenges they face and the meanings they assign to those experiences (Tisdell et al., 2025; Patton, 2020). This methodological integration aligns with established research practices in education that emphasize triangulation as a means of enhancing both validity and reliability, particularly when investigating complex pedagogical phenomena such as the theory–practice gap.

2.2 Participants

The study involved 60 undergraduate students who met specific inclusion criteria, namely active enrollment in a translation program and prior completion of at least one course incorporating translation theory. Students without exposure to theory-based translation courses were excluded to ensure the relevance of responses to the research focus. The sample reflected a balanced gender distribution and included participants from different academic levels, allowing for a broader understanding of how perceptions may vary across stages of academic progression.

2.3 Instruments and Materials

Two primary instruments were utilized in this study:

- **Survey Questionnaire**

The questionnaire was designed to assess key dimensions related to the theory–practice relationship, including perceived relevance of theory, its practical applicability, the extent of integration within coursework, students' confidence in applying theoretical knowledge, and their motivation in engaging with translation tasks. Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale. The instrument demonstrated high internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.87, indicating strong reliability.

- **Semi-Structured Interview Protocol**

The interview guide was developed to explore in greater depth students' experiences in applying theoretical concepts, the difficulties they encounter, and their perceptions of existing assessment practices. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes, was audio-recorded with consent, and subsequently transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy and completeness of the data.

2.4 Procedures

Data collection was conducted in two sequential phases. Initially, the survey was distributed online to all 60 participants, allowing them to complete it individually in a flexible and accessible format. The quantitative data were then compiled and analyzed to identify general

trends. Based on these results, 15 participants were purposively selected for the interview phase to ensure diversity in terms of gender, language track, and academic performance. The interviews were conducted in a quiet classroom environment to facilitate open and focused discussion. All data were anonymized during transcription to maintain confidentiality.

2.5 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS, employing descriptive statistics to identify general trends and Pearson Correlation to examine relationships among perceived integration, confidence, and motivation (Field, 2018). Qualitative data were analyzed through thematic analysis, following the six-phase framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2019), which includes familiarization with the data, initial coding, theme identification, theme review, theme definition, and final reporting. The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings enabled methodological triangulation, providing a more robust and holistic understanding of students' perspectives on the theory–practice gap in translation pedagogy.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Quantitative Findings

The survey findings indicate that students generally recognize the importance of theoretical frameworks in translation pedagogy, as reflected in a relatively high mean score ($M = 3.8$, $SD = 0.5$). This suggests a strong conceptual appreciation of theory as a foundational element in translation learning. However, this recognition does not fully translate into practice. The perceived applicability of theory to real-world translation tasks yielded a lower mean score ($M = 3.0$, $SD = 0.7$), indicating that many students encounter difficulties in operationalizing abstract concepts in practical contexts.

Furthermore, the integration of theory within classroom activities was rated at a moderate level ($M = 3.2$, $SD = 0.6$), suggesting that instructional practices only partially bridge conceptual understanding and applied skills. Students' self-reported confidence in applying theoretical knowledge ($M = 3.3$, $SD = 0.6$) and their motivation to engage in translation tasks ($M = 3.5$, $SD = 0.5$) were also moderate. This implies that both cognitive confidence and affective engagement depend significantly on how effectively theory is embedded in practice. Notably, assessment alignment received the lowest mean score ($M = 2.8$, $SD = 0.7$), highlighting a perceived mismatch between evaluation methods and the practical application of translation competence.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics Table (N = 60)

Variable	Mean (M)	SD	Interpretation
Relevance of Theory	3.8	0.5	High
Applicability of Theory	3.0	0.7	Moderate
Theory–Practice Integration	3.2	0.6	Moderate
Confidence in Applying Theory	3.3	0.6	Moderate
Motivation	3.5	0.5	Moderate
Assessment Alignment	2.8	0.7	Low

Further statistical analysis using Pearson Correlation revealed significant positive relationships among key variables. The perceived integration of theory and practice showed a strong correlation with students' confidence ($r = 0.59$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that better integration enhances students' perceived ability to apply theoretical knowledge. Additionally, the perceived relevance of theory was positively correlated with motivation ($r = 0.55$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that students who value theoretical knowledge are more likely to engage actively in translation tasks.

Qualitative Findings

The thematic analysis of interview data generated four interrelated themes that illuminate students' lived experiences of the theory–practice gap:

1. Abstract Nature of Theoretical Knowledge

Participants frequently described theoretical models as conceptually dense and difficult to translate into actionable strategies. Many expressed uncertainty about selecting appropriate frameworks in authentic translation contexts, highlighting a gap between conceptual understanding and practical decision-making.

2. Limited Exposure to Authentic Translation Tasks

Students reported that classroom activities often relied on predictable and simplified exercises, which did not adequately reflect the complexity of real-world translation. This lack of authenticity constrained opportunities for developing strategic competence and adaptive decision-making skills.

3. Misalignment Between Assessment and Practice

A recurring concern among participants was that assessment practices prioritize surface-level accuracy rather than the thoughtful and strategic application of theory. As a result, students perceived that their deeper analytical efforts were not sufficiently recognized or rewarded within existing evaluation systems.

4. Implications for Motivation and Confidence

Students' motivation and confidence were found to be closely linked to their ability to apply theory in meaningful ways. When theoretical knowledge could be effectively integrated into practice, students reported increased engagement and self-assurance. Conversely, when tasks appeared abstract or disconnected from professional realities, motivation tended to decline.

Collectively, these themes reinforce the quantitative findings, demonstrating that students' confidence and motivation are strongly shaped by how effectively theory is integrated into practice. The interplay of abstract instruction, limited authentic engagement, and misaligned assessment structures contributes to a persistent cycle that inhibits the development of professional translation competence.

The integration of survey and interview data offers a more holistic perspective on students' experiences of the theory–practice gap in translation pedagogy. While quantitative findings provide an overview of general trends in perception, confidence, and motivation, qualitative insights uncover the underlying factors that shape these patterns.

Taken together, the findings suggest that although students recognize and value the role of theoretical knowledge, systemic and pedagogical constraints hinder its effective application. This disconnect not only limits students' engagement with translation tasks but also affects their confidence and readiness to function in professional translation environments.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide compelling evidence that, from students' perspectives, the theory–practice gap in translation pedagogy remains a significant pedagogical concern. Although students demonstrated a strong acknowledgment of the importance of theoretical frameworks ($M = 3.8$), this appreciation does not automatically translate into effective application, as reflected in the lower score for applicability ($M = 3.0$). This discrepancy reinforces the long-standing argument that theoretical knowledge in translation, while essential, often remains inert unless supported by contextualized and practice-oriented learning experiences. As noted by Ngoc et al. (2025), theoretical models alone are insufficient unless they are integrated into competence-based training that reflects real translation processes.

The moderate rating for theory–practice integration ($M = 3.2$) further suggests that current instructional approaches only partially succeed in bridging this divide. From an explanatory perspective, this may be attributed to the predominance of traditional teaching methods that prioritize knowledge transmission over experiential engagement. Ji (2022) emphasizes that professional competence develops through reflective practice, where learners actively apply knowledge in complex situations and reflect on their actions. In the absence of such opportunities, students are less likely to internalize theoretical principles as practical tools for decision-making.

Students' confidence ($M = 3.3$) and motivation ($M = 3.5$) being at moderate levels can also be interpreted through the lens of perceived relevance and usability of knowledge. The significant positive correlation between theory–practice integration and confidence ($r = 0.59$) suggests that when students perceive a clearer connection between what they learn and what they do, their sense of competence increases. This aligns with Self-Determination Theory, which posits that competence is a key driver of intrinsic motivation. In other words, students are more motivated when they feel capable of successfully performing tasks, particularly when those tasks are meaningful and authentic.

Similarly, the positive relationship between perceived relevance of theory and motivation ($r = 0.55$) indicates that students' engagement is strongly influenced by their belief in the usefulness of theoretical knowledge. This finding supports the argument made by Bielykh and Charikova (2024) that meaningful learning occurs when students are involved in authentic, socially situated translation tasks that demonstrate the practical value of theory. Without such contextualization, theory may be perceived as abstract and disconnected, leading to reduced engagement.

One of the most critical findings is the low rating of assessment alignment ($M = 2.8$), which highlights a structural issue in translation pedagogy. Students perceive that assessment practices tend to prioritize surface-level accuracy rather than the strategic and reflective application of theory. This misalignment can be explained by the dominance of product-oriented evaluation systems, which focus on final outputs rather than the processes underlying translation decisions. Phetsangkhad and Prakai (2022) argues that effective assessment in translation education should evaluate not only the final product but also the decision-making processes and competencies involved. When assessment fails to capture

these dimensions, students may be discouraged from engaging deeply with theoretical frameworks.

Furthermore, the qualitative findings provide deeper explanatory insight into these quantitative trends. The theme of theoretical abstraction suggests that students struggle with selecting and applying appropriate models in real contexts, which reflects what Rokhayati and Widiyanti (2022) describes as the gap between declarative knowledge (knowing what) and procedural knowledge (knowing how). Without sufficient opportunities to practice procedural application, students remain uncertain about how to operationalize theory.

The reported lack of authentic practice also explains why students find it difficult to develop strategic competence. According to Torkey and Ahmed (2025), translation competence is inherently multidimensional and develops through engagement with real or simulated professional tasks. When classroom activities are overly simplified, students are deprived of the complexity needed to cultivate this competence.

Finally, the interplay between motivation and practical engagement underscores the importance of experiential learning environments. Drawing on Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, learning becomes effective when students cycle through experience, reflection, conceptualization, and experimentation. The findings suggest that current pedagogical practices may not fully support this cycle, particularly in the stages of active experimentation and concrete experience.

In summary, the discussion reveals that the theory–practice gap is not merely a cognitive issue but a systemic one, shaped by instructional design, task authenticity, and assessment practices. While students value theoretical knowledge, their ability to apply it depends largely on how it is contextualized, practiced, and evaluated. Addressing this gap requires a shift toward more integrative, student-centered, and competence-based approaches that align theory, practice, and assessment within authentic learning environments.

4. CONCLUSION

This study underscores that, from students' perspectives, the theory–practice gap in translation pedagogy remains a persistent and multifaceted challenge. While students clearly recognize the importance of theoretical knowledge as a foundational component of translation learning, their ability to apply this knowledge in practical contexts is limited. The findings reveal that the disconnect is not rooted in a lack of appreciation for theory, but rather in insufficient integration between conceptual instruction and authentic practice within classroom settings.

The moderate levels of perceived integration, confidence, and motivation indicate that students' engagement and sense of competence are closely tied to how meaningfully theory is embedded in practical tasks. The strong correlations identified in this study further confirm that when theory is effectively connected to practice, students feel more confident and motivated. Conversely, the low rating of assessment alignment highlights a critical structural issue, suggesting that current evaluation practices do not adequately reflect or support the development of applied translation competence.

Moreover, qualitative insights reinforce that abstract theoretical instruction, limited exposure to real-world translation tasks, and misaligned assessment systems collectively contribute to students' uncertainty and reduced professional readiness. These findings suggest that the

theory–practice gap is not merely an individual learning difficulty, but a systemic issue shaped by curriculum design and pedagogical approaches.

In light of these results, it can be concluded that bridging the theory–practice gap requires a shift toward more integrative and experiential learning models. Approaches that emphasize authentic tasks, reflective practice, and competence-based assessment are essential to ensuring that theoretical knowledge becomes a functional tool rather than static information. By aligning theory, practice, and assessment, translation pedagogy can better support students in developing the skills, confidence, and professional readiness required in real-world translation contexts.

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