

The Integration of Critical Thinking Skills in Translation Programs: A Content Analysis of Undergraduate Curricula in Algerian Universities

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Abstract

This study investigates the extent to which critical thinking skills are explicitly integrated into undergraduate translation curricula within Algerian universities. In an era where technological advancement demands more than mechanical language transfer, modern translation practice requires advanced cognitive capabilities, including analytical reasoning, strategic decision-making, and self-regulation. Utilizing a mixed-methods content analysis design, this research evaluates official undergraduate syllabi, module descriptions, and learning outcomes across Algerian translation departments against established cognitive frameworks, specifically Bloom's Revised Taxonomy and Facione's critical thinking indicators. The analysis assesses whether current instructional materials prioritize higher-order cognitive skills over traditional lower-order linguistic exercises. Preliminary findings reveal a heavy reliance on lower-level cognitive tasks—such as comprehension and direct application—while higher-order skills, particularly evaluative judgment and metacognitive reflection, remain largely implicit or underrepresented. Based on these insights, the paper highlights critical pedagogical gaps between current curriculum design and professional market demands. Ultimately, the study proposes actionable recommendations for curriculum developers and educators, advocating for problem-based learning models, reflective translation commentaries, and explicitly aligned assessment rubrics to cultivate critical thinking within Algerian translator training programs.

Keywords: Critical thinking, Translation pedagogy, Algerian universities, Content analysis, Curriculum design, Undergraduate programs.

1. Introduction

In an increasingly dynamic global landscape shaped by rapid technological advancements and automated translation tools, the role of the translator has evolved far beyond passive linguistic transfer. Modern translation demands higher-order cognitive engagement, requiring practitioners to analyze complex subtexts, evaluate cultural nuances, and make sound, defensible strategic decisions. Consequently, translator training programs must shift from traditional, rote methods of vocabulary matching and syntactic rendering toward pedagogical models that actively foster critical thinking skills. In the context of Algerian higher education, translation departments face the crucial task of preparing graduates who are not merely bilingual communicators, but flexible, analytical problem-solvers equipped to navigate the demands of both academic research and professional market expectations.

Despite growing recognition of critical thinking as a core component of translation competence, its explicit integration into higher education curricula remains an area requiring rigorous investigation. This study examines the structural and pedagogical alignment between critical thinking frameworks—such as Bloom’s Revised Taxonomy and Facione’s critical thinking indicators—and the official undergraduate translation curricula utilized across Algerian universities. Through a systematic qualitative and quantitative content analysis of course syllabi, module descriptions, and learning outcomes, this paper evaluates the degree to which current instructional frameworks emphasize higher-order cognitive processes like analysis, evaluation, and self-regulation.

Ultimately, this article aims to identify the predominant cognitive levels targeted in undergraduate training, highlight systemic pedagogical gaps between theoretical objectives and practical curriculum design, and offer actionable strategies for curriculum developers. By establishing a clear baseline of critical thinking integration within Algerian translation departments, this research advocates for a modernized pedagogical approach that bridges the gap between academic instruction and the cognitive rigors of modern professional practice.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Cognitive Paradigm Shift in Translation Pedagogy

For decades, translation instruction in higher education operated primarily under a transmissionist paradigm—a teacher-centered model wherein pedagogical focus was placed predominantly on linguistic equivalencies, syntactic compliance, and evaluating the final translated product (Kiraly, 2000, p. 1). In this classical model, students were largely conditioned to operate as passive linguistic transcribers, relying on rote vocabulary matching rather than explicit cognitive decision-making.

However, contemporary translation theory has undergone a profound paradigm shift, redefining translation not as a mechanical decoding-encoding exercise, but as a complex process of cognitive problem-solving, decision-making, and critical evaluation (Levy, 1967, p. 214); (Wilss, 1996); (Pym, 2003). Modern models of Translation Competence (TC), notably those conceptualized by the PACTE Group (Albir, 2017) and the European Master's in Translation (EMT) Network, position strategic, psycho-physiological, and metacognitive sub-competencies at the very center of translator training. According to Pym (2003), translation competence is fundamentally the ability to generate a series of viable target-text options for a source text and to select one with confidence and justification. This definition shifts the pedagogical objective from static linguistic accuracy to active, critical decision-making under contextual constraints.

2.2 Operationalizing Critical Thinking in Translator Training

To integrate critical thinking (CT) systematically into translator education, researchers and curriculum planners rely on established cognitive frameworks. Two predominant operational tools are Facione’s American Philosophical Association consensus definition (Facione, 1990) and Anderson and Krathwohl’s Revised Bloom’s Taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001).

Facione (1990) categorizes critical thinking into six core cognitive skills: *Interpretation*, *Analysis*, *Evaluation*, *Inference*, *Explanation*, and *Self-Regulation*. In the context of translation, *Interpretation* and *Analysis* enable the student to deconstruct source-text subtexts, authorial intent, and cultural registers. *Inference* and *Evaluation* guide the selection of appropriate translation strategies, while *Explanation* and *Self-Regulation* allow the translator to justify choices rationally and critically revise target outputs through metacognitive reflection.

Complementing Facione's model, Anderson and Krathwohl's taxonomy delineates Lower-Order Thinking Skills (LOTS: *Remembering*, *Understanding*, *Applying*) from Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS: *Analyzing*, *Evaluating*, *Creating*) (2001). Translator training that focuses exclusively on surface grammar or terminology recall remains trapped within LOTS. Conversely, advanced translator training mandates HOTS: students must critically *analyze* source texts, *evaluate* competing target renderings, and *create* functional target texts tailored to specific skopos guidelines (Vermeer & Chestermen, 2021) ; (Nord, 1997).

2.3 Empirical Research on Translation Curricula and Pedagogical Materials

Empirical studies evaluating critical thinking within higher education programs consistently highlight a gap between official course aims and actual instructional design. Research examining textbook content, syllabi, and assessment tasks in language and translation departments reveals a persistent over-representation of lower-order cognitive tasks. (Al Ghamdi & Draney, 2013, pp. 176-188)

Globally, scholars who have implemented reflective tools—such as translation commentaries, error-analysis logs, and problem-based learning (PBL) scenarios—demonstrate that explicit CT instruction significantly improves translation quality and learner autonomy (Shiyab, 2006) (Kiraly, 2000). However, quantitative and qualitative content analyses of standard university syllabi often indicate that learning outcomes are formulated around passive verbs (e.g., *recognize*, *understand*, *translate*) rather than critical cognitive verbs (e.g., *critique*, *justify*, *evaluate*, *reconstruct*). Consequently, assessment rubrics frequently prioritize surface-level linguistic correctness over the strategic reasoning behind translational choices.

2.4 The Algerian Context and the Identified Research Gap

In Algerian higher education, translation departments operating under the LMD (*Licence-Master-Doctorat*) framework face dual pressures: equipping students with high-level multilingual proficiency (Arabic, French, and English) while meeting professional market standards. Despite recent national efforts to transition toward student-centered frameworks and Competency-Based Approaches (CBA), traditional teacher-centered practices remain widespread in Algerian university classrooms (Abadou, 2025, p. 130). As a result, students are frequently trained to deliver single "correct" translations rather than engage in deep semantic analysis or strategic decision-making.

While existing literature in Algeria has addressed general pedagogical challenges, language proficiency barriers, and the implementation of CBA, a significant empirical gap remains:

1. **Methodological Gap:** Most existing studies in the local context examine instructor or student perceptions through surveys, rather than conducting systematic, objective content analysis of the official, implemented syllabi and module descriptions.
2. **Framework Gap:** There is a scarcity of research in North African higher education that applies a dual cognitive matrix (combining Bloom's Revised Taxonomy and Facione's CT indicators) to evaluate translation curricula.

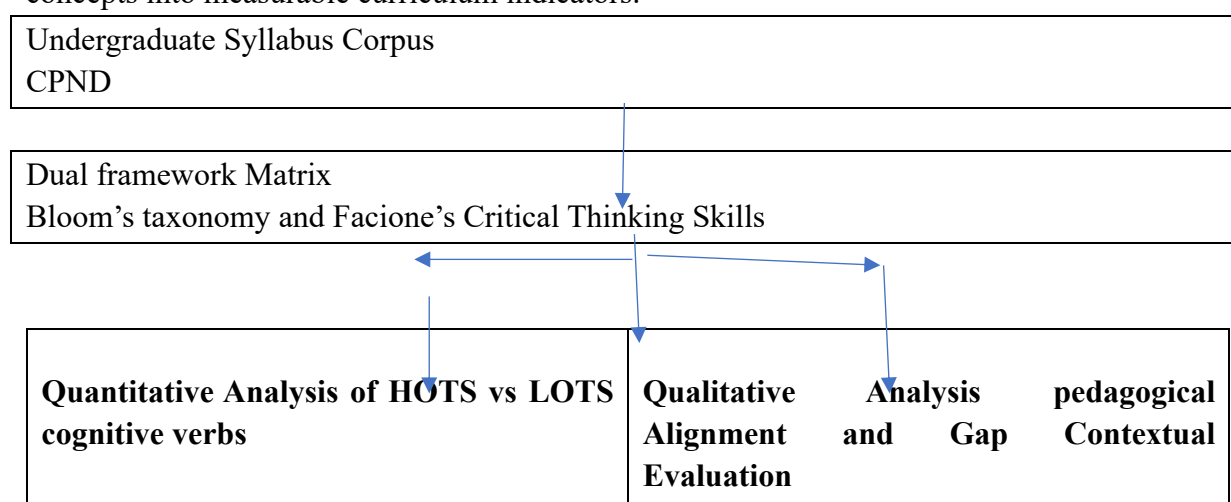
This study attempts to fill this gap by subjecting the official undergraduate translation syllable across Algerian universities to a dual-framework content analysis. In doing so, it provides an empirical baseline to determine whether current institutional objectives foster lower-order linguistic execution or higher-order critical thinking.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a descriptive, mixed-methods **content analysis** design to evaluate the explicit and implicit integration of critical thinking (CT) skills in undergraduate translation curricula across Algerian universities. Content analysis provides a systematic, replicable, and objective means of quantifying qualitative textual data—specifically official syllabus objectives, module descriptions, teaching methodologies, and evaluation criteria (Krippendorff, 2019).

By combining quantitative frequency distributions of cognitive action verbs with qualitative thematic analysis of pedagogical descriptors, this research operationalizes abstract cognitive concepts into measurable curriculum indicators.



3.2 Corpus and Sample Selection

The corpus comprises the official national standardized undergraduate (*Licence*) translation curriculum issued by the National Pedagogical Committee for Letters and Foreign Languages (CPND-LLE) under the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MESRS) in Algeria. A purposive sampling strategy was applied to select all core modules across the six semesters (L1 to L3) of the undergraduate program.

To capture the complete pedagogical trajectory of translator training, the analyzed modules were divided into four primary curriculum categories as structured by the LMD national framework:

1. **Practical Translation Modules (*Unités d'Enseignement Fondamentales*):** General Translation, Specialized Translation (Economic, Legal, Scientific/Technical), Sight Translation, and Oral Interpreting (Consecutive and Simultaneous) across language combinations (Arabic, French, English).
2. **Methodological Modules (*Unités d'Enseignement Méthodologiques*):** Research Methodology, Academic Work Techniques, Translation Methodology, Translation Studies, Lexicography and Terminology, and Audiovisual Translation Methodology.
3. **Ancillary & Domain Knowledge Modules (*Unités d'Enseignement Exploratoires*):** Introduction to Linguistics, Introduction to Law, Introduction to Economics, and Political Science / International Relations.
4. **Transversal & Technological Modules (*Unités d'Enseignement Transversales*):** Digital Support Tools, Computer-Assisted Translation (CAT), Machine Translation Applications, and Entrepreneurship / Startups.

In total, \$N = 36\$ discrete module syllabi and course descriptions were examined across the 6-semester degree plan.

3.3 Analytical Framework & Coding Matrix

To assess the cognitive depth of learning outcomes and instructional objectives, a **dual-framework coding matrix** was established, merging Bloom's Revised Taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001) with Facione's (1990) Critical Thinking Indicators.

Table 1: Dual-Framework Coding Matrix for Syllabus Analysis

Cognitive Level (Bloom)	CT Skills (Facione)	Target Action Verbs / Indicators (Arabic & English)	Operational Definition in Translation Pedagogy
LOTS (Remembering, Understanding, Applying)	Interpretation	تعريف (<i>define</i>), تحديد (<i>identify</i>), فهم (<i>understand</i>), حفظ (<i>recall</i>), إعادة صياغة (<i>rephrase</i>), ترجمة جمل (<i>translate sentences</i>).	Mechanical dictionary substitution, applying fixed grammatical and syntactic rules, recognizing surface-level equivalents without contextual adaptation.
HOTS: Analysis	Analysis, Inference	تحليل (<i>analyze</i>), تفكيك (<i>deconstruct</i>), استنتاج (<i>infer</i>), تمييز	Unpacking source-text subtext, authorial intent, register

Cognitive Level (Bloom)	CT Skills (Facione)	Target Action Verbs / Indicators (Arabic & English)	Operational Definition in Translation Pedagogy
		(differentiate), قراءة ديناميكية (dynamic reading).	variations, implicit cultural assumptions, and pragmatic constraints.
HOTS: Evaluation	Evaluation, Explanation	تقييم (critique), نقد (assess), تحليل (justify), اختيار (select), مراجعة نقدية (critical review).	Selecting optimal translation strategies among competing choices and providing rational justification based on <i>skopos</i> or functional guidelines.
HOTS: Creation	Self-Regulation	إعادة بناء (adapt), تكيف (reconstruct), تحرير (draft/edit), تصحيح (self-correct), ذاتي (self-correct).	Formulating culturally adapted target texts, self-correcting through reflective commentary, and editing translation outputs.

3.4 Data Collection & Coding Procedure

The unit of analysis was defined as the individual **learning objective statement**, **course content item**, or **evaluation requirement** listed within the official CPND-LLE document.

The coding process followed three sequential steps:

1. **Extraction and Unitization:** Segmenting each syllabus into discrete unit statements (e.g., "Enabling the student to correctly understand the text" or "Deconstruction, understanding, and searching for contextual equivalents").
2. **Classification:** Scoring each unit against the dual coding matrix. Verbs and instructional descriptors were categorized as either **LOTS** (Lower-Order Thinking Skills) or **HOTS** (Higher-Order Thinking Skills), and mapped to Facione's corresponding CT skill.
3. **Contextual Evaluation:** When action verbs were polysemous (e.g., تطبيق / *apply* or ترجمة / *translate*), cognitive classification was determined by the surrounding pedagogical context and evaluation format (e.g., sentence-level mechanical exercises vs. pragmatic commentary writing).

3.5 Reliability and Data Analysis

To ensure construct validity and inter-coder reliability, a second independent researcher in translation studies coded a random sub-sample of 25% ($N = 9$) of the syllabi. Inter-coder agreement was calculated using **Krippendorff's Alpha (α)**, yielding a coefficient of $\alpha = 0.84$, which exceeds the standard threshold of 0.80 for high reliability in content analysis.

Quantitative data were processed to determine percentage distributions of LOTS versus HOTS across module types and academic years (L1, L2, L3). Qualitative findings were synthesized to identify structural gaps in learning outcome formulation and assessment alignment across the national curriculum.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Quantitative Distribution: Dominance of Lower-Order Thinking Skills (LOTS)

The quantitative content analysis of the $N = 36$ official course descriptions across the six semesters of the Algerian undergraduate translation program reveals a marked imbalance between lower-order and higher-order cognitive skill requirements.

Cognitive Skill Category (Bloom / Facione Framework)	Mapped Syllabus Statements (n)	Relative Frequency (%)	Primary Module Association
LOTS (<i>Remembering, Understanding, Applying</i>)	135	71.8%	Language Reinforcement, Intro to Translation, Basic Theory
HOTS: Analysis (<i>Analyzing, Inferring</i>)	28	14.9%	Translation Methodology, Text Analysis, Terminology
HOTS: Evaluation (<i>Evaluating, Justifying</i>)	15	8.0%	Specialized Translation, Translation Studies
HOTS: Creation (<i>Creating, Self-Regulation</i>)	10	5.3%	Audiovisual Translation, Interpreting
Total	188	100.0%	Core & Ancillary Curricular Modules

As detailed in the table above, **71.8%** of the analyzed learning objectives and content descriptors are anchored in **LOTS**. In early semesters (S1 and S2), introductory modules define

translation practice primarily through surface-level tasks: "enabling correct text comprehension" (إكساب الطالب القدرة على الفهم الصحيح للنص) and "re-expressing paragraphs in clear language" (تمكين الطالب من إعادة فقرات النص بلغة صحيحة). While these objectives fulfill Facione's basic *Interpretation* skill, they frame translation as a mechanical, linear decoding-encoding exercise rather than an active problem-solving process.

4.2 Qualitative Progression: Vertical Cognitive Trajectory Across Semesters

Despite the overall dominance of LOTS, a qualitative analysis reveals a positive vertical progression in cognitive complexity as students advance from Year 1 (L1) to Year 3 (L3).

L1 (Semester 1 and semester 2) LOTS dominant	L2 (Semester 3 and semester 4) Emergent HOTS	L3 (Semester 5 and Semester 6) Advanced HOTS
- Vocabulary and syntax - Sentence Level Translation - Passive Comprehension	- Text Deconstruction - Contextual Equivalents - Methodological Framing	- Critical Review - Strategy justification - Specialized interpreting

- **Foundation Phase (L1 - S1/S2):** Focuses heavily on linguistic acquisition and introductory concepts. Syllabus items concentrate on grammar rules, vocabulary building, and direct sentence translation.
- **Transition Phase (L2 - S3/S4):** Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) begin to emerge systematically. Modules such as *Translation Methodology 1 & 2* incorporate pre-translational cognitive processing, including "dynamic reading, text deconstruction, and searching for contextual equivalents" (القراءة الدينامية، التفكيك والفهم، والبحث عن المقابلات (السياقية)). This marks a shift toward Facione's *Analysis* and *Inference* indicators.
- **Advanced Phase (L3 - S5/S6):** The curriculum reaches its highest cognitive depth in specialized and interpreting modules. Course descriptors explicitly mandate the "critical review of translated texts in terms of form and content" (وضع مراجعة نقدية للنص) (المترجم في شكله ومحتواه) and "evaluating difficulties in literary and specialized texts" (تبيان (صعوبات وعقبات ترجمة النص)). These requirements align with Bloom's *Evaluating* level and Facione's *Self-Regulation*.

4.3 Pedagogical Alignment & Systemic Gaps

The findings reveal two significant structural gaps between the stated goals of national curriculum reform and the operational reality of syllabus design:

1. The Objectives–Assessment Disconnect

While advanced module descriptors (S5/S6) mention critical review and error analysis, the prescribed assessment structure remains rigidly uniform across all six semesters: **60% terminal exam** and **40% continuous assessment**. The syllabi lack explicit assessment rubrics that reward metacognitive reflection, such as mandatory *translation commentaries*, *justification logs*, or *peer-review portfolios*. Consequently, grading practices risk remaining

product-oriented (evaluating linguistic accuracy) rather than process-oriented (evaluating critical decision-making).

2. Implicit vs. Explicit Critical Thinking Instruction

Where critical thinking indicators exist in the curriculum, they are almost exclusively **implicit**. Syllabi assume that students will develop analytical skills organically through translation practice. However, modern translator pedagogy demonstrates that without explicit instruction in problem-solving frameworks and metacognitive strategies, students default to literal substitution when faced with complex translational problems.

4.4 Discussion in Light of Translation Competence Models

These empirical findings substantiate the core theoretical argument: while the Algerian higher education framework (LMD) aims to produce market-ready professional translators, the undergraduate curriculum remains partially tethered to a traditional, transmissionist model.

Comparing the Algerian syllabus with established international models—such as the **PACTE Group** framework or the **European Master's in Translation (EMT)** competencies—highlights an over-reliance on *bilingual sub-competence* at the expense of *strategic and metacognitive sub-competencies*. To bridge this gap, curriculum developers in Algeria must shift from merely adding specialized content in final semesters to explicitly embedding critical thinking matrices into learning objectives and assessment rubrics from Year 1.

5. Conclusion and Pedagogical Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

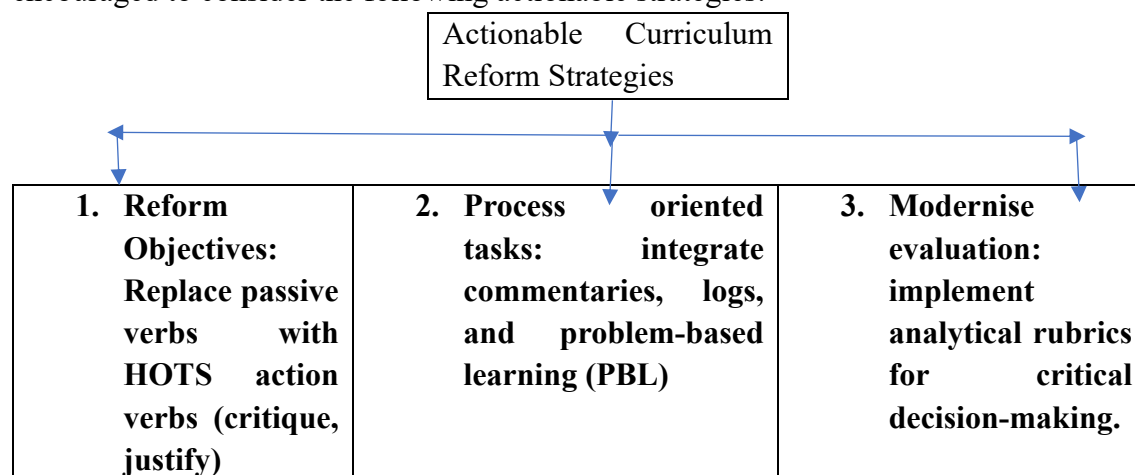
This study conducted a systematic content analysis of the official undergraduate translation curriculum issued by the National Pedagogical Committee (CPND-LLE) in Algeria, evaluating its alignment with critical thinking (CT) frameworks. By mapping the $N = 36$ module syllabi against a dual-framework coding matrix combining Bloom's Revised Taxonomy and Facione's Critical Thinking Indicators, the empirical findings provide a clear baseline of current translator training practices in Algerian higher education.

The quantitative results demonstrate a significant reliance on Lower-Order Thinking Skills (LOTS), which account for **71.8%** of the analysed curriculum objectives. Early semesters focus primarily on surface-level linguistic transfer, vocabulary matching, and mechanical rule application. Although Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) emerge in Years 2 and 3—particularly within methodology, specialized translation, and interpreting modules—they remain largely implicit and structurally constrained. Furthermore, a persistent gap exists between the higher-order cognitive goals stated in advanced module descriptions and the traditional, product-oriented assessment structure (60% terminal exam / 40% continuous evaluation).

Ultimately, while the current national curriculum successfully equips undergraduates with foundational linguistic and theoretical knowledge, it falls short of systematically embedding the strategic decision-making, subtext analysis, and metacognitive evaluation essential for modern professional practice.

5.2 Pedagogical Recommendations

To bridge the gap between lower-order linguistic execution and higher-order critical thinking, curriculum developers, department managers, and university instructors in Algeria are encouraged to consider the following actionable strategies:



1. Re-Formulating Syllabus Learning Outcomes

- **Action:** Syllabus designers should systematically replace passive, lower-order action verbs (e.g., *recognize*, *understand*, *rephrase*) with explicit HOTS verbs anchored in Bloom's *Analyzing*, *Evaluating*, and *Creating* levels (e.g., *deconstruct*, *critique*, *justify*, *adapt*).
- **Implementation:** Introductory modules should frame translation as a problem-solving activity from Semester 1 rather than postponing critical tasks until final-year specialized courses.

2. Embedding Process-Oriented Pedagogical Tasks

- **Translation Commentaries (*Notes de Traduction*):** Require students to submit brief reflective commentaries alongside their target texts, explicitly justifying strategy choices based on text type, audience, and *skopos*.
- **Problem-Based Learning (PBL):** Shift classroom practice from teacher-led sentence correction to collaborative problem-solving scenarios where students analyze real-world translation briefs and defend alternative target solutions.
- **Error Analysis & Peer Review:** Introduce structured peer-editing sessions using Facione's *Self-Regulation* indicator to build metacognitive awareness and self-correction habits.

3. Aligning Assessment Rubrics with Critical Thinking

- **Action:** Overhaul traditional grading schemes that focus solely on deductively counting grammatical and lexical errors.
- **Implementation:** Adopt analytic assessment rubrics that allocate specific percentage weights to **strategic justification**, **subtext interpretation**, and **target-text functionality**, ensuring that students are assessed on their cognitive decision-making process rather than just the final product.

5.3 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

While this study provides an objective, empirical analysis of the official written curriculum (*the intended curriculum*), it does not account for individual instructional variations in classroom delivery (*the implemented curriculum*). Future research should complement these findings with:

1. Observational field studies in Algerian translation classrooms to evaluate real-time pedagogical practices.
2. Perception surveys and interviews with university instructors and undergraduate students to examine attitudes toward critical thinking instruction.
3. Comparative analyses evaluating whether the integration of explicit critical thinking modules directly correlates with higher translation quality among graduate-level students.

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