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Title : A Descriptive Case Study of the Translation Section at the Department of English, University of Zawia: Achievements and Challenges.

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ABSTRACT

This study presents a descriptive case study of the Translation Division within the Department of English at the Faculty of Arts, University of Zawia, which was established during the 2017–2018 academic year as the first specialized translation program in the Zawia region. The study aims to evaluate the division's achievements and identify the structural challenges that hinder the realization of its stated objectives.

The research adopts a descriptive case study approach, drawing on two sources of data: the program's official academic Profile (2023), which includes the curriculum, course descriptions, faculty profiles, and infrastructure-related information; and the researcher's direct field observations in her capacity as a faculty member in the department.

The findings reveal three major achievements. First, the program has successfully undergone an institutional transition from a general English language teaching model to a specialized translation program. Second, it has graduated several cohorts of students while supervising undergraduate research projects in Translation Studies. Third, both faculty members and students have demonstrated consistent adherence to institutional regulations, academic schedules, and administrative procedures.

At the same time, the study identifies three major structural challenges. The curriculum postpones translation competence–based courses until the later stages of the program, omits courses on computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools and artificial intelligence applications, and provides no field training hours. Furthermore, instruction relies heavily on theoretical lectures delivered by faculty members who are not specialized in Translation Studies, with limited opportunities for workshops or authentic translation practice. Finally, the study documents the absence of specialized infrastructure necessary for effective translator training.

The study concludes by offering practical recommendations aimed at building upon the division's achievements and bridging the gap between its declared objectives and its current institutional reality.

Keywords: Translation; University of Zawia; Translation Competence; Computer-Assisted Translation (CAT) Tools; AI-Assisted Translation; Achievements; Challenges

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دراسة حالة وصفية لشعبة الترجمة بقسم اللغة الإنجليزية في جامعة الزاوية: المنجزات والتحديات

نهلة العربي
قسم اللغة الإنجليزية، كلية الآداب الزاوية، جامعة الزاوية، الزاوية، ليبيا

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ملخص البحث

يقدّم هذا البحث دراسة حالة وصفية لشعبة الترجمة في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية بكلية الآداب جامعة الزاوية، التي أُسِّست في العام الدراسي 2017–2018 بوصفها أول برنامج ترجمة متخصص في منطقة الزاوية. تهدف الدراسة إلى تقييم منجزات الشعبة ورصد التحديات الهيكلية التي تحول دون تحقيق أهدافها المُعلنة. اعتمدت الدراسة منهج دراسة الحالة الوصفي، مستندةً إلى مصدرَي بيانات: الملف الأكاديمي الرسمي للبرنامج (2023) الذي يتضمن الخطة الدراسية وتوصيفات المقررات وبيانات أعضاء التدريس ومعطيات البنية التحتية؛ والملاحظة الميدانية المباشرة للباحثة بوصفها عضو هيئة تدريس في القسم. كشفت النتائج عن ثلاث منجزات رئيسية: التحول المؤسسي الناجح من نموذج تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية العام إلى استحداث برنامج ترجمة متخصص؛ وتخرّج أكثر من دفعة مع الإشراف على مشاريع بحثية في دراسات الترجمة؛ بالإضافة الي التزام أعضاء هيئة التدريس والطلبة بالجداول واللوائح المؤسسية. كما رصدت الدراسة ثلاث تحديات هيكلية: مناهج تؤجل المحتوى القائم على كفاءة الترجمة إلى الفصول المتأخرة وتُغفل مقررات أدوات الترجمة الآلية والذكاء الاصطناعي ولا توفر ساعات تدريب ميداني؛ واعتماد مفرط على المحاضرات النظرية من قِبل أعضاء غير متخصصين في غياب ورش العمل وبيئات الترجمة الحقيقية؛ وغياب موثَّق رسمياً للبنية التحتية المتخصصة. وتختتم الدراسة بتوصيات عملية للبناء على منجزات الشعبة وسد الفجوات بين أهدافها المُعلنة وواقعها الراهن.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الترجمة؛ جامعة الزاوية؛ كفاءة الترجمة؛ أدوات الترجمة الآلية؛ الترجمة بالذكاء الاصطناعي؛ المنجزات؛ التحديات.

1.0 Introduction

Translation programs have become an important component of higher education in the Arab world, valued for their role in meeting the growing demand for qualified translators across public administration, the legal and oil sectors, media, and international business (Giaber, 2005; Atari, 2012). In Libya, most universities have responded to this demand by establishing translation departments or sections, among them the Department of English at the Faculty of Arts, University of Zawia, which established its Translation Section in the academic year 2017–2018, the first of its kind in Zawia region.

According to the Academic Program Profile (APP, 2023), the program aims to prepare graduates capable of working as professional translators, translation teachers and as researchers in Translation Studies. However, the practical experience and the direct field observation of the researcher as being a staff member within the department, reveal a set of challenges that seems to hinder the achievements of the section's goals and demanding a systematic evaluative investigation.

The present paper seeks to provide a descriptive case study report about the section, identifies its achievements and challenges, and propose actionable recommendations that may help in enhancing the pedagogical and institutional performance of the program in alignment it with the best practices in the global translator education.

2- **Statement of the Problem**

Despite its strategic importance, the Translation Section at University of Zawia has not been subject to any systematic study since its founding in 2017. This absence constitutes a gap in institutional reporting and program development. After several years of operation and the graduation of more than one cohort, it is valuable to assess the alignment between the curriculum, human resources, infrastructure, and the professional competencies required by the translation market.

The documentary evidence and participant observation reveal structural limitations across three dimensions: curriculum design, modes of instruction, and the integration of modern translation technologies. Furthermore, translation education in Libyan universities remains a largely undocumented area of inquiry (Alshniet, 2024), and the challenges facing newly established program receive little systematic investigation. This study addresses these gaps simultaneously: providing the department with an evidence-based internal evaluation, and contributing to the broader literature on translation programme development in Libya and the Arab world.

3- **Research Questions**

This Study is guided by the following questions:

1- To what extent has the translation Section at the Department of English, University of Zawia achieved its stated institutional objectives since its establishment in 2018?

2- What Achievements can be documented in the work of the section from its beginning to the present?

3- What are the challenges facing the section in the areas of curriculum design, modes of instructions and the physical infrastructure?

4-What evidence-based recommendations can be derived to strength the section's alignment with the contemporary standard of translator training?

4- Aims and Objectives

The main aim of this study is to produce an evidenced-based investigation to the Translation Section that can serve as an institutional report for program improvements. This general aim is pursued through the following objective:

1- To document the section's achievements since its establishment drawing on the APP (2023) and participant observation.
2- To identify and analyze the structural and the pedagogical challenges that hinder the realization of the section's stated objectives.
3- To formulate evidence-based recommendations for curriculum reform, pedagogical innovations and infrastructure improvements grounded in the institutional context of University of Zawia and in the theoretical literature on translator training.
5- Literature Review and Theoretical Framework
a) Theoretical Orientations of Translation Education:

Scholars in translation education broadly agree that effective translation training programs must balance between theoretical and practical components and must be grounded in a multi-dimensional conception of translation competence (PACTE Group 2003). Pym (2003, 2014) argues that translation curricula must revolve translation competence- the ability to generate visible target-text alternatives and select among them purposefully rather than focusing only on the linguistic proficiency. He further observes that many translation programs in the developing world universities tend to concentrate on linguistics and literary studies at the expense of specialized practical training, resulting a wide gap between educational outcomes and the demands of labour market. (Pym, 2014).

Kiraly (2000) proposes his Social Constructivist Approach to translator education, arguing that students need exposure to real-world professional settings in which they engage with genuine texts, real clients, and realistic deadlines. His model requires the creation of authentic translation environments in classrooms and workshops, as opposed to full reliance on traditional informative lectures.

On the technological dimension, Computer Assisted Translation (CAT) tools, Neural Machine Translation (NMT), and Large Language Models (LLMs, e.g. Chat GPT), have brought a rapid change to professional translation practice, making the integration of these tools into university curricula a necessity rather than an option (Bowker,2002; Kenny& Way 2001).Contemporary translators are expected to work effectively with translation memory systems, terminology management tools and machine translation post-editing workflows. Moorkens et al. (2018) demonstrates that post-editing has become a baseline professional competency, while Vieira et al. (2021) confirms that programs failing to address AI-tool literacy leave graduates unprepared for the current market.

b) Translation Education in Arab Universities and Libya

Atari (2012) identifies a cluster of impediments in Arab university translator training: weak integration between language courses and specialized translation courses, absent dedicated infrastructure and a predominance of non- specialized instructors. Al-Hadithy (2015) documents a similar pattern in UAE undergraduate programs, where translation is routinely offered to fulfil general degree requirements rather than as a component of coherent professional training. Both studies find that Arab translation programs tend to treat translation as a linguistic exercise rather than a professional competency requiring specialized training.

In the Libyan context, Giaber (2005) was among the first to document the growing professional demand for translators in Libya’s political and business sectors, and Alshniet (2024) provides a recent case study of the University of Tripoli’s Translation Department, identifying challenges in curriculum design, faculty specialization, and technology integration that closely parallel those of the present study.

c) How the Theoretical Framework Informs the Analysis

The three theoretical frameworks drawn from the literature - Pym’s (2003, 2014) competence-centered curriculum, Kiraly’s (2000) authentic learning environments, and Bowker’s (2002) technology integration imperative - serve as evaluative criteria in this study. Pym’s

framework informs the analysis of curriculum sequencing and content. Kiraly's model informs the evaluation of pedagogical approaches. Bowker's argument informs the assessment of infrastructure. The Arab world literature (Atari, 2012; Al-Hadithy, 2015; Alshniet, 2024) provides the comparative regional context. The researcher's position as a practicing faculty member also provides access to the informal, day-to-day dimensions of the program that documentary sources alone cannot capture.

6- **Methodology**:

The study adopts the descriptive case study methodology which is widely regarded as the most appropriate approach for examining a specific phenomenon in its natural context and documenting it in depth (Yin, 2014). Data were collected from two sources and analysed thematically against the theoretical frameworks established in the literature review.

6.1- **Data Sources**

The first and primary source is the academic Programme Profile (APP, 2023), an official document submitted to National Centre for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Educational and Training Institutions. It covers the programme's institutional framework, objectives, learning outcomes, curriculum structure, course descriptions, faculty qualifications, assessment system, and available resources.

The second source is direct participant observation conducted by the researcher as a practising faculty member within the department, carried out across multiple academic years since 2018. Observation encompassed classroom activities, departmental meetings, students' interactions, and administrative processes, with particular attention to pedagogical approaches, technology use and the gap between the program's documented objectives and its enacted practice.

As an insider researcher, the researcher-maintained awareness of potential positional bias. To reduce this, observational findings were systematically corroborated against the documentary evidence of the APP wherever possible. The study makes no evaluative claims about individual staff members and focuses exclusively on structural and programmatic dimensions .

6.2- **Data Analysis**

6.2.1- Achievements of the Translation Section:

a) A successful Institutional transition towards specialized Translation program

The most fundamental achievement of the section is the transition itself. The department of English Language at University of Zawia, has moved from a program focused on general English language pedagogy and EFL instruction only toward another that formally recognizes translation as a distinct academic major. The section now operates with its own curriculum, stated objectives, graduation research track and national accreditation registration, leading to a Bachelor of Arts, (BA) degree in English Language -Translation Track.

b) Successful Graduation of Multiple Cohorts and Supervision of Translation Research

Since its establishment, the section has graduated more than one cohort of students and has maintained a continuous record of supervising graduation research projects in Translation Studies covering areas such as, Translation Theories, and Comparative Analysis of translated works. These graduates represent the section's primary contribution to the Libyan job market, providing a growing alumni body for the public and private sectors.

c) Staff and Students Commitment to Institutional Schedules and Regulations

Field observation reveals a broadly shared commitment among teaching staff and students to the section's growth. All have adhered consistently to academic calendars, examination schedules, assessment procedures, and administrative instructions issued by the department

and faculty showing organisational reliability and a shared sense of professional responsibility..

6.2.2- Challenges Facing the Section

The following three challenges emerge from both the documentary evidence (APP,2023) and the participant observation, and correspond to the gaps identified between the section's stated objectives and its current operational realities.

a. Curriculum Gaps

The program 's profile lists a total of 134 credit hours including 49 modules, divided into two phases, foundational and specialized. Table (1) below shows the foundation phase of the program:

Semester	Courses	Main Orientation
1	Grammar1, Writing 1, Reading comprehension1,Reading Comperhension2	General Language Foundation
2	Grammar 2, Writing 2, Reading comprehension 1, Reading comperhension2	General Language development
3	Writing 3, Grammar 3, introduction to Linguistics, Literature, Vocabulary, introduction to Translation,Phonetics	Extended language preparation
4	General texts Translation, , morphology, Writing 4, Grammar 4, History of Translation, Theories of translation	Pre-specialization and transitional translation training.

Table 1: Foundation Stage of the Programme (Semesters 1–4)

Table 2 shows the specialised phase of the programme:

Semester	Courses	Main Orientation
5	Varieties, Strategies of Translation, Semantics, Scientific translation, Interpreting, Advanced Grammar, Literature2, Literary Translation	Translation-oriented with linguistic support.
6	Petroleum Translation, Lexicology, Legal Translation, Comparative Linguistics, Comparative Literature, Commercial Translation, advanced Grammar, Research Method	Specialized Translation training.
7	Translation and world Literature, Syntax, Research Methods, Media Translation Audio-visual Translation, Machine Translation, Using Dictionaries	Applied and technology-oriented translation - Research skills.
8	Deplomatic Translation, Religious Translation, Translation Criticism, syntax 2, Orientalism, Cultural Studies.	Advanced specialization with Cultural and Critical dimensions.

Table 2: Specialized Phase of the Program (Semesters 5–8)

Discussion of Curriculum Data

An Analysis of Table 1 reveals that the first semesters are dominated by general language skill courses - *Grammar, Reading , Writing* with course syllabi formed as general language subjects rather than translation- oriented preparation modules. They do not explicitly address L1, L2 development, source-target language awareness, or contrastive linguistic translation training. This treats language preparation as a separated component rather than an integrated part of translator training, creating a gap between the linguistic foundational stage and translation competence as defined by Pym (2003, 2014).

Table 2 shows a gradual and structured development in the programme's second half, moving from general linguistic foundation to specialized translation modules (e.g., *Scientific, Legal Commercial, Petroleum Translation*), and finally to critical and culturally informed translation study (e.g., *Translation Criticism, Cultural Studies*). This progression reflects an attempt to balance linguistic competence, translation skills, cultural awareness, and academic development. However, the delayed introduction of translation content represents a structural tension between the program's stated ambitions and its operational design, directly contradicting Kiraly's (2000) model of integrated, front-loaded professional training.

Furthermore, the curriculum also shows the absence of any courses dedicated to modern translation technologies. The program provides no instruction in Computer-Assisted Translation (CAT), no training in Large Language Models(LLMs) tools such as Deeply, ChatGPT, or Google Translate in professional contexts and no machine translation post-editing- despite these being standard professional competences today (Moorkens et al., 2018; Vieira et al., 2021).The listed course of *"Using Dictionaries and Resources",* while relevant, has been substantially replaced by the digital transformation of translation practice. Translation students todays rarely consult dictionaries, they navigate AI-powered glossaries, Large Language Models (LLMs) interfaces, and neural machine translation systems instead. The presence of this course and the absence of any AI translation training in the same curriculum reflects a program designed around a model of practice that predates the tools now defining the profession. Unless this gap is not addressed, graduates will leave without the technological literacy the contemporary translation market requires (Bowker, 2002).

b) Non-Specialists Staff, and Lecture-Based instruction:

The APP lists five faculty members for 40 specialization courses, only three hold a directly translation-related specialization degree, while the rest hold qualifications in Linguistics an Literature. Kiraly (2000) argues that translation pedagogy requires educator who approach translation as a communicative, and project-based professional practice rather than as linguistic exercise. A faculty trained primarily in linguistic analysis and literary interpretations will tend to handle translation as an extension of those disciplines, and treating as a text-based language activity rather than a professional competency built through practice.

This disciplinary orientation shapes the pedagogical practices. Participant observation confirms that the instruction is predominantly lecture-based across all semesters, with limited structured workshops, no collaborative learning, no peer-review sessions or project- based assignments (in which students practice translation with real-world clients). According to Kiraly (2000), authentic translation competence is not developed through theoretical explanation alone but teachers of translations relying on modes of Social Constructive, (Kiraly approach), that emphasizing learning through situated, collaborative and real-projects-based classroom activities. Pym (2014), in his work on translator training also highlights the importance of preparing students for professional decision-making practices in real contexts. If translation classroom remains dominated by lectures and conventional examinations, students may gain conceptual knowledge without sufficient exposure to the practical interactive and problem-solving dimensions of translator training.

The assessment system is unchanged 40%/60% in almost all courses, measuring students as language learners rather than as developing translation trainees. The result is a program in which the staff-to-course ratio, faculty specialisation profile, and instructional model converge to produce the same outcome: students receive extensive theoretical exposure to translation but limited opportunity to practise it as professionals in training - contradicting both the stated objectives of the program and the pedagogical standards identified by Kiraly (2000) and Pym (2014).

c)Infrastructure and learning resources:

The third challenge is the most directly evidenced by the APP documentary record. Under the sections on laboratories nor library resources, the document states (None). There is no translation laboratory, no licensed CAT software, no interpretation facility, and no library collection for the specialization. Bowker (2002), identifies that translation laboratory as the fundamental resources of any contemporary translation program, because the competencies that define professional translation today such as, translation memory management, terminology extraction, machine translation post-editing are inseparable from the tools used perform them. The program lists " *Machine Translation"*, *Audio-visual Translation*" and *"Interpreting"*, among its offering courses, while providing none of the physical or digital environment these courses required, showing a structural gap between its curriculum ambitions and its material realities.

7- Findings

The present study sets out to provide the first systematic report of the Translation Section at the Department of English in University of Zawia since its establishment in 2017-2018. Drawing on the section 's Academiv Program Profile (APP,2023), and direct observation, the study addresses four research questions concerning the section's achievements, challenges, alignments with the stated objectives and the recommendations that follow from the evidence.

The findings confirm that the section has achieved genuine foundational legitimacy. It has operated continuously for over seven years, graduated multiple cohorts, maintained a graduation research projects in Translation Studies, and the comply with institutional schedules and accreditation requirements, pointing that the program is highly continued by the commitment of its administration staff and students in the first place. Speaking is regarded as one of the most vital abilities of a language when learning a second or foreign tongue. In the rapidly advancing 21st century, diverse innovative technologies are being introduced to instruct English in classrooms at the same time, three structural challenges are identified and formally corroborated by APP.(Samah Asswail,2026).

First, the curriculum defers translation-competence-based content to the second half of the programme, provides no courses in CAT tools, AI-assisted translation, or LLM workflows, and records zero practical training hours - while retaining a course on' Using Dictionaries and Resources' whose professional relevance has been substantially weakened by the digital transformation of translation practice. Second, instruction is delivered predominantly through traditional lectures by non-specialist faculty, without workshops, peer-review tasks, or authentic translation environments of the kind that Kiraly (2000) and Pym (2014) identify as essential to professional formation. Third, the APP explicitly records the absence of any specialised laboratory, interpretation facility, or library collection- a formally acknowledged infrastructure gap that structurally prevents the delivery of several of the curriculum’s own listed courses in a professionally meaningful way.

Taken together, these findings answer the study’s primary question: the section has built a real and functioning institutional foundation, but has not yet achieved the professional formation its stated objectives require. The gap is structural and not motivational, and is therefore amenable to reform.

8- Discussion

The findings present a section that has achieved foundational legitimacy but has not yet achieved the professional formation its stated objectives require - a distinction that maps directly onto the gap Atari (2012) identifies as characteristic of Arab translation programms:

institutions that have established translation as an academic category without fully building the conditions for translation as professional practice.

The curriculum challenge is best understood through Pym's (2003, 2014) distinction between linguistic competence and translation competence. A program that occupies its first four semesters with general language skills is treating linguistic competence as a sufficient foundation for professional translation- precisely the assumption Pym's framework contradicts. The consequence, observable through participant observation, is that students in the early years frequently lack disciplinary orientation and professional motivation - a problem that intensive later-stage instruction cannot fully reverse.

The technological gap is particularly urgent in the current case. Moorkens et al. (2018) and Vieira et al. (2021) demonstrate that post-editing and AI-tool literacy are no longer advanced competencies but entry-level market expectations. The program retains a Using Dictionaries and Resources course while making no provision for LLM-assisted translation, is preparing graduates for a version of the profession that no longer exists in its traditional form. As Al-Hadithy (2015) noted in the UAE context, the gap between the traditional and the modern translation classroom is widening at a step that requires deliberate curricular intervention.

The pedagogical challenge reflects what Kiraly (2000) describes as the tendency of language departments to teach about translation rather than through it. The uniform 40%/60% assessment model, applied identically across all eight semesters from Introduction to Linguistics to Simultaneous Interpreting, treats a professional competency as though it were a body of declarative knowledge to be examined conflating two fundamentally different learning outcomes.

The infrastructure finding should be read alongside Alshniet's (2024) account of the University of Tripoli's Translation Department, which documents similar gaps in a program operating since 2008. The persistence of these conditions across Libyan translation programs over time suggests a structural institutional pattern rather than a transitional phase, requiring planned strategic intervention.

9- Recommendations

Based on the study's findings the following recommendations are addressed to the administration of the faculty and department:

1- Curriculum Reform

- Integrate translation-competence-based content from the first semester, beginning with an introductory course on the theory, history, and professional ethics of translation.
- Replace the Using Dictionaries and Resources course with a course on AI and Digital Translation Tools, covering CAT platforms (e.g., OmegaT, SDL Trados), LLM-assisted translation, and machine translation post-editing.
- Introduce a mandatory field placement component in the final year to provide supervised professional translation experience.

2- Pedagogy

- Replace a part of lecture hours with structured translation workshops incorporating peer critique and authentic text assignments.
- Introduce portfolio-based assessment in at least two specialisation courses per year alongside the existing examination system.

3- Faculty Development

- Prioritise recruitment of staff with postgraduate specialisation in Translation Studies.
- Support current staff in pursuing professional development in translation technology and contemporary translation pedagogy.

▪Engage professional translators as visiting practitioners in applied courses such as Legal Translation and Diplomatic Translation.

4- Infrastructure

▪Designate a room as a translation laboratory with networked computers and install Omega T as a free interim CAT solution.

•Establish a basic reference library for the section.

•Subscribe to at least one-open- access translation studies databases.

10- Conclusion

This paper has provided the first systematic evaluative account of the Translation Section at the Department of English, University of Zawia, drawing on the APP (2023) and participant observation. The findings confirm a program that has achieved genuine institutional foundations- continuous operation, multiple graduating cohorts, supervised research, and regulatory compliance - under conditions of significant structural constraint.

They also confirm three interrelated challenges, formally documented in the APP: a curriculum misaligned with contemporary translation comptence frameworks and lacking of technology training; a pedagogical model that emphasizes passive reception over authentic professional practice; and a complete absence of the physical and digital infrastructure that modern translator training demands. These findings are consistent with the regional patterns documented by Atari (2012), Al-Hadithy (2015), and Alshniet (2024), and call for the same response: planned, coordinated reform aligning curriculum design, faculty development, pedagogical practice, and infrastructure investment within a coherent programmatic vision.

The section has demonstrated the institutional will to exist. The task now is to build the conditions in which it can fulfil the professional ambitions with which it was founded. Future research should examine graduate employment outcomes, investigate student perceptions of the program's professional relevance, and conduct comparative studies of translation sections across Libyan universities to build an evidence base for national-level policy recommendations in translator training.

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