

# Students' reflections on integrating theory and practice in translation: A qualitative study of an academic–practitioner collaborative course

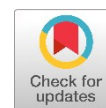
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## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history

Received 12 June 2025

Revised 12 July 2025

Accepted 4 August 2025

### Keywords

Reflective practice

Translator education

Theory and practice integration

Student reflection

## ABSTRACT

This research examines students' reflections on the integration of theoretical knowledge and practical application within a translation curriculum that combines academic instruction with sessions led by industry practitioners. Sixteen students in their fifth semester from the English Education Department of Universitas Sarjanawiyata Tamansiswa participated in this investigation, having engaged in both theoretical lectures and practical workshops as components of the *Principles in Translating and Interpreting* course. Data were obtained through reflective journals and semi-structured interviews, subsequently undergoing thematic analysis. The results indicate that academic sessions provided crucial theoretical foundations, whereas practitioner-led activities facilitated students in applying, testing, and attaining a deeper comprehension of these theories within authentic translation environments. Systematic reflection enabled students to identify challenges, develop effective translation strategies, and enhance their confidence and professional mindset. Many participants reported shifting from seeing themselves solely as students to perceiving themselves as emerging professionals. Supported by recent research highlighting reflective practice as a catalyst for developing professional competence and learner autonomy (Dangerfield & Napier, 2016; Korol, 2024; Pietrzak, 2019b), these findings underscore the value of designing translation curricula that integrate theory, real-world practice, and structured reflection. The study further suggests that such integration can strengthen students' readiness for the demands of professional translation work and guide curriculum developers in creating more practice-oriented, reflective learning environments.



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**How to Cite:** Kristanto, T, M, A. & Sudirman, A. (2025). Students' reflections on integrating theory and practice in translation: A qualitative study of an academic–practitioner collaborative course. *English Language Teaching Educational Journal*, 8(2), 78-91. <https://doi.org/10.12928/eltej.v8i2.14046>

## 1. Introduction

Translation is a discipline that requires both theoretical knowledge and practical skills, as discussed in Munday et al. (2022) and Nord (2018). While translation theory provides essential foundations, such as linguistic structures, translation strategies, and cultural adaptation, translation practice requires real-world problem-solving skills, professional adaptability, and industry experience. One of the ongoing challenges in translation education is to ensure that students can bridge the gap between theoretical instruction and the practical demands of the profession (Kiraly, 2015). Many translation courses aim to address this issue by combining academic and practitioner-led approaches, enabling

students to learn from both perspectives and develop a comprehensive understanding of translation (Chairina et al., 2025; González-Davies & Enríquez-Raído, 2016; Yin, 2019). Recent research also shows that translation programs benefit when theory and practice are situated within authentic contexts (Dewi, 2019; Munday et al., 2022; Nord, 2018).

The academic aspect of translator education generally emphasizes theoretical concepts, text interpretation, and methodological strategies (Pietrzak, 2019a; Siregar & Stroupe, 2025). In contrast, the practice-focused component exposes learners to the realities of translation work, such as professional processes, client demands, and industry norms. Numerous studies have underscored the necessity of finding a balance between these two elements, noting that students who engage with both academic and practical viewpoints are more effectively equipped for careers in translation (Orlando, 2016; Sofyan & Tarigan, 2023). Upon finishing their studies, the students can handle translation assignments and navigate potential challenges (Liu, 2017).

Related to the integration of theory and practice in translation courses, Dewi (2019) highlights the importance of theoretical competence in guiding decision-making in translation practice and discusses transfer competence, particularly concerning the Skopos theory and strategic decision-making, which encourages students to reflect on their application of theoretical knowledge in real-world contexts. She also underscores professional competence, including ethical considerations and industry expectations, reinforcing the role of practitioner collaboration in shaping the students' mindset. Additionally, she adds that technological competence, such as the use of CAT tools and machine translation, is relevant to understanding how students integrate technology with theoretical principles. However, despite efforts to integrate theory and practice, students often struggle to apply theoretical principles in real-life translation tasks, underscoring the need for structured reflection to facilitate this integration (Kiraly, 2015).

Reflection involves thoughtfully reviewing and analyzing past experiences to guide future actions (Farrell, 2015; Tiessen, 2018). It plays an important role in developing students' self-awareness, self-regulation, and professional growth. Unlike self-assessment, which applies clear standards to evaluate performance through convergent thinking, reflection is more descriptive and open-ended, relying on divergent thinking. As such, reflection tends to be more passive and retrospective, while self-assessment is active and focused on improvement (Fraser et al., 2024; Pietrzak, 2019b). Together, these practices highlight the value of structured reflection as a foundation for meaningful self-assessment in translator education.

Contemporary translation education has established and evaluated various reflective instruments, such as paired or group discussions, reflective interviews, checklists, and mechanisms for peer feedback (Crezee & Marianacci, 2022; Holewik, 2021; Zohrabi & Xodabande, 2024). These tools not only enhance critical reflection but also promote collaborative learning among students and help them improve their practices. Situated learning frameworks also highlight the importance of applying these tools within real-world translation contexts (González-Davies & Enríquez-Raído, 2016). Among these reflective instruments, journals appear to be the most utilized in the training of both translators and interpreters. Recent research highlights their significance in connecting theory with practice and cultivating more profound professional insights (Korol, 2024; Pietrzak, 2019a). Through the journals, students can critically reflect on their competencies in theory and practice, assess how coursework shapes their understanding of the profession, and identify which skills or knowledge will be most useful for their future as translators.

The role of reflective practice in translator training has been widely examined in recent studies, which emphasize that professionals need to critically analyze their experiences to develop expertise (Dangerfield & Napier, 2016; Korol, 2024). In translation studies, reflection helps students evaluate their decision-making processes, recognize challenges, and refine their strategies. Recent scholarship also promotes collaborative and peer reflection as part of situated learning, highlighting translation as a cognitive, social, and cultural activity embedded in real-world contexts (Fraser et al., 2024; Zohrabi & Xodabande, 2024). Through these reflective and collaborative activities, students learn by applying theory to practice and working in teams, supporting the goal of developing reflective and adaptive practitioners. Moreover, research shows that multilingual competence and translanguaging strategies help students navigate complex audiences and genres in professional contexts (Laviosa, 2019; Rajendram et al., 2023).

A growing body of research highlights that structured reflection strengthens translation competence. Orlando (2016) shows that practices like self-assessment and peer discussion raise students' awareness of their translation strategies and support more deliberate linguistic and ethical choices. Likewise, Kim (2016) finds that critically linking prior knowledge with new theoretical concepts transforms passive understanding into practical, applicable knowledge, key to building professional competence. Translation theories also serve as valuable guides, especially when students encounter complex tasks, by providing systematic, expert-informed strategies. Overall, reflective engagement functions as a cognitive bridge between theory and practice, encouraging deeper learning, adaptive reasoning, and professional growth.

Expanding upon Schön's (1983) concept of the reflective practitioner, recent research further highlights how collaborative learning frameworks and structured reflection enhance translation competence (Dangerfield & Napier, 2016; Korol, 2024; Zohrabi & Xodabande, 2024). These studies suggest that combining individual reflection with peer discussions and project-based collaboration enables students to move beyond passive understanding toward active engagement with translation challenges. According to this research, learners develop greater autonomy and a deeper, more integrated understanding of their professional roles when structured reflection is intentionally embedded alongside collaborative activities (Fraser et al., 2024; Siregar & Stroupe, 2025). As a result, students are better equipped to critically analyze their translation strategies, adapt to varied professional contexts, and internalize theoretical concepts in ways that directly inform practice.

In research on translator training, the integration of multiple data sources—particularly reflective journals and semi-structured interviews—is widely recognized as an effective strategy for gaining a deeper and more nuanced understanding of students' learning processes (Crezee & Marianacci, 2022; Pietrzak, 2019b). While reflective journals provide valuable self-reported accounts of students' experiences and perceptions, interviews serve a complementary role by allowing researchers to probe further into themes that may only be hinted at in written reflections. This process helps reveal students' evolving cognitive and professional development in greater detail. Triangulating these qualitative data sources not only enriches the findings but also strengthens the credibility and trustworthiness of the analysis (Nowell et al., 2017). By inviting participants to elaborate on their reflections during interviews, researchers can better capture the complex interplay between theoretical instruction and practical application that characterizes translator education.

Moreover, designing the curriculum plays a crucial role in linking professional practice with translation theory. Recent studies indicate that integrating AI tools can improve feedback and engagement during revision tasks, thus fostering reflective practice and enhancing learning experiences (Xu et al., 2024). Additionally, recent research investigates how to systematically assess translation revision and post-editing skills to enhance translator training (Robert et al., 2024). Effective curriculum models should include opportunities for mentorship, collaboration, and contextual learning, specifically supporting the integration of academic teaching with real-world experiences. For instance, universities might develop courses that consistently invite industry professionals to lead workshops on particular topics such as technical, legal, or medical translation (Orlando, 2016). Such integration should be established in the course design from the outset rather than being considered a secondary addition. Furthermore, research indicates that project-based learning enhances students' practical skills and understanding of real-world challenges by having them carry out actual translation projects under the mentorship of experienced professionals (Sofyan & Tarigan, 2023; Tandiana et al., 2025). A comparative analysis of European MA translation programs reveals differences in the ways internships and theoretical components are combined (Torres-Simón & Pym, 2019).

To ensure that these experiences support deeper learning, reflective components must also be built into the curriculum. These can take the form of learning journals, reflective portfolios, or guided peer discussions, which allow students to critically assess their decision-making processes and professional growth. By thoughtfully designing curricula that align theory with practice and integrate reflection as a core pedagogical feature, institutions can better prepare students to navigate the demands of professional translation work (Siregar & Stroupe, 2025).

Despite these efforts, gaps remain in understanding how students experience and make sense of academic-practitioner collaboration. While some studies have examined translation curriculum effectiveness, few have focused on students' reflective engagement with both theoretical and practice-led components. This study aims to address that gap by exploring students' perspectives on how theory

and practice are integrated, and how their reflections contribute to their development as future translators. The findings are expected to inform the development of more responsive and practice-oriented curricula in translator education.

Thus, this study investigates students' reflections on integrating theory and practice in translation, focusing on their perspectives on both academic and practitioner-led sessions. By examining their experiences, this research contributes to ongoing discussions about pedagogical best practices in translator training and offers recommendations for enhancing translation education curricula.

## 2. Method

This study applied a reflective journal procedure as a central qualitative tool to explore how students connected theoretical knowledge with practical experience. By guiding students to systematically document their thoughts, challenges, and insights after each stage of the integrated translation course, the reflective journals served as a primary means of capturing individual learning processes and professional development. Together with semi-structured interviews, this approach provided a richer understanding of students' reflections on integrating theory and practice. To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, data triangulation was employed by comparing themes emerging from both journals and interviews, ensuring that interpretations were well-grounded and representative of students' shared experiences.

### 2.1. Participants

The participants of this study were 16 fifth-semester students from the English Education Program at Universitas Sarjanawiyata Tamansiswa (UST). These students were enrolled in the Principles in Translating and Interpreting course, which is designed to introduce both theoretical and practical aspects of translation. The group was purposefully selected as they had completed both academic sessions with their lecturer and practice-oriented sessions with a professional translator, making them suitable subjects for exploring reflections on the integration of theory and practice in translation. Notably, the practitioner-led sessions conducted as part of the *Praktisi Mengajar* program in 2024 is part of the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) policy, which brings industry professionals to co-teach university courses and help bridge the gap between academic learning and professional practice. Funded by the Ministry of Research and Technology, this initiative supports recommendations to include authentic, industry-based experiences in translation education (Torres-Simón & Pym, 2019; Dewi, 2019; González-Davies & Enríquez-Raído, 2016).

### 2.2. Data Collection Technique

Data were collected using two main instruments: post-course reflective journals and semi-structured interviews. The reflective journals were written by each student at the end of the course, guided by prompts that asked them to evaluate their experiences of learning translation theory and engaging with real-world practice (Korol, 2024; Pietrzak, 2019a). The interviews were conducted individually and focused on the students' perceptions of how theory and practice were integrated, the challenges they encountered, and the value they derived from each learning component. These methods reflect recommendations in recent scholarship for using multi-method reflective tools to capture students' perspectives more holistically (Alolaywi, 2022; Crezee & Marianacci, 2022).

### 2.3. Data Analysis Technique

This study employed a qualitative case study design to analyze students' reflections on integrating theory and practice in translation training. Two data sources were used: post-course reflective journals and semi-structured interviews. Each data set was analyzed using thematic analysis, following the six-phase process originally proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), as described and applied by Nowell et al. (2017) to meet trustworthiness criteria in qualitative research. The analytical framework also drew on recent studies that emphasize the value of reflection-on-action and structured reflective practices for developing translation competence (Dalol & Ali, 2023; Korol, 2024; Pietrzak, 2019a).

#### 1) Reflective Journals

Students' reflective journals were collected after the completion of both academic and practitioner-led sessions. These journals contained students' self-assessments of their learning experiences, with prompts focusing on theoretical understanding, practical challenges, and professional development (Pietrzak, 2019a). The analysis began with a thorough review of all entries. Initial codes were

generated manually and categorized under emergent themes such as “application of theory”, “professional insights from practitioners”, and “personal growth”. The themes were then reviewed to ensure coherence and accuracy in representing students’ retrospective evaluations. The analysis emphasized how students internalized translation theory, processed their experiences, and formulated learning outcomes through reflection-on-action.

To guide students in writing meaningful and structured reflections, a post-course reflective journal prompt was developed as part of the data collection instrument.

### **Post-Course Reflective Journal**

#### **Instructions:**

Write a reflective journal summarizing your learning experience throughout the translation course. Focus on the integration of theoretical knowledge and practical skills. Use the following guiding questions:

#### **A. Overall Learning Journey**

What were your main takeaways from the academic sessions?

What were your main takeaways from the practitioner sessions?

How do you think the two approaches (academic and practitioner) complement each other?

#### **B. Challenges and Solutions**

What challenges did you face in combining theory and practice during the course?

How did you address or overcome those challenges?

#### **C. Personal Growth and Insights**

How has this course influenced your understanding of translation as a profession?

What skills or knowledge from this course will be most beneficial for your future as a translator?

#### **D. Suggestions for Improvement**

What aspects of the course could be improved to integrate theory and practice better?

### **2) Interviews**

Given the small number of participants (N=16), all students enrolled in the Principles in Translating and Interpreting course took part in semi-structured interviews. These interviews explored students’ reflections on combining academic theory with practitioner-led practice and complemented the reflective journals for triangulation. Thematic analysis focused on students’ learning experiences, the interplay between theory and practice, and the challenges they encountered. Analyzing journals and interviews separately preserved the integrity of each data source, while triangulation enhanced validity by revealing recurring patterns and insights. Guided by the concept of reflection-on-action, this approach captured how students developed translation competence and professional identity through integrated learning.

In addition to describing the analysis, the study also developed an interview guide to help structure the semi-structured interviews. This guide aims to encourage students to reflect critically on their learning experiences, the integration of theory and practice, challenges faced, and professional development.

### **Interview Guidelines**

#### **Instructions:**

Answer each question as honestly and thoroughly as possible, drawing on specific examples from your coursework, both in the academic sessions and the practitioner-led workshops. There are no right or wrong answers—your insights will contribute to a deeper understanding of how students experience and respond to translation training that combines theoretical learning with professional practice.



**A. Learning Experience**

How would you describe your experience learning theory in class?

How was your experience working with the translation practitioner?

What are the main differences between learning with your lecturer and with the practitioner?

**B. Integration of Theory and Practice**

Do you feel that the theory taught in class supports the practices introduced? Why or why not?

Can you give an example of a situation where theory helped you understand the practice, or vice versa?

**C. Challenges and Strategies**

What was the biggest challenge you faced in integrating theory and practice?

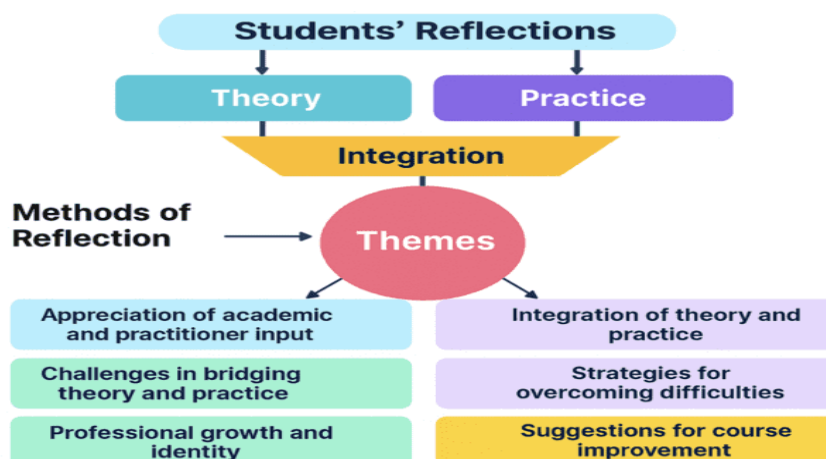
How did you overcome that challenge?

**D. Personal Reflection**

What do you think was the most valuable aspect of the practitioner sessions?

How has this experience influenced your view of translation as a profession?

To illustrate this process, [Figure 1](#) shows how academic instruction and practitioner workshops were combined, followed by student reflections documented in journals and interviews. This analysis led to a deeper understanding of how reflective practice bridges theory and real-world translation practice.



**Fig. 1.** Flowchart Illustrating the Reflective Learning Process in an Integrated Translation Course

As shown in [Figure 1](#), this sequence—from integrated teaching to reflective journaling and interviews, followed by thematic analysis—helped capture students' evolving perceptions and strategies. By systematically linking learning activities, data collection, and analysis, the study ensured that students' voices remained central to understanding how theoretical knowledge and practical experience interact in translator training.

### 3. Finding and Discussion

#### 3.1. Findings

The thematic analysis revealed six main themes describing how students bridged theory and practice. These themes illustrate the dynamic learning process facilitated by the integration of academic sessions, practitioner-led workshops, and reflective practice ([Dangerfield & Napier, 2016](#); [Korol, 2024](#)).

To provide a clear overview of the qualitative data analysis, Table 1 below summarizes the six key themes identified from students' reflective journals and interviews. These themes reflect students' evolving understanding of translation, their experiences in bridging theory and practice, the strategies they employed to overcome challenges, and the formation of their professional identity. Presenting this summary helps contextualize the detailed discussion that follows and illustrates the breadth of perspectives captured through the integrated reflective process.

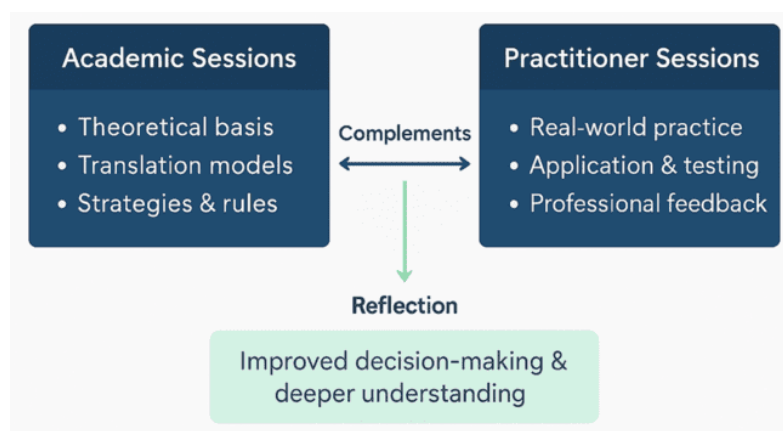
### 1) *Appreciation of Academic and Practitioner Input*

Most students (14 out of 16 in reflective journals and 13 out of 16 in interviews) expressed appreciation for the academic sessions, highlighting their value in building a strong theoretical foundation. These sessions were particularly noted for enhancing students' understanding of key translation principles such as equivalence, translation strategies, and the analysis of source and target texts. In addition, nearly all students (15 out of 16 in journals and 10 out of 16 in interviews) reported that the practitioner-led sessions were instrumental in exposing them to the realities of professional translation practice. These sessions provided practical experience, including the use of computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools like MemoQ, receiving professional feedback, and learning about client expectations and industry standards. The integration of AI tools can also support reflective revision by giving immediate feedback on draft translations, encouraging students to critically assess their own work (Xu et al., 2024). One student emphasized this distinction, stating in an interview, *"From the lecturer, I understood the principles behind translation, but it was the practitioner who made me realize how flexible and responsive I needed to be in real-world settings."*

### 2) *Integration of Theory and Practice*

Most students (13 out of 16) expressed that the academic and practitioner sessions complemented each other in both journals and interviews. They found that theory offered a basis for understanding translation decisions, while practice helped them apply and refine those decisions in context.

Figure 2 below illustrates how students viewed the dynamic interplay between theoretical instruction and practical experience.



**Fig. 2.** Complementarity of academic theory and practitioner-led practice in students' reflections

Interview: *"Sometimes I didn't fully understand the theory until I saw how it worked during a real translation task."*

Journal: *"This course helped me understand that theory is not just abstract—it becomes real when applied to actual texts."*

### 3) *Challenges in Bridging Theory and Practice*

Students used strategies like improving English skills, collaborating with peers, reviewing theoretical frameworks, and creating checklists to support their translation practice. Reflective journals helped them systematically track these strategies over time. One student noted, *"I created a list of strategies based on class discussions and used it to check my translation,"* showing how journaling promoted metacognitive awareness and critical self-evaluation.

Semi-structured interviews provided a chance to discuss these strategies in more depth and highlight the value of peer support and reflective thinking. As one student explained, *"Discussing problems with classmates helped me connect theory with what I did in practice."* This dual approach—

combining journals and interviews—captured both evolving reflections and students’ reasoning about why certain strategies were effective in bridging theory and practice.

Common challenges reported included difficulty translating into English due to limited vocabulary or grammar (10 students), applying theory in practice (8 students), and adapting to different teaching approaches (5 students). Reflective journals documented students’ real-time struggles, such as *“Sometimes I knew the theory, but when I had to apply it, I wasn’t sure how to start the translation.”* Interviews offered space to explain these reflections further, with one student sharing, *“I got stuck when the practitioner told us to simplify a sentence, but in class we learned to maintain the original structure.”*

Overall, combining reflective journals and interviews provided a richer, triangulated view of students’ learning processes. This approach revealed not only the specific challenges students faced but also how they analysed, adapted, and grew in their understanding of translation as both an academic discipline and a professional practice.

#### 4) Challenges in Bridging Theory and Practice

Students adopted a range of strategies to overcome challenges they faced during the translation process, including improving their English proficiency, collaborating with peers, systematically reviewing theoretical concepts, and developing personal tools such as checklists. Reflective journaling played an important role in this process by enabling students to document their evolving strategies, notice recurring difficulties, and consciously track improvements over time. One student wrote in their journal, *“I created a list of strategies based on class discussions and used it to check my translation.”* This demonstrates how reflective writing encouraged self-monitoring and critical thinking about individual translation decisions.

In parallel, the semi-structured interviews provided a space for students to elaborate on these strategies verbally, offering richer insight into how collaborative reflection and peer feedback supported their learning. As expressed by one student during an interview, *“Discussing problems with classmates helped me connect theory with what I did in practice.”*

By using both reflective journals and interviews, the study was able to capture not only what strategies students employed but also how they understood and articulated the value of these strategies in bridging theoretical learning with real-world translation practice.

#### 5) Challenges in Bridging Theory and Practice

Thirteen students described a significant transformation in their understanding of what it means to be a translator. Initially, many viewed translation primarily as a linguistic exercise focused on accuracy and word choice. Through the combined experience of academic instruction, practitioner-led workshops, and structured reflection, they began to see translation instead as a professional responsibility that demands critical judgment, ethical awareness, and sensitivity to audience and context.

One student articulated this shift in a reflective journal: *“Now I see that translation is not just changing words, but making sure the message is appropriate for the audience.”* This highlights how journaling encouraged deeper critical engagement with the role of translators as communicators rather than mere language converters.

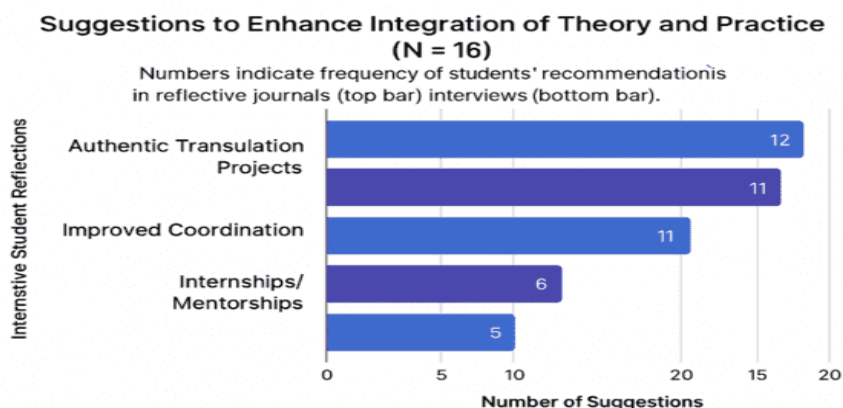
The interviews complemented these written reflections by providing space for students to express how their sense of identity evolved throughout the course. As one student shared during an interview, *“This course made me feel like a translator, not just a student.”*

By combining these two data sources, the study was able to capture both the internal realization documented in journals and the more explicit articulation of professional growth shared in interviews, together demonstrating how integrated learning experiences can foster the development of a reflective and confident translator identity.

#### 6) Challenges in Bridging Theory and Practice

Several students offered constructive suggestions for improving the integration of theory and practice within the course. To illustrate these suggestions visually, see [Figure 3](#) below, which summarizes the main areas for improvement identified by students in both reflective journals and interviews.



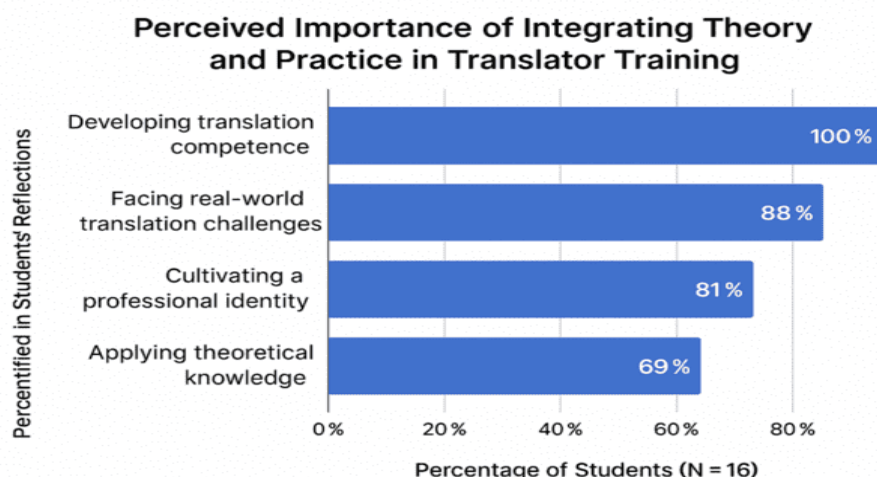


**Fig. 3.** Suggestions for improving the integration of theory and practice in the translation course

A total of 12 out of 16 students in their reflective journals and 11 out of 16 during interviews recommended enhancements such as incorporating more authentic translation projects, strengthening the coordination between academic instruction and practitioner-led sessions, and expanding the use of translation technologies. Additionally, 6 students in journals and 5 in interviews proposed the inclusion of internships or mentorship programs to expose them to real-world translation workflows further. These suggestions reflect students' growing metacognitive awareness and their desire for a more seamless and professionally oriented learning experience. As one student expressed in an interview, *"It would help if the practitioner and lecturer followed up on each other's sessions."* Similarly, a journal entry stated, *"Maybe we can simulate a real translation project from start to finish."* Such insights indicate a reflective maturity and a proactive attitude toward optimizing translator education.

### 3.2. Discussion

The findings of this research emphasize the importance of merging theoretical understanding with hands-on experience in training programs for translators. This combination proves to be most effective when paired with organized reflection, allowing students to relate their classroom education to practical applications (Pietrzak, 2019b; Zohrabi & Xodabande, 2024). To illustrate this, Figure 4 below shows students' reflections on how combining theory and practice contributed to their learning and professional growth.



**Fig. 4.** Students' reflections on the importance of merging theoretical knowledge with practical experience.

By participating in reflective tasks such as journaling and conducting interviews (Dangerfield & Napier, 2016; Farrell, 2015), students progressed from merely absorbing content to critically assessing their translation methods. They became more proactive in evaluating their decisions and connecting those choices to both theoretical concepts and practical requirements. Importantly, these reflections

ultimately translated into measurable improvements in translation proficiency, as students learned to justify their choices, revise based on professional feedback, and approach texts with heightened audience awareness—key indicators of professional readiness.

Building directly on Schön's (1983) original concept of reflection-on-action—defined as *"the process by which practitioners reflect on their actions after the event to discover how their knowing-in-action may have contributed to an unexpected outcome"* (Schön, 1983)—the findings show that students gained deeper insights when they reviewed their translation experiences after completing tasks. This reflective process enabled them to compare academic knowledge with practical realities, recognize inconsistencies, and refine their strategies. Reflection thus served not only to consolidate learning but also to help students anticipate professional challenges—such as balancing accuracy with readability—and respond with theory-informed decisions. In this way, reflection supported the development of adaptive, context-sensitive translation competence directly applicable to professional practice (Dangerfield & Napier, 2016; Fraser et al., 2024; Pietrzak, 2019b).

Students consistently recognized the academic component of the course as fundamental in shaping their theoretical understanding of translation. Concepts such as equivalence, Skopos theory, and communicative translation were regarded as critical tools that informed their analytical approach and helped them view translation as a purposeful, audience-focused, and culturally sensitive activity. However, it was through practitioner-led sessions that these theories were fully realized, allowing students to navigate authentic translation scenarios. The theme of *appreciation of academic and practitioner input* also revealed underlying tensions: some students initially struggled to reconcile the theoretical emphasis on fidelity and linguistic precision with practitioners' demands for flexibility and functional adaptation. Rather than undermining learning, these tensions encouraged students to reflect critically on the nature of translation and recognize it as an inherently context-driven process.

The practical sessions challenged students to translate theoretical knowledge into action while navigating authentic professional demands. As one student observed, *"At first, theory seemed abstract, but when the practitioner asked us to justify our translation choices, I realized I needed to connect my decisions with what we had learned in class."* Another student shared a similar realization, stating, *"We learned about Skopos theory in lectures, but I didn't understand its relevance until I had to choose a tone for a tourism brochure and explain why it suited the target readers."* By learning to articulate their reasoning, students developed habits directly transferable to professional contexts, such as explaining choices to clients or creating project briefs.

This progression from theoretical abstraction to situated competence aligns with recent perspectives emphasizing that learners develop translation skills most effectively through active participation, reflection, and socially situated practice (Fraser et al., 2024; Korol, 2024; Siregar & Stroupe, 2025). Rather than viewing knowledge as something transmitted from teacher to student, these approaches frame learning as a dynamic process shaped by collaboration, reflective engagement, and authentic professional experiences. In this study, students' reflections indicated that their understanding of translation theory became significantly more meaningful and applicable once they engaged in hands-on translation tasks under the guidance of professional practitioners. The transition from abstract classroom discussions to contextualized practice revealed gaps in their comprehension but also created opportunities for deeper learning and strategic growth.

A total of 16 students, as reflected in both journals and interviews, reported that after getting helpful criticism from professionals who pushed them to look beyond theoretical definitions, their capacity to defend and explain translation choices had significantly improved. One student said, *"After receiving feedback from the practitioner, I had to revise my translation, and I began to understand why certain theories were important—it wasn't just about knowing them but using them to make better choices."* As one student put it, *"I was forced to think more critically and make sure my translation fit the real context when I had to explain why I chose a certain expression for a client brief—it helped me understand the theory better."* These observations highlight the fact that developing translation competency requires thoughtful practice and genuine engagement with professional standards and expectations rather than just theoretical exposure.

Furthermore, the study highlights the constructive tension that emerged between academic instruction and the practical demands of professional translation. While classroom-based learning frequently emphasized theoretical accuracy, linguistic equivalence, and fidelity to the source text, the practitioner-led sessions introduced students to a different set of expectations grounded in industry

realities, namely, audience orientation, functional effectiveness, and adaptability to client briefs. This contrast prompted students to reflect critically on the nature of translation and recognize that it is not governed by fixed rules but shaped by contextual demands and communicative goals. Evidence from the data shows that 10 out of 16 students explicitly mentioned this tension in their reflective journals, describing moments when they had to choose between sticking closely to theoretical models or adapting to practical needs. Similarly, in interviews, 9 students shared concrete examples where practitioner feedback challenged their theoretical assumptions and encouraged more flexible strategies. One student noted, *"In class, we were taught to keep close to the source text, but during practice, I was asked to adjust the tone and expressions to suit the target reader. That's when I understood how context can change what's considered a good translation."* Another student expressed a similar realization: *"At first, I thought I had to choose between what the lecturer taught and what the practitioner expected, but later I saw that both had value depending on the purpose of the translation."* These reflections demonstrate how navigating differing expectations deepened students' understanding of translation as a flexible, decision-driven process—an insight that aligns with Risku's (2016) model of situated learning, where translation competence is context-sensitive and constructed through real-life practice rather than abstract rules.

Notably, Students increasingly recognized translation as a socially and professionally situated activity (Korol, 2024; Siregar & Stroupe, 2025), moving beyond seeing it merely as a technical exercise focused on accuracy and equivalence. Exposure to real-world translation tasks and practitioner feedback helped them view translation as a set of audience-focused, context-sensitive decisions shaped by genre and purpose. This shift was supported by data: 12 out of 16 students reported in journals a change from a purely linguistic view to a broader, communicative perspective, while 11 noted in interviews that practitioner feedback encouraged them to consider user expectations. This aligns with recent research highlighting that critically evaluating one's actions fosters professional competence (Fraser et al., 2024; Zohrabi & Xodabande, 2024). As one student reflected, *"Translation choices depend on what the message needs to achieve in the target language,"* and another noted, *"Now I think about who will read the translation and what they need from it."* This growing metacognitive awareness is key for developing reflective, professionally competent translators and suggests that translator education should intentionally cultivate this mindset to help students adapt theory to diverse real-world contexts.

In developing strategies to manage translation challenges, students drew on several approaches. Many used theoretical checklists from class to guide their decisions, while others highlighted the benefits of peer discussions and feedback from lecturers and practitioners. Reflective journaling also proved especially valuable, helping students identify patterns in their reasoning, recognize weaknesses, and track progress over time. As one student explained, *"Keeping a journal helped me notice patterns and fix things over time,"* and another noted, *"Writing after each session showed me what worked and what didn't."* These findings support earlier research suggesting that reflective practice not only improves strategic competence but also fosters autonomy and critical self-awareness (Dangerfield & Napier, 2016; Korol, 2024; Pietrzak, 2019b).

Another key finding of this study was the gradual development of students' professional identity as translators. By engaging with theoretical frameworks and practice-based tasks led by practitioners, students shifted from simply completing assignments to adopting the mindset of professional translators. This shift was reflected in greater confidence, ethical awareness, and a clearer sense of responsibility toward real audiences. One student noted, *"This course made me feel like I was doing real translation work, not just class exercises,"* while another shared, *"For the first time, I felt accountable to a real audience, not just my lecturer."* These reflections indicate that the course structure helped students move beyond technical skills to internalize professional values, audience awareness, and self-directed learning—key aspects of translator education.

Finally, students' suggestions for improving the course provide valuable insights into pedagogical refinement. Their recommendations, such as aligning theoretical and practitioner content more clearly, increasing opportunities for simulated projects, and extending post-task reflections, demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of how learning design influences professional readiness. These suggestions reflect a form of reflective maturity in which learners become active stakeholders in the educational process, not just passive recipients of instruction.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study shows that integrating theoretical instruction, practitioner-led sessions, and structured reflection can significantly enhance student learning and professional development. Students built a solid theoretical foundation while learning to critically assess and adapt translation strategies through reflection. Challenges in bridging theory and practice became valuable learning moments, helping students internalize key concepts and gain confidence as emerging professionals. However, the study also faced limitations, including differences in student engagement, time constraints, and limited access to advanced translation tools. These challenges highlight the need for stronger institutional support and curriculum planning to ensure students can fully apply theoretical knowledge in practice. Overall, the findings underline the importance of designing translation programs that balance academic rigor with authentic, practice-based learning. Collaborative models involving lecturers and practitioners, supported by reflective practice, help students develop both technical competence and professional identity. Future research could explore how such models impact graduates' professional performance or examine the role of technologies like AI in enhancing reflective learning.

#### Acknowledgment

The authors thank all the participants who have shared their voices so that this study could be accomplished. The authors' gratitude also goes to the anonymous reviewers for their constructive and substantial feedback so that this manuscript could be published and reach wider readers.

#### Declarations

- Author contribution** : The research was collaboratively undertaken by both authors, encompassing topic selection, proposal development, methodological application, data analysis, and the preparation of the discussion section. Author 1 assumed primary responsibility for managing the publication process, while both authors jointly contributed to covering the publication fee.
- Funding statement** : No funding is available for this research.
- Conflict of interest** : I declare that there are no competing interests.
- Ethics Declaration** : As the author, I confirm that this work has been written based on ethical research principles in compliance with our university's regulations and that the necessary permission was obtained from the relevant institution during data collection. I fully support ELTEJ's commitment to upholding high standards of professional conduct and practicing honesty in all academic and professional activities.
- Additional information** : No additional information is available for this paper.

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