

Translation Quality at the Threshold of the Profession: Novice Perceptions and Professional Expectations

جودة الترجمة على أعتاب الممارسة المهنية: تصوّرات المترجمين المبتدئين وتوقعات المهنيين

Sena MESMI¹, Yasmine KELLOU², Djamel GOUI³

¹ University of Algiers 2 - Abou Elkacem Saadallah (Algeria), sena.mesmi@univ-alger2.dz

² University of Algiers 2 - Abou Elkacem Saadallah (Algeria), yasminekellou1@yahoo.fr

³ University of Ouargla - Kasdi Merbah (Algeria), djamel_goui@hotmail.com

Received: 30/09/2025

Accepted: 08/11/2025

Published: 28/12/2025

Abstract:

This study aims to investigate novice translators' perceptions of translation quality during the initial transition phase from university training to professional practice in the Algerian market. It adopts an exploratory design combining a questionnaire for trainees and new recruits with semi-structured interviews with professionals involved in supervising professional integration. The descriptive and thematic analysis of the data points to three main themes: the predominance of linguistic accuracy as an assessment criterion in the academic context; a gap in readiness that calls for clearer mechanisms for assessing and refining competence; and a shift in the perception of quality after integrating into the labour market to include client requirements and workflow. The study finds that quality standards and academic assessment mechanisms need to be aligned with market needs through valid and measurable criteria and authentic assessment tasks that explicitly reflect professional constraints.

Keywords: TQA ; Academic Criteria ; Professional Insertion ; Novice Translators; Professional Expectations

ملخص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استقصاء تصوّرات المترجمين المبتدئين لجودة الترجمة في المرحلة الانتقالية الأولى من التكوين الجامعي إلى الممارسة المهنية في سوق الترجمة بالجزائر. وتعتمد تصميمًا استكشافيًا يجمع بين استبيان موجه للمتدربين وحديثي التوظيف ومقابلات شبه منظّمة مع مهنيين ذوي خبرة في الإشراف على الإدماج المهني. وتشير نتائج التحليل الوصفي والموضوعاتي للبيانات إلى ثلاثة محاور أساسية: هيمنة الدقّة اللغوية معيارًا للتقويم في السياق الأكاديمي؛ وفجوة في الجاهزية تستدعي آليات أوضح لتقويم الكفاءة وصقلها؛ كما تكشف تحولًا في تصور المترجمين المبتدئين للجودة بعد الاندماج في سوق العمل ليشمل متطلبات العميل وسير العمل. وتخلص الدراسة إلى ضرورة مواءمة معايير الجودة وآليات التقويم الأكاديمي مع حاجات السوق عبر معايير قابلة للقياس والتحقق، ومهام تقويمية أصيلة تعكس بوضوح القيود المهنية.

كلمات مفتاحية: تقويم جودة الترجمة؛ المعايير الأكاديمية؛ الإدراج المهني؛ المترجمون المبتدئون؛ توقعات المهنيين

1. INTRODUCTION

Translation quality has long been a central but controversial issue in translation studies. Its assessment goes beyond technical measures; it determines how the profession itself gains legitimacy, how translators obtain recognition and authority, and how education programmes ensure effectiveness. Translation quality assessment (TQA) therefore lies at the intersection of pedagogy and professional practice, but continues to be hampered by the absence of consensus on what constitutes “quality” or how it should be assessed. This has given rise to two parallel quality frameworks — academic and professional— that not only diverge in their logic, but also risk complicating the transition from the classroom to the workplace.

Research in Arab and international contexts suggests that these misalignments are widespread. Kellou (2013) underscored the need to articulate explicit standards and move away from impressionistic judgments. A subsequent study by Abanomey and Almosa (2023), which examined 98 Arab faculties, reinforced this finding by showing that the absence of unified criteria results in fragmented and predominantly error-focused practices. Alzamil (2024) reported graduates’ dissatisfaction with their training, which they viewed as inadequate for meeting labour market demands. Similarly, Chakher and Kellou (2021) argue that theory-centred programmes generate a gap with practice. Collectively, these findings highlight two persistent controversies: the absence of standardised criteria and the enduring disconnection between academic training and professional requirements.

This tension frames the problem statement of the present study: although universities assess translation through academic criteria, these practices often fail to equip graduates with the competencies required in the labour market. The present study addresses that gap by focusing on assessment as a mediating practice. Early employment experience represents a critical juncture where novice translators confront discrepancies between academic expectations and professional demands. It is at this point that shortcomings in training become visible, compelling a recalibration of what “quality” means under real constraints. The present research therefore investigates how novice translators in Algeria perceive translation quality across academic and professional contexts, advancing the expectation that early professional experience reshapes and broadens these perceptions. In addition to eliciting novice translators’ own perceptions, the study also incorporates the perspective of professionals who integrate or oversee these novices in the workplace, in order to situate self-reported preparedness and quality concepts against the expectations and assessment practices of the receiving environment.

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do novice translators perceive quality criteria during academic training compared to professional practice?
2. To what extent do novice translators feel academically prepared to meet professional quality requirements?

3. How does early professional experience reshape their understanding of translation quality, and what improvements do they propose for academic training?

The significance of this study lies in its focus on assessment as the hinge between academic training and professional practice. While much research has addressed curriculum design, the evaluative dimension remains underexplored despite its formative and summative role in shaping translators' competence and confidence. By situating the inquiry in the Algerian context—a setting marked by institutional challenges and growing market demand—the study offers insights with both local and broader pedagogical relevance. Methodologically, it adopts an exploratory, two-source design: a structured questionnaire administered to novice translators, complemented by brief semi-structured interviews with professionals responsible for their early integration, while prioritising qualitative interpretation in order to capture the lived transitional experience of novice translators as well as the constraints under which their work is actually evaluated. Ultimately, it aims to provide empirical evidence that can support the development of clearer assessment tools and a more integrated understanding of translation quality across educational and professional domains.

2. Literature Review

2. 1. Conceptualizing Translation Quality

The quality of translation is widely acknowledged to be a complex and dynamic concept, subject to contextual variables rather than a fixed or universal standard (House, 1997; Williams, 2004; Gouadec, 2007). The persistent question of what constitutes a “good” translation has given rise to definitions as diverse as the theoretical frameworks that underpin them. As House (1997) points out, different conceptions of translation necessarily produce divergent quality criteria and assessment methodologies, while Colina (2009) observes that these criteria shift depending on the purpose of the assessment, whether educational, professional or theoretical. Consequently, there is no clear definition of what ‘quality’ in translation actually entails, a difficulty that Bowker (2000, p. 183) captures in her description of its “fuzzy and shifting boundaries”. Colina (2009) adds that assessment entails measurement against explicit criteria, whereas evaluation involves inherently subjective, judgmental dimensions.

This lack of conceptual clarity and terminological stability has profoundly influenced assessment practices, where quality is still frequently judged on the basis of subjective impressions of success. This reflects what Martínez Melis and Hurtado Albir (2001, p. 283) identify as “intuitive assessment” which is “very widespread in teaching and in professional practice.” House’s (2015, p. 9) critique of “mentalist

views” reinforces this point by showing how contemporary neo-hermeneutic approaches continue to privilege subjective interpretation, resist systematic application and complicate empirical assessment. The persistence of such impressionistic practices highlights the urgent challenge of articulating evaluation approaches that combine analytical rigour with sensitivity to linguistic, cultural, and ideological contexts—an endeavour that has led to the development of TQA models in professional and academic settings as attempts to reduce subjectivity through explicit criteria.

Thus the explicit aim of TQA, as argued by Abanomey and Almossa (2023, p. 2), is to “de-subjectify translation assessment” through empirically grounded and systematically oriented procedures, an approach that has gradually shaped the field into a discipline seeking to reconcile methodological rigour with sensitive contextual criteria. Yet this orientation toward greater systematisation inevitably foregrounds the role of norms and codified standards in determining what counts as “quality” in translation.

2.2. Translation Quality Assessment Across Contexts

Models of TQA are not confined to a single field. Quality frameworks often circulate between research, pedagogy, and industry. For clarity, the present discussion distinguishes between models primarily rooted in academia and those designed for professional workflows, while acknowledging the overlaps that inevitably connect them.

2.2.1 Academic and Pedagogical Models

TQA in academia has largely emerged as a response to the limits of intuitive judgments, aiming for systematic and replicable procedures. House’s model is one of the most influential in this regard, combining overt–covert distinctions with a comparative text profile grounded in situational dimensions (House, 1997, pp. 36-45). However, Williams (2004, pp. 13-14) points out that House’s model faces difficulties with consistent error weighting, sensitivity to sociocultural norms, and its reluctance to deliver a final evaluative judgment. These concerns expose the tension between methodological ambition and practical applicability. House’s revised version (2015, pp. 63-70) responded to such critiques by integrating cultural filtering and pragmatic equivalence, thereby widening its scope in light of globalized communication.

Building on functionalist premises, Christiane Nord (2005) advanced a translation-oriented text analysis that integrates extra- and intratextual features into a cyclical, replicable procedure, designed to reduce reliance on intuition in pedagogical contexts. She grounds assessment in a functional hierarchy where extratextual, pragmatic factors outweigh linguistic ones, with errors graded according to their relevance to the TT function and brief (Nord, 2005, pp. 189-190). In the same line, Robert Larose (1994; 1998) proposed a multilevel grid—microstructural, macrostructural, and superstructural—while stressing contextual constraints and the

interplay between process and product. In addition, Gouadec (1990/2007) developed the SEPT model, featuring a detailed taxonomy of assessment criteria (Larose, 1998, p. 12). These models reflect efforts to root evaluation in empirical principles rather than intuition. Nord's framework gained traction in pedagogical contexts thanks to its replicability, whereas Larose's remained underdeveloped and challenging to apply consistently. Similarly, the analytical density of SEPT rendered it impractical for routine use. Together, these cases underscore the persistent tension between theoretical comprehensiveness and practical feasibility.

Subsequent work increasingly concentrated on measurability and replicability. Al-Qinai (2000, pp. 499-503) attempted to synthesise equivalence-based, functionalist, and discourse-analytic traditions into seven parameters, ranging from typology to pragmatic equivalence. The model highlighted the tension between comprehensive coverage and operational feasibility, raising doubts about its applicability outside academic exercises. Waddington (2001), by contrast, sought to develop more practical scoring systems for teaching contexts, combining error analysis, holistic judgment, and weighted scales. Both frameworks illustrate the tendency to move from abstract functional criteria toward tools that could be consistently applied in academic settings, even if subjectivity remained.

Williams (2004) took these efforts further by integrating quantitative error counts with qualitative justification, framing evaluators' claims through argumentation theory so that judgments rest on explicit evidence and warrants. His argumentation-centred model has often been considered the most systematic within this line of research, though House (2015, pp. 19-20) criticised its tendency to privilege argument structure at the expense of other linguistic and micro-textual aspects.

2.2.2 Professional & Industry Frameworks

Professional approaches to TQA differ markedly from academic ones in their priorities; instead of theorizing translation quality, they aim to guarantee reliability, efficiency, and client satisfaction within production workflows. One of the earliest and most influential initiatives was SICAL, implemented by the Canadian Translation Bureau in the late 1980s. SICAL classified errors into transfer and language categories, subdivided into major and minor, and used 400-word samples to assign quality ratings (Larose, 1998). Its quantitative grid attempted to impose objectivity, but as Williams (2004, p. 4) notes, evaluators still had to decide whether an error affected an "essential" element of the message, revealing the persistent role of subjective judgment even in quantitative models.

SICAL principles informed subsequent initiatives, such as the Council of Translators and Interpreters of Canada (CTIC) certification exam and Ontario's

Government Translation Services (GTS). Both adapted error-based grids for certification and contractor evaluation but moved away from rigid thresholds by considering contextual variables such as deadlines, text complexity, and intended readership (Williams, 2004, pp. 5-6). Later sector-specific metrics further illustrate this pragmatism. SAE J2450 quantified syntactic and semantic errors for technical translations while sidelining stylistic issues, aligning evaluation with the functional priorities of the automotive industry (SAE, 2001). Likewise, the LISA QA model formalized evaluation through weighted error categories and Pass/Fail outcomes, enabling consistency across multilingual projects (LISA, 2004).

Contemporary frameworks, including the MQM (Multidimensional Quality Metrics) and the TAUS DQF (Dynamic Quality Framework), extend these principles to large-scale, globalized workflows. MQM offers modular error characterization with flexible weighting and has informed a range of standardized evaluation practices (Lommel, Burchardt, & Uszkoreit, 2013), while DQF integrates content profiling, benchmarking, and productivity measurement for both human and machine translation, providing actionable insights for diverse project types through its platform of tools and knowledge base (Görög, 2014, p. 445). Both frameworks emphasize scalability and data-driven decision-making, with MQM serving as a basis for derivative metrics across the translation and localization industry and DQF functioning as an applied environment that tracks and measures translation process performance.

2.3 The Academia–Industry Gap in Translation Quality

Despite shared concern for quality, academia and industry diverge significantly in how they define, assess, and operationalize it. These divergences become particularly visible when graduates transition into professional practice. Colina (2015, p. 231) links this variability to the contested nature of translation, the multiplicity of evaluative purposes, and the impracticality of models that rarely extend beyond their creators, leaving practitioners to improvise ad hoc solutions. Williams (2004, pp. xiv–xvii) similarly identifies a lack of consensus across ten areas, from error categorization and sampling practices to the weight assigned to contextual factors such as deadlines, readership, or purpose. These differences reveal not just methodological inconsistency but fundamentally distinct priorities: academia privileges theorization and competence formation, while industry emphasizes efficiency, scalability, and client satisfaction.

Research consistently highlights this pedagogical gap. Abu-Ghararah (2017) points to unclear objectives, weak curricula, and flawed assessment practices as systemic shortcomings, while Salamah (2021, p. 277) likewise underscores the disconnection between many curricula and professional realities, reinforcing the need to align competence models with labor-market requirements.

From the perspective of employers, this gap emerges as particularly evident. Gouadec (2007, p. 153) notes that both international organizations and private service providers report chronic shortages of adequately trained translators, often compelling

them to take responsibility for in-house training. He adds that hiring undergraduates as junior translators has become increasingly common in Europe and North America, justified by the assumption that subsequent revision will compensate for initial deficiencies (Gouadec, 2007, p. 156). This consequently raises a broader issue of whether universities and industry are aligned in their vision of quality, or whether graduates risk lacking what Hurtado Albir (2015, p. 263) calls “operationalization competence,” the ability to mobilize theoretical and methodological knowledge under real working conditions.

Certification exams mark a key intersection between academic training and professional practice. Unlike university diplomas, which attest to the completion of coursework, certification provides a market-recognized guarantee of quality through structured, objective, and replicable assessment grids. Bodies such as the ATA in the United States, the CTTIC in Canada, and NAATI in Australia apply error-based scales that measure accuracy, meaning transfer, and adherence to target-language norms (Korol, 2020). These exams function not as academic exercises but as high-stakes, gatekeeping mechanisms that validate professional readiness.

In Algeria, under the *Ordonnance n° 95-13* regulating official translators/interpreters, access to the sworn translator profession is mediated by a competitive exam organized in collaboration with the Justice Ministry (Goui & Boukrika, 2025). However, the detailed evaluation criteria for that exam are not publicly documented, which suggests a lack of transparency in how quality is assessed. This opacity underscores the uneven adoption of rigorous certification standards and underlines the need for clear, reliable assessment frameworks that align both training and professional accountability.

Most documents translated in Algeria’s official translation offices are legal and administrative in nature (Goui & Boukrika, 2025, p. 244), which demands high linguistic and translational competence. Goui and Boukrika (2025) explain that sometimes translators “encounter a new contract replete with convoluted terminology, alien concepts, complex phraseology, vagueness, and long sentences and paragraphs” (p. 241). Yet, despite these challenges, academic training has not provided specialised preparation in legal or official translation, leaving graduates poorly equipped. As noted, “the poor standard of training was evidenced by the quality of the translations produced by some translation students and graduates” (Goui & Boukrika, 2025, p. 243). The resulting gap compels novice translators to rely on self-directed learning and professional practice to build the competences required by the market. This mismatch between academic output and professional demand illustrates how systemic weaknesses in translator training directly translate into reduced performance in the field, perpetuating the gap between theory and practice.

The persistence of this misalignment underscores the need for more integrative approaches. Bridging the academia–industry gap requires assessment models that are both pedagogically robust and professionally relevant: models that prepare trainees for the complexities of practice while meeting the industry’s demand for reliability, efficiency, and adaptability.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design and Instruments

This study adopted an exploratory, two-source design combining a structured questionnaire administered to novice translators and semi-structured interviews with professionals who hire or supervise them. Both instruments were developed specifically for this study to capture the dual perspective of academic training and professional practice during the transitional phase of career entry.

The questionnaire comprised four sections (Appendix 1) addressing: participant background; quality criteria and assessment practices in academic settings; quality criteria and feedback mechanisms in professional contexts; and post-entry perception shifts with improvement suggestions. Prior to administration, the questionnaire was reviewed by two senior faculty in translation studies for clarity and content validity.

The interview guide mirrored the questionnaire structure to facilitate comparability across sources. Spoken interviews were transcribed verbatim; email participants provided structured written responses to the same questions. All participants received study information and confidentiality assurances.

3.2. Participants and Sampling

The questionnaire target group consisted of translators at the threshold of professional engagement: interns, newly recruited translators, and early-career freelancers whose experiences directly address the study's objectives. Participants were recruited through professional networks, social media, and direct invitations during September 2025. Forty respondents completed the questionnaire, with demographic characteristics (reported in Table 1, Results section) confirming alignment with the intended profile. Participation was voluntary with informed consent, and all data were anonymized.

Twelve professional were purposively selected to maximize contextual variation across three workplace settings: public institutions , sworn translation offices , and private companies. The inclusion criterion required direct involvement in mentoring or supervising novice translators within the preceding 24 months. Interviews were conducted via telephone, in person, and email between September and October 2025. Employers were not necessarily supervisors of the questionnaire respondents, ensuring independent perspectives on the same transition phase.

3.3. Data Analysis

Given the modest sample size of the study and exploratory design, analysis employed descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) to identify patterns within the target population rather than to generalize beyond it. Open-ended responses underwent qualitative synthesis to support interpretation and contextualization within existing literature.

Interview materials were organized within a framework matrix aligned with the questionnaire domains. Reflexive thematic analysis identified how quality is operationalized under professional constraints. Given the study's focused scope and structured interview guide, code-level saturation rather than meaning saturation determined analytical sufficiency.

Following separate analyses, questionnaire patterns and interview themes were systematically compared to identify areas of convergence and divergence in the perception of quality from the perspective of novices and employers. This integration is discussed in Section 5, where findings from both sources are examined alongside existing literature to interpret alignment and discrepancies.

4. Results

This section presents findings in two parallel strands: the questionnaire, which captures novice translators' perspectives, and the employer interviews, which reflect the supervisory view of professional integration.

4.1. Questionnaire Results

This subsection reports findings from forty novice translators across four domains: quality criteria in academic versus professional settings, feedback practices, expectations versus perceived preparedness, and post-entry perception shifts with suggested improvements.

4.1.1. Participant Profile

Table 1 summarises the demographic and professional background of the respondents. The sample reflects the study's target population: early-career translators with limited experience.

Table 1. Respondents' Profile

Highest diploma	Bachelor (25%), Master (62.5%), PhD (12.5%)
Status	Intern (75%), Newly recruited (7.5%), Freelance (15%)
Field of internship/work	Translation Office (57%), Government (7.5%), Private Sector (17.5%), Freelancing (15%)
Experience	<6 months (57.5%), 6m–1y (30%), 1–2y (12.5%), >2y (0%)

Over half of the respondents are Master's graduates, with Bachelor and PhD holders making up smaller portions of the sample. The majority are interns, which reflects the strongly transitional character of the sample, while freelancing and newly recruited positions appear only as secondary pathways. In terms of field of practice, more than half report placements in translation offices, with the private sector and freelancing occupying a second rank. Professional experience is strikingly short: over half of the sample has less than six months of practice, and none exceeds two years. This indicates that the questionnaire effectively reached its intended population of novice translators at the early threshold of their careers.

4.1.2. Academic vs. Professional Quality Practices

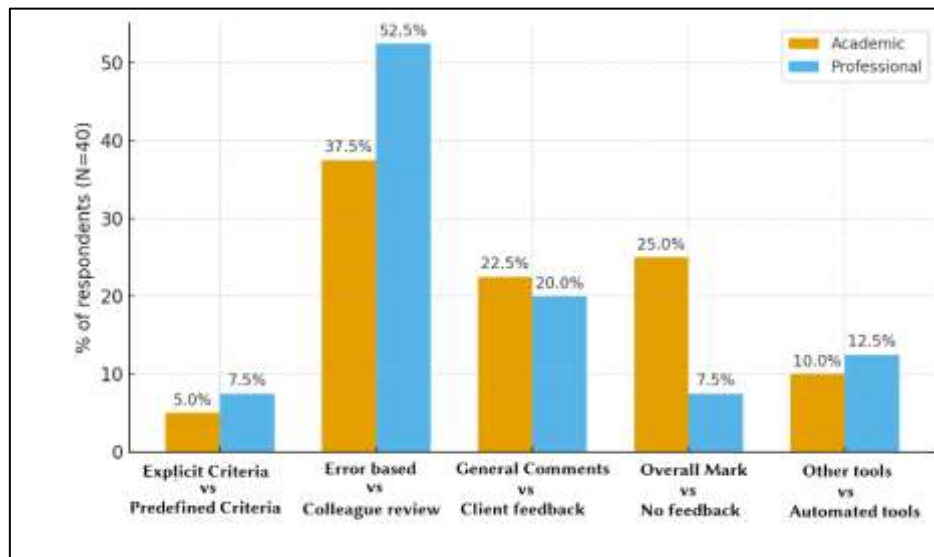
Respondents were asked to rank quality criteria in both academic (Q2.1) and professional (Q3.1) contexts. Table 2 reports the percentage assigning ranks 1 or 2 to each criterion, indicating strong emphasis. Criteria were paired for functional equivalence: formatting and presentation (academic) versus formatting and technology use (professional); teacher guidelines versus client instructions; application of theory versus meeting deadlines.

Table 2 : Comparative Emphasis on Quality Criteria (ranked 1–2)

Quality Criterion	Academic	Professional
Linguistic accuracy	100%	67.5%
Stylistic appropriateness	75%	17.5%
Cultural & contextual adaptation	25%	22.5%
Formatting / CAT tools	0%	35.0%
Teacher guidelines / Client inst.	15%	45.0%
Theory / Deadlines	20%	37.5%

Academic training was almost exclusively form-oriented: all respondents ranked linguistic accuracy as their primary concern, with style (75%) in second place. Cultural adaptation received limited attention, while formatting and theoretical frameworks were often relegated to “not applicable.” In professional practice, however, the balance shifted. Accuracy remained important but no longer absolute, and client instructions (45%), deadlines (37.5%), and technology use (CAT tools) (35%) emerged as critical dimensions of quality. This suggests that professional assessment privileges deliverability, functionality, and client satisfaction, in contrast to the formalist orientation of academia.

Figure 1: Comparative Feedback Practices



Feedback practices reveal a clear paradigm shift. In academia, evaluation was mainly teacher-centered, relying on error-based annotations (37.5%), overall marks (25%), and general comments (22.5%). In professional practice, however, feedback became collaborative and client-oriented, dominated by colleague review (52.5%) and client feedback (20%), with automated tools playing a secondary role (12.5%). Explicit or predefined criteria were rare in both contexts (<10%).

4.1.3. Expectations vs. Preparedness

To capture perceptions of preparedness, respondents were asked to rate their expectations of market difficulty before entry and their sense of how well academic training prepared them afterwards.

- Expected difficulty (Q2.3): $M = 3.9$, $SD = 0.8$.
- Perceived preparedness (Q3.3): $M = 2.2$, $SD = 1.3$.

While respondents entered the market expecting high difficulty, their subsequent evaluation of preparedness fell significantly below the scale midpoint, indicating that academic training left them feeling under-equipped.

4.1.4. Perception Shift and Perspectives

The final section examined how respondents' conception of translation quality evolved after entering the market and what improvements they deemed most urgent for academic training. The first question assessed whether exposure to professional contexts altered participants' understanding of quality. A small minority reported no change at all (5%), one third indicated only a slight change (32.5%), the largest group noted a moderate change (37.5%), and about a quarter experienced a strong or very strong change (25%). The overall mean was 3.1 ($SD = 1.0$), just above the midpoint,

suggesting that most respondents revised their conception of quality once confronted with workplace realities.

The second question invited respondents to suggest improvements to academic translation quality practices in order to better prepare students for professional quality requirements. Responses converged around four themes:

- Integration of professional tools (CAT systems and formatting conventions).
- Systematic and transparent criteria, moving beyond error-focused grading.
- Client-oriented evaluation scenarios, including deadlines, iterative revisions, and responsiveness to briefs.
- collaborative work and peer assessment, which directly mirror professional teamwork and review cycles.

These findings capture novice translators' perceptions of quality standards, preparedness levels, and post-entry adjustments. To investigate these patterns from a complementary angle and examine whether they align with observed workplace realities, the study now turns to professional employers who mentor and supervise novice translators.

4.2. Employer Interview Results

This subsection presents the supervisory perspective on novice integration, describing how novices respond to early workplace challenges and offering a focused view of their expectations, readiness, and alignment with operational quality standards.

4.2.1. Participant Profile

Twelve professionals participated across three workplace settings: public institutions (n = 3), sworn translation offices (n = 5), and private sector (n = 4). Interviews were conducted via telephone (n = 6), in person (n = 4), and email (n = 2). All work with Arabic, French, and English, handling primarily legal and administrative translation.

4.2.2. Academic Transfer: Strengths and Gaps

Supervisors credited university training with establishing solid linguistic accuracy and consistent self-revision of language form. However, the transition to professional practice revealed gaps managing explicit specifications, such as headers, seals, stamps, file naming conventions and layout requirements. Client brief interpretation was described as under-rehearsed in academic preparation.

Across settings, employers described quality in operational rather than purely textual terms: brief/spec compliance, jurisdiction-appropriate terminology and timeliness/throughput with stable quality. One supervisor observed, "A text may read well yet be institutionally wrong if it uses a legal term not employed locally" (P05, sworn office). While multiple renderings may appear acceptable in class, professional contexts require jurisdiction-appropriate terminology; choices outside local convention risk rejection. As another emphasized, "Legal translation isn't free choice— locally

admitted terms are required” (P02, sworn office). While linguistic competence was generally adequate, professional viability depended on operational adequacy: understanding specifications, adhering to jurisdictional conventions, and meeting client expectations.

4.2.3. Initial Workplace Performance : Expectations vs Readiness

The initial months of professional practice were commonly characterized as hesitant, marked by a template-based approach: novices tended to over-polish individual sentences while under-reading client briefs, and many sought ready-translated templates despite high genre variability. "First months are hesitant" remarked one interviewee (P01, public sector). Another added, “They want ready examples to reuse, while insisting on their lack of experience regarding these texts” (P11, private sector). Several supervisors reported heavy reliance on machine translation and other AI tools without sufficient critical judgment. A sworn translator cautioned that uncritical dependence could yield serious contextual errors (P03).

Overall readiness was judged low to moderate, with recurrent gaps in brief handling, legal-terminology discipline, and deadline management. One sworn-office interviewee warned that “literal French calques into English are risky” (P02), while another emphasized consequences: “An error in class is a mark deduction; in sworn/legal work it can invalidate a document” (P04). These assessments reveal a preparedness gap in the procedural, technical, and contextual knowledge that professional practice demands.

4.2.4. Recalibration Mechanisms and Suggestions

Supervisors attributed workplace adjustment to exposure to professional feedback mechanisms distinct from academic assessment: revision protocols with annotated guidance, direct client feedback, and deadline pressures. Private-sector employers highlighted initially underestimated norms such as confidentiality protocols and version control: "Review cycles and versioning surprise them; they expect a single 'final' pass" (P12, private sector). Rather than retrospective grading, professional feedback functions as real-time performance calibration with client satisfaction and document validity as immediate outcomes.

Interviewees converged on assessment-specific proposals that mirror operational criteria: transparent, criterion-referenced rubrics; authentic assessment tasks using real documents with client-style briefs, phased deadlines; iterative review; and legal-terminology modules in Arabic–French–English aligned with Algerian usage. Together, the accounts demonstrate how operational criteria and feedback mechanisms adjust novices' conceptions of quality in practice. Their alignment with the questionnaire findings is discussed in Section 5.

5. Discussion

This study examined how novice translators in the Algerian market conceptualize translation quality at the threshold of professional practice and whether early workplace exposure reshapes that perception. Drawing on questionnaire data from novices and interviews with employers, findings cohere around three analytical dimensions—quality criteria and assessment practices, preparedness and professional expectations, and post-entry recalibration—corresponding to the study's research questions.

First, questionnaire responses indicate that academic assessment remains predominantly micro-textual: linguistic accuracy and stylistic refinement dominate student conceptions of quality, while contextual and operational dimensions receive less attention. Snell-Hornby (1992, pp. 19–21) observed that academic examinations privileging correctness over functionality fail to prepare students for professional realities, while Williams (2004) noted that error-oriented models risk obscuring higher-level dimensions of coherence and argumentation thereby narrowing students' conception of quality. Employer interviews reveal a markedly different quality framework. In operational contexts, quality encompasses compliance with client briefs and technical specifications, jurisdiction-appropriate terminology—particularly critical in legal and administrative translation where locally admitted usage determines institutional validity—timely delivery under production constraints, and proper file preparation. A text may be linguistically fluent yet professionally inadequate if it disregards client instructions or employs terminology not recognized within the local legal system. The central finding here is that academic assessment, as experienced by novices, does not render these professional constraints assessable, thereby limiting its formative effectiveness of developing the multi-dimensional competence required for professional practice (Hönig, 1997; Hurtado Albir & Martínez Melis, 2001).

Second, the preparedness gap emerges clearly across both instruments. Novices anticipated demanding market conditions ($M \approx 3.9/5$) yet rated their preparedness below adequacy ($M \approx 2.2/5$). This gap aligns with findings by Goui and Boukrika (2025), who documented criticism of translation programmes in Algeria for inadequate training standards, with some departments suspending translation specializations due to persistently low output quality. The present results confirm that academic evaluation frequently fails to translate into professional readiness, a misalignment also emphasized by Wang (2017) in broader international contexts. Employer accounts locate the deficit not in sentence-level linguistic accuracy but in procedural literacies: interpreting and executing client briefs; managing technical specifications including headers, official seals, stamps, and layout requirements; applying jurisdiction-specific terminology across legal sub-domains; and coordinating deadline adherence across projects. Additional gaps emerged in critical judgment regarding machine translation and AI tools, particularly recognizing when automated suggestions conflict with jurisdictional conventions, as well as in understanding professional protocols for

confidentiality and version control. While some employers mentioned translation technology competence, overall adoption of such tools was described as uneven. Thus, the questionnaire data signal the existence of a preparedness gap; the interview data specify its nature and location.

Third, both data sources document quality reconceptualization following workplace integration. The questionnaire records a moderate shift in novices' understanding of quality; employer interviews identify the mechanisms driving this recalibration: quality revision, client returns, and deadline pressures that require maintaining quality under time constraints. The consequence structure of error also shifts: in academic contexts, errors result in grade reduction; in sworn translation and legal practice, errors may invalidate documents with serious legal and financial repercussions. This difference is amplified by contrasting feedback ecologies: teacher-centered correction with often implicit criteria versus collaborative, client-driven review processes that serve dual functions of professional credibility and operational control (Colina, 2015; Gouadec, 2007; Toudic et al., 2014). For many participants, workplace entry redefined quality from linguistic form alone to a broader understanding integrating timeliness, accountability, and client expectations.

Improvement proposals from both stakeholder groups demonstrate notable convergence. Novice translators called for transparent criterion-referenced assessment rubrics, authentic client-oriented scenarios incorporating realistic briefs with phased deadlines and iterative review, and collaborative peer assessment modeling professional revision practices. Employers independently recommended similar approaches while additionally proposing targeted legal terminology instruction for Arabic–French–English translation aligned with Algerian jurisdictional usage. These proposals support redesigning academic assessment around transparent, industry-aligned quality criteria and authentic professional tasks. Curricular priorities should shift toward operational competencies while maintaining the linguistic foundations upon which professional competence depends.

6. CONCLUSION

This study examined how novice translators in Algeria navigate the shift from academic conceptions of translation quality to professionally enforced standards. It combined a questionnaire with forty novice translators and interviews with twelve professionals involved in integrating or overseeing them in order to trace how assessment practices, workplace demands, and feedback mechanisms shape a professional quality construct at labour-market entry. Three principal findings emerged.

- First, novices described academic assessment as micro-textual: linguistic

accuracy and stylistic refinement were treated as the main signs of “quality”. Employers, by contrast, defined quality operationally through compliance with briefs and technical specifications, jurisdiction-appropriate terminology, timely delivery, and usable formatting. Both sources converge on the same point: academic assessment, as experienced by novices, does not make these professional constraints visible or assessable, which limits its formative effectiveness.

- Second, respondents expected demanding market conditions but rated their preparedness below adequacy. Employers did not mainly question language proficiency, but pointed to missing procedural literacies and to over-reliance on machine translation tools without contextual judgment; in addition to the lack of experience in dealing with authentic documents.
- Third, workplace entry itself redefines quality. Novices reported that their understanding of quality changed after first exposure to client work; employers attributed this shift to annotated review, client satisfaction, and exposure to consequence structures in which an error may invalidate a document rather than merely reduce a grade.

These findings indicate that early professional experience does not merely apply an academic notion of translation quality; it reshapes it. “Quality” is broadened from sentence-level linguistic adequacy to a multidimensional, situated construct tied to brief compliance, institutional validity, timeliness, and accountability to clients.

Given the study's exploratory scope and the modest purposive sampling, findings illuminate patterns specific to this setting rather than supporting broad generalization. Future research following novice translators and assessing their translations against explicit criteria is needed to determine whether this conceptual shift reflects durable professional competence. Pedagogically, academic assessment cannot remain an audit of linguistic error: it must make professional constraints visible and assessable by embedding brief compliance, jurisdiction-sensitive terminology, deadlines, and iterative review cycles into evaluation process.

7. References

- Abanomey, A. A., & Almossa, S. Y. (2023). "Translation Quality assessment Practices of Faculty Members of Colleges of Languages and Translation in Arab Countries: An Exploratory Study." *Humanities & Social Sciences Communications*, 10(1).
- Abu-Ghararah, B. A. (2017). "The Gap between Translator Training and the Translation Industry in Saudi Arabia." *Arab World English Journal for Translation & Literary Studies*, 1(4), 107–118.
- Al-Qinai, J. (2000). "Translation QAuality Assessment: Strategies, Parameters and Procedures." *Meta: Journal des traducteurs*, 45(3), 497–519.
- Alzamil, A. M. (2024). "Translation Competence between Industry and Academia in Saudi Arabia: Job Descriptions vs. Students' Perceptions." *Arab World English Journal for Translation & Literary Studies*, 8(2), 34–50.
- Bowker, L. (2000). "A Corpus-based Approach to Evaluating Student Translations." *The Translator*, 6(2), 183–210.
- Colina, S. (2009). "Further Evidence for a Functionalist Approach to Translation Quality Evaluation." *Target*, 21(2), 235–264.
- Colina, S. (2015). *Fundamentals of Translation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Chekhar, R. & Kellou, Y. (2021). "Exploring MA students' Perspectives on the Link between Theory and Practice within Translation Courses." *Cahiers de Traduction*, 24(1), 341-356.
- Görög, A. (2014). "Quantifying and Benchmarking Quality: The TAUS Dynamic Quality Framework." *Tradumàtica*(12), 443-454. doi:10.5565/rev/tradumatica.66
- Gouadec, D. (2007). *Translation as a profession*. John Benjamins.
- Goui, D., & Boukrika, A. (2025). "State of Art and Challenges of Official Translation in Algeria: A Descriptive Study." In S. A. Halimi, & D. Goui, *Issues in Arabic Legal Translation: New Insights into the Field* (pp. 228-245). Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Hönig, H. (1997). "Positions, Power and Practice: Functionalist Approaches and Translation Quality Assessment." *Current Issues in Language and Society*, 4(1), 6–34.
- House, J. (1997). *Translation Quality Assessment: A model Revisited*. Gunter Narr Verlag.
- House, J. (2015). *Translation Quality Assessment: Past and present*. London/New York: Routledge.
- Hurtado Albir, A. (2015). "The Acquisition of Translation Competence. Competences, Tasks, and Assessment in Translator Training." *Meta*, 60(2), 256–280.
- Kellou, Y. (2013). *Taqyīm al-tarjama min al-‘arabiyya ilā al-inglīziyya: Dirāsa tajrībiyya li-tarājim ṭullāb al-tadarruj fī qism al-tarjama fī Jāmi‘at al-Jazā‘ir* [Translation Quality Assessment from Arabic into English: An Experimental Study of Undergraduate Students' Translations at the Department of Translation, University of Algiers] Doctoral Dissertation, University of Algiers 2.

- Korol, T. (2020). "Professional Translator Certification: Implications for Assessment in Undergraduate Philologists' Training." *Bulletin of the Cherkasy Bohdan Khmelnytsky National University (Series "Pedagogical Sciences")*, 3, 63-72.
- Larose, R. (1994). "Qualité et efficacité en traduction: Réponse à F. W. Sixel." *Meta*, 39(2), 362–373. <https://doi.org/10.7202/003405ar>
- Larose, R. (1998). Méthodologie de l'évaluation des traductions. *Meta: Journal des traducteurs*, 43(2), 163–186.
- LISA. (2004). *Best Practice Guide: Quality Assurance – The Client Perspective*. Localization Industry Standards Association.
- Lommel, A., Burchardt, A., & Uszkoreit, H. (2013). "Multidimensional Quality Metrics: A Flexible System for Assessing Translation Quality." *Proceedings of Translating and the Computer* 35, 455-463.
- Martínez Melis, N., & Hurtado Albir, A. (2001). "Assessment In Translation Studies: Research Needs." *Meta*, 46(2), 272–287.
- Nord, C. (2005). *Text Analysis in Translation: Theory, Methodology, and Didactic Application of a Model for Translation-oriented Text Analysis* (2nd ed.). Rodopi.
- SAE, International. (2001). *SAE J2450: Translation Quality Metric*.
- Salamah, A. (2021). "Translation Competence and Translator Training: A Review." *International Journal of Linguistics Literature & Translation*, 4(3), 276-291.
- Snell-Hornby, M. (1992). "Translation Studies: An Integrated Approach. Papers from the First Language International Conference." In C. Dollerup & A. Loddegaard (Éd.), *Teaching Translation and Interpreting: Training, Talent and Experience* (pp. 15-22). Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Toudic, D., Morin, K. H., Moreau, F., Barbin, F., & Phuez, G. (2014). *Du contexte didactique aux pratiques professionnelles: Proposition d'une grille multicritères pour l'évaluation de la qualité en traduction spécialisée*. ILCEA – Revue de l'Institut des Langues et Cultures d'Europe et d'Amérique, 19.
- Waddington, C. (2001). "Different Methods of Evaluating Student Translations: The Question of Validity." *Meta: Translators' Journal*, 46(2), 311–325.
- Wang, J.-s. (2017). "Translation Quality Assessment: Bridge the Gap between Theory and Practice." *Journal of Literature and Art Studies*, 7(10), 1701–1706. <https://doi.org/10.17265/2159-5836/2017.10.023>
- Williams, M. (2004). *Translation Quality Assessment: An Argumentation-centred Approach*. University of Ottawa Press.

8. Appendice

1. Questionnaire

Section I: General Information

1. Highest diploma obtained in translation studies:
☐ Bachelor ☐ Master ☐ PhD ☐ Other: _____
2. What is / was your statut?
☐ Intern ☐ Newly recruited ☐ Freelance translator ☐ Other: _____
3. Field of internship/work:
☐ Translation Office ☐ Government position ☐ Private Sector ☐ Freelancing ☐ Other:
4. Professional or internship experience:
☐ Less than 6 months ☐ 6 months–1 year ☐ 1–2 years ☐ More than 2 years

Section II: Academic Training Period – Expectations

1. Rank the following quality criteria according to how much they were emphasized according to how much they were emphasized by your instructors. (*1 = Most important, 5 = Least important, or select “Not emphasized” if not applicable*).
☐ Linguistic accuracy ☐ Stylistic appropriateness ☐ Cultural and contextual adaptation
☐ formatting and presentations ☐ Adherence to teacher guidelines ☐ Application of theoretical frameworks
2. How did you *mostly* receive quality feedback on your translations during your academic training?
☐ Through explicit criteria ☐ Through error-based annotations ☐ General comment
☐ No feedback was provided (just overall mark) ☐ Other: _____
3. What were your expectations of professional quality requirements before entering the market? (*1 = Very easy to 5 = Very difficult*)

Section III: Professional Practice Period – Reality & Perceptions

1. Rank the following quality criteria according to how much they were emphasized during your professional experience (internship or early work): (*1 = Most important, 5 = Least important, or select “Not emphasized” if not applicable*).
☐ Linguistic accuracy ☐ Stylistic appropriateness ☐ Cultural and contextual adaptation
☐ Formatting, Layout and CAT tools ☐ Compliance with client instructions
☐ Meeting deadlines and delivery requirements
2. How did you mostly receive quality feedback during your early professional experience?
☐ Peer/colleague review ☐ Automated tools or metrics ☐ Predefined criteria
☐ Direct client feedback ☐ No feedback provided ☐ Other :
3. To what extent did your academic training prepare you for professional market quality requirements? (*1 = Not at all to 5 = Very well*)

Section IV: Outcomes & Perspectives

1. Has your perception of translation quality changed after gaining professional experience (internship or early work)?
(*1 = Not at all to 5 = Very well*)
2. In your view, what aspects of academic quality assessment should be **improved** to better prepare students for professional quality requirements?

2. Interview

Opening

Briefing the purpose (novice transition & quality), confidentiality.

Section I — General Information

I.1. Role & context.

Please introduce yourself and your current role.

I.2. Experience with novices (last 24 months)

How many junior translators/trainees have you hired or supervised in the past two years?

Section II — Early Transition & Academic Transfer

II. 1. Early months: attitudes & behaviours.

How would you describe junior translators' first months at work? What typical attitudes and behaviours do you observe?

II. 2. Academic transfer: what works / what does not.

Which element(s) of university quality assessment transfer well to your context—and which do not? Why?

Section III — Professional Criteria & Preparedness

III. 1. Criteria under real constraints.

When you assess novices, which quality criteria matter most under real constraints?

Name your top three criteria in order of importance.

III. 2. Preparedness for those criteria.

How well prepared are recent graduates for these requirements?

Section IV — Recalibration & Outcomes

IV. 1. Mechanisms of recalibration.

What early workplace experiences most clearly changes a novice's idea of "quality"?

IV. 2. Suggestions for academia

If you could change one or two elements of university assessment of quality, what would they be to better align academic and professional quality?

Closing: Anything we didn't ask that would help educators understand novices' transition?