

CURRICULUM, SCAFFOLDING, AND TRANSLATION COMPETENCE: A CONSTRUCTIVIST CASE STUDY OF 100-LEVEL TRANSLATION TEACHING AT DELTA STATE UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

The introduction of translation studies at the 100-level under the Core Curriculum Minimum Academic Standard (CCMAS) presents unique pedagogical challenges, particularly for anglophone students with limited French exposure. This study examines the alignment between the intended curriculum and the assessment practices at Delta State University (DELSU), using a qualitative case study approach. Data were drawn from the CCMAS 100-level translation course outline, learning outcomes, a past examination paper, and representative class-based translation assignments including terminology exercises, the identification and discussion of translation tools, and extended written assignments. The study employs Kiraly's constructivist approach to translator education, which emphasizes that translation competence develops through task-based, collaborative, and scaffolded learning rather than rote memorization of theory. Using this framework, the study evaluates whether assessment tasks provide sufficient scaffolding for beginner learners to acquire practical translation skills. Findings reveal a pedagogical gap: while the curriculum emphasizes simple word and sentence translation, DELSU tasks often require students to complete cognitively demanding exercises, such as producing 5-page assignments with translation terminology in French and English, which exceed learners' scaffolded competence after only four months of French study. The study underscores the need for progressive, task-based instruction that gradually builds competence, aligns assignments with beginner learners' abilities, and provides structured guidance and feedback. By situating DELSU as a case study, the paper offers insights into the design of beginner-level translation pedagogy under CCMAS, highlighting strategies to enhance competence development, learner engagement, and assessment alignment.

Keywords: CCMAS, Kiraly; scaffolded learning, Task-based instruction, Translation; Translation pedagogy

Introduction

Translation plays a central role in multilingual societies by facilitating cross-linguistic communication, academic exchange, and professional interaction. In Nigeria, where English functions as the official language alongside numerous indigenous and foreign languages, translation training occupies a strategic position in language education. The recent introduction of translation studies at the 100-level under the Core Curriculum Minimum Academic Standard (CCMAS) reflects an institutional effort to introduce students early to foundational translation skills, particularly within French language programmes.

However, teaching translation to beginner learners presents significant pedagogical challenges. Translation competence does not emerge from the memorisation of definitions or terminology; rather, it develops progressively through guided engagement with translation tasks that are appropriate to learners' linguistic and cognitive levels (Kiraly, 2000; Pym, 2010). For anglophone students who have studied French for only a short period, effective translation pedagogy must prioritise simple, scaffolded tasks designed to progressively develop procedural competence before introducing abstract theoretical distinctions (Göpferich, 2009).

At Delta State University (DELSU), 100-level translation instruction includes both class-based assignments and formal examinations. Class tasks require students to write translation tools and terminology in both French and English, often in extended formats spanning up to five foolscap pages. Examination questions similarly demand theoretical explanations of translation concepts, distinctions between general and specialised translation, and discussions of translation across professional domains. While these tasks align superficially with CCMAS learning outcomes, they impose substantial cognitive and linguistic demands on learners who have approximately four months of formal instruction in French language. From a constructivist perspective, such task design raises concerns about scaffolding, task progression, and curriculum–assessment alignment. Kiraly’s constructivist approach to translator education emphasises that novice translators acquire competence through task-based learning environments where complexity increases incrementally and learners receive structured guidance and feedback (Kiraly, 2000, 2005).

Research on translation competence further supports the view that beginner learners benefit most from short, manageable tasks that allow them to integrate language knowledge and translation strategies without cognitive overload (Göpferich, 2015; Tirkkonen-Condit, 2005).

This study therefore examines the extent to which DELSU’s 100-level translation tasks align with the CCMAS curriculum and support beginner learners’ competence development. Using Kiraly’s constructivist framework as its primary theoretical lens, the study analyses curriculum documents, examination questions, and class-based assignments to identify pedagogical gaps and propose improvements for beginner-level translation instruction. By situating DELSU as a case study, the paper contributes to broader discussions on translation pedagogy, curriculum implementation, and assessment practices in Nigerian universities.

Objectives

The objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To examine the alignment between DELSU’s 100-level translation tasks and the CCMAS curriculum.
2. To evaluate whether the assessment tasks provide sufficient scaffolding for beginner learners to develop translation competence.
3. To identify pedagogical gaps in beginner-level translation instruction, particularly in relation to task complexity and learner readiness.
4. To propose improvements for 100-level translation pedagogy based on constructivist principles, including task-based and scaffolded learning.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the tradition of constructivist and task-based approaches to translation pedagogy, which emphasise that translation competence develops not through memorisation of theory but through structured engagement with meaningful tasks, supported by scaffolding and interaction (Kiraly, 2000, 2005; Pym, 2010). According to Kiraly, translation learners build competence through authentic tasks, collaborative problem-solving, and gradually increasing challenge, with instructors and peers playing a crucial role in guiding the learning process. This pedagogical framework contrasts sharply with models that prioritise the transmission of abstract terminology and theoretical distinctions without regard to learners’ linguistic readiness.

Translation competence models further reinforce this task-based view. Göpferich (2009, 2015) conceptualises translation competence as a multidimensional construct involving declarative knowledge, procedural skills, and strategic awareness. Competence, in this view, unfolds through repeated, scaffolded task engagement that enables learners to integrate language skills, translation strategies, and contextual understanding. Similarly, Pym (2003, 2010) argues that translator training should prioritise learner autonomy and task design, shifting focus from isolated knowledge of terms to the purposeful use of language in real translation activities.

Research in translation cognition

underscores the critical role of task complexity and learner readiness in shaping translation performance and competence development. Shreve and Angelone (2010) illustrate that translation tasks differ significantly in their cognitive demands, highlighting that novice learners are particularly sensitive to task difficulty and benefit most from activities that are carefully structured to provide gradual scaffolding. Without such scaffolding, learners' risk cognitive overload, which can impede both their engagement with the task and the quality of the translation output. Complementing this view, Tirkkonen-Condit (2005) demonstrates that the type and design of translation tasks directly influence not only the cognitive processes employed by learners but also the final quality of their translations, emphasizing that misaligned tasks can compromise learning outcomes. Taken together, these studies indicate that effective translation pedagogy for beginners requires a deliberate calibration of task demands, ensuring that exercises are sufficiently challenging to promote skill development yet remain within the learners' capacity to manage. By aligning task complexity with learner proficiency, educators can foster meaningful engagement, facilitate procedural skill acquisition, and support the progressive development of translation competence.

Beyond the specific domain of translation studies, broader educational research underscores the central importance of constructive alignment in curriculum design, which entails ensuring coherence among learning outcomes, instructional activities, and assessment tasks to facilitate meaningful and effective learning (Biggs & Tang, 2007). When learning outcomes for beginner-level translation courses emphasize foundational skills—such as the translating simple words, basic sentences, and elementary disciplinary texts—it is essential that assessment tasks are calibrated to reflect this level of competence; failure to do so risks imposing cognitive demands that exceed learners' current abilities, potentially leading to frustration, disengagement, and surface-level learning rather than genuine skill acquisition (Brown, 2004). Furthermore, the effectiveness of language learning is significantly enhanced within

interactive and scaffolded learning environments, where structured guidance from instructors and collaborative engagement with peers create opportunities for learners to actively construct knowledge, practice translation strategies, and internalize linguistic and conceptual competencies (Swain & Lapkin, 2001). Taken together, these principles indicate that alignment between curriculum intentions, classroom practices, and assessment tasks is not merely procedural but fundamental to supporting novice learners' development of translation competence in a manageable, progressive, and pedagogically sound manner.

Taken together, these frameworks argue that translation pedagogy for beginner learners should be task-based, scaffolded, and aligned with learners' abilities. A disconnect between curriculum expectations and assessment tasks (e.g., tasks demanding extensive theoretical explanations or bilingual terminology lists far beyond learners' experience) can impede translation competence development and learner confidence. Applying this extended theoretical lens, the present study critically examines whether 100-level translation tasks at DELSU provide the scaffolded practice and incremental challenge necessary to build functional translation skills under the CCMAS framework.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative case study design to investigate the teaching and assessment of 100-level translation courses under the CCMAS framework, focusing specifically on Delta State University (DELSU) as a representative institutional context. The qualitative approach is particularly well-suited to this inquiry because it allows for an in-depth exploration of nuanced pedagogical phenomena such as curriculum–assessment alignment, the design and sequencing of translation tasks, and the development of beginner learners' translation competence that cannot be fully captured through quantitative measurement alone (Yin, 2018). By situating the research within a single institutional case, the study benefits from a rich contextual understanding of how policy directives, course

structures, and classroom practices intersect to shape student learning experiences. The case study design further enables a detailed examination of multiple data sources, including course outlines, examination papers, and class-based assignments, providing a holistic perspective on how instructional strategies and assessment practices align—or fail to align—with intended learning outcomes. In doing so, the approach captures the complexity and variability inherent in real-world educational settings, allowing the study to generate insights that are both specific to DELSU and informative for broader discussions on beginner-level translation pedagogy under CCMAS.

Data Sources

Data for the study were drawn from three main sources:

1. **CCMAS 100-Level Translation Course Outline and Learning Outcomes:** These documents specify the intended competencies for beginner learners, including the ability to define translation and its importance to French studies, translate simple words and sentences between French and English, and translate basic materials from social sciences and science disciplines. In addition, the course content includes translation of simple sentences in present tense from French to English, translation of simple sentences in past tense (*le passé composé*) from French to English, translation of simple sentences in future tense (*le futur*) from French to English and translation of simple sentences from French metropolitan prose or proses from other francophone literary sources.
2. **DELSU 100-Level Past Examination Paper:** The examination paper includes tasks requiring students to:
 - Define translation and explain its importance
 - Distinguish between general and specialised/technical translation
 - Provide English equivalents of French translation terminology
 - Identify employers of translators

- Discuss the importance of translation in political, diplomatic, medical, legal, and economic domains

3. **Class-Based Translation Assignments:** These consist of tasks requiring students to:

- Write lists of translation tools and terminology in both French and English
- Produce extensive written content (up to **five full-scrap pages**) on translation concepts and terminology, despite their limited exposure to the French language.

Analytical Framework

Data were analysed using Kiraly's constructivist approach to translator education as the primary analytical lens, supported by insights from translation competence models and task-based pedagogy (Göpferich, 2009, 2015; Pym, 2010). Kiraly's framework emphasises that translation competence develops through scaffolded, task-based engagement, where task complexity increases progressively in line with learners' linguistic and cognitive development (Kiraly, 2000, 2005).

To operationalise this framework, tasks were analysed according to three criteria:

1. **Task-Competence Alignment:** Whether the task matches the beginner-level competencies specified in the CCMAS learning outcomes.
2. **Scaffolding and Progression:** Whether tasks provide structured support and gradual progression from simple to complex translation activities (Kiraly, 2000).
3. **Cognitive and Linguistic Load:** Whether the task demands are appropriate for learners with approximately four months of French instruction, in line with translation competence development models (Göpferich, 2009; Tirkkonen-Condit, 2005).

This approach is underpinned by the principle of constructive alignment, which posits that meaningful learning occurs when there is deliberate coherence between the intended learning outcomes, the instructional activities designed to facilitate those outcomes, and the assessment tasks used to measure their attainment (Biggs & Tang, 2007). In other words, constructive alignment emphasizes that all elements of the curriculum what students are expected to learn, how they are taught, and how their learning is evaluated must work synergistically to promote effective knowledge and skill acquisition. When assessment tasks are thoughtfully aligned with learning outcomes and teaching methods, they reinforce learning by providing students with opportunities to engage in

tasks that directly reflect the intended competencies, allowing them to progressively internalize both procedural and conceptual knowledge. Conversely, misalignment such as when tasks demand skills or understanding beyond what has been scaffolded through instruction can create cognitive overload, hinder motivation, and undermine learners' ability to achieve the desired outcomes. By integrating this principle into the analysis of translation pedagogy at DELSU, the study highlights the importance of designing assessment tasks that are not only consistent with curricular objectives but also sensitive to the developmental stage and linguistic proficiency of beginner learners, ensuring that translation competence is nurtured incrementally rather than assumed.

Analysis and Discussion

Alignment between CCMAS Learning Outcomes and DELSU Tasks

The CCMAS learning outcomes for 100-level translation clearly emphasise the development of introductory competence, focusing on the translation of simple words, basic sentence structures across different tenses, and elementary materials drawn from selected disciplines. Such outcomes inherently suggest a pedagogical approach that is foundational, practice-oriented, and aligned with constructivist and task-based principles, where learners gradually build procedural skills through manageable, meaningful tasks (Kiraly, 2000; Pym, 2010). In contrast, a closer examination of DELSU's actual assessment practices including both examination questions and class-based assignments, reveals a notable misalignment between these intended learning outcomes and the cognitive and linguistic demands imposed on students.

For example, as part of the continuous assessment, students were required to write five foolscap sheets in French and in English on translation tools and translation terminologies:

« *Lister les outils utilisés par le traducteur en français et en anglais* »

« *Écrire les terminologies de la traduction en français et en anglais* »

In addition to this extensive requirement, they were also asked to respond (in two foolscaps sheets) to questions such as:

« *Pourquoi traduisons-nous?* »

These requirements demanded prolonged bilingual writing and abstract theoretical explanation rather than sentence-level or guided translation practice.

Rather than providing tasks that scaffold competence development, many of these assessments require learners to produce abstract theoretical explanations, compile extensive bilingual terminology lists, and complete prolonged written exercises that assume a level of linguistic proficiency and conceptual understanding far beyond what is reasonable for beginners with only a few months of French instruction. This

misalignment not only risks overwhelming students but also undermines the constructive, task-based learning environment that the CCMAS curriculum seeks to establish, highlighting a critical gap between curriculum design and classroom implementation that can impede the gradual acquisition of translation competence.

Evaluation of Examination Tasks

The examination question that asks students to define translation and explain its importance aligns reasonably well with the foundational objectives of a 100-level curriculum, as it engages learners in reflecting on basic concepts without imposing excessive cognitive demands. In the DELSU examination paper, this question appeared as: « *Qu'est-ce que la traduction ?* » and « *Pourquoi traduisons-nous ?* ».

However, other examination tasks—such as requiring students to distinguish between general and specialised translation, analyse translation practices in professional domains like law and medicine, or identify potential employers of translators—introduce a level of conceptual and domain-specific complexity that exceeds the linguistic and cognitive readiness of beginner learners. For instance, students were asked: « *Faites la distinction entre la traduction générale et la traduction spécialisée* »; « *Donner l'équivalence anglaise des termes suivants : texte source, texte cible, langue de départ, langue d'arrivée, traducteur* »; and « *Qui sont ceux qui emploient les traducteurs ? Quelles sont les importances de la traduction dans les domaines politique, diplomatique, médical, juridique et économique ?* »

These questions required abstract categorisation, bilingual terminology mastery, and discussion of specialised professional domains entirely in French. From a constructivist standpoint, as Kiraly (2005) emphasizes, translation competence develops most effectively when learners engage with tasks that they can perform meaningfully, supported by structured guidance, feedback, and incremental challenge. Tasks that demand extended theoretical exposition or the application of specialised knowledge without sufficient prior scaffolding risk fostering superficial engagement, rote memorization, and frustration, rather than promoting genuine skill acquisition. Research on translation competence reinforces this view, highlighting that novice learners benefit most from opportunities to build procedural skills and gradually integrate linguistic knowledge into practical translation tasks before attempting abstract or domain-specific distinctions (Göpferich, 2015). Consequently, these examination tasks, while well-intentioned, may inadvertently impede the early development of functional translation competence by prioritizing theoretical coverage over scaffolded, task-based learning that aligns with students' initial proficiency levels.

Analysis of Class-Based Assignments

The most pronounced pedagogical challenge becomes evident in DELSU's class-based translation assignments, where 100-level students are required to produce five foolscap pages detailing translation tools and terminology in both French and English. In addition to this requirement, students were instructed to write extended responses in both languages addressing questions such as « *Pourquoi traduisons-nous ?* » and to provide bilingual lists of translation tools and translation terminologies. This expectation imposes a substantial cognitive and linguistic burden on learners who have only recently begun studying French, demanding advanced writing skills, a broad vocabulary, and a level of conceptual understanding that novice translators have not yet developed. From a Kiraly-informed constructivist perspective, effective scaffolding entails decomposing complex tasks into smaller, manageable units and progressively increasing their difficulty to match learners' developing skills (Kiraly, 2000). However, the assignments in question place students directly into high-stakes, large-scale exercises without providing the incremental practice or guided support needed to build competence gradually. This mismatch between task complexity and learner readiness can overwhelm students, limiting their ability to internalize translation strategies and apply language knowledge effectively. Tirkkonen-Condit (2005) similarly observes that translation tasks with excessive cognitive demands can hinder both the translation process and the quality of the final product, particularly for beginners who are still consolidating foundational skills. Consequently, such assignments risk encouraging rote reproduction of content rather than fostering meaningful engagement, procedural skill development, and confidence,

highlighting the need for curriculum designers and instructors to calibrate task demands carefully to support scaffolded learning in beginner translation pedagogy.

Implications for Translation Competence Development

The findings indicate that, although the CCMAS curriculum is intended to support the gradual, stepwise development of translation competence, the assessment practices at DELSU frequently adopt a theory-heavy, product-oriented orientation that diverges from the curriculum's foundational goals. This misalignment undermines the constructivist principles essential for beginner-level translation instruction, which emphasize guided, task-based engagement, incremental challenge, and the integration of practical skills with cognitive understanding. By requiring learners to tackle complex theoretical explanations or extensive bilingual tasks beyond their current proficiency, these assessments risk creating cognitive overload, reducing motivation, and discouraging early engagement with translation tasks. Drawing on Biggs and Tang's (2007) principle of constructive alignment, effective pedagogy at the 100-level necessitates coherence among learning outcomes, instructional activities, and assessment tasks, ensuring that each component reinforces the other to facilitate meaningful learning. When assessment tasks outpace learners' developmental stage, they not only fail to consolidate emerging translation skills but also potentially hinder the acquisition of procedural competence, confidence, and learner autonomy, highlighting the need for carefully scaffolded, progressively structured translation exercises that align with beginner learners' capabilities (Brown, 2004; Göpferich, 2009).

Summary of Findings

Overall, the analysis indicates that the translation tasks assigned to 100-level students at DELSU often surpass the scaffolded competence envisioned by the CCMAS curriculum, placing undue cognitive and linguistic demands on learners with limited French exposure. From a Kiraly-informed constructivist perspective, effective beginner translation pedagogy should focus on carefully structured, incremental learning experiences that allow students to develop competence progressively. This includes prioritizing short, guided translation exercises, sentence- or paragraph-level tasks, and collaborative or scaffolded activities that integrate language knowledge with emerging translation strategies. By contrast, assignments that require extensive theoretical writing, lengthy bilingual terminology lists, or broad conceptual analysis risk overwhelming students, encouraging rote memorization rather than meaningful skill acquisition. Aligning assessment practices with constructivist principles would not only facilitate the gradual development of procedural translation knowledge but also enhance learner confidence, motivation, and engagement, creating an instructional environment in which novice translators can consolidate foundational skills, experiment safely with new tasks, and experience

tangible progress in their competence. Such an approach underscores the importance of matching task complexity to learner readiness, ensuring that the introduction of translation studies under CCMAS fosters functional, applied translation abilities rather than purely theoretical understanding at the very outset of instruction.

Conclusion

This study examined beginner-level translation pedagogy at Delta State University (DELSU) within the framework of the CCMAS curriculum, using Kiraly's constructivist approach to translator education as its primary analytical lens. The findings reveal a clear disconnect between curriculum intentions and assessment practices. While CCMAS learning outcomes emphasize foundational translation skills such as translating simple words, sentences, and basic disciplinary terms DELSU's class assignments and examination tasks frequently demand advanced theoretical explanation, extensive bilingual terminology lists, and prolonged written production that exceed the linguistic and cognitive capacity of 100-level students with limited exposure to French. From a constructivist perspective, such practices undermine the gradual, scaffolded development of translation competence advocated by Kiraly (2000, 2005). Rather than fostering procedural knowledge and confidence

through manageable translation tasks, overly demanding assessments risk encouraging rote learning, surface-level reproduction of content, and learner disengagement. The case study thus highlights a broader pedagogical challenge in the early implementation of translation studies under CCMAS: the tendency to prioritise theoretical coverage over competence-oriented task design for beginner learners.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and the constructivist framework underpinning this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Reorient Assessment toward Scaffolded Tasks**
Translation assessment at the 100-level should prioritise **short, guided tasks** that reflect learners' limited proficiency, such as sentence-level translation, controlled text excerpts, and basic terminology within familiar contexts. Extensive theoretical writing and long-form assignments should be deferred to higher levels.
2. **Adopt Progressive Task Sequencing**
In line with Kiraly's constructivist model, tasks should progress incrementally from word translation to sentence translation, and then to short texts allowing learners to build competence through repeated, supported practice.
3. **Reduce Cognitive and Linguistic Load**
Assignments requiring students to write multiple pages in both French and English should be redesigned into

modular activities, such as glossary-building exercises, guided terminology matching, or collaborative translation tasks, which better align with beginner-level competence.

4. **Strengthen Curriculum–Assessment Alignment**

Departments should ensure that assessment practices reflect CCMAS learning outcomes through internal moderation and curriculum review mechanisms, promoting constructive alignment between objectives, instruction, and evaluation (Biggs & Tang, 2007).

5. **Embed Constructivist Pedagogy in Lecturer Training**

Lecturers teaching introductory translation courses should be supported through pedagogical workshops that emphasize **task-based learning, scaffolding strategies, and competence development**, particularly in contexts where students are new to the foreign language.

By foregrounding task-based, scaffolded learning, this study contributes to ongoing discussions on translation pedagogy in Nigerian universities. The DELSU case illustrates the importance of aligning beginner-level translation instruction with constructivist principles to ensure that the introduction of translation studies under CCMAS leads not only to curriculum expansion, but to meaningful competence development among novice learners.

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