
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Exploring the integration of CAT into translation programmes at Saudi universities

Talal Musaed Alghizzi¹ ✉ and Muhammad M. Abdel Latif²

¹College of Languages & Translation, Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University (IMISU), Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

²Faculty of Graduate Studies of Education, Cairo University, Egypt

Corresponding Author: Muhammad M. Abdel Latif, **E-mail:** mmmabd@cu.edu.eg

ABSTRACT

Important issues are yet to be explored regarding computer-assisted translation (CAT) integration into translator training programmes in the Saudi context. In this study, we sought to explore the realities of CAT integration into translator training programmes at Saudi universities by examining the characteristics of the CAT courses offered, trainers' perspectives on using CAT activities in non-CAT translation courses, and the challenges encountered. We tried to profile these issues through reviewing translation programme study plans and CAT course descriptions, and collecting interview data from eight translation faculty members working at five Saudi universities. The results indicate the lack of CAT courses in a considerable number of undergraduate translation programmes. Besides, the available CAT courses in both the undergraduate and postgraduate translation programmes lack the sufficient training or a practical part. The interviewed faculty members were found unwilling to integrate CAT-based activities into non-CAT translation courses. Their reported obstacles to the effective CAT integration include the limited time, students' non-responsiveness, and the unavailability of required applications. These results indicate the need for reforming CAT teaching practices and integrating CAT more effectively into translator training programmes.

KEYWORDS

CAT; translation technologies; translation applications; translator training; Saudi universities

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1. Introduction

Compared to its counterpart research in language teaching, programme evaluation in translation studies is a relatively recent research phenomenon. Educational programme evaluation can be defined as a multifaceted process "with the potential to make judgments and recommendations, to evaluate effectiveness and efficiency and to contribute to curriculum improvement and development" (Rea-Dickins & Germaine, 1998, p. 12). In translator training, programme evaluation studies focus on determining the success of a translation academic programme or curriculum in achieving its expected outcomes. The translation programme evaluation process is normally completed through investigating the perspectives of stakeholders (i.e., trainees, trainers, programme managers), and looking at the curriculum, teaching and assessment materials (for more details see Abdel Latif, 2020). A main issue deserving due attention in the research dealing with evaluating translator training programmes is the place of computer-assisted translation (CAT) in them.

In translation training literature, CAT tasks are the ones in which human translation is assisted by technologies and applications (Bowker & Fisher, 2012). Commonly used CAT types include: machine translation, translation memory, translation management and concordancers (Alotaibi, 2020; Kornacki, 2018; Tarasenko et al., 2020). SDL Trados, Matecat, MemoQ, Wordfast, DeepL Translate, and Google Translate are examples of the commonly used CAT applications. The rapid growth in using CAT tools in the translation industry worldwide calls for preparing translation trainees to meet this labour market requirement. Thus, evaluating the integration of CAT tools into translator education programmes is an issue of utmost importance for helping

trainees meet their future workplace requirements and making any needed potential reforms in the programme itself. This research issue, however, remains under-explored in some contexts. In this study, we tried to examine and profile the realities of CAT integration into the translator training programmes delivered at Saudi universities.

2. Previous studies

The issue of profiling the realities of CAT integration into translator training programmes has received some research attention in previous studies. Such studies have been concerned with different contexts and approached the issues investigated from varied angles. In a cross-cultural study, Zhang and Vieira (2012) surveyed the CAT teaching in 112 higher education institutions in 33 countries. Their study revealed that tutorials informing students about the way of operating CAT tools were the most prevalent teaching method, along with a few learning-by-doing activities. The results also showed that CAT tool training in most of the universities surveyed lacks adequate practical sessions. Yao (2017) reported a study on the integration of CAT into translation teaching in China. The study revealed a number of factors hindering this integration, including the lack of qualified teachers and effective teaching materials, and the insufficient understanding of translation labour market requirements. In a study concerned with Spanish higher-education institutions, Sánchez-Castany (2023) interviewed 13 translation trainers about their integration of translation technologies into their translation teaching. Sánchez-Castany's study revealed a little integration of CAT into translation modules at Spanish universities. This was ascribed to factors beyond trainers' control and to the lack of specialized technologies. In a more recent study, Eminović and Bureković (2025) surveyed the frequency of using CAT tools outside the classroom context by the English language majors at a university in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Their survey data showed a lower frequency of using CAT applications outside their university classes, thus indicating the need for a better integration of CAT instruction into students' translation courses.

Some other studies were concerned with Mid-Eastern translation training settings. Al-Darraj (2023), for instance, surveyed Libyan university faculty members' use of CAT tools in their teaching and interviewed them about the factors related to this use. This study showed a need for including training in CAT tools at Libyan universities. Khadem, Olhosseiny and Askari (2024) collected focus group interview data to explore Iranian students' perceptions of using CAT tools and related factors. Their participant students reported positive perceptions of CAT tools and their benefits and usability, but they had some challenges such as the learning curve for new application versions, software compatibility issues, and they were also concerned about over-reliance on technology. Driai and Bekkouche (2025) assessed translation technology training at an Algerian university by exploring teachers' views on CAT instruction. Their results revealed a significant gap between the translation labour market requirements and students' CAT training. In another recent study, Alzghoul et al. (2025) looked at the integration of CAT into a translation training programme at a Jordanian university via using a questionnaire and follow-up interviews with students. While their participant students were aware of the benefits of CAT, its integration was found to be limited as a result of insufficient training, workshops, and tutorials.

On the other hand, not much research has been reported on the realities of integrating CAT teaching into the translator education programmes of Saudi universities. The few pertinent studies include those reported by Alotaibi (2014), Omar et al. (2020), Al-Rumaih (2021), and Aldossary (2023). Alotaibi (2014) drew upon classroom observation, a questionnaire, and interviews in exploring King Saud University female translation students' knowledge about CAT tools and their attitudes towards using them. Omar et al. (2020) interviewed a group of translation instructors from some Saudi universities about the opportunities and challenges of incorporating CAT tools into translator training at Saudi universities. Al-Rumaih (2021) looked at students' perceptions of CAT integration into translator training programmes at Saudi universities. She drew upon surveying students and graduates' opinions, and conducting interviews with them. Meanwhile, Aldossary (2023) employed surveys, training sessions, observation and interviews to understand the use of CAT tools at Saudi universities. Overall, these studies indicate there are some shortcomings in CAT integration and teaching, including students' negative attitude towards using CAT (Alotaibi, 2014; Al-Rumaih, 2021), insufficient training, translator trainers' unpreparedness to teach CAT (Aldossary, 2023) and negative attitudes towards using CAT applications (Omar et al., 2020).

Despite the insights gained from these previous studies, much remains to be explored about the integration of CAT into translator training programmes at Saudi universities. Previous studies have been mainly concerned with assessing students' perceptions and attitudes, but little has been done to explore translation faculty members' actual integration of CAT and the potential difficulties encountered. Accordingly, there is a need for using a different approach to examining CAT integration into Saudi university translator training programmes. The translation industry has been growing rapidly in Saudi Arabia. The enormous expansion of the translation industry in Saudi Arabia has resulted from several factors such as the expansion of employment sectors, and communication needs of people living and working in the Kingdom (Fatani, 2009). For future translators to meet these needs, they should be prepared well for using CAT applications in their workplace tasks. This paper investigated the realities of integrating CAT into undergraduate and postgraduate translation programmes at Saudi universities

by examining the study plans of translation programmes and the descriptions of the CAT courses available, and collecting interview data from translation faculty members. The present study aimed to answer the following questions:

- What are the characteristics of the CAT courses integrated into undergraduate and postgraduate translation programmes at Saudi universities?
- How do translation faculty members perceive the integration of CAT activities into non-CAT translation courses?
- What potential difficulties do translation faculty members encounter in their integration of CAT, and what potential relevant reforms do they suggest?

Answering these questions could provide important implications for improving translation training practices at Saudi universities and meeting students' translation technology-related learning needs. The results of the study could show insights into how to optimally integrate CAT and its courses into undergraduate and graduate translation programmes.

3. Method

3.1 Participants

Eight translation faculty members took part in the present study. They were working at five Saudi universities during the data collection stage ($n = 2$ from university A, B, and C, and 1 from university D and E). Four participant faculty members were females and four were males. Besides, six of them were Saudi and two were Egyptian. Regarding their academic ranks, four faculty members were associate professors, two were professors and the other two were assistant professors. The participant faculty members were teaching various translation majors, and all of them had experience in teaching CAT courses but only three faculty members taught CAT courses to postgraduate students. They have also had varied periods in teaching translation courses. All the participant faculty members took part voluntarily in the study based on informed consent.

3.2 Data sources

3.2.1 Study plans and CAT course descriptions

The online study plans and CAT course descriptions were reviewed to identify the availability of the related courses at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels and their features. These study plans and CAT course descriptions were available on the websites of the relevant departments (e.g., English, languages & translation). In the study plans, we identified the existence of CAT courses, and in each course description available, we examined the topics and CAT tools used, the teaching hours allocated, the mandatory versus elective nature of the course, and the teaching and assessment methods.

3.2.2 Semi-structured interviews

We developed the guiding questions of the semi-structured interviews based on the purposes of the study. In total, the interviews were guided by 12 questions. In developing these questions, we started by adding a biographic question to collect data about the interviewees' educational, cultural and professional backgrounds, and their teaching experiences. The core guiding questions focused on the interviewees' perceptions of CAT integration into academic programmes and into non-CAT translation courses, the availability of applications required for implementing CAT in their classes, students' aptitude for using CAT, and the difficulties related to integrating CAT.

3.3 Data collection and analysis

The interview data for this study were collected during the summer of 2025. Some translation faculty members with relevant CAT teaching experiences were contacted about the interview, and those who responded positively to the invitation were individually interviewed by the first author. Two participants were face-to-face interviewed and the other six participants were remotely interviewed via mobile application calls. The interviews were mainly conducted in Arabic to facilitate communication, and each interview lasted for 50-60 minutes on average. Meanwhile, the academic programmes of translation available on the websites of the Saudi universities were also reviewed as indicated in the above section. The review of the translation programmes and study plans took place in August and September 2025.

After transcribing the interview data, we collaboratively analyzed it, drawing upon the thematic analysis. First, we individually identified the themes and subthemes in the eight interviews, and then we met online to discuss them. There was a high agreement percentage between our individually identified themes and subthemes (percentage = 94 %). Discrepancies in the individual analysis of the interviews were resolved through discussion. In addition to the interview data, the notes taken from reviewing the undergraduate and postgraduate translation programme study plans and course descriptions supplemented the interview data. Both data types were combined to answer the three research questions.

4. Results of the study

In the following subsections, we provide the results of the data analysis guided by the three research questions.

4.1 The nature of CAT courses in undergraduate and postgraduate translation programmes

The review of online study plans and available course descriptions revealed key information about the nature of CAT integration into undergraduate and graduate translation programmes at Saudi universities. Table (1) gives a summary of the translation technology courses found in the study plans of the reviewed programmes of both types.

Table (1).

Translation technology courses found in the study plans of translator education programmes at Saudi universities

Undergraduate programmes reviewed	Translation technology courses found	Postgraduate programmes reviewed	Translation technology courses found
22	14 (3 elective courses)	9	11 (2 elective courses)

Of the 22 translation education programmes reviewed, only 14 programmes have CAT courses (63.6 %). These are the programmes offered at the following Saudi universities (arranged alphabetically): Bishah University, Effat University, Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University, Jeddah University, Jouf University, King Abdulaziz University, King Khaled University, King Saud University, Najran University, North Border University, Qassim University, Prince Sultan University, Saudi Electronic University, and University of Hafr Albatin. CAT courses are mandatory in 11 out of these 14 programmes, and included as elective ones in three universities (Jouf University, King Abdulaziz University, and Qassim University). The related courses taught in the 14 universities were given different names such as translation technology(ies), computer-assisted translation, and machine translation, and their weekly classes are allocated 2 or 3 hours. Some of the course descriptions available on the websites of the 14 universities do not clearly state the translation technologies covered in the courses whereas others refer to them. Overall, the technological applications found in the course descriptions reviewed include: machine translation (7), translation memories (9), terminology management systems (7), terminological databases (3), artificial intelligence (4), speech recognition-translation tools (3), and corpus-based translation tools (4). As may be inferred from this list, each course description reviewed refers to 1-3 translation technologies. The number of translation technologies reported in each course description is generally limited.

As for the postgraduate programmes, only nine translation programmes (7 MA and 1 PhD) were located in 22 universities. Eight of these nine programmes have translation technology courses. The eight programmes are offered at the following universities (arranged alphabetically): Effat University, Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University (an MA programme and a PhD one), King Abdulaziz University, King Khaled University, King Saud University, Princess Nora University, Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University, and Saudi Electronic University. It is worth noting that the translation technology courses offered by Effat University and King Abdulaziz University are elective rather than mandatory ones. In a similar way to the undergraduate courses, the relevant courses in the postgraduate programmes took different names such as computer applications in translation, translation & technology, translation technology(ies), and machine translation. Only one 3-hour/2-hour translation technology course is delivered in the eight programmes with the exception of Saudi Electronic University which has a specialized MA translation technology programme with three relevant courses. Regarding the technological applications the courses focus on, the available online course descriptions indicate these include: corpus-based translation tools, translation memories, machine translation, terminological databases, terminology management software (4 each), and project management (3) and artificial intelligence-driven translation applications (2). As noted, this range of translation technological applications is also similar to the one noted in the undergraduate course descriptions.

In their answers to the interview questions, the faculty members confirmed the issues noted in course descriptions. They mentioned focusing on machine translation and translation memory applications in the CAT courses taught. Applications such as SDL Trados, Matecat, and Google Translate were frequently mentioned by the interviewees. Besides, six interviewees also mentioned integrating online dictionaries and terminology bases into their CAT teaching. Post-editing activities were also mentioned by three faculty members. Overall, what the interviewees mentioned is consistent with course descriptions, but adds some minor details about CAT integration.

A problematic issue seems to be related to the teaching methods used and students' performance assessment in these undergraduate and postgraduate courses. In both programme types, the lecture was the most frequently mentioned teaching method in course descriptions. Other teaching techniques include: class discussion, group and pair activities, and tutorials. This generally indicates the more theoretical nature of the CAT courses delivered. As for assessment, most undergraduate course descriptions suggest that students' performance is assessed theoretically rather practically. Assessment methods such as student presentations, workshops, group discussions, class activities, quizzes, written tests, and critical essays occur very frequently in the available undergraduate course descriptions whereas student projects occur only once. In postgraduate course descriptions, practical projects occur more frequently but they are accompanied by other assessment methods such as presentations, observation, assignments, and final exams. Thus, postgraduate students' performance is not assessed in a pure practical way despite the more practical nature of their courses. Overall, the reviewed course descriptions indicate shortcomings in the teaching and assessment methods in both undergraduate and postgraduate translation technology courses.

4.2 Integrating CAT into non-CAT translation courses

The interviews revealed important points about the faculty members' perceptions of CAT integration. The eight interviewees congruently agreed on the importance of integrating CAT into their university translation programmes and teaching. All interviewees strongly supported this view and justified it by the benefits students can gain from such integration; the two interview parts summarize their reasons:

- *Yes, sure. Integrating CAT in our translation programme is a must. This saves translators' time and helps in getting a better translation product.*
- *Certainly. At present, CAT is the key to learning translation and completing translation tasks quickly and successfully.*

Due to these reasons, the faculty members reported consistent views on the importance of CAT courses in the BA and MA translation programmes offered by their universities.

Despite the faculty members' positive perceptions of CAT, they were unwilling regarding its integration into the non-CAT courses tailored for teaching different translation genres. Overall, the interviewed faculty members reported a positive attitude towards using CAT-based activities in teaching genres such as legal, media, and scientific translation. Despite this, the interviewees said they opt for getting students to use CAT applications on their own out of the university rather than in university classes. They mentioned encouraging their students to use CAT outside the classroom context; for example:

- *I always encourage my students to depend on CAT either in their individual or collaborative translation projects.*

According to all the interviewees, there are two factors hindering their attempts for effectively implementing CAT in normal or non-CAT translation classes. These factors are primarily the limited time available and lack of students' responsiveness to these technology-mediated activities. In the following two interview parts, the latter issue is clarified:

- *I usually ask the students to use tools such as ChatGPT to translate a text. Unfortunately, when I first tried to use this activity kind, they simply copied and pasted the translation with no clear understanding of the choices made. When asking them to edit the translation, they couldn't explain their decisions or offer any interpretations. They were unwilling to engage properly in this activity.*
- *We've recently started training students to post-edit AI-generated translation. But we're still an early stage. Getting students familiar with performing CAT-based tasks in classes requires a lot of improvement and development, which we're planning to implement in the academic terms and years to come.*

As can be inferred from the two interview parts, undergraduate translation students at some Saudi universities seem to be unfamiliar enough with doing CAT-based activities in traditional translation classes. One main reason for the lack of undergraduate students' responsiveness to CAT-based activities in non-CAT translation classes could be the lack of adequate training in CAT courses. In other words, the CAT course delivered in the BA translation programme offered by each department/university does not seem to have enabled students to be ready enough for this types of activities in their non-CAT translation courses.

4.3 Difficulties encountered in CAT integration and needed reforms

Apart from the above views and experiences the faculty members reported, they also referred to some other difficulties encountered in integrating CAT either as a complete course or as a part of course covering a translation genre. They talked particularly about the unavailability of required CAT facilities and the inadequate practice students have in the CAT courses currently taught at their universities. According to the interviewees, the students in the five universities can access free

translation applications, but non-free ones are only accessible in a lab or some limited computer devices at the university. Besides, the interviewees representing three universities ($n = 5$) mentioned that only one or two non-free translation applications are accessible at their universities. Outside the university, students cannot access these applications. Congruent with the point mentioned at the end of the above subsection, the interviewed faculty members also complained about the superficial practical experiences students have in using CAT applications at their universities. That is why many students complete their translation degrees with no ample CAT knowledge or practice.

To address these gaps, the interviewees congruently referred to two main reforms needed for helping students be more efficient CAT users, and in turn prepare them for their future workplace tasks. Their suggestions concern fostering the practical component in CAT courses and accessing paid CAT applications. Both requirements are related to undergraduate and postgraduate courses, though two faculty members view that the first requirement applies to the undergraduate courses only at their university as their postgraduate ones need no further modifications. With regard to fostering the practical component, the interviewees view it could be accomplished through increasing practical training time, training students in various applications, establishing CAT labs, and offering translation faculty members regular training workshops involving collaboration with translation technologists. The following interview parts illustrate the last two specific needs:

- *To foster the practical part in CAT courses, I suggest establishing CAT labs in which students can have intensive training.*
- *I suggest organizing regular workshops for our faculty members to collaborate with CAT companies and specialists. This will help a lot in developing our CAT training competencies.*

The above two interview parts indicate that CAT labs seem to be unavailable in most Saudi universities, and that training translation faculty in using CAT applications will be key to implementing CAT courses efficiently. As for accessing paid CAT applications, this requirement concurs with the interviewees' concerns about their inability to access multiple CAT applications and use them in translation courses. Therefore, translation/foreign language departments need to enable their students and faculty members to access CAT applications they cannot afford subscribing to.

5. Discussion and conclusions

The present study revealed important issues about the integration of CAT into the undergraduate and postgraduate translation programmes in Saudi Arabia. The review of academic study plans and CAT course descriptions revealed that CAT courses are only available in 14 BA translation programmes, and eight postgraduate ones (out of 22 and nine programmes reviewed, respectively). The range of CAT applications covered in both types of courses was almost similar (for example, translation memories, machine translation, terminological databases, and project management applications), though there seems to be a deeper level of studying them at the postgraduate stages. The interviews also confirmed what has been noted in academic study plans and course descriptions. A main shortcoming found in both the undergraduate and postgraduate CAT courses is their more theoretical nature, and the insufficient training or practical part in them. This issue was noted in the teaching and assessment methods in the available course descriptions, and also raised by some interviewees. Similarly, the same shortcoming was also found in other international contexts (e.g., Alzghoul et al., 2025; Driai & Bekkouché, 2025; Eminović & Bureković, 2025; Sánchez-Castany, 2023; Yao, 2017; Zhang & Vieira, 2012).

Though the participant faculty members positively perceived the integration of CAT into non-CAT courses covering different translation genres, they were unwilling to use CAT-based activities in these courses. The faculty members' two main reasons for this unwillingness are the limited time available and lack of students' responsiveness to technology-mediated activities in non-CAT classes. That is why they reported opting for getting students to use CAT applications outside translation classes to complete the translation tasks related to non-CAT courses. Additionally, the faculty members also talked about the unavailability of required CAT facilities and the inadequate practical training in CAT courses as two other obstacles they encounter in using translation technologies and activities in both CAT courses or the non-CAT courses covering translation genres. These results are consistent with previous studies reporting similar obstacles to effective implementation of CAT in Saudi university translation education programmes (Aldossary, 2023; Alotaibi, 2014; Al-Rumaih, 2021; Omar et al., 2020).

The present results indicate the need for reforming translator education practices and integrating CAT more effectively into translation programmes at Saudi universities. CAT courses should be popularized in all translation programmes and allocated more teaching hours. In line with the interviewees' suggestions, students in both undergraduate and postgraduate translation programmes need to be provided with sufficient CAT training. This will not be possible without training translator trainers in how to teach CAT, making required translation technologies available, establishing CAT labs, and collaborating with translation technologists. There is also a need for modifying assessment policies in CAT courses offered at Saudi universities. Assessment tasks in future courses should make much more use of practical assignments and projects rather than written essays, tests and exams.

This study is not without limitations. Future studies could investigate the same issues addressed here using a survey to access a larger number of translator trainers. Further, students' perceptions of and interaction with CAT tools cannot be ignored. Issues such as students' self-efficacy in using CAT applications, attitudes towards using them, and their post-editing cognitive processes deserve due attention in future research (see Abdel Latif, 2018, 2021, 2024; Abdel Latif & Alhamad, 2025). Finally, comparing the perspectives of trainees and trainers on CAT integration is another issue that remains under-explored.

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Informed Consent Statement

The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki. Informed consent was obtained from all the participants who took part in the study.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data collected for this study cannot be shared publicly due to strict adherence to privacy concerns and ethical obligations related to the participants' confidentiality.

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Author bios

Talal Musaed Alghizzi is an associate professor of applied linguistics at Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University (IMSIU), Saudi Arabia. He completed his PhD at the University College Cork, Republic of Ireland. He has published in WoS- and Scopus-indexed journals. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1088-9216>

Muhammad M. M. Abdel Latif is an associate professor of TESOL at the Faculty of Graduate Studies of Education. Cairo University, Egypt. He has published research papers in more than 20 internationally well-known and ranked journals, including: *Applied Linguistics*, *Assessing Writing*, *Canadian Modern Language Review*, *ELT Journal*, *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning*, *ReCALL*, and *System*. He is also the author of *Writing Motivation Research, Measurement & Pedagogy* published by Routledge. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4002-822X>