The Role and Place of Translation in The French Department: The Case of 3rd Year Students At University of Oran 2

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### Abstract

Pedagogical translation is a specific type of translation employed in language education to enhance students' literacy skills. It is recognized that didactic translation involves transferring meaning between languages with the aim of improving language proficiency. This case study was conducted to emphasize the role of translation within the French Language Department at the University of Oran 2. The researcher aimed to explore the benefits of translation in teaching French and preparing students for careers as French language educators at both primary and secondary educational levels. The study focused on students and teachers within the French Language Department, who are pivotal in the teaching-learning environment.

Established in 2014, the French Language Department at the University of Oran 2 was formerly part of the Foreign Languages Institute. This investigation took place during the second semester of the academic year 2022-2023 and employed a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of the subject. The study systematically addressed the issue from various scientific and practical perspectives. Data collection involved student questionnaires, teacher interviews, and observations to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings.

Participants included third-year students at the University of Oran 2 (Algeria). The findings indicated that didactic translation significantly enhanced students' reading comprehension and written expression, particularly at grammatical, syntactic, and semantic levels. The study also proposed strategies to assist future French teachers in overcoming challenges and limitations in their careers. It recommended integrating translation as a core module across all academic levels to ensure thorough mastery of the French language.
**Mots clés**

Apprentissage ; Compréhension de l’écrit ; Enseignement ; Langue française ; Production écrite ; Traduction pédagogique

**Résumé**

La traduction pédagogique est une méthode employée dans l’enseignement des langues pour renforcer les compétences des étudiants. Cette étude vise à évaluer l’efficacité de l’intégration de la traduction pédagogique dans le programme officiel de français de la troisième année de licence (L3). Pour répondre à cette question de recherche, le chercheur utilise une approche mixte, incluant une étude de cas, et recourt à plusieurs outils de collecte de données : un questionnaire adressé aux étudiants, un entretien avec l’enseignant, et une observation directe.

Les données collectées, qui ont validé l’hypothèse initiale, proviennent d’étudiants de la troisième année à l’université d’Oran 2 (Algérie). Les résultats indiquent que la traduction didactique a significativement amélioré la compréhension de l’écrit ainsi que l’expression écrite des étudiants, notamment sur les plans grammatical, syntaxique et sémantique. De plus, elle a contribué au développement de stratégies permettant aux futurs enseignants de français de mieux gérer les défis et de réussir dans leur carrière.

L’étude suggère également l’inclusion de la traduction comme module fondamental à tous les niveaux académiques pour garantir une maîtrise approfondie de la langue.

**الملخص**

تعتبر ترجمة التعليمية من الطرق المستعملة في تعليم اللغة بغية تطوير مهارات فهم النص و التحرير لدى الطالب. يروم هذا البحث إلى تقييم مدى نجاعة إدراج الترجمة التعليمية في المنهج الرسمي البرنامج اللغة الفرنسية لطلبة السنة الثالثة ليسانس، ويعتمد الباحث على دراسة حالة كعينة للإجابة على اشكالية هذه الدراسة. واستعان الباحث باستبيان موجه للطلبة، ومقابلة مع الأساتذة، وتحليل لإجابات الطلبة على اختبارات كتابية  ، وهي إجراءات تستغلها في جميع البيانات للتأكد من ثوثيقة وصحة النتائج. تم الحصول على البيانات التي تؤكد الفرضية من عينة من طلبة السنة الثالثة -لغة فرنسية- بجامعة وهران 2 (الجزائر). وأظهرت النتائج أن الترجمة التعليمية حسن بشكل كبير مهارات فهم النص والتحرير لدى الطلبة على المستوى النحوية والفرعية والدلائية. كما طرط مجموعة من الاستراتيجيات لمساعدة معلمي اللغة الفرنسية في المستقبل على تدليل الصعوبات وتوفير الحلول الملائمة. وقد تم اقتراح إدراج الترجمة كوحدة أساسية في جميع المستويات الأكاديمية لضمان إتقان اللغة بشكل كامل.

**الكلمات المفتاحية**

الترجمة التعليمية; فهم النص; التحرير التعليمية; تعلم اللغة الفرنسية;
1. Introduction

The task of learning and teaching languages is crucial in today's world, demanding consistency, commitment, and effective methods tailored to meet students' needs and objectives. Consequently, scholars and educators have strived to develop suitable theories and approaches to comprehend the entire learning process and establish effective guidelines.

The use of translation in language classes, for example, is a natural process but has been a subject of concern and controversy. Its negative reputation in education stems from the shortcomings of the grammar-translation method in the 20th century, which emphasized rules over communication. However, translation has recently regained popularity with a reevaluation of traditional methodologies.

In Algeria, teaching translation in academia serves dual purposes: professional, by preparing translators for the workforce, and academic, by training future language teachers to use translation as a teaching tool in language classes. Translation plays a crucial role in the training of French language students during their second and third years.

Thus, the aim of this paper is to explore teachers' and students' perceptions regarding the use of translation within the French department, and to assess how well the subject matter aligns with the educational requirements of the official curriculum. This study seeks to address the following research question:

- To what extent does the translation unit contribute linguistically (to enhance language skills) and pedagogically (to acquire necessary techniques for teaching French across different educational stages) in shaping French language students?

The researcher hypothesises that integrating a translation unit into the curriculum for French language students will better prepare them to overcome challenges they may encounter in their future roles as teachers in primary, middle, and secondary schools. The effectiveness of this preparation hinges on whether participants in the teaching-learning process understand the specific objectives and requirements of the unit by the end of the program.

Third-year students in the Department of French Language were selected as the focus of a case study to gather primary data on prospective graduates who will enter the teaching profession at various educational levels—primary, middle, and secondary schools. A mixed-method approach was used for data collection, specifically employing a combination of questionnaire surveys, interviews, and program evaluations as research instruments in the case study research.

2. Translation in Language Education

Compared to other teaching methods, the educational significance of translation requires clear definition, as it can be challenging for teachers to perceive translation as a standalone language learning approach. Typically employed as a verification tool to assess
learning outcomes or to elucidate key distinctions between language systems, translation is often relegated to the task of converting individual sentences. (Pym et al., 2013)

2.1. A Historical Background
2.1.1. Translation as a Teaching Tool

In the early nineteenth century, translation served as a key tool in language education, particularly for teaching classical languages. It played a crucial role in fostering linguistic awareness. During translation exercises, learners were required to discern both structural and lexical nuances (Abdel Magid & Mubaraki, 2023). Teachers designed grammar and translation activities to enhance students' abilities in reading and writing in the target language, notably aiding in the study of Latin or Greek by translating religious or literary texts to illustrate grammar points. The Grammar Translation Method (GTM) emerged to facilitate the learning of modern languages. However, such practices often relegated speaking skills to a secondary role, focusing instead on transferring decontextualized sentences or sentence fragments to deepen comprehension of written language. (Malmkjaer, 1998)

The use of learners' mother tongue was also integrated to bolster the acquisition of the target language. It was assumed that proficiency in the mother tongue would fortify mastery of the target language, enabling learners to articulate their thoughts more effectively in a foreign language. Grammar instruction often involved comparative activities between the target and native languages, although reliance on rigid grammatical structures sometimes hindered fluid language acquisition. Additionally, learners' native language was utilized to explain vocabulary in the target language.

Translation, therefore, became instrumental in bilingual classrooms, facilitating the objective enhancement of knowledge, vocabulary, and grammar necessary for comprehending complex texts. However, the process of translating from the target language back into the mother tongue posed challenges, as it could obscure whether the passages truly reflected understanding in the target language. (Sankaravelayuthan et al., 2020).

By the late nineteenth century, a reform movement criticized the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) for its limited utility in achieving the primary goal of language education: communication. Recognizing the shortcomings of the GTM, new teaching methodologies emerged, such as the Direct Method, Natural Method, and Communicative Approach, which prioritized active language use and marginalized the role of translation in language instruction. (Malmkjaer, 1998)

2.1.2. The revival of translation as the Fifth Skill in Language Classes

Recently, many researchers have questioned the exclusion of translation from language classes, arguing that objections to its use should be reconsidered. This concern highlights the pedagogical value of translation (Howatt, 1984; Harmer, 2007). If translation is completely rejected in the classroom, it cannot be eliminated from learners'
cognitive processes and daily experiences. Utilizing translation as an effective tool in foreign language education provides opportunities for contrastive analysis across various linguistic levels, encompassing both systemic and functional aspects of different languages. Translation serves as a valuable skill that facilitates communicative goals and addresses linguistic challenges. (Naimushin, 2002)

Artar (2017) asserts that integrating translation into language classes serves multiple significant purposes:

- **Humanistic Reasons**: Utilizing translation, particularly by reducing the constraints of using only the target language (L1), alleviates anxiety among learners and fosters a relaxed learning atmosphere.
- **Practical Reasons**: Translation, including code-switching, proves to be a time-saving technique, enhancing efficiency in learning and comprehension.
- **Technical Reasons**: The pervasive influence of technology necessitates the consideration of online machine translation tools, emphasizing the practicality and relevance of incorporating such resources.
- **Political Reasons**: In the context of globalization, translation assumes a crucial role in various political and social domains, facilitating communication across diverse linguistic and cultural boundaries.
- **Cognitive Reasons**: Acknowledging that translation inevitably engages learners' cognitive processes, teachers are encouraged to integrate it as a natural part of the learning experience, recognizing its intrinsic value in language acquisition.

### 2.2. Pedagogical Translation vs Professional Translation

Translation is taught in universities in two primary ways: pedagogic translation and traditional translation. The latter involves activities that translate between foreign languages and the native tongue (version and theme), designed for translation students (Gile, 2005). It is recognized as a distinct discipline in translation institutes and departments, or as an integral module in foreign language training. Translation serves as a crucial and effective tool in language education and assessment (Evanthia, 2023).

Of particular interest in this study is pedagogic translation, which analyzes the translation process through comparisons of target texts with source texts between teachers and students (Perrin, 2007). This approach is commonly practiced in departments of foreign languages, where language acquisition is central to student preparation. Translation's role here is to enhance and refine linguistic skills. Delisle (2005) terms this type "didactic translation," emphasizing its role in interlinguistic transfer to enhance language proficiency.

In contrast, professional translation aims to meet client needs without necessarily comparing the final product with the source text, tailored for specific audiences (Delisle, 1980). Didactic translation, on the other hand, primarily serves pedagogical purposes,
facilitating language learning through the development of lexical, grammatical, and syntactical competencies (Ahmadi, 2019).

Didactic translation is typically conducted within foreign language departments, involving interaction between two parties who evaluate the final product. It serves as a tool rather than a goal, unconstrained by economic contexts that might limit creativity and flexibility in translation processes. Instead, it fosters engaging activities aimed at enhancing linguistic performance. It primarily serves as an assessment tool to evaluate and strengthen grammar and vocabulary through comparative linguistics, addressing equivalence challenges (Medhat-Lecocq et al., 2016).

2.2.1. The Characteristics of Pedagogic Translation

Pedagogical translation is characterised by several distinct features:

- It focuses on evaluating students' work by identifying and correcting errors, emphasizing linguistic correction rather than cognitive processing of the translated content. This approach is student-centered, assessing the degree of linguistic equivalence between the source and target texts rather than the cognitive content.
- Translation primarily targets the terminological level, progressing in difficulty from single words to short texts.
- Within language departments, translation serves as a tool to enhance vocabulary acquisition.
- Didactic translation often omits documentary research, relying instead on bilingual dictionaries and terminological databases.
- Pedagogical Translation adheres to contemporary translation theories, particularly the interpretive theory (Gile, 2005).
- It adopts an explanatory approach where the teacher's role involves explaining or commenting on the L1 (Lavault, 1998)

2.3. Pedagogical Translation in the French Department at an Algerian University

Translation within the French department is introduced as a unit for third-year undergraduate students pursuing a degree in French. The languages of instruction are French and Arabic. The approach is governed by a methodology focused on translating various types of texts (Ministry of Higher Education, 2022).

2.3.1. Types of Didactic Translation in the French Department

According to Perrin (2007), didactic translation employs three types of exercises:

- *Imitation or Free Translation:* In this exercise, the teacher selects texts containing challenging vocabulary for the students.
3. Methodology

The present study aimed to explore the role of the translation unit within the French Language Department at University of Oran 2. Specifically, the researcher investigated the effectiveness of integrating translation in teaching French and its impact on preparing students for future careers as French language educators in primary and secondary education settings.

Participants included both French language students and teachers, chosen due to their central role in the teaching-learning process. The Department of French, established in 2014 at University of Oran 2, originated from the Foreign Languages Institute. Data collection took place during the second semester of the academic year 2022-2023.

Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study gathered quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the topic. It systematically addressed the research problem from multiple perspectives—scientific, practical, and educational.

3.1 Research Design

The case study research was conducted to systematically gather primary data from a selected sample. The sample consisted of eighty (80) third-year French language students and four (4) translation teachers. In their third year, starting from 2022, students were introduced to translation studies as per ministerial decision (Arreté 1116, 2022), with an emphasis on preparing them for future roles as language instructors.

3.2 Research Instrument(s)

To ensure the reliability and objectivity of the data collected, the researcher employed three key instruments: a student questionnaire, teacher interviews, and semi-structured observations. These instruments were strategically designed and utilised to align with the course development and research objectives.

3.2.1. The Student’s Questionnaire

The student questionnaire served as a crucial tool in the case study research. It comprised logically organised questions distributed among the participants. The data gathered from the questionnaire will be analyzed using statistical methods. The questionnaire is divided into three main sections:

- **Grammatical Translation**: The teacher creates texts in the students' native language, which they then translate into French (theme) to demonstrate their mastery of grammar.
- **Theme/Version Exercise**: Students translate authentic texts from Arabic to French and vice versa. The teacher evaluates the students based on specific criteria including terminology, grammar, style, and others.
○ **Part One: Assessment of Students' French Language Proficiency**
This section aimed to gather general information about students' proficiency in the French language. It included their awareness of international scoring systems used to evaluate language learners and their self-reported proficiency levels based on these standards.

○ **Part Two: the Status of Translation in the French Department**
This part assessed students' awareness of and interest in translation as a component of French language education.

○ **Part three: Translation as a Pedagogical Tool in The French Department**
This section explored students' perceptions of academic translation, including their understanding of its various types and distinctive characteristics. It also investigated their impressions of how translation aids in achieving their learning objectives.

3.2.2. *The Teacher’s Interview*

The interview process is crucial in case studies for gathering qualitative data. It involves posing questions to four (4) translation teachers within the department of French. Their responses will be thematically analysed. The interview includes ten (10) questions structured around three main themes: the rationale behind integrating translation into the French language department's curriculum, the adequacy of the allocated time for achieving teaching objectives, and the effectiveness of translation as a pedagogical tool for enhancing proficiency in French language skills.

3.2.3. *The Semi-structured Observation*

Third-year students (in semesters five and six) undertake a unit titled “Translation: Mother Tongue L1 (Arabic)/French Language L2” as part of the discovery teaching units, carrying 2 credits and a coefficient of 2. They study for sixteen (16) weeks per year, split into two sessions of three (3) hours each week (one for lectures and the other for practical sessions). Assessment comprises 40% continuous evaluation and 60% summative evaluation at the end of each semester.

The first semester focuses on theoretical aspects, covering definitions, translation theories, techniques, and the relationship between translation and foreign language learning. The second semester emphasises practical exercises (theme/version) involving the translation of various types of texts.

The observation protocol was designed in line with the study's context and objectives. The researcher conducted observations during the second semester of the academic year from January to May 2023, employing diagnostic tests administered at the beginning of the year and continuous assessments conducted throughout the semester.
4. Results and Discussions

4.1 The Students' Questionnaire

This section analyses and discusses the quantitative data in detail.

4.1.1 The Students' Proficiency Level in French

According to the diagram, 47% of students reported their proficiency as good, while 40% considered themselves average, and the remaining 13% rated their proficiency as weak. It is important to note that these self-assessments may not accurately reflect the students' actual proficiency levels, as they were not based on rigorous, scientifically validated assessments. This discrepancy is further highlighted by their performance in the diagnostic test, which indicated that a majority of students fell within the average proficiency range. Moving forward, it is crucial to explore methods for students to better gauge their proficiency levels in the language based on their responses to subsequent questions.

4.1.2 The Students' Knowledge of the International Language Scoring Scale

Initially, 60% of the participants were unaware of the international standard used to assess proficiency in the French language, known as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Upon introduction to the scale, they gained awareness of their proficiency levels and subsequently focused on improving their language skills.
4.1.3 The Students’ Proficiency level Regarding their familiarity with the international scale

Out of the respondents, 40% (32 students) indicated awareness of the scale. Among them, 68% had a basic understanding, while only 32% answered correctly about its details.

5. The Status of Translation in the French Department

5.1. The Students’ punctuality

During the academic year, 90% of students consistently demonstrated punctuality, indicating their strong commitment to the subject. Conversely, the remaining 10%, who attended sporadically, showed comparatively less progress.
5.2. The Importance of Translation as a Unit

At the start of the academic year, 45% of respondents acknowledged the importance of translation in language learning. By the end of the year, this figure had risen significantly to 92%. This increase can be attributed largely to their enriching experiences.

Figure 4. The Importance of Translation as a Module

5.3. The Students' Perceptions of the Translation Program

Eighty-seven percent (87%) reported that the translation course had a positive impact on their terminological, semantic, and grammatical competencies.

Figure 5. Students' Perceptions of the Translation Program
5.4. The Students' Perception of Translation Inclusion in The French Department

A majority of respondents expressed a need for increased time allocated to translation to develop essential strategies for improvement. Specifically, 85% considered translation a novel and crucial tool for enhancing their language proficiency. Additionally, 76% emphasized the significance of translation as a technique within French classes. Furthermore, 86% recommended introducing translation from the first year of study due to its perceived importance.

6. Translation as a Pedagogical Tool in the French Language Department

6.1. The Difference Between Pedagogical Translation and Professional Translation

![Figure 6. The Difference Between Pedagogical Translation and Professional Translation](image)

Initially, 86% of respondents required clarification on the distinction between pedagogical and professional translation, a logical starting point. By the conclusion, 96% of students demonstrated understanding of the subject's nature and objectives.

6.2. The Students Explanation of the Difference Between Pedagogical and Professional Translation

Responses indicated that even those who initially answered affirmatively needed clarification on the differences between both types.

7. The Role of Pedagogical Translation in Enhancing Students’ Performance

The diagram below illustrates the beneficial impact of pedagogical translation within the French department, particularly in enhancing reading and writing skills through progressive improvement.
8. The Impact Impact of Translation on Students’ Performance

Among respondents who found translation beneficial, 63% noted improvement in their literary skills. Additionally, 25% acknowledged its role in enhancing reading abilities, while nearly all participants highlighted gains in grammar and vocabulary. A significant 87% appreciated how translation facilitated self-correction and improved proofreading abilities.

9. The Strategies and Activities Used in Translation Class

Sixty-five percent (65%) of respondents confirmed that they found Theme/Version activities most effective for learning. This method allows for comprehensive commitment across all linguistic levels.

Figure 7. The Role of Pedagogic Translation in the Development of the Student's Performance

Figure 8. The Strategies and Activities Used in Translation Class
4.2 The Teachers’ Interview

The researcher conducted interviews with four translation instructors from the French department, all holding advanced degrees in translation studies. Three of them are full-time faculty members with teaching experience ranging from two to ten years. Their extensive experience enabled them to effectively deliver the course content and achieve its objectives. The researcher noted a high level of coordination among them, which positively impacted the overall proficiency of the students.

Regarding the official curriculum, all respondents emphasized the importance of translation in foreign language education and recommended, as previously suggested by students, the inclusion of translation as a core unit across all academic years (L1, L2, L3, M1, and M2). This integration is crucial for providing learners with a comprehensive understanding of translation and its practical applications in language learning. Two interviewees also suggested increasing the allocated time to better meet teaching objectives.

The informants unanimously agreed that teaching didactic translation within French language classes is highly effective for developing various linguistic competencies such as lexical, semantic, and grammatical skills. During the observational phase, the researcher observed improved performance among learners. Furthermore, three teachers highlighted that proficiency in translation prepares students for future careers, particularly as French language educators across different educational levels.

4.3 The semi-structured observation

At the beginning of the academic year, the teacher conducted a diagnostic assessment using theme and version translations of literary texts to evaluate students' comprehension and writing abilities. The version translation assessed reading comprehension in French, focusing on grammar, vocabulary (lexis), and semantics. Four texts were used for theme translation exercises, where students translated from Arabic into French, thereby refining their written expression skills in French.

According to the result (theme translation), the researcher classified the percentage of translation errors as follows:

- Diagnostic test: The grammatical errors represented 47%, the lexical errors were 45%, and the semantic errors identified were 20%.
- Text 1: The grammatical errors represented 43%, the lexical errors were 40%, and the semantic errors identified were 20%.
- Text 2: The grammatical errors represented 38%, the lexical errors were 31%, and the semantic errors identified were 17%.
- Text 3: the grammatical errors represented 31%, the lexical errors were 27%, and the semantic errors identified were 14%.
- Text 4: the grammatical errors represented 22%, the lexical errors were 19%, and the semantic errors identified were 10%.
Over the course of the study period, the researcher observed a decrease in errors to 25% for grammar, 26% for vocabulary, and 10% for semantics. Overall, there was a notable 17% improvement in written expression skills, demonstrating the effectiveness of these activities in enhancing students' writing abilities as confirmed by both teachers and students.

Version translation activity unveiled the following findings:

- **Diagnostic test**: The grammatical errors represented 36%, the lexical errors were 19%, and the semantic errors identified were 25%.
- **Text 1**: The grammatical errors represented 33%, the lexical errors were 18%, and the semantic errors identified were 23%.
- **Text 2**: The grammatical errors represented 24%, the lexical errors were 12%, and the semantic errors identified were 8%.

The analysis revealed a reduction in errors to 12% for grammar, 7% for vocabulary, and 5% for semantics. This improvement in reading comprehension by 8% was considered satisfactory based on the number of translated texts.

### 7. Conclusion

The investigation highlighted the critical role of integrating translation units within the French department to validate the predetermined hypothesis. Upon thorough analysis of the primary data, the researcher substantiated that pedagogical translation significantly enhances linguistic proficiency in French, particularly in reading comprehension and written expression. Didactic translation effectively diminishes linguistic errors, particularly grammatical inconsistencies, while fostering the development of contrastive equivalence between linguistic systems. Learners also benefit from enriched vocabulary acquisition (lexis) through pedagogical translation tailored for French language learners. In essence, translation emerges as a strategic domain where learners cultivate skills to overcome potential challenges in their future careers. Consequently, the researcher advocates for the integration of translation units across all academic levels (from L1 to M2) and suggests increasing dedicated time for pedagogical translation within the official curriculum.
References


Appendices
Appendix (I): The Students’ Questionnaire
The student's level in the French language
1. What do you think of your level in the French language?
   Weak
   Average
   Good
2. Do you know about the international languages scoring scale?
   Yes
   No
3. If yes, which level you think you have achieved

The status of translation in the French department
1. Do you attend your translation classes?
   Always
   Sometimes
   Never
2. How can you rate translation as a module
   Important
   Less important
   Not important
3. What do you think of the translation module program? Does it help achieve the learning objectives?
   Yes
   No
4. What do you think of translation inclusion as a module in the French department?

Translation as a pedagogic tool in the French language department
1. Do you know the difference between pedagogic translation and professional translation?
   Yes
   No
2. If yes, can you explain

3. Can you determine the role of pedagogic translation in your development?
   Useful
   Useless
4. Based on your experience, to what extent does it help improve your linguistic level?
5. What strategies and activities do your teacher use to help you improve?
   Theme/version
   Imitation
   Grammar activities

6. Which skills are best-improved using pedagogic translation?
   Writing
   Comprehension
   Both

Appendix (II): The Teachers’ Interview

1. General information
   a. Scientific degree
   b. Grade
   c. Position
   d. Experience
2. What do you think about integrating translation as a separate module in language departments?
3. What do you think of the official program administered by the ministry destined for French language students?
4. Does it help to improve pedagogical or professional translation?
5. If used as a pedagogical tool, does it help to improve the student's level of proficiency in the French language?
6. What do you think of the time allotted to translation in the French department?
7. Is it enough to help learners acquire the necessary strategies to improve their linguistic competencies?
8. Have you noticed an improvement in the student's linguistic level?
9. After implementing translation as a pedagogic tool to help them develop comprehension and writing skills?
10. Does the translation course enable them to use pedagogical translation in their future career as teachers of the French language in the different educational stages?
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