Competency-Based Education To Teach Translation: Jordan's Graduate Employability

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Abstract: Youth make up over half of Jordan's population, and almost half of them are unemployed. Young people experience apathy and frustration due to a lack of employment opportunities and an education system that does not prepare them for the workforce. In Jordanian Higher Education Institutions, student success is our focus. However, we still follow a traditional way of teaching and delivering knowledge. This study aims to promote operating more of a personalized learning approach to increase graduates' preparedness to meet workforce needs in the translation industry. For the purpose of assessing the efficiency of the standing teaching approach in the Translation program, Al-Balqa Applied University (BAU) students were surveyed. With respect to collecting data on the employability skills needed in the market, translation companies/agencies in Jordan were also surveyed. To remedy the gap between academia and industry and to prepare graduates for the market needs, the study proposes reforming the curriculum and teaching methods of the Translation Program to align with the competency-based approach in education.

Keywords: *employability skills; translation industry, competency-based education, translator's ethics and visibility.*

Introduction

It is essential that the market is provided with competent translators. As highlighted by Daniel Gouadec (2007), universities should award translation credentials only to those who master the translation competencies. Students at Jordanian Higher Education Institutions go from one course to another without being fully competent.

Using competency-based education (CBE) model terminology, a student who receives 50% of the total grade can pass the course and enter the workforce. It is my understanding of CBE that it connects student achievement in the classroom with workforce readiness. To increase employability skills, the Jordanian education system needs to adopt a more personalized approach. Figure 1 below shows what it means by competence. It is a combination of skill, knowledge, and attitude.
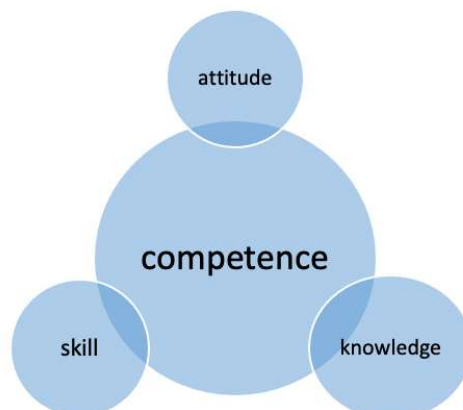
Figure 1. Competence

Despite differences in competence among institutions, learning expectations remain constant. In order to demonstrate competencies, students must engage in activities and experiences aligned with clearly defined programmatic outcomes. Faculty members provide proactive support and guidance to students. CBE is different from self-paced learning in that faculty are still involved, there is some sort of substantiative interaction. In order to earn credentials, students must demonstrate mastery, which will differ from institution to institution, so assessment and curriculum design are key considerations. With CBE, the focus shifts from how time is allocated to whether the students can demonstrate well-defined competencies. Through this approach, students can take advantage of their past knowledge, build on their experience, and customize the learning process according to their needs. Instead of advancing to the next level when the semester or term is over, students are measured when they demonstrate proficiency in the material they have been assigned. Ultimately, CBE is about improving the learning outcomes that matter. CBE is an outcome-based approach to earning a college degree or other credentials. Students demonstrate competencies specific to the course at the program level through a structured curriculum and genuine assessment.

How to implement CBE? By making competencies explicit, teachers can help students monitor their progress throughout the semester and steer their learning toward those competencies. Competencies are assessed continuously rather than in a single summative test. Moreover, objective tests may or may not measure what students can do. They may measure knowledge, but do they really measure what they can do? Rather than simply reciting, the CBE assesses whether the student can apply and do. This approach could be applied to assess whether students/alumni have the competencies needed in the workforce and whether they can produce an adequate translation that meets market needs.

Method

This study, which has two surveys, one for the employer and the other one for the alumni, aims to enhance the Translation graduate employability skills. The population of the study consists of associate diploma (two-year

program) alumni of Translation for three years (2021, 2022, and 2023), taking into consideration that the program has been established recently in 2019. To reach the largest sample possible, the researcher sent out two online surveys of 22 questions each, most of which are closed-ended questions. The first survey form was sent out to BAU alumni of the associate diploma Translation Program while the other one was sent out to various local translation companies/agencies in Amman, Jordan. Alumni and employers were asked to participate in those two web-based surveys; the link to those online surveys was sent to the participants via WhatsApp (a communication app). Of the 70 questionnaires sent to the alumni, 32 were returned, and of the 20 questionnaires sent to the translation companies/agencies, 8 were returned, all the surveys were filled in properly, so all of them were considered and no one was eliminated. The data used in the research were evaluated over 40 questionnaires received from the two samples (alumni and employers).

The return rate of the alumni survey was 46% while the return rate of the employer survey was 40%. It is seen that this rate is sufficient to represent the population. In order to measure the participants' employability competencies, multiple choice questions with multiple answers are formed and scales (from 1 to 5) are used to rate the necessity of using technology in translation and inevitability of work ethics. In the questionnaire form, the purpose of the study was first explained to the participants and then they were asked to fill in the questionnaire form. The average time of the employer form is 7 minutes and 45 seconds while of the alumni form it is 8 minutes and 17 seconds.

Results

Table 1 shows the findings of the employer survey. All the companies/agencies are local establishments located in Amman (the capital of Jordan). Looking at the number of translators in each establishment, we notice that the size of those establishments varies. Half of those establishments (50%) have only 1 to 2 translators, whereas 25% have 5 to 6 translators. This is reasonable considering the size of the company, especially if we have a look at Talal Abu Ghazaleh Translation Company, one of the largest translation agencies in Jordan. More than 10 translators working for Talal Abu Ghazaleh as full-time and part-time translators, including freelance translators.

It goes without saying that translators could do their work remotely. Translators of written content do not need to commute to the office if they have all the resources and material they need at home. The survey results show that most companies (88%) offer written translation services, with a focus on legal translation (88%). Their focus on written translation gives room for translators to work from home. This explains why 75% of the employers under question prefer translators to work remotely while the rest of the employers (25%) prefer translators to work in a hybrid mode (in-person and remotely). This is valid especially when 63% of the study sample confirm that they hire freelancer translators.

To investigate the skills needed in the translation industry, we need to look into the tasks a translator is

responsible for. A translator does not only render a text into another language but also proofreads that text and sometimes manages the whole translating project. The majority of the employers under question (63%) suggest that a translator is responsible for editing along with translating. 38% of the total employers propose also creating subtitles while another 25% of the total employers propose that a translator is responsible for project management.

To be able to implement those tasks efficiently, a translator needs to master a certain skill set. Within the scope of the research, we use the term employability skills to cover this skill set. The questionnaire divides those skills into five groups (critical thinking skills, interpersonal skills, personal traits, translation skills, and project management skills). When it comes to critical thinking skills, we find that 87.5% of the employers propose that a translator should be able to think creatively, and half of the total employers support the need for problem-solving skills. Likewise, 75% of the total employers agree that organizational skills are essential. For interpersonal skills, the majority of the employers (87.5%) suggest that clear and effective communication is of high priority, the next priority skills are responding to client needs and teamwork with percentages of 75% and 62.5% respectively. For the personal traits category, all employers surveyed believe that a translator should demonstrate a willingness to learn. Whereas the majority, with a percentage of 62.5%, suggest that demonstrating professionalism and flexibility is of high importance.

It is obvious that project management skills are highly needed in the market. 87.5% of the study population (employer survey) suggest that the use of tools and resources efficiently as well as the search for terminology or necessary information are the top needed skills (among the project management skills). Moving into the translation skills group, linguistic competence is the most selected skill with 87.5%. Cultural competence and subject or domain competence come next with a percentage of 62.5% for each. When it comes to linguistic competence, English and Arabic language proficiency should be in high demand in the translation industry. Most employers (75%) advocate for an advanced level of language proficiency (Arabic and English), while some (25%) see that the translator should be a native bilingual.

Along with the multiple-choice questions, the questionnaire contains two scales to rate the need for technology and the necessity of ethics. Half of the employers highly appreciate the use of technology and the possession of work ethics. Speaking in numbers, 50% of the population rate the use of technology and work ethics as high-priority needs on a scale of 1-5. Ultimately, the last set of questions examines the need for translators in the Jordanian Translation market. The findings show that most employers (63%) see that currently there is a real need for translators, while half of the total employers see an increasing need for translators over the next five years.

Table 1. Employer Survey

Question	Options	Percentage
Your translation company/agency is	local	100%
	international	0%

	regional	0%
The Translation services you provide:	oral translation (interpretation)	13%
	literary translation	50%
	legal translation	88%
	medical translation	38%
	localization	13%
	content creation	25%
	audiovisual translation	13%
	written translation	88%
Number of translators you have:	1-2	50%
	3-4	13%
	5-6	25%
	7-10	0%
	11 and more	13%
I prefer the translator to work ---- .	from the office	0%
	remotely	75%
	both	25%
What does a translator do?	translating	100%
	proofreading	38%
	creating subtitles	38%
	editing	63%
	project managing	25%
	localizing	13%
I am expecting the need for translators to --------- over the next five years.	increase	50%
	decrease	38%
	remain stable	17%
Is there a need for translators in the market?	yes	63%
	no	17%
	maybe	25%
The majority of translators who work for you are...	full-time translators	63%
	part-time translators	25%
	in-house translators	50%
	freelance translators	63%
	male translators	63%
	female translators	75%
What kind of translation is the most needed?	audiovisual translation	12.5%
	literary translation	12.5%
	content creation	25%
	transcreation	12.5%
	non-literary translation	37.5%
	other	37.5%
Competent translators are in---demand	high	37.5%
	average	50%
	low	12.5%
Are the translators at your company competent?	yes	75%
	no	0%
	maybe	25%
What critical thinking and problem-solving skills are needed in the translation industry?	thinks creatively	87.5%
	thinks critically	37.5%
	solves problems	50%
	plans/organizes	75%
What interpersonal skills are needed in the	teamwork and collaboration	62.5%

translation industry?	responding to client needs	75%
	professionalism/work ethics	12.5%
	clear and effective communication	87.5%
	other	37.5%
What personal traits are needed in the translation industry?	demonstrate responsibility and self-discipline	25%
	adapts and shows flexibility	62.5%
	works independently	0%
	demonstrates a willingness to learn	100%
	demonstrate integrity	12.5%
	demonstrate professionalism	62.5%
	takes initiative	50%
What English language skills are the most needed in the translation industry?	speaking	37.5%
	writing	100%
	reading	62.5%
	listening	12.5%
What level of English and Arabic proficiency is needed in the translation industry?	native	25%
	advanced	75%
	intermediate	0%
	fair	0%
How do you rate the need to use technology in the translation industry?	1	12.5%
	2	25%
	3	0%
	4	12.5%
	5	50%
How do you rate the need for work ethics?	1	0%
	2	12.5%
	3	12.5%
	4	25%
	5	50%
What project management skills are the most needed in the translation industry?	meets deadlines	75%
	uses tools and resources efficiently	87.5%
	looks for terminology or necessary information	87.5%
	organizes data	37.5%
Translation skills needed:	cultural competence	62.5%
	linguistic competence	87.5%
	subject or domain competence	62.5%
	transform competence	37.5%
	textual competence	50%
	other	12.5%

Table 2 reveals the data collected from the alumni population. The first question in the survey specifies whether they work in the field of translation or not. 68% of them say yes, they are working in translation -related areas whereas 53% say "no", they do not work in the field of translation. Here, let us list the most apparent challenges in the translation industry as listed by the study sample. The most selected challenge (59%) is the inessentiality of having a diploma or a professional certificate in translation to practice translating; the market is full of too many translators who do not have credentials. Half of the study sample (alumni survey) suggests that 'there is no legal protection for translators' as the second challenge in the market. The next three challenges are 'there are

not enough opportunities in the market' (with a percentage of 47%), low-income fare (with the percentage of 44%), and 'the university did not prepare me for the market' (with a percentage of 44%). Given all these challenges, it makes sense that 69% of the alumni under question do not work for any translation agency or company.

Looking into the type of translation the alumni population craft, we find written translation is at the top with a percentage of 69%. The following genre is the audiovisual translation (more specifically subtitling) with a percentage of 44%. This kind of translation qualifies translators to work from home. 37.5% of the alumni under study work remotely. A lot of them could work as freelance translators. Half of the alumni population (50%) state that they work as freelancers. Since there is no need to commute to the office, a translator could work internationally while they reside in their hometown. 16% of the study population (alumni survey) work locally while 12.5% work internationally.

Whether locally or internationally, a translator is responsible for extra tasks other than translating, such as localizing the content and proofreading the translation. 53% of the alumni surveyed propose that a translator is responsible for editing too, whereas 37.5% of the total alumni suggest content creation as well. To be able to perform those tasks adequately, a translator should be skilled and competent. Only half of the alumni surveyed (50%) consider themselves competent translators while 34% consider themselves relatively competent and the rest (16%) as incompetent yet.

In order to judge whether a translator is competent or not, we need to dig deeper into the employability skills needed in the market. In this regard, we use the same classifications we used in the employer survey as we categorize the skills into five groups (critical thinking skills, interpersonal skills, personal traits, project management skills, and translation skills). Most alumni population under study (84%) agree that a competent translator should be able to think critically. When it comes to interpersonal skills, 72% of the population vote for teamwork and collaboration skills. For the personal traits, I do not see it as a coincidence that the majority of the employers (in the other survey) and the alumni agree that demonstrating a willingness to learn is the most needed personal trait. It goes without saying that project management skills are needed, especially in terms of the search for the right terminology and information with a percentage of 78%. Of course, translation skills are of high importance, cultural competence resides as the most needed one with a percentage of 75% followed by textual competence with a percentage of 69%. It is unquestionable that a translator should be bilingual or fluent in the languages they are translating from and into. Most BAU alumni under study see themselves as native speakers of Arabic (66%) and fluent speakers of English with a percentage of 47%.

With respect to technology use and work ethics, the majority of alumni surveyed give the highest rate for the use of technology with a percentage of 44%. Likewise, most of the total alumni under study (63%) rate work ethics as a highly needed skill as they choose the highest rate (5) on the rating scale from 1 to 5. The last portion of the survey examines the need for translators and the appreciation of translators in the market. Most of the alumni sample (75%) suggest that there is a need for translators in the market. However, translators do not receive the deserved recognition or appreciation. Half of the study sample (50%) indicates that translators are not well

appreciated.

Table 2. Alumni Survey

Question	Options	Percentage
Do you work in the field of translation?	yes	68.5%
	no	53%
What year did you graduate?	2023	62.5%
	2022	19%
	2021	18.5%
What are the challenges in the translation industry?	low-income fare	44%
	inflexible schedule	25%
	not enough work opportunities in the market	47%
	too many translators who do not have a diploma or a certificate in Translation	59%
	copyright issues	22%
	no legal protection for translators	50%
	The university did not prepare me for the market.	44%
	I am not competent enough to work as a translator	25%
I work for a(n) .... translation company/agency.	local	16%
	international	12.5%
	regional	3%
	none	69%
The type of translation I do:	oral translation (interpretation)	41%
	literary translation	41%
	legal translation	41%
	medical translation	22%
	localization	19%
	content creation	28%
	audiovisual translation (more specifically subtitling)	44%
	written translation (umbrella term)	69%
	none	9%
I work ----.	from the office	12.5%
	remotely	37.5%
	both	31%
What tasks do you implement as a translator?	translating	81%
	proofreading	34%
	content creation	37.5%
	editing	53%
	Project managing	25%

	localizing	31%
Is there a need for translators in the market?	yes	72%
	no	3%
	maybe	25%
I work as a	full-time translator	19%
	part-time translator	19%
	in-house translator	31%
	freelance translator	50%
The translators are .... appreciated in the market.	highly	25%
	relatively	50%
	not	25%
Are you a competent translator?	yes	50%
	no	16%
	relatively	34%
What critical thinking and problem-solving skills do you have?	thinks creatively	37.5%
	thinks critically	84%
	solves problems	62.5%
	plans/organizes	12.5%
	I do not have any of the listed critical thinking skills	16%
What interpersonal skills do you have?	teamwork and collaboration	72%
	responding to client needs	59%
	professionalism/work ethics	56%
	clear and effective communication	62.5%
	I do not have any of the listed interpersonal skills	16%
How do you rate your use of technology?	1	6%
	2	6%
	3	19%
	4	25%
	5	44%
How do you rate your work ethics?	1	3%
	2	16%
	3	6%
	4	13%
	5	63%
What personal qualities do you have?	demonstrate responsibility and self-discipline	66%

	adapts and shows flexibility	59%
	works independently	53%
	demonstrate a willingness to learn	69%
	demonstrate integrity	44%
	demonstrate professionalism	47%
	takes initiative	47%
	I do not have any of the listed personal skills	19%
What is the level of your English proficiency?	native	6%
	fluent	47%
	intermediate	31%
	beginner	16%
What is the level of your Arabic proficiency?	native	66%
	fluent	19%
	intermediate	12.5%
	beginner	3%
What project management skills do you have?	meets deadlines	72%
	uses tools and resources efficiently	56%
	looks for terminology or necessary information	78%
	organizes data	59%
Which of the following translation skills do you have?	cultural competence	75%
	linguistic competence	56%
	subject or domain competence	53%
	transform competence	50%
	textual competence	69%
	other	0%
Extra remarks:	what is best to regulate the translation industry in Jordan?	3%
	not enough translation BA programs in Jordanian universities.	3%

Discussion

This study aims to bridge the industry-academia gap by enhancing the graduates' employability skills and fostering engagement with the industry. The research findings indicate that there is a need to reform the curriculum of the Translation Program to align the competencies with the market needs. Looking into the market needs revealed in the data collected from the employers, we notice that translators are asked not only to translate but also to perform editing, create subtitles, localize websites, and manage translation projects, sometimes they also proofread others' translations. This is the norm in the Jordanian translation industry, especially when those companies offer translation for various text types, including legal texts, technical texts, literary texts, and others.

In order to craft adequate and efficient translation, the translator needs to master the skill set needed for those genres of translation. Analyzing the alumni responses on the employability skills they were asked in the survey, are BAU alumni competent enough to produce adequate translations for such texts? To address this question, we need, first, to navigate the curriculum of the Translation Program at BAU to check if it covers all those genres of translation, and second, to check if the market-needed competencies are embedded in the curriculum.

Let us start with the legal translation that ranked as the most frequent type of translation. The current curriculum of the Translation program at BAU offers only one course of legal translation in which students are supposed to learn how to translate local documents, such as marriage and divorce certificates as well as leases and business contracts, and international documents, like international agreement, UN releases, and other international official documents. In this sense, they are supposed to be introduced to the legal terminologies and glossaries and to the language used by official bodies like the government or the NGOs. They should also be briefed about the linguistic, cultural, and textual variations of the legal systems. To make the best of the course, students are expected to practice translating some legal excerpts and texts. Could not this be overwhelming and too much for one course? Since the focus of the industry is on this type of translation, would it make more sense to offer two courses, 'Legal Translation 1' to translate local documents and 'Legal Translation 2' to translate international documents? This same argument applies to technical translation. The program currently offers only one course in technical translation where students are supposed to be able to translate scientific texts, financial texts, business texts, and so on. Would not be of more value to offer two courses in technical or non-literary translation where students have more time and resources to look up technical vocabulary and learn more about technical writing in English and Arabic.

Not to mention that some text types are not part of the curriculum like medical translation or localization. Localization is understood to be taught within the course of audiovisual translation. However, due to the ubiquity of technology and the prevalence of audiovisual mediums, we would suggest localizing websites to be an independent course. The same suggestion could also be applied to the course 'Technology in Translation'. The findings of the study rank the use of technology as of high priority. Therefore, to meet the expectations of the employers and to be of more added value, we would suggest offering two courses in this field: the first one could cover the basics of general technological tools, electronic resources, and machine translation while the other one is more advanced (on CAT tools and e-translation.). Another online source that could be examined in the advanced Technology in Translation course is ChatGPT, which is a short term for "Chat Generative Pre-Training Transformer". It is an artificial intelligence software that was developed by OpenAI and released on May 24, 2023. It has demonstrated that it can be of added value and an effective tool for translators as it generates translations with remarkably high accuracy. Students could be taught how to optimize the use of ChatGPT by learning how to write a translation prompt that would enhance the quality of the translation.

Another course that could be suggested to meet the market needs is 'Translator Ethics'. Strong work ethic skills are highly rated by both groups (the employers and the alumni under study) because they show the translator's intrinsic motivation for their outstanding performance. If a translator has a strong work ethic, they are more

likely to have efficient organizational skills as well. Accordingly, it is essential for students to orient themselves with the local market code of ethics and the international codes of ethics. Though accountability, impartiality, professionality, and accuracy could be common principles across various linguistic communities, there could be a disparity in other concepts like adequacy, confidentiality, and fidelity. For example, the American Translator Association envisions collegial behavior, which means a translator does not release negative or offensive remarks on their colleagues' translations but insightful and productive comments instead, as part of its code of ethics and professional practice. Is collegial behavior part of the Jordanian translation market code of ethics? To orient students with various codes of ethics in various countries and sometimes different organizations within the same country, Translator ethics and (in)visibility could be a standalone course. In that course, students would be able to read through different perspectives of translation and look into the literature built around those two rich concepts: translator's ethics and translator's visibility. Translator's visibility, which is thoroughly investigated by Lawrance Venuti in his book *Translator's Invisibility* changes our conception of translation to consider it as an "*ethical* attitude towards a foreign text and culture, ethical effects produced by the choice of a text for translation and by the strategy devised to translate it" (2008).Venuti as a theorist looks into translation from a different angle. He does not consider translation as a transference neutral unmediated process but rather as a construction of a certain image of the text (2008). By learning such theories and digging deeper into the theoretical frameworks, we put translation theory into practice, widen the scope of translation in the Jordanian market, and get the students to explore different approaches to translation.

Another disparity of the translation norms across cultures is the use of a contract or some kind of agreement tool to regulate the communication between the translator, language service provider, and the commissioner.
One of the key challenges the translator faces, as suggested by the alumni under study, is the lack of legal protection for translators. If a freelance translator receives a translation task and puts a lot of effort into the task, then the commissioner refuses to pay the translator making fake excuses, what could be the options for the translator? Is there some sort of legal measures to protect translators from such commercial fraud commissions? Given all these challenges that translators face, is the translation work well systemized in Jordan? To give a clearer picture of what a systemized framework should look like, let us ask ourselves whether there is a unified national code of ethics in Jordan and whether there is legal protection policy, especially for freelance translators.

Moving to the competencies needed by the translation market, are BAU alumni ready for the workforce? The survey findings reveal that 84% of the alumni population under question are critical thinkers. Likewise, 72% of the study sample appreciate teamwork and collaboration (the most selected interpersonal skill) while 69% demonstrate a willingness to learn (the key personal trait). Are these numbers sufficient to call the alumni population under study competent translators? How about the 16% of the alumni who do not see themselves as critical thinkers? This also applies to the other sets of skills, which are interpersonal skills and personal traits as the percentage of the lack of those skills is 16% and 19% respectively. To enhance the graduates' employability skills, which is the core of this research, the curricula and course description of the Translation program should be reformed to match the needs of the industry. For example, to integrate teamwork and collaboration skills into the curricula, the school could run translation workshops that are separable from the theoretical courses. In the

translation workshops, the focus would be on translation practice and the students would be the leading participants where they form teams and sit in groups. This kind of workshop course would equip the students with not only teamwork skills but also proofreading skills in which they review each other's translations and provide insightful and productive comments.

Another reform technique to cover those employability skills could be having a sustainable partnership with local and international employers. One way to secure this kind of partnership could be to form an advisory committee where stakeholders and translation agency staff sit on the committee along with the academic staff at BAU. Surveys and questionaries are great tools to collect data from the employer around those skills; however, they are time-specific inputs. In other words, the data is not dynamic. However, the advisory committee could deliver frequent productive insights. To establish that committee, one needs to establish connections with the industry and build pipelines of communication with the employers locally and internationally. This could be done through collaborating with partners who could help facilitate contact with the employers. We should not limit our work to the local market because, according to the data from the alumni survey, there are not enough job opportunities in the local market. To prepare the students for the international market, we need, first, to build linkages with international employers in the field of translation, second, to equip the students with the right skills needed in the international market, and third, to elevate the alumni credentials by linking the academic diploma to an international certificate of translation.

Conclusion

This study contributes to the field of Translation and Education by providing an in-depth and thorough discussion of the competencies needed in the Translation market and by suggesting a novel approach to Translation pedagogy. The competency-based approach suggested in this study embraces all the skills needed in the Translation market. Employers and stakeholders from academia and the private sector should be involved as equal partners in building competency-based education with students and instructors involved. Translation curricula, training, and assessments should be reformed to align with the competencies needed in the workplace. The study findings indicate that there should be a focus on advanced technological tools like translation memories to enhance the quality of translation and to keep the students up to date with all the modern trends in the field of Translation as it is constantly evolving.

Recommendations

This research paper could be expanded to analyze other variables in the data collected by the surveys. For instance, gender variation could be examined. In the Jordanian market, the female translators are more than the male translators. Is this also the case with the global market? Is the Translation industry dominated by women? What could be the reasons? Do women make better translators than men? Another recommendation could be to survey a larger population in which we include other universities in Jordan to see the evaluate the program from

different angles.

Acknowledgments

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