

## Investigating Views of Omani Students' Majoring in English on Their Undergraduate Translation Course

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### Abstract

This paper presents the results and findings of a study carried out in a public college in Oman. The overarching aim of the study is to explore the views of Omani students majoring in English about their undergraduate translation course in terms of content, methods of delivery, modes of assessment, challenges, and what could be done to improve the course in question. The study is significant due to the fact that the results would potentially help translation teachers and practitioners to improve the content, delivery and assessment of their undergraduate translation courses. Additionally, there was a lack of information about students' views on their undergraduate translation courses in this particular context. A questionnaire with open-ended questions was administered to 44 Omani students majoring in English and who were at their final semester of their B. Ed programme. The quantitative data was analyzed using frequencies, percentages and thematic analysis was utilized for the open-ended questions. The results showed that students have mixed opinions and views about the course but the vast majority believed that the course content, objectives, teaching methodology and modes of assessment need to be reviewed and aligned with other courses. As a result, key findings, conclusions, recommendations, and pedagogical implications were presented. It is hoped that the findings will be of a great value to undergraduate translation teachers in this particular college.

**Key words:** majoring in English, Omani undergraduate students, public college, translation course, views

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## Introduction

Translation in general is a phenomenon that has a huge effect on people everyday life (Hatim & Monday, 2004; Newmark, 1991). Translation teaching has become common in English language and literature undergraduate degrees because it plays an important role in the development of communicative abilities of English as a foreign language (EFL) or English as a second language (ESL) learners (Omar & Mohammed, 2014). Translation fosters discussion and speculation and it helps in developing translator's communicative competence and negotiation and interpretation skills. However, there are some many challenges encounter translation teachers in terms of course content, delivery and assessment. Gile (2009) states that translation teaching should always be centered on the translation process, rather than on the analysis of translation errors which are made by students. Analyzing translation teaching methods and strategies, methods of delivery and assessment approaches from students' perspectives may help in improving translation pedagogy (Clavijo & Marin, 2013). It is essential that translation courses in universities be academic rather than professional as the purpose is to improve students' language skills (Colina, 2002). Translation teachers' job is to teach English language, and translation craft as per Newmark's (1988 a) description to it as "a craft consisting of the attempt to replace a written message and/ or statement in the language by the same message and/ or statement in another language" (p.7). Therefore, the present study is conducted in a public college in Oman on students majoring in English language and literature for the purpose of investigating students' views about their e translation course to better understand their views about the content of the course, methods of delivery and modes assessment for the purpose of improving the provision of the course by using current trends of teaching translation.

## Institutional Context of the Study

This study is conducted at the Department of English Language and Literature in one of the Colleges of Applied Sciences, Oman. There are six colleges of applied sciences which are distributed across Oman. There is only one college which offers B.Ed in English language and literature. The college mission is to provide high quality programmes that meet national and regional employment needs, prepare students for postgraduate studies and lifelong learning, equip them with knowledge and skills necessary to excel as future professionals, and contributes to Oman's economy and society (<http://rustaq.cas.edu.om>). The department of English Language and Literature at the college in question offers three main streams namely: the B.Ed English, the English for specific purposes (ESP) and the English for academic purposes (EAP) and General Foundation programme. The foundation programmes is streamed into four levels (A, B, C and D) in the light of their performance the newly admitted students will be placed. The ESP/ EAP programmes are divided into two levels and it is offered to the International Business Administration (IBA) and the information technology (IT) students. The B.Ed programme is a four year 132 credit hour programme designed to produce graduates who are competent in their English major and who are ready to be involved in teaching in Omani schools and educational industry. The B.Ed programme has different courses in language –related courses, English language teaching (ELT), applied linguistics, theoretical linguistics, education and translation. Therefore, the present study attempts to look into the views of Omani students who are majoring in English about their present translation course in terms of course content, methods of delivery and assessment to better improve the provision of the course in the future.

### **An Overview of the Translation Course**

EFL college students require translation skills in both their daily lives and in their future workplaces. Moreover, translation facilitates the learning of the English language. During the process of translating text from Arabic into English, students accumulate knowledge about the application of vocabulary and syntax to practical uses (Pan & Pan, n.d.). The translation course is an obligatory course which is a three credit hour offered in the fourth year of the he B.Ed degree. The course introduces students into translation between English and Arabic as an internlingual process. The course is meant to develop students' awareness of problem arising in the process of translation and ways of handling them. By the end of the course students are expected to: demonstrate as sense of linguistic awareness through contrastivity, translate a variety of texts (informative, argumentative, expressive texts, etc. and to discover and handle basic translation problems. Students are introduced to different types of translations between English and Arabic and English such as cultural, literary, scientific, legal, general, etc. The mode of teaching is classroom discussions and in-class practices. The course is assessed through midterm which is weight 30% of total marks of the whole course, projects which weight 10%, classroom participation and in-class tasks which weight 10% and the final exam which is 50% (Source: General Translation-ENSP 3116-Course Outlines). Thus, there is a wide consensus among teachers and students of translation that translation course needs to be reviewed and improved because translation is considered to be an important course for students majoring in English as meeting their needs both real life and the future workplace. Another reason to incorporate translation into the EFL classroom is that a significant number of researchers (e.g. Cohen & Brooks-Carson, 2001; Hsien, 2000; Husain, 1995; Jones, 1995; Marti Viano & Orquin, 1982; Prince, 1996; as cited in Pan & Pan n.d, p. 3) have considered the positive potential of using translation in language learning.. Therefore, the study tries to investigate students' views about this particular course to help in improving its content, delivery and assessment methods used.

### **Theoretical Background of the Study**

Involving students in evaluating their translation course is of a paramount importance and significance for future reform and improvement because teaching and assessing translation courses is not as easy task. Arbitrary approaches to teaching translation cannot serve as reliable and sound so a systematic approach should be utilized to achieve the course goals and learning outcomes (Amer,n.d). Teaching translation for academic purposes means training students for mastering the linguistic and communicative competence in translation (Amer, n.d). Translation helps students to see the link between language usage and language use. It also, encourages students to see the similarities and differences between first language (L1) and second language (L2) (Omar & Mohammed, 2014, p. 67-68). Researchers classified translation competences into three major domains: First, knowledge which is important for student to have such as sufficient knowledge of both the source and the target language, in-depth understanding to their cultural norms and to know more about translation theory and to know more about how to practice each translation skill. Second, skills domain which is equally important to the knowledge domain for students and it includes skills such as reading and writing skills and have good understanding to translation strategies and techniques. Finally, attitudes and ethics domain: This includes the ability of the student to convey the meaning faithfully, accurately and impartially and to show positive attitude towards translation. Thus, undergraduate translation courses should equip students with all these skills in order to help them developing their communicative competence

(Habeeb, et. al 2016). In order to improve the course content, delivery and assessment, both teachers and students need to be involved for future improvements. The course objectives, content, and present teaching methodology need to be reviewed to achieve realistic learning outcomes. Translation students are expected by the end of the course to use translation techniques such as calque, borrowing, literal translation, transposition, modulation, functional equivalence and adaption effectively. Moreover, teachers are also expected to consider Nida's suggested criteria for assessing translation comprehension of the intent, communication of the intent and equivalence of response. Assessing and delivering translation course should be informed by translation theories.

### **Objectives of the Study**

According to the researcher's experience in teaching linguistics and language-related course suggested that there has been research was carried out to investigate students' views about their translation course in this particular college. Therefore, this study will inform the provision of the translation courses and helps in achieving the following objectives: to investigate Omani students' majoring in English language and literature perceptions and views about their undergraduate courses; to identify the challenges that encountered when studying this particular course; and to propose some possible strategies which could be used to improve the content, delivery and assessment of this course in particular.

### **Research Questions**

1. How is an undergraduate translation course perceived by Omani students majoring in English language and literature?
2. What type of challenges do they encounter in this course?
3. What could be done to improve the content, delivery, and assessment of this undergraduate translation course?

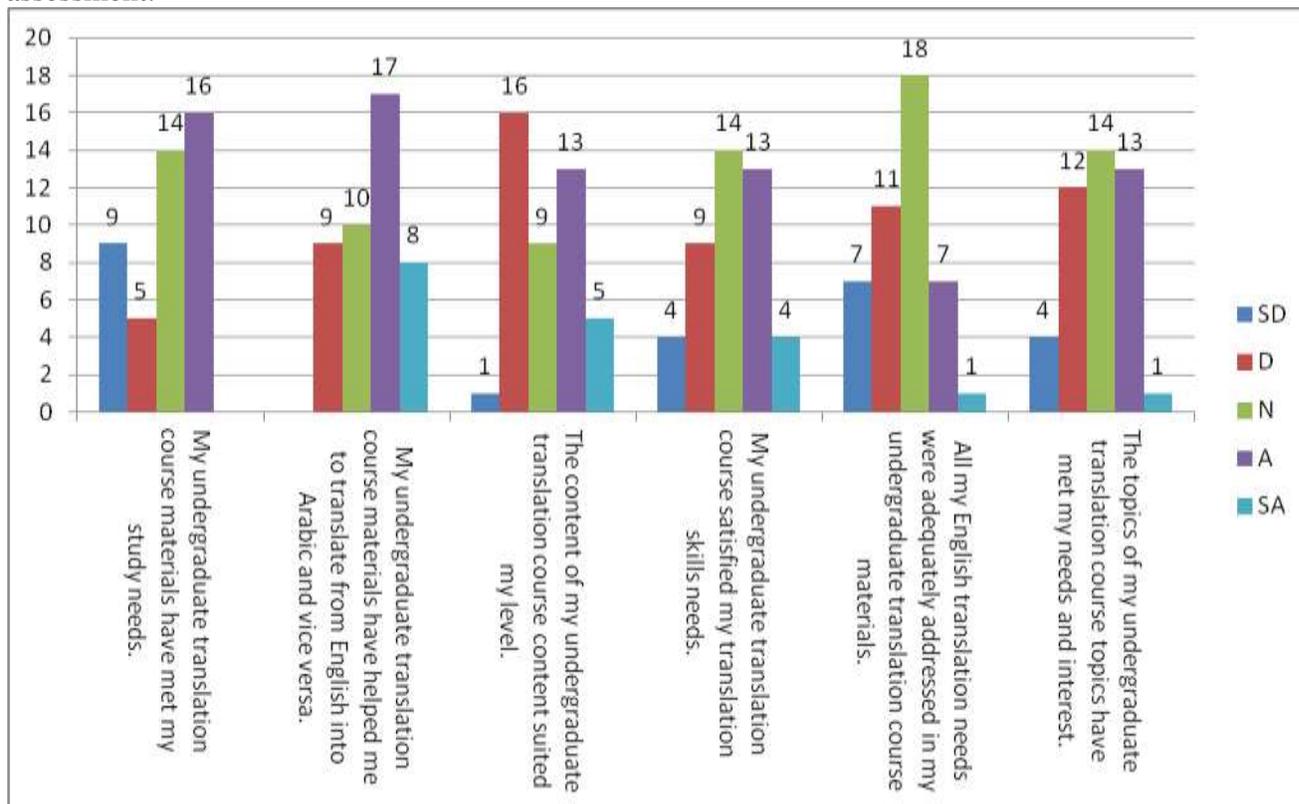
### **Methods**

This study utilized quantitative methodology. A survey with four major parts was used to collect data from the fourth year students majoring in English language and literature. The survey contains four parts: part one undertakes students' views about the course content. Part two is centered on students' views about the methods of delivery used in this particular course. Part three deals with students' views about modes of assessment used. Finally, part four handles the open-ended questions which intend to generate free responses from students with regard to their opinions about the course, challenges encountered and what could be done to improve this particular course. The number of the participants is 44 out 55 students. All of them are Omani and they have been studying English as a major for four years. The questionnaire was administered to them during their normal classes and all their queries were addressed and all ambiguities and wording related to the questionnaire were clarified and corrected. The purpose of the study was explained to the participants and their questions were answered. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, charts and frequencies and percentages.

### **Data Analysis and Discussion**

This section undertakes data analysis and discussion of findings. Charts were used to present the data and to answer the study first question which related to students' views about

their undergraduate translation course in terms of content, methods of delivery and modes of assessment.



**Figure 1** Students' Views about the Content of the Course

Figure 1 shows the students' views about their current undergraduate course. As for item one, 16 students reported that the course materials have met their study needs. 14 students responded by neutral and 14 disagreed with statement. As for question two, whether the their undergraduate translation course materials have helped them to translate from English into Arabic and vice versa or not, 25 students agreed that the course materials have helped them to translate from English into Arabic and vice versa, and 10 students responded by neutral and nine disagreed with the statement. So it is quite obvious that the majority of the students believed that the course have helped them to translate between English and Arabic. Item three, whether the content of the course suited their level or not, 17 respondents disagreed with the statement, nine responded by "neutral" and 18 students agreed with statement. In response to item four whether the translation course satisfied their translation skills needs or not, 13 students disagreed, 14 remained "neutral", and 17 students agreed with the statement. As for item whether all their English translation needs were adequately addressed in their translation course materials or not, 18 students disagreed, whereas 18 responded by "neutral" and only eight agreed. It is quite evident that a considerable number of the students believed that their English translation needs were not adequately addressed in their translation course materials. As for the final question six, whether the topics of their translation course have met their needs and interests, 16 believed that they did not meet their needs and interests, 14 students reported by "neutral", and 14 agreed with the statement.

Have a closer look to students' open responses about the course, there are mixed opinions and views about the course and here are some of the examples:

A student reported: *In my opinion, translation course needs to be more clear and give them more time in the semester because 3 hours are not enough to learn translation course."*

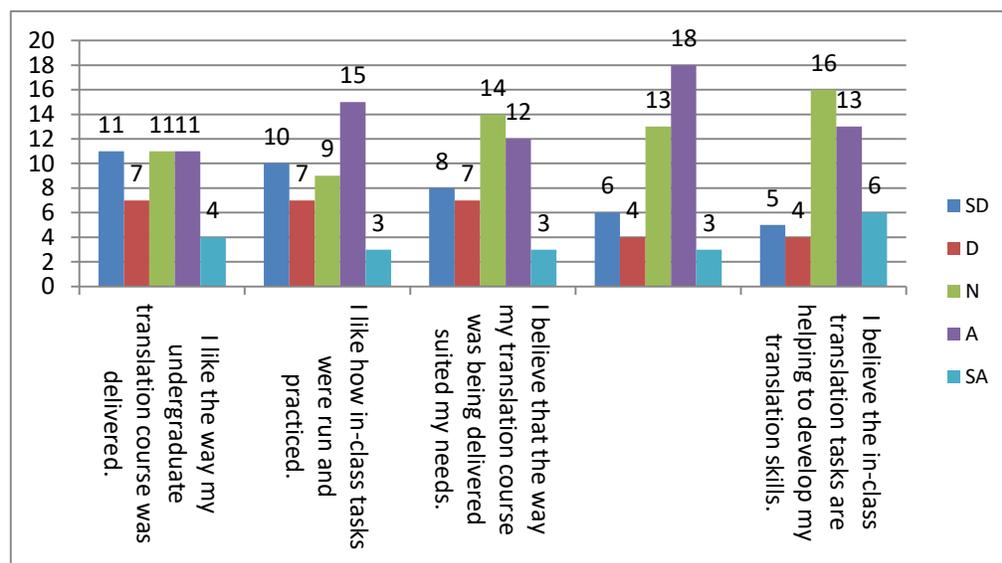
Another student said: *"I think the content of the course is not enough, and the methods are not clear. Moreover, the assessment is not valid".*

Yet, a student reported: *"It was really good but I think it should be enough courses for translating from Arabic into English or vice versa".*

A student replied: *"I think this course is very important but they need to create other course to help ss to develop their skills, also the way of assessing ss because it is not helpful for ss".*

Furthermore, a student said: *"content needed to be varied. The content needs to be divided into two courses. Assessment needs to be changed (more homework or other activities)".*

In the light of the above mentioned response it is quite obvious that students have diverse views and opinions about their undergraduate course content in terms of its suitability and adequacy. Some of the study believed that the course content should be divided into two semesters as the number of credit hours allocated for the course is not enough to teach students all the necessary and essential skills in translation. Having two courses would help students to benefit from the course in a better way. As for students' needs, some of the students believed that their needs were not adequately addressed by the course content. Therefore, it could be argued that the translation course should be needs-responsive and students' needs should be analyzed before choosing the content. Because translation is not as easy task and it need linguistic and nonlinguistic skills. The researcher believes that students who are majoring in English should be introduced to different types of translation because that will foster their linguistic competences and help them to join translation profession and industry.



**Figure 2 Students' Views about the Methods Used in Delivering the Course**

Figure 2 illustrates students' view about the methods of teaching used to deliver their undergraduate translation course. In response item one, whether students liked the way their undergraduate translation course was delivered or not, 18 students responded by "disagree", 11

reported by "neutral" whereas, 15 "agreed". It is quite clear that a considerable number of the students were not happy with the way the course is delivered. As for item two which intended to elicit students' views about whether they liked their in-class translation tasks, 17 students "disagreed" with the statement, nine said "neutral" and 18 students responded by "agreed". This shows that a substantial number of the students they liked the translation in-class tasks and activities and some they did not like them. In response to item three, whether the way their translation course being delivered suited their needs, 15 students responded by "disagreed", 14 reported as "neutral", and 15 "agreed" that the way of delivery suited their needs. As for item four, 10 students believed that the way their current translation course was being delivered offered them opportunities to practice translation, 13 students responded by "neutral" and 21 "agreed" that the course offered them opportunities to practice translation. It is quite evident that the course was a golden opportunity for students to practice translation because it is the only translation course that offered in their degree. Finally item five, nine students "disagreed" with the statement that whether the in-class translation tasks were helping them to develop their translation skills, 16 remained "neutral", and 19 students "agreed" that the in-class task have helped them to develop their translation skills. So it could be argued that a considerable number of the students were satisfied with the methods of delivery and in-class activities but they need to be improved. In this regard a student replied: " I think this course helped me to understand these kinds of terms, to be better and helpful".

Moreover, another student reported: " it needs more improving includes more types of translation".

Another student said: "Both the content and assessment were suitable, but the only issue was the method that the teacher uses to deliver the topics".

Yet, a student replied: "the content is OK but the methods and assessment need to be changed in a better way".

Yet, a student argued: "*Content need to be changed because it is useless. The methods of delivery are boring and do not encourage students to learn*".

Again, the methods of delivery need to be revisited to make the translation classes much more interesting to students. Choosing the appropriate translation teaching methodology and activities are significant in the success of the course.

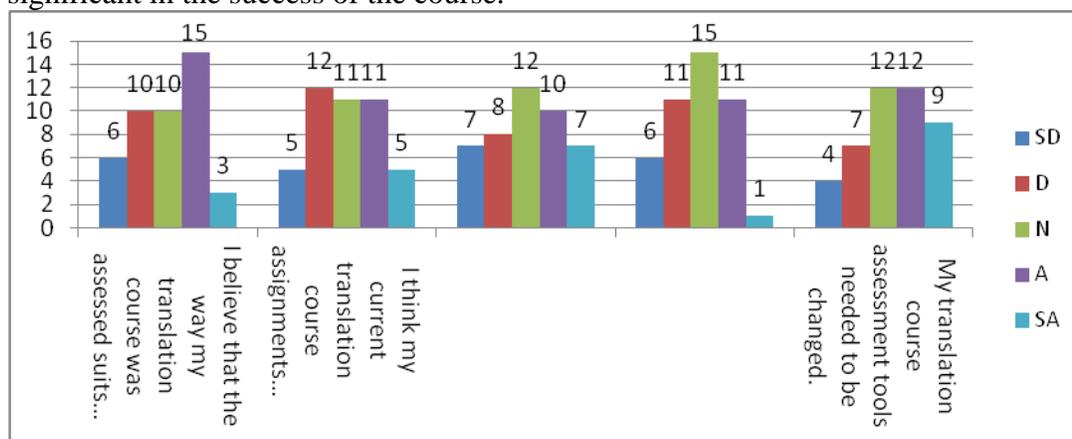


Figure 3 Students' Views about the Methods Used in Assessing the Course

Figure 3 undertakes students' views about the modes of assessment used in their undergraduate translation course. As for item one, 16 students believed that the way their translation course was assessed suited them. However, 10 students replied by "neutral" and 18 "agreed" that the way the course was assessed had suited their needs. In response to item two, whether their current translation course assignments offered them enough opportunities to practice translation or not, 15 students "disagreed", 11 responded by "neutral" and 15 "agreed". It seems there are mixed views and opinions with regard to the benefits of course assignments. As for item three, whether the students liked the way their exam questions were written or not, 15 students "disagreed" with the statement, 12 responded as "neutral", and 17 students "agreed" with the statement and they reported that they liked the way their exam questions were written. Item four handles students' expectations about their translation course, 17 students "disagreed", 15 reported by "neutral" and 12 respondents "disagreed". The majority of the students disagreed maybe it is impossible and impractical to offer all types of translations in one course and one semester. As for the final item five whether the translation course assessment tools needed to be changed or not, 11 students "disagreed", 12 students reported by "neutral" and 21 students "agreed" that the tools of assessment needed to be changed. It is quite clear that a great number of students were in favor of changing the assessment tools in this particular course. In this regard a student said: *"More practice, less theories and content, and more projects and less exams"*.

Further, another student responded: *"the content was good but it is better to make some changes to match students' needs. Also, assessment tools didn't suit what students were learning"*.

Yet another student replied: *"content, methods of delivery and assessment tools somehow need to be changed"*.

To sum up, some of the students appreciated the content of the course, methods of delivery and assessment tools, however, all of them they need to be changed to suit the students' needs and abilities.

### **What type of challenges do students encounter in this translation course?**

To realize the objectives of the study and answer this question, an open-ended question was kept within the questionnaire and students came up with diverse opinions and views.

A student reported that: *"I encountered difficulties with translating idioms and verbs. Actually translation needs time so we didn't have too much time. Also, the number of students in the class was huge"*.

Moreover, another student replied: *"I found difficulty with final exam; they should either give shorter text to translate or give students more time"*.

Yet, a student said: *"The main challenges are using the suitable words in translation because in English language has a synonym and antonyms ...etc. So this made me confused sometimes"*.

Further, another student reported: *"I think the time and type of dictionaries are very important in the exam. So you need to have to answer the questions in the exam. So time wasn't enough for translating"*.

Another student argued: *"I think there was no particular way or steps that can students follow to practice translation. I had difficulty in dealing with some technical words which have scientific meaning"*.

A student said: *"In my point of view, I think the most common issues that I faced are: the translation from Arabic to English is sometimes difficult for me especially in aspects of grammar"*.

Yet, a student reported: *"How to translate from Arabic to English, how to deal with meaning and how to find appropriate vocabulary"*.

Another student replied: *"The final exam was somehow difficult, need more time, and especially the second part which was about translating a paragraph consists of at least 12 lines"*.

Yet, a student said: *"lack of knowledge in both languages. The translation of some types of texts like literature, physics, legal and math texts were challenging and difficult"*.

Moreover, a student responded: *"The main challenges are to know the exact meaning of the text or context because; sometimes the word carries different meanings according to the situation or the purpose of it"*.

Students came up with several challenges and difficulties and they could be summarized into the following categories: First, difficulties and challenges related to the translation of idioms, verbs, technical and scientific vocabulary. Second, challenges related to final exam and time. Some of the students believed that time given for final exam in relation to the give texts are not really enough. Third, choosing and appropriate dictionaries during exam are considered to be a big challenge for them. Forth, translation texts from Arabic into English are reported to be the most salient problem for them. Fifth, dealing with different types of genres such as translating literary, legal, physics or math texts are considered to be a challenge for them. Sixth, they find it difficult to find suitable equivalents when translating texts and this was considered to be a great challenge for them. Seventh, lack of knowledge and skills in both English and Arabic languages. Thus, in order for the undergraduate translation course to be successful, teachers and practitioners needs to look into the challenges encountered by students so as to help them to make use of the course and to the gain intended learning outcomes. The best way for help students to be good translators is practice. The more they practice, the more they benefited from the course.

### **What could be done to improve the content, delivery, and assessment of this undergraduate translation course?**

This question intends to capture students' views about what could be done to improve the provision of the course in terms of course content, methods of delivery and modes of assessment. Students have made many suggestions which could improve the content, methods of delivery and modes of assessment. A student suggested that:

*"I suggest that students should not be allowed to use dictionaries, they should find out the meaning of the words from the context. For teachers they need to consider their students' level when designing the course. Teachers should apply oral translation. For example, teachers ask students to translate the text immediately. This gives the students a good experience. This kind of translation is used in conferences and international meetings so the students will be professional"*.

Yet, another student said: *"Giving sufficient practice and enough time for translating is the best solution. More practice on translation from Arabic into English and having more quizzes and tasks which should be done individually. Moreover, reading a lot may help students to cope and get away from these problems."*

A student replied: *"Teachers should expose learners to the techniques of how to translate from SL to TL. The focus should be more on the techniques of translation rather than the content."*

Moreover, another student suggested that:

*"In my opinion, I think it is better if we give students to do their activities by themselves without any help from the teacher until they finish. Also, the teacher should ask the students to bring a dictionary during the class; I mean not a mobile phone, so they will have the idea about how to search for some words in dictionary than the phone which is easier. Students should be exposed to more practice and should be given resources to refer to such as websites or some books that might help them."*

Further a student believed that:

*"Yes, I believe that teacher can provide different topics to the students and ask them to translate as a home work. Last but not least, teacher should first explain different techniques on how to translate certain topics and how to avoid problem with cultural issues. Moreover, practice is the best way to improve the skills of translation. Teachers have to provide students with enough practice or examples."*

Yet, another student suggested: *"We need more than one course in translation. Only expert teachers must teach this course. It is important to connect this course with other courses to help student more. They need to provide books for this course and double the course."*

A student said: *"The translation course should be made optional if we want to choose or not and the course should be kept in two semesters and more focus should be on the practical side instead of theories"*.

terms of its content, methods of delivery and modes of assessment. This reform is to help students to develop their abilities. Translation competence is undeniably central to successful translation teaching and training and translation courses should be successfully constructed in the presence of an adequate understanding of what one need to know in order to translate well and effectively (Mudawi, 2016, p. 215). These competences can only be achieved through well-constructed courses and valid assessment tools.

### **Summary of Findings, Conclusions, Recommendations and Pedagogical Implications**

To conclude, the findings indicted that students have mixed responses and opinions about their translation course but many issues raised which merit consideration. A closer look to the study findings and students' suggestions the study puts forward the following recommendations: The vast majority of the students believed that one course in translation is not enough for them so they need to courses instead of one so as to enable them to acquire the translation techniques and skills in a better way. Further, students should be trained on translation techniques such as adaptation, modulation, exposition, literal translation, borrowing, functional equivalence, claue,

etc. They need to be trained on how to approach the text and how to use these techniques purposefully. Translation resources such as books, specialized dictionaries, and websites should be made available for students to use. Besides, students should be allowed to use dictionaries frequently and they should be encouraged to work out meanings of words from the context. Further, the course content, present teaching methodology, assessment criteria, objectives of the course and textbooks used in the course should be reviewed in relation to students' views and needs to achieve realistic learning outcomes. In addition, EFL students should be instructed to go through two phases: comprehension and reformulation. In the comprehension phase, students attempt to understand the source text. Then they move on to the reformulation phase, where students produce, edit, and refine English translations to make them accurate, intelligible, and readable (Pan & Pan, n.d., p. 3). One of the difficulties that students have reported that they encountered when translating is the choice of suitable equivalent in a given text or context in this regard Baker (1992) claimed that the choice of equivalent in certain context depends on linguistic and extra-linguistic factors. Therefore, students need to be trained on how to use their extra-linguistic knowledge to decipher the meaning of words and expressions when it is impossible to use their linguistic knowledge convey and render the intended meaning. Additionally, the training of teachers on some of the current trends in teaching translation is of utmost importance. Finally, students and teachers should be trained on how utilize new technologies in translation.

The study has pedagogical implication for both translation teachers and practitioners. It may inform the methodology of teaching translation and it may give insights to teachers to modify their course content, methods of teaching and assessment. Moreover, some translation assessment tools such tests were questioned in terms of their validity for testing translation competences as it is difficult to identify the variables which constitute translation ability (Campbell, 1991). Therefore, different methods and tools such as portfolios should be utilized to avoid any discrepancies in assessment.

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## APPENDIX

### Translation Students' Questionnaire

#### Dear Student,

This survey intends to investigate translation students' perceptions of the difficulties and challenges that they faced with their undergraduate translation course so as to find ways for overcoming them and improving the course. You are kindly requested to answer the questions in this questionnaire to the best of your knowledge and ability and to provide the researcher with useful ideas and suggestions for improving your undergraduate translation courses. You may be assured that your responses will remain confidential and will be used for research purposes only. Your identity will not be disclosed when reporting my research findings.

**Thank you very much for your cooperation!**

Using the following scale, please indicate your agreement with students' views about an undergraduate translation course.

1. **Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1**
2. **Disagree (D) = 2**

- 3. Neutral (N) = 3
- 4. Agree (A) = 4
- 5. Strongly Agree (SA) = 5

No	Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA
<b>Content of the Course</b>						
1.	My undergraduate translation course materials have met my study needs.					
2.	My undergraduate translation course materials have helped me to translate from English into Arabic and vice versa.					
3.	The content of my undergraduate translation course content suited my level.					
4.	My undergraduate translation course satisfied my translation skills needs.					
5.	All my English translation needs were adequately addressed in my undergraduate translation course materials.					
6.	The topics of my undergraduate translation course topics have met my needs and interest.					
<b>Methods of Delivery</b>						
1.	I like the way my undergraduate translation course was delivered.					
2.	I like how in-class tasks were run and practiced.					
3.	I believe that the way my translation course was being delivered suited my needs.					
4.	I think the way my current translation course was being delivered offered me opportunities to practice translation.					

5.	I believe the in-class translation tasks are helping to develop my translation skills.					
1.	I believe that the way my translation course was assessed suits me.					
2.	I think my current translation course assignments offered me enough opportunities to practice translation.					
3.	I like the way my current translation course exam questions were written.					
4.	I expected my translation course materials to offer me all types of translation.					
5.	My translation course assessment tools needed to be changed.					

**Part Three: Please, answer the following questions**

1.	What do you think of your undergraduate translation course in terms of content, methods of delivery, assessment, etc.?
2.	In your opinion, what were the main challenges that you encountered in this course?
3.	In your opinion, what are the reasons behind these challenges? How did you cope with these challenges?
5.	In your opinion, what could be done to improve this particular translation course?
6.	Any further comments or suggestions?

**Thank you very much for your cooperation!**