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The effects of a translation training program on English as a foreign language trainees' translation skills

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This study aimed to measure the effectiveness of a training experience involving a simulation of the work environment in developing the translation skills of a group of translation trainees. It also sought to investigate the participants' views about their training experience, as well as measure their level of satisfaction with the program. Thirty participants with qualifications in English language and translation from different regions of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia participated in this study. This research is a quasi-experimental study in the form of a one-group pretest and posttest design. Initially, the participants underwent a preliminary assessment (pretest) of their translation abilities. Afterward, they undertook the experiment, an intensive course in translation and its required skills, which extended over a 2-month period. At the end of the program, the participants underwent a posttest to measure whether there were statistically significant differences in their performance in the pre- and posttests, with the results showing statistically significant differences in program performance ($p < 0.05$). The data from the attitudinal questionnaire administered to the participants at the end of the program showed that they held positive opinions about the program and they benefited significantly from the training experience. Based on these results, suggestions and recommendations are proposed to those interested in the field of training and translation to further improve the work.

KEYWORDS

translation, training, evaluation, empirical research, pretest, posttest

Introduction

Undoubtedly, societies are in constant need of translators in all the fields. The translation profession is critical and in demand in all the governmental, educational, and private sectors, including business and tourism.

However, there are important questions regarding translators: Is everyone who holds the title of translator worthy of practicing the translation profession? How competent

are current translators in the field? What are the criteria for the qualification and evaluation of translators? All these questions deserve to be answered through research and investigation.

The translation profession requires adequacy in a set of skills and subskills. If a translator lacks one of these skills, deficiencies will occur in the translation process. There is an urgent need for adequate preparation of translators, providing them with all the skills and knowledge necessary for the profession before they embark on the labor market. This is particularly important in areas where translation errors cannot be accepted. Moreover, the translation career involves different intellectual activities, including language proficiency, analysis, problem solving, association, conceptualization, learning, information processing, perception, understanding, and re-expression, which makes translation a complex phenomenon (Coban, 2015). Coban continued as follows:

As in other professions, translation also requires some skills such as language acquisition, text competence, research competence, cultural competence, transfer competence, and abilities such as decision-making, creativity, giving quick responses, especially in simultaneous translation, and arranging the time of response well (p. 708).

In addition, it is important not to rely entirely on university outputs, as these preparatory programs are at times insufficient or inadequate.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) is a monolingual country with limited linguistic diversity, which limits opportunities for language practice for bilinguals and polyglots. For example, considering the situation of the English language in KSA, it will be found that its uses are limited, and mostly confined to the academic domain. Therefore, in Saudi Arabia, English has deemed a foreign language due to the scarcity of its use in public facilities.

All of these factors combined call for the proper rehabilitation and preparation of translators before the actual engagement in the translation profession.

Today, translation has moved to different areas, especially due to the impact of developments in communication technology, services, and modern age demands. As a result, it requires the ability to quickly choose among many alternatives and make decisions. What is important for a translator is not knowing everything, but knowing how and where to find the information when needed and how to choose the most appropriate information (Pym, 2014).

In this regard, it has been recently observed that there are many training programs and training institutes for translators in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. These institutes offer a wide array of courses in general and specialized translations that include all the fields of translation (religious, legal, literary, medical, etc.).

In addition, the conditions resulting from the COVID-19 lockdown have provided more opportunities for trainees to enroll in these programs, which have been offering courses remotely for the last 2 years.

However, despite the abundance of these programs, there are not enough studies evaluating the quality of these programs or measuring their efficiency. This study has been undertaken to answer these questions. The current study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of a translation-training experience in developing trainees' translation skills and to examine the participants' perceptions of the training program.

Research questions

The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- How effective is the proposed translation training program in preparing prospective English as a Foreign Language (EFL) translators?
- What are the trainees' perceptions of the translation training program?

Significance of the study

The significance of the study is summarized as follows:

- The results of this study will provide insights into the efficacy of training in terms of preparing future translators and improving their skills.
- It will help narrow the gap in preservice training research, particularly in the field of translator training.
- The study will test the feasibility of the proposed program and assess the possibility of the application of the program on a larger scale.
- The study will present a paradigm of translator training that involves a set of strategies to be subsequently simulated and adopted in similar contexts.
- The feedback obtained from the study will be expected to help trainers, educators, and policymakers improve current training conditions.
- The research outcomes will arguably provide useful insights and visions of interest to future researchers, as well as identify more research gaps to be filled by further research.

Literature review

This part reviews the literature related to the current study and provides the framework for this article. It sheds light on both the theoretical and empirical considerations of

this research and presents an overview of the findings of previous studies.

Theoretical considerations

Theory of constructivism

The theoretical framework of the experimentation in this research is based on the theory of constructivism, which postulates that learners construct new understandings and knowledge, integrating with what they already know. The main premise of constructivist theories is that learners create their own knowledge through experience. Constructivism has its roots in the cognitive theories of Piaget and Vygotsky and embraces several aspects of both of those theories. From Piaget, we have active learning, schemes, assimilation, accommodation, etc. From Vygotsky, we get social constructivism, group work, apprenticeship, etc. (Vygotsky, 1978).

Torrance and Pryor (2002) described the constructivist perspective as an aspiring approach because it considers the interaction between the teacher and the pupil in the learning process. Torrance and Pryor (2002) argued that, in this approach, the interaction between teachers and learners means that teachers assist the learners to understand new ideas, rather than just discussing the pupils' assessment results. Kolb (1985) suggested that the constructivist approach helps learners to be active in analyzing knowledge.

The constructivist approach treats learners as individuals who are trying to make sense of the knowledge that has been introduced to them (Sjoberg, 2007). It maintains that individuals create or construct their own new understandings or knowledge through exploring what they already know, as well as the ideas, events, and activities with which they come in contact (Richardson, 1997). The constructivist-learning environment provides the learner with opportunities to help them build on prior knowledge and understand how to build up new knowledge from authentic experience (Rami et al., 2009).

Moreover, it is essential that instructors try to know how their pupils associate new information with ideas, which are already present in their minds (James, 2013). Driscoll (2000) identified two main characteristics of the constructivist approach; first, it helps pupils to comprehend new knowledge; second, it refines old ideas, and it ought to have feedback, which should include feedforward notions. Feedforward notions focus not only on what pupils have achieved, but what they might achieve (Torrance and Pryor, 2002).

Empirical considerations

Reviewing the literature regarding the training of translators, it was found that there is little research conducted in the field. However, a few studies tackled the issue and

yielded some interesting findings. For instance, Di Wu and Aiping (2019) examined the influences of training programs on preservice translators in terms of their self-efficacy beliefs in translating, teaching, and research. It was found, in general, that the program had positive impacts on the development of the self-efficacy beliefs of the participants, suggesting that the training of translators could yield successful results when conducted in a formal and systematic ways. In addition, Mekheimer (2015) investigated the challenges for EFL students enrolled in Arabic–English and/or English–Arabic programs at language and translation colleges in Saudi Arabia before them embarking on the labor market. The findings identified three major challenges: (1) lack of language proficiency, (2) insufficient intercultural knowledge, and (3) curriculum design issues. Results also indicated a number of issues that require systemic modification of the curricula of these colleges.

Arslan and Kavaklı (2019) conducted a study to analyze the translation errors of preservice EFL teachers. The translation assignments of 30 preservice EFL teachers were analyzed through document analysis, and the results showed that the errors fell into structural, lexical, and translational/interpretational categories. The vast majority of the errors fell into the structural category. It was apparent that some of the participants of the study had challenges in forming subject–verb agreement, using relative clauses/pronouns, and constructing well-formed sentences in accordance with the rules of syntax.

Likewise, experimental research was carried out to compare students' translation learning ability before and after using e-learning lessons and to study the satisfaction of the English preservice students in the Basic Translation course. The participants were 48 English students from the Faculty of Education at Suratthani Rajabhat University. The findings showed that the efficiency of the e-learning lesson in Basic Translation was 75.12/77.86. The students' achievement after learning by using the e-learning lesson was significantly higher than the previous level of 0.05. The satisfaction of the students in the e-learning lesson was rated at a high level (Kittichartchaowalit, 2018).

Moreover, a specifically preservice translator training program was designed to test trainees' ability to deal with cultural references, a text segment type, which is widely considered problematic for translators. It was found that the program enabled a group of students within a naturally occurring preservice training context to detect a greater number of cultural references within a text, and to also propose a greater number of feasible variants for the translation of cultural references (Scott-Tennent and Davies, 2008).

Similarly, English–Yoruba translation, which is a mandatory course for preservice teachers in education colleges in Nigeria, is an important aspect of Yoruba language studies. Adeoye (2016) studied the effects of bilingual and peer-tutoring instructional strategies on preservice teachers' learning gains in Yoruba translation. Findings indicated that bilingual

and peer-tutoring instructional strategies were effective in enhancing preservice teachers' English–Yoruba translation skills. Accordingly, English–Yoruba translation teachers in education colleges are expected to implement the strategies when teaching it.

Rafiq and Yasim (2019) conducted a study to investigate elevating the preservice teacher's translation skills through learner autonomy. The notion of learner autonomy or learner independence moves into an area where learners can direct their own learning, particularly when translating the sentences and texts given during the class. It refers to learning activities, which take place without the intervention of a teacher. This, in turn, encourages learners to be more efficient and effective when they study independently. Learners are indirectly forced to assume responsibility for their own learning. The findings of the study showed that learner autonomy has a great impact in elevating the preservice teacher's translation skills. Additionally, a study was undertaken by Hatipoğlu (2015) to examine the effects of training by exploring the expectations and needs of preservice English language teachers in Turkey. Data were collected from 124 preservice English language teachers using needs analysis survey questionnaires and interviews. The results of the study illustrated the effect of local assessment cultures and contexts and the previous assessment experiences on preservice teachers' perceived needs related to language assessment literacy. The findings also showed that instructors should monitor their students if the aim is to create more useful English language testing and evaluation (ELTE) courses.

Finally, it is acknowledged in the literature and professional practice that there is a "gap" between the theory of preservice training and the actual professional practices. Hence, Kervin and Turbill (2003) described a model of professional learning that greatly assisted novice trainees in making connections between their preservice training and its relevance to their professional practices. A gap has also been identified between the theory and practice of some training programs. Lingham et al. (2006) evaluated training programs that promote collaboration between organizational leaders, trainers, participants, and evaluators by adopting a four-phase approach. The main result of the study was that content was stronger than applicability. This finding was critical in understanding the learning focus of the program and the significance of developing unique evaluation systems that are both meaningful and important to any organization and its members.

Methodology

Research design

This research reported herein is a quasi-experimental study in the form of one-group pretest and posttest designs. The experiment was conducted during the second semester of the

2020 academic year and included 30 participants. Before the experiment, the participants' translation ability was measured using a pretest. Thereafter, a posttest was administered to each participant after completing the 2-month translation training program. Upon the completion of the program, the participants were also asked to complete an attitudinal questionnaire to measure their level of satisfaction with the translation course.

Research participants

The study included 30 participants, each holding degrees in the English language and were mainly graduates of the English language and translation departments of various Saudi universities. Most of those enrolled in the program were either unemployed individuals who were seeking to develop their translation skills in order to enhance their eligibility to secure a job or were freelance translators with a desire to refine their translation skills.

Research instruments

Translation program

The total duration of the program was 8 weeks, with 96 h of training. Taking into account the personal circumstances of the trainees, the program was divided into two slots—one in the morning and another in the evening. The entire training program was conducted remotely. The training was practical and intensive and was designed in a way that simulated the work environment. The program targeted all the translators, translation students, and graduates of English language programs who were interested in developing their translation skills. It was offered by experts specialized in the field of translation, and applicants obtained certificates submitted by an accredited translation office. The total value of the program was 1,500 Saudi Riyals. The organizational party for this course was the House of Translators, a certified translation institute in Saudi Arabia.

Pretest and posttest

Every participant undertook a pretest to determine their translation ability before the translation course. The participants then undertook a posttest after completing the program, and the results of the pretest and posttest were compared. The two tests had the same format; both were self-designed by the researcher with multiple choice questions (MCQs) format. Each test comprised 30 items testing the respondents' general knowledge of translation concepts, strategies, theories, English to Arabic editing skills, as well as simple translating tasks (Appendix A). A single item counts for 1 point with a total score of 30 points per test.

Attitudinal questionnaire

An attitudinal questionnaire measuring the trainees' rate of satisfaction with their training experience was developed and administered at the end of the program. The questionnaire comprised 10 close-ended items and was designed in a four-point scale format. It generally consisted of characteristic statements, and the respondents were required to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed by ticking one of the responses ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree."

Data collection and analysis

The study utilized a one-group pretest and posttest quasi-experimental design. The data collection involved the administration of the pretest with the 30 participants, who together represented the translation program registrants. The pretest was administered to the participants before the commencement of the extensive Translation Training Course. The experiment was carried out over 2 months. Upon completing the program, a posttest was administered to the participants, as well as a satisfaction questionnaire to measure their attitudes toward the Translation Training Course.

The data were analyzed quantitatively using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) (version 23). The raw scores of both the tests were submitted to the SPSS for further analysis, and the significance level was set to $p < 0.05$. The one-sample t -test was run to compare the means of the pretest and posttest scores. In addition, descriptive statistics were generated to demonstrate the means of the attitudinal questionnaire items.

Validity

In research terminology, validity refers to the degree to which an assessment procedure measures the variables it claims to measure (Dornyei, 2007). In order to ensure the content validity of the research instrument, the researcher adopted the following procedures:

- Four or more response-item construct format was selected to minimize the guessing of correct answers.
- The options were made homogeneous in content.
- To eliminate the testing effect, an 8-week interval mediates between the pretest and posttest.
- To eliminate mortality threats (participants' dropout or withdrawal from the study), more than thirty students were initially enrolled in the study.

TABLE 1 Reliability statistics of research instruments.

Instrument	Cronbach's alpha
Pre- and Posttests	0.988
Questionnaire	0.867

TABLE 2 One-sample statistics.

	N	Mean	Std. deviation	Std. error mean
Pretest	30	14.27	7.239	1.322
Posttest	30	17.27	6.313	1.153

Reliability

Reliability, on the other hand, of a research instrument refers to the stability or the consistency of the measurements produced by a particular assessment procedure (Gravetter and Forzano, 2006). The internal reliability of the two tests and questionnaire items was established by conducting a standard reliability test. The statistical technique adopted to measure the internal reliability was Cronbach's alpha (Table 1).

The measurement revealed that the instrument was reliable at 0.988 for the pre- and posttests, which are considered an excellent value according to the general evaluation system of Cronbach's alpha statistics. In addition, it was found that the questionnaire was reliable at 0.883, which is also considered a fairly plausible value.

Results

Q1: How effective is the proposed translation training program in preparing prospective English as a foreign language translators?

This research question aimed to examine the impact of the translation training program on improving trainees' translation abilities. To this end, the study participants undertook a pretest and posttest. Upon analyzing the data, it was found that the trainees' performance in the posttest had improved considerably as a result of their enrollment in the program. Table 2 shows that the mean score for the posttest was 17.27 compared to 14.27 in the pretest.

This finding shows that there was a statistically significant difference in the performance of the participants in both the tests as the significance level was $p \leq 0.05$ (Table 3).

TABLE 3 One-sample test.

	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean difference	95% confidence interval of the difference	
					Lower	Upper
Pretest	10.794	29	0.000	14.267	11.56	16.97
Posttest	14.980	29	0.000	17.267	14.91	19.62

TABLE 4 Test of normality.

	Kolmogorov–Smirnov ^a			Shapiro–Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Pretest	0.157	30	0.057	0.951	30	0.179
Posttest	0.205	30	0.002	0.898	30	0.007

^aLilliefors significance correction.

Test of normality

A test of normality was also calculated to determine whether or not the data is normally distributed. To this end, the Shapiro–Wilk test was conducted. The results of the test are shown on [Table 4](#).

As it can be seen in table above, the significance value for the pretest is $p \geq 0.05$, which ultimately supports the null hypothesis, which states that “sample distribution is normal.” On the other hand, the significance value for the posttest is $p \leq 0.05$, which accordingly rejects the null hypothesis.

Q2: What are the trainees’ perceptions of the translation training program?

This research question aimed to explore the participants’ attitudes toward the translation course. To answer this question, an attitudinal questionnaire was administered to the trainees at the end of the treatment. Upon examining the respondents’ replies to the questions, the overall results revealed positive attitudes toward the program. [Table 5](#) shows the overall results of the questionnaire items.

The participants were asked whether they enjoyed the translation program, and the results showed that 47% of them strongly agreed, 44% agreed, 3% were undecided, and only 6% disagreed. When asked if they felt that their translation skills had improved as a result of their enrollment in the program, 52% strongly agreed, 43% agreed, 2% were undecided, and 3% disagreed. When asked whether they had observed any improvement in their English skills as a result of attending the program, 34% strongly agreed, 42% agreed, 10% were undecided, 8% disagreed, and 6% strongly disagreed. When questioned if they were generally satisfied with their

performance in the program, 46% strongly agreed, 43% agreed, 5% were undecided, 4% disagreed, and 2% strongly disagreed.

Upon investigating the respondents’ opinions about whether they believed that the training was essential for translators, 41% of them strongly agreed, 53% agreed, 4% were undecided, and 2% disagreed. Furthermore, the participants were asked whether they thought that a 2-month period was sufficient for training. In all, 35% strongly agreed, 23% agreed, 25% were undecided, 14% disagreed, and 3% strongly disagreed. They were also asked whether they were generally satisfied with their translation abilities, with 35% strongly agreeing, 23% agreeing, 25% being undecided, 14% disagreeing, and 3% strongly disagreeing. When asked whether they felt that they needed further translation training, 29% of them strongly agreed, 26% agreed, 15% were undecided, 16% disagreed, and 14% strongly disagreed.

In response to the statement “I think that practical training should be integrated into the program,” 42% of the participants agreed, 13% were undecided, and 45% disagreed. Finally, in assessing the respondents’ general satisfaction levels with their overall training experience, 46% strongly agreed that they were generally satisfied, 45% agreed, 6% were undecided, and 3% disagreed.

Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that the training experience had a positive impact on the trainees’ translation abilities. This is in accordance with previous studies, such as those of [Mansour \(2013\)](#) and [Abd Samad et al. \(2015\)](#), which concluded that training yielded positive outcomes on trainees’ performance.

After participating in the Translation Training Course, the student’s achievement levels were significantly higher than before at the 0.05 level. This has also been proven by similar studies, which compared students’ translation learning abilities before and after joining learning programs ([Kittichartchaowalit, 2018](#)).

Moreover, the participant’s responses to the satisfaction questionnaire indicated positive attitudes toward the training experience and program, as well as their translation skills. This finding is also similar to the findings of [Di Wu and Aiping \(2019\)](#), who found that training had a positive impact on the development of self-efficacy beliefs of the participants, suggesting that the training of translators could yield successful results when conducted in a formal and systematic ways. It is also consistent with the findings of [Kittichartchaowalit \(2018\)](#), who found that the satisfaction of the students with an e-learning lesson in the Basic Translation Course was rated at a high level.

Previous research has shown that English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students face challenges with the English language, with their proficiency levels being found inadequate

TABLE 5 Statistics of the questionnaire items.

Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree
I enjoyed the translation training experience.	0%	6%	3%	44%	47%
I feel that my translation skills have improved as a result of joining the program.	0%	3%	2%	43%	52%
I noticed an improvement in my English language skills as a result of joining the program.	6%	8%	10%	42%	34%
I am satisfied with the performance of the trainers in the program.	2%	4%	5%	43%	46%
I believe that training is essential for translators.	0%	2%	4%	63%	41%
I think that a 2-month period is enough for training.	3%	14%	25%	23%	35%
I am satisfied with my general translation abilities.	2%	5%	7%	44%	42%
I feel that I am in need of further training on translation.	14%	16%	15%	26%	29%
I think that practical training should be integrated to the program.	0%	45%	13%	42%	0%
Generally, I am satisfied with my overall training experience.	0%	3%	6%	45%	46%

(Mekheimer, 2015). Yet, the results of the research showed that the students recognized progress in their levels of the English language as a result of joining the training program.

Finally, previous studies have pointed out a gap between the theory and practice of some training programs (Lingham et al., 2006). Nevertheless, no gaps were identified between training and practice in the current program. This finding was critical to understanding the learning focus of the program and the significance of developing unique evaluation systems that are both meaningful and important to the organization and its beneficiaries.

Conclusion

This study aimed to evaluate a training experience involving the simulation of the work environment in developing the translation skills of a group of translators. It also sought to explore the opinions of the study participants about their perceptions of the program and assess their level of satisfaction with the program outcomes. The results of the study showed that, in general, the participants had positive attitudes about the program and that they benefited significantly and enjoyed the training experience. The findings also showed statistically significant differences in the participants' performance in the pre- and posttests. This result corroborates the findings of previous research on the effectiveness of training in developing translators' skills. However, there were persistent research gaps that will require further investigation and exploration.

Recommendations and practical implications

Based on the findings of the current study, the following recommendations were proposed:

1. It is suggested that practical training becomes an integral part of any training program plan.
2. The outcomes of the study can have pedagogical implications for translators' preparation programs in Saudi universities and in Qassim University to simulate the experience and refine translators' talents.
3. It is also recommended that the training period extends to 6 months at least instead of 2 months to ensure more robust outcomes and efficient training.
4. The new program could include a plan for language skills enhancement, as language proficiency is essential for translators, as well as further ensuring the efficiency and quality of the training outputs.
5. It is also suggested that longitudinal studies are conducted to examine the effectiveness of training, focusing primarily on testing the translation skills included in the program.
6. The selection of both the trainees and trainers to take part in the program should be based on standard criteria such as linguistic testing to ensure the quality and efficiency of the training program.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in this study are included in the article/[Supplementary material](#), further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

Ethical review and approval was not required for the study on human participants in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. Written informed consent for participation was not required for this study in accordance with the national legislation and the institutional requirements.

Author contributions

YA designed the study, developed the framework, carried out the experiment in coordination with the director of the translation program, analyzed the data, reported the findings, and approved the submitted version.

Conflict of interest

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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