Enhancing learning of non-translation major students through developing translation competence

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ABSTRACT

Linguistic competence is crucial to developing a deep understanding of the contents of Islamic texts, which are typically written in Arabic. Linguistic competence varies, particularly among non-native speakers of Arabic, and mastering the language can be challenging at times. The present study uses an online survey to investigate students' perceptions of the effectiveness of learning translation skills in enhancing students learning process. This study also assesses the students' performance in various tasks to support their statements. This study involves third-year undergraduate students majoring in different fields of Islamic Studies at Universiti Islam Sultan Sharif Ali (UNISSA). They took a translation module as part of their respective programme structure. Results revealed that some students expressed their difficulties in finding equivalent terms. However, they solved the problems by applying translation techniques and strategies they learned in the course. Learning translation skills did not only help them understand religious texts easily. However, it also helped them improve other language skills through various translation exercises. They also mentioned that translation skills, such as analytical, research, technological and teamwork skills, are beneficial when writing assignments for other modules.

Keywords: Translation course, Skills, Learning, Languages, and Islamic studies.

INTRODUCTION

Translation competence

Translation competence is a subjective notion as it is difficult to draw boundaries and list down the characteristics required to be a fully competent translator. However, Pietrzak (2015) simply described the term as "the ability to translate". Various conceptions and models of translation competence have been introduced to define the term. Hansen (2008, p. 274), for example,

defined translation competence as a set of skills influenced by four major factors: knowledge terminology, translation theories, language cultures and translation technology. On the other hand, Neubert (2000, p. 5) listed down a different set of features of translation competence, namely complexity, heterogeneity, approximation, open-endedness, creativity, situationality and historicity. European Master's in Translation (EMT) expert group (2009) also listed 6 main areas of competence: language competence, intercultural competence, info mining competence, technological competence, thematic competence, and translation service provision competence. However, the previously mentioned sets of skills or features are subjective and do not fully define the characteristics of the term translation competence. One may have different preferences of what they believe to define it. Therefore, any conception or model of translation competence can be used if it fulfils the purpose of the programme.

Translator training in the digital era

Translator training has evolved tremendously since the introduction of Machine Translation (MT) in the 1950s. Over the years, various translation technologies have also been developed. Each offers similar features such as translation memories, terminology management, concordance, quality assurance, and MT integration. As a result, the demands and needs for translator training have also changed. The use of technology has become an integral part of both profession and training (Koponen, 2015; Lesznyák, 2019; Yamada, 2019). It requires additional skills, such as post-editing, software skills, basic programming knowledge and others.

In the academic setting, various universities have modified their current translation programmes according to serious changes in the digital era. Most of them integrated translation technologies into their programmes as core modules. Furthermore, it has become a trend in the research field (Zheng and Zhu, 2020; Bian, 2021), particularly in advancing these technologies in the fourth industrial revolution with the help of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies, such as deep learning, neural machine translation engines and voice recognition (Lionbridge, 2017).

Translation programmes at UNISSA

Translation courses are offered to students studying Arabic language and translation as their major at Sultan Sharif Ali Islamic University. Both undergraduate and postgraduate students can benefit from various fields of specialised translation offered according to their respective programme structures. Most courses are mandatory, and some are optional. These

comprehensive programmes were designed based on the current requirements in the professional setting. They cover various topics, including basic translation theories, techniques, strategies, various text types, technologies, and interpreting (See Table 1). Some courses are also offered as minor courses so that students from other faculties can learn additional skills from other programmes. Completing a minor programme will add value to the graduates' certificate and make them more marketable when applying for jobs. Furthermore, they can start their career as freelance translators as their main source of or side income.

Table 1

Translation courses offered at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels

NO.	COURSE NAME	LEVEL OF STUDY	TYPE
1)	Madhkhal Ila Al-Tarjamah	Undergraduate	Mandatory
2)	Al-Tarjamah Baina Al-Nazariyyat wa Al-Tatbiq		
3)	Al-Akhtaa' Al-Syaai'ah Fi Al-Tarjamah		
4)	Al-Tarjamah Al-Aliyyah		
5)	Tarjamah Al-Nusus Al-Diniyyah		
6)	Tarjamah Al-Nusus Al-Iqtisadiyyah Wa Al-Idariyyah		
7)	Tarjamah Lughah Al-I'lam		Optional
8)	Al-Tarjamah Al-Adabiyyah		
9)	Al-Tarjamah Al-Fawriyyah		
10)	Dirasat Fi Thaqafat Al-Tarjamah	Postgraduate	Mandatory
11)	Al-Tarjamah Al-Fawriyyah		
12)	Falsafat Al-Tarjamah		
13)	Namadhij Tatbiqiyyah Fi Al-Tarjamah		
14)	Ilm Dilalah wa Tarjamah		Optional
15)	Dirasat Fi 'Ilm Al-Tarjamah		

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The present study involved a total of 68 third-year undergraduate students majoring in different fields of Usuluddin. The students are native speakers of the Malay language. Results in Table show that 52.9% of the students rated their English language proficiency as good and 38.2% as average, indicating that they have a good command of English. The results also show that 69.1% of the students rated their Arabic language proficiency as average, suggesting that their English language proficiency is better than their Arabic.

Translation Course

The students take a translation course, called "Al-Tarjamah Baina Al-Nazariyyat wa Al-Tatbiq" (Translation between Theories and Practice). In 14 weeks, this course offers various theories and a series of translation exercises, such as translation techniques and strategies, translation quality assessment, error analysis, translation technologies and many others. Working in groups, the students were required to submit and present their translations of different text types and commentaries.

Due to the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, the course was completely taught online via Microsoft Teams. Even though the online learning platform can restrict the conventional learning environment, it allows the lecturer to organize all the students' work and activities. Their performance can also be assessed through online tests, quizzes, exercises, group presentations and assignments.

Translation Competence Framework

The present study uses the European Master's in Translation (EMT) expert group's list of competence required to become a professional translator. Previously, they listed six main areas of competence. Over the years, the skills and demands in the translation profession have changed due to the advancement of technologies and the high demand for quality translation services (Lionbridge, 2017). Furthermore, translation tasks are nowadays required to be completed in a short time at a low cost. For the latest framework, the EMT expert group (2017) developed the previous set of competence and proposed five similar categories. However, they provided a more detailed description of each competence as follows:

- Language and culture: This competence covers transcultural and sociolinguistic awareness and communicative skills.
- Translation: This competence requires strategic, methodological, and thematic competence throughout all the translation processes from text analysis to the end product.
- Technology: This competence requires skills and knowledge to use translation tools and applications to enhance the quality of the final product.
- Personal and interpersonal: This competence refers to soft skills to increase the translators' adaptability and marketability after they graduated.
- Service provision: This competence covers all aspects of the translation service such as negotiation with clients, quality assurance and project management.

Even though the framework was designed for master's programmes, these skills should be incorporated into the programmes at the undergraduate level. Each competence is essentially required after they graduate or if they want to pursue their study at the master's level. Such competencies should be the core objectives of any translation programme as they meet the needs and demands of today's translation profession.

Data analysis

At the end of the 14-week course, the students were required to fill in a questionnaire to find out their perspective on the effectiveness of learning translation skills in enhancing students learning process. Based on the translation competence proposed by the EMT expert group, the present study designed a 5-Likert scale questionnaire to find out the following statements:

1. Learning the correct translation techniques helps me produce good translations.
2. I am more thorough in producing quality translations and analyzing and correcting errors.
3. Translation helps me improve my language proficiency.
4. Translation helps me increase my vocabulary.
5. Translation helps me understand linguistic and cultural differences according to the text types.
6. I can use technologies to produce good translations of different text types.
7. Translation improves my research skills, particularly in ensuring the validity of the information by referring to appropriate references.
8. The translation course helps me improve my personal and interpersonal skills.

This set of statements covers the five main categories suggested by the EMT expert group (2017). Some questions may cover more than one category as these areas are interrelated. In the second part of the analysis, the results of the survey will be supported by looking into the students' performance in their assessments. This analysis aims to investigate any correlation between the results and the students' performance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Online questionnaire:

The main objective of the present study is to find out the participants' perspectives on the effectiveness of learning translation skills in enhancing students learning process. The results of the online questionnaires are shown in Table 2:

Table 2

Overall responses of the survey questions on the effectiveness of learning translation skills

Statement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
1	-	-	2 (2.9%)	12 (17.6%)	54 (79.4%)
2	-	-	10 (14.7%)	28 (41.2%)	30 (44.1%)
3	-	-	6 (8.8%)	14 (20.6%)	48 (70.6%)
4	-	-	1 (1.5%)	13 (19.1%)	54 (79.4%)
5	-	-	10 (14.7%)	25 (36.8%)	33 (48.5%)
6	-	-	8 (11.8%)	27 (39.7%)	33 (48.5%)
7	-	-	8 (11.8%)	22 (32.4%)	38 (55.9%)
8	-	-	3 (4.4%)	20 (29.4%)	45 (66.2%)

Regarding Statement 1, the results show that the students mostly agreed (97%) that learning correct translation techniques helped them produce good translations. Mastering translation techniques is crucial in ensuring that translators can identify problems, such as untranslatability and inequivalence, and find appropriate techniques and strategies to produce good translations. Mastering these techniques also requires analytical skills, particularly in the revision stage. The results show that 85.3% of the students noticed that they have become more thorough in ensuring the quality of their translations through analyzing and correcting errors (Statement 2). Based on the results of the two statements, the translation course has helped the students develop translation service provision competence.

In response to Statement 3, 91.2% of the students expressed that translation helped them improve their language proficiency. Having a good command of at least two languages is fundamental to avoid misunderstanding and mistranslation, regardless of the translation direction. Translating into one's mother tongue is preferable. However, near-native fluency is sufficient to produce quality translations. Most students rated their English and Arabic language proficiency as good and average respectively. However, one of the main objectives of the translation course is to develop their language competence. Therefore, it requires constant practice and years of experience.

Furthermore, almost all students (98.5%) agreed that translation helped them increase their vocabulary (Statement 4), which is crucial when dealing with different text types. Providing

correct equivalent terms in the target language improves the quality of the translation. Finding equivalence may be a difficult task even for professional translators because different text types require specific terms. The translation can become more complicated when dealing with cultural references, even for professional translators (Chahrour, 2018). Therefore, translators must have excellent knowledge of the source and target languages and cultures. Based on the survey, the results show that 85.3% of the students agreed that translation helped them understand linguistic and cultural differences (Statement 5), indicating that they have developed language, intercultural, and thematic competence.

Technological competence is also crucial in translation training as it is an integral part of the translation profession. The students must also be aware of translation technologies and know how to use them appropriately. In the translation course, they were familiarized with the basic knowledge of using different technologies, such as machine translations and computer-assisted translation tools. A series of practical sessions were conducted over two weeks to allow the students to explore different features of the technologies. Such features can be beneficial for them to enhance their translation quality. Also, they could experiment with the technologies and evaluate the translation results of different text types. In response to Statement 6, 88.2% of the students agreed that they could use the technologies to produce good translations of different text types, indicating that they could use the technologies wisely and did not solely depend on them.

Strong research skills are required to become professional translators as such quality separates them from one another. Translators need to ensure the validity of the information in the original texts as they may be errors that could result in the mistranslation of the original meaning. Any mistakes would reflect poorly on their credibility as translators. Research skills also help translators understand the content of the source text, primarily when translating names, history, geographical location, and others. In response to Statement 7, 88.3% of the students agreed that the translation course improves their research skills, particularly in ensuring the validity of the information by referring to appropriate references.

In any profession, personal and interpersonal skills are crucial. Professional translators tend to deal with other professionals such as clients, proofreaders, and project managers. These skills are also known as soft skills. Schulz (2008) listed various soft skills, including teamwork capability, time management, creativity, problem-solving and negotiating skills. In the

translation course, the students were assigned group tasks, such as writing assignments, presentations, translation exercises, and discussions. These activities were designed to develop their personal and interpersonal skills when working in a team. In response to Statement 8, most students (95.6%) agreed that the translation course helped them improve their personal and interpersonal skills.

Students' assessments:

As previously mentioned, the student's performance was assessed through various performance tasks, such as pre-test and final tests, assignments, monthly quizzes, and group presentations.

Table 3
Waddington's (2001) holistic approach to assessing students' translations

Level	Accuracy of transfer of ST	Quality of expression in TL	Degree of task completion	Mark
5	Complete transfer of ST information; only minor revision needed to reach professional standard.	Almost all the translation reads like a piece originally written in TL. There may be minor lexical, grammatical, or spelling errors.	Successful	9, 10
4	Almost complete transfer: there may be one or two insignificant inaccuracies; requires certain amount of revision to reach professional standard.	Large sections read like a piece originally written in TL. There are a number of lexical, grammatical, or spelling errors.	Almost completely successful	7, 8
3	Transfer of the general idea(s) but with a number of lapses in accuracy; needs considerable revision to reach professional standard.	Certain parts read like a piece originally written in TL, but others read like a translation. There are a considerable number of lexical, grammatical, or spelling errors.	Adequate	5, 6
2	Transfer undermined by serious inaccuracies; thorough revision required to reach professional standard.	Almost entire text reads like a translation; there are continual lexical, grammatical, or spelling errors.	Inadequate	3, 4
1	Totally inadequate transfer of ST content; the	The candidate reveals a total lack of ability to express himself adequately in TL.	Totally inadequate	1, 2

translation is not worth revising,			

In the pre-test and final test, the quality of the students' translations was evaluated using Christopher Waddington's (2001) holistic approach to assessing students' translations (See Table 3). This approach uses five levels of quality: ranging from 1 (totally inadequate) to 5 (successful). Each level provides descriptions of the accuracy of translated source text's content and the translation quality. Therefore, assessors can subjectively give scores to each translation based on these characteristics. This approach was intended to assess translation from Spanish to English. Since then, many studies (Varzande and Jadidi, 2015; Derakhshi and Khorrami Fard, 2019; Manipuspika, 2021) experimented with different language pairs and directionalities. Therefore, the present study used the framework to assess the students' translations between three languages: Malay, Arabic and English.
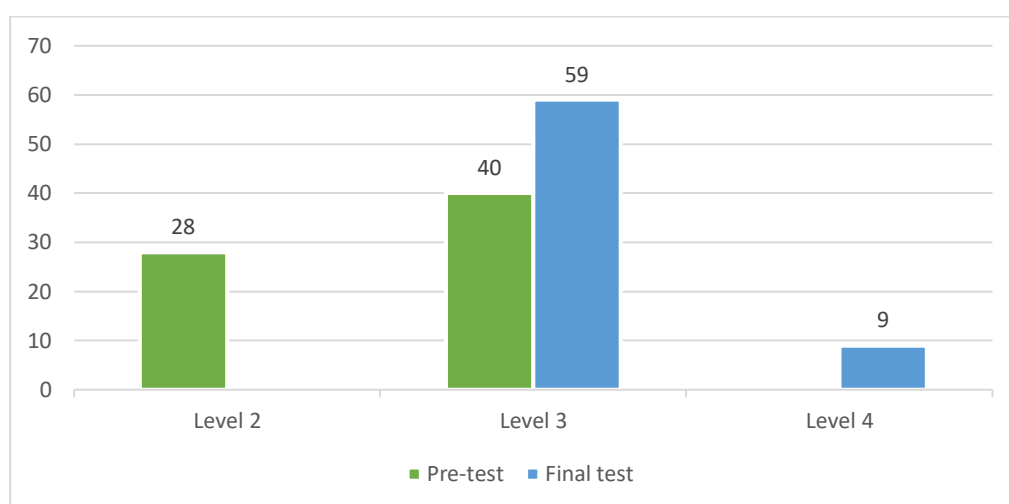

Figure 1: Students' average marks in the pre-test and final test

The results in Figure 1 show that 58.8% of the students obtained average marks (Level 3). However, the remaining students (41.2%) performed below average (Level 2), indicating that the students needed more training to produce translations of good quality. When compared to their performance in the final test, 86.8% of the students managed to produce adequate translations, and 13.2% of them obtained Level-4 marks (almost completely successful). The results indicate that on average, the students have successfully improved their translation quality throughout the course.
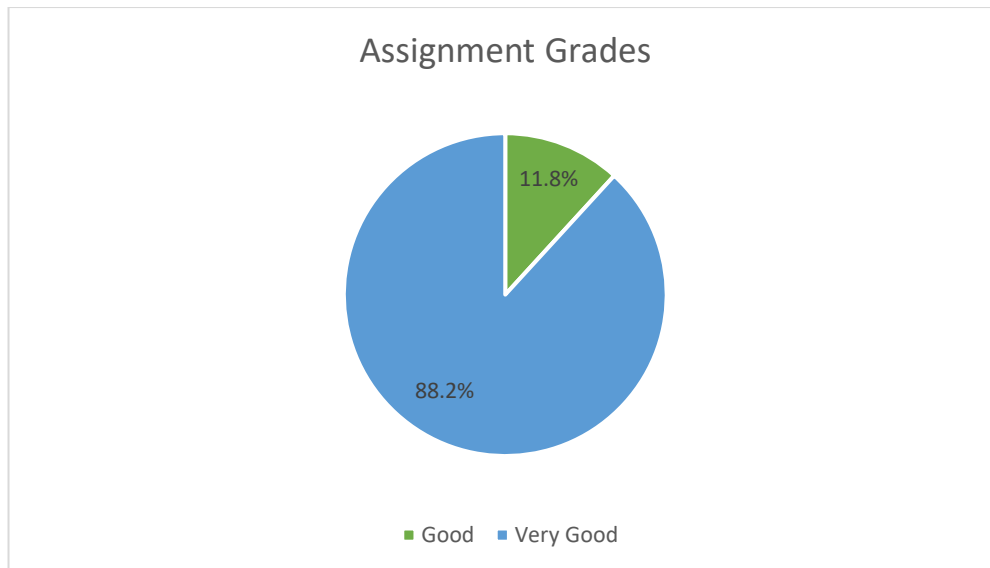
Figure 2: Students' assignment grades

The students were also given translation assignments, in which they worked in groups. They were asked to choose and translate a source text. For this assignment, they were required to highlight the problems faced in the translation process and find solutions by applying the translation strategies and techniques they learned in class. When looking at their group assignments, most of them (88.2%) managed to produce a very good translation (See Figure 2) and discuss their problems and solutions effectively, mainly by finding equivalent terms. Also, most students stated that the translation skills they obtained helped them write their assignments, particularly in their Islamic courses.
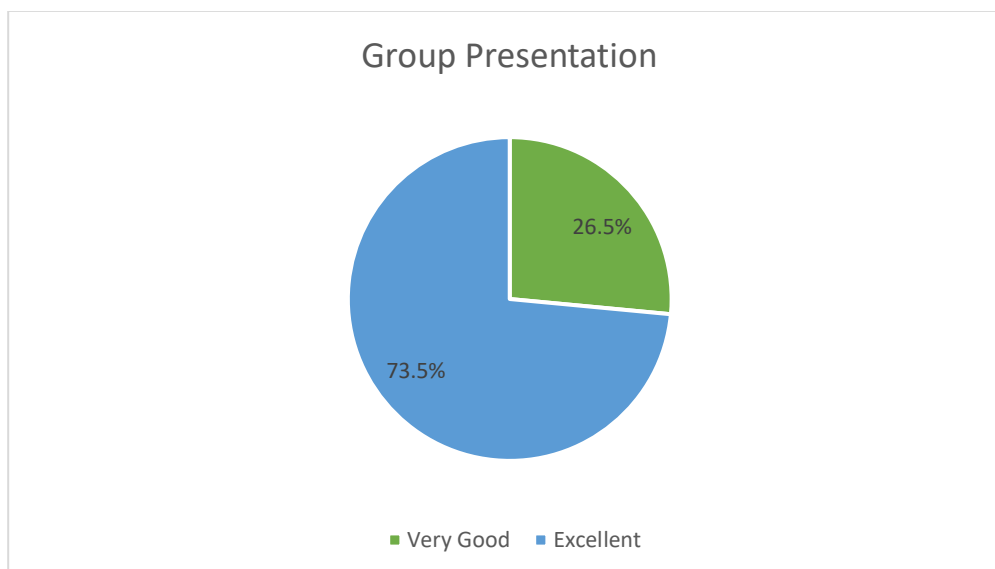

Figure 3: Students' grades for group presentation

Furthermore, they managed to present their translation and findings in groups. 73.5% of them delivered excellent presentations (Figure 3). Their creativity was also reflected in their presentation, which was effectively conducted directly or through video on Microsoft Teams, indicating good leadership and teamwork. Despite facing challenges, such as unstable internet connectivity and lack of interaction, they expressed that online presentation helped them boost their confidence in speech delivery, indicating that online presentation can be a useful training tool for speaking skills, primarily for beginners.
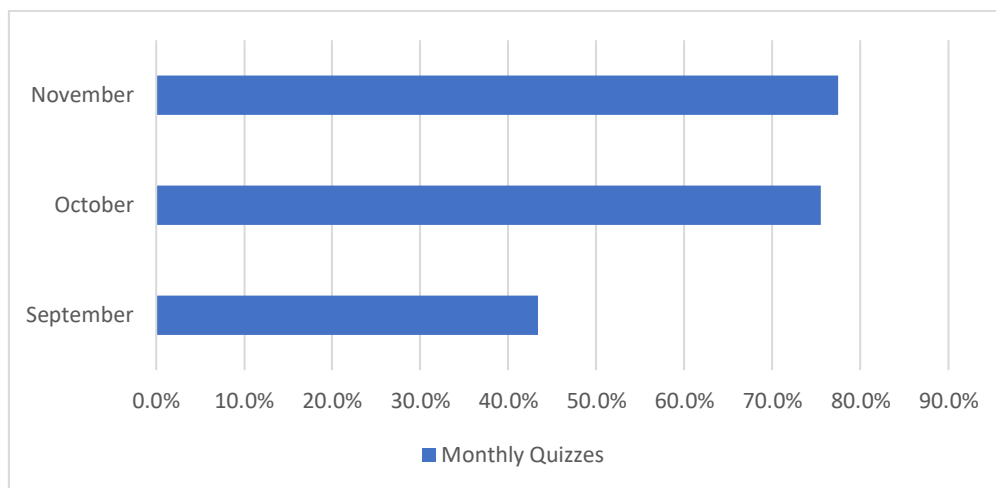

Figure 4: The average percentage of correct answers in the monthly quizzes

To ensure their understanding towards the course, monthly quizzes were also carried out, covering all topics they learned in the course. Figure 4 shows that cumulatively the students only managed to answer 43.4% of the questions. However, towards the end of the course, their performance improved by answering correctly 75.5% and 77.5% in October and November respectively. The increase in their performance indicates that the course was delivered effectively despite their poor performance in the first test. A possible explanation for this is lack of prior knowledge and skills in translation as they come from different academic backgrounds.

CONCLUSION

Despite the limited nature of this study, it points to several conclusions:

1) Based on the results of the survey and assessments, the study observed and noticed improvements in the students' overall performance. The correlation between the data is evident in their translation quality and ability to apply and discuss the translation strategies and techniques effectively in their assignments and presentations.

2) Despite facing challenges in online teaching, the course achieved its objectives by delivering its contents effectively by incorporating the six main areas of translation competence highlighted by the EMT expert group (2009). The results also showed that the competence can be adaptable outside the classroom, particularly in understanding religious texts and writing assignments. Also, the assessments also indicate an increase in their confidence and excellent leadership and teamwork skills.

3) Students can benefit more from similar translation courses if they are given more training and experience for a longer period. This is evident in their constant improvements towards the end of the course.

This study was limited to students majoring in Islamic studies. It would be interesting to see various results of conducting similar studies with participants of different academic backgrounds. The study also focused on translations between three different languages: Malay, Arabic and English. It would also be interesting to experiment with other language pairs in addition to the latest trends in the translation field, such as cognitive approaches (eye-tracking and keystroke logging) and translation technologies of artificial intelligence (computer-assisted translation tools and machine translation).

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