# The Qualitative Program Evaluation of the Postgraduate English Translation Major in Iran

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## Abstract

The present study aims at evaluating the M.A. English Translation Program. Although this is somehow a new established program, nothing has been done about evaluation of it. Program evaluations need to be carried out within a well-constructed framework. A review of more than 30 evaluation models and checklists led to the decision that Stufflebeam's CIPP Model (2002) would best fit this evaluation study. This model has four parts (Context, Input, Process, and Product) and the research questions were written based on these parts. Then, all the universities having this program (at the time of this study) were chosen (except Islamic Azad University, Chabahar Branch). The first step in doing this study was conducting a comprehensive needs analysis to clarify the needs and objectives of students, presenting their language problems and their inabilities in relation to translation. This was done through class observations, interviews, and questionnaires. According to the obtained data it became clear that the first and most important aim of establishing this program- "training the expert translators skilled in the fields of Human and Social Sciences, etc." to the great extent is ignored.

**Keywords:** evaluation, qualitative evaluation, MA English translation program, CIPP Model, second language proficiency, translation ability.

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## Introduction

Programs are planned and delivered in different contexts like business centers, health care organizations, educational communities, and the like. For each program, certain objectives specific to the given context and stakeholders are identified, and program delivery is supposed to be in line with those sets of objectives. Organizational decision-makers and stakeholders want to ensure that programs are accomplishing their intended objectives and purposes.

To make sure about the effectiveness of the program and its success in meeting the objectives, the program must be *evaluated*. Evaluation is "the systematic collection and analysis of all relevant information necessary to promote the improvement of a curriculum, and assess its effectiveness and efficiency, as well as the participants' attitudes within the context of the particular institutions involved" (Brown, 1989, p. 222). It involves careful collection of information about a program or some aspects of it to make necessary decisions about the program. In effect, "Evaluation is about standing back and being able to see things through somebody else's eyes" (Patton, 2002, interview at IDRC—International Development Research Center).

Program evaluation has been defined as "judging the worth or merit of something or the product of the process" (Scriven, 1991, p. 139). Guskey (2000) updated this definition stating that evaluation is a systematic process used to determine the merit or worth of a specific program, curriculum, or strategy in a specific context.

Despite the fact that in all educational and curriculum planning, evaluation of programs is an agreed upon and necessary step in the whole process, and while the outcome of the program evaluation can certainly lead to valuable revisions in the programs, this important step remained untouched particularly in English programs in different sectors and levels. It is, therefore, the intention of the present study is to fill the gap in one of the under-researched areas, namely, that of program evaluation of MA English translation.

To yield dependable results, program evaluations need to be carried out within a well-constructed framework. A review of the models led to the decision that Stufflebeam's CIPP Model (2002) would best fit this evaluation study, as the components of the model could well lend themselves to the purposes of this study.

The CIPP model is designed to be used by external evaluators to collect the type of data about program effectiveness that can assist managers in making judgments about program worth. Ultimately, the evaluation report is used to supply decision-makers with information about whether to continue, modify, or terminate all or part of an educational or training program. One of the additional strengths of the CIPP evaluation model is that it can be utilized for both formative and summative evaluation.

Corresponding to the letters in the acronym CIPP, the model's core concepts are context, input, process, and product evaluation. Context evaluations assess needs, problems, and opportunities as bases for defining goals and priorities and judging the significance of outcomes. Input evaluations assess alternative approaches to meeting needs as a means of planning programs and allocating resources. Process evaluations assess the implementation of plans to guide activities and later to help explain

outcomes. Product evaluations identify intended and unintended outcomes both to help keep the process on track and determine effectiveness. In general the "CIPP Model" connects the context, inputs, processes, and products of a program each of these sections requiring its own research questions as follows:

A. *Context Evaluation: What needs to be accomplished and in what context?*
   1. What are the language needs (general-academic) of the students as reported by the heads of departments, instructors, and students themselves?
B. *Input Evaluation: How can the objectives of the program be accomplished?*
   2. Has the MA English Translation Implemented Curriculum been designed according to the objectives of the program specified by the Supreme Council of Programming in the Ministry of Culture and Higher Education?
C. *Process Evaluation: What is being done and is it effective?*
   3. Is there any conformity between the instructors' view and that of MA English Translation students on evaluating students' command over language skills and components?
D. *Product Evaluation: Was the program successful?*
   4. As an indicator of the program's success or failure, is there any correspondence between students' attained knowledge at the end of the program and their overall level of satisfaction?

## Methodology

**Participants**

A total of 233 subjects participated in this study, including 44 MA English Translation heads of departments, instructors from both State and Azad Universities, experts in different fields of English translation, heads of translation offices, heads of publication companies; and 189 MA students at the English Translation Departments of nine universities in Iran including four State Universities: Allameh Tabatabai, Shahid Beheshty, Tarbiat Moallem and Isfahan Universities and five

branches of Islamic Azad University (IAU) offering the postgraduate translation program, namely: Central-Tehran, South-Tehran, Bandar Abbas, Fars, and Tehran Science and Research Branch.

**Instruments**

In order to investigate the above mentioned questions, a thorough needs analysis was done. According to Graves (2001), three different instruments were used for needs analysis: 1) observation, 2) interview and 3) questionnaire.

*Observation*

Prior to the design of the questionnaires, the researcher personally conducted different observations including:

- 15 hours of instruction to MA English Translation students at IAU (Central-Tehran and South-Tehran);

- Five sessions of actual translation processes being carried out in different translation offices were also observed by the researcher personally.

*Interview*

In order to get better results, observation studies are often followed by various interview measures. So, the researcher conducted different semi-structured interviews with all relevant involved participants in order to obtain their ideas and insights regarding to the design and construction of the questionnaires for needs analysis. The interviews were based on 10 open-format questions, written with regard to the main objectives of the study.

*Questionnaires*

Questionnaires were the main instruments used for needs analysis. Six different questionnaires were designed and constructed based on the different stages as Gillham (2002) proposed.

The first questionnaire, which was referred to as "Questionnaire #1" included seven open-ended questions asking the respondent's general impression of the program quality and how it could be improved in terms of the courses and the methods of implementation.  This questionnaire was given to 12 heads of MA English Translation departments, and university instructors at State and Islamic Azad Universities. The questionnaire designed in English and mainly aimed at collecting the opinions and suggestions of the above-mentioned groups.

The second questionnaire, which was referred to as "Questionnaire #2" containing eight open-ended questions was given to 35 MA students at State and Islamic Azad Universities. This questionnaire was designed in Persian for ease of comprehension and self-expression on the part of the respondents.

The third and fourth, questionnaires (Questionnaire #3 and Questionnaire #4) were constructed in Persian containing eleven and seven open-ended questions respectively and given to 7 heads of translation offices, and publication companies. The fifth questionnaire (Questionnaire # 5) was designed in English containing nine open-ended questions and given to 6 experts in translation. The main aims of these questionnaires were collecting the opinions and suggestions of these groups regarding their experiences in translation and characteristics of a good translator.

The sixth questionnaire and the last one (Questionnaire #6) was based on the information obtained through the above-mentioned questionnaires, class observations, and interviews. This questionnaire was given to 14 MA instructors who teach different translation courses, heads of English Translation departments, and 189 MA students at State and Islamic Azad universities. This questionnaire designed in English consists of two sections: introduction and main body. The

introduction part of the questionnaire was intended for familiarization and motivation as well as explanation of the effect of the questionnaire results on the future possible modifications to the program. The main body of questionnaire contains three parts:

Part I, Needs Analysis, which contained 26 questions asking the respondent's general impression of the program quality and how it could be improved.

Part II included 15 questions asking the respondent's attitudes toward Specialized-Compulsory and Specialized-Optional courses of the Program.

Part III included 12 questions asking the respondent's attitudes toward different aspects of MA English Translation entrance examination.

**Design and Procedure**

The qualitative research design proposed by Maxwell (1996) justifies the design of this research study. Maxwell presents a qualitative research design that he calls an "*Interactive Model*," which does not begin from a fixed starting point or proceeds through a determination sequence of steps and reflects the importance of interconnection and interaction among the different design components.

For deciding what types of questions should be included in the questionnaires, two steps were taken prior to the design and construction of the questionnaires: Observation and Interview as mentioned before.

At the second stage, six different questionnaires were designed and constructed. When the questionnaires were finalized they were distributed among all relevant participants, for some unavailable subjects the questionnaires were e-mailed.

The researcher then began to classify, and analyze the data obtained through questionnaires. The data was analyzed by implementing certain descriptive statistical methods such as Chi-square). Also, for analyzing open-ended questions and interviews the QSR analysis was employed.

## Results

### Analysis of the Research Questions Based on CIPP Model

*1. What are the language needs (general-academic) of the students as reported by the heads of departments, instructors, and students themselves?*

Students, their instructors and heads of departments defined and ranked the required "language skills and components" based on their importance in educational activities of MA English Translation program as shown in table 1. (It should be mentioned that, due to the small number of participating heads of departments the relevant data of this group was included in the instructors group.)

Table 1
Ranks of Language Skills and Components

| Rank | Skills & Components | Instructors | | Students | |
|------|---------------------|------|------|------|------|
| | | N | % | N | % |
| 1st | Reading | 13 | 97.8 | 104 | 96.67 |
| 2nd | Writing | 12 | 96.2 | 101 | 94 |
| 3rd | Grammar | 11 | 82.4 | 96 | 88.9 |
| 4th | Vocabulary | 10 | 79.2 | 92 | 86.1 |
| 5th | Listening | 5 | 35.71 | 53 | 49.73 |
| 6th | Speaking | 5 | 35.71 | 40 | 42.85 |
| 7th | Pronunciation | 4 | 33.2 | 33 | 30.9 |

Both instructors and students ranked Reading as the most important language skill. This is followed by Writing. Grammar and vocabulary were chosen as the most

important language components. On the other end of Table 1, Pronunciation is ranked as the least important component proceeded by Speaking and Listening holding the 6$^{th}$ and 5$^{th}$ ranks respectively.

As the table displays, there is a perfect conformity between the instructors and students on language skills and components based on their importance in program.

Regarding "the most important tasks and activities" and "language needs" that the students should perform in English, the opinions of instructors and students are shown in table 2 and 3 respectively.

According to table 2, 98.4% of instructors and 91.2% of the MA students selected "Extensive reading of articles and books prior to class discussions", 81.4 % of instructors and 89.3% of students chose "Extensive reading to get informed about the developments in translation issues", and 80.4% of instructors and 89.1% of students selected "Analysis and evaluation of theories".

For the tasks that require writing skill, 79.4% of instructors and 60.2%of students claimed that "Writing summaries" was very important, whereas, 84.3% of instructors and 82.3% of the MA students selected "Planning, designing, and writing term projects", and 88.9% of instructors and 95.4% of students considered "Writing exam papers" to be very important. This indicated that the majority of students believed "Writing term projects" and "Writing final exam papers" were the most important writing tasks.

Table 2

The Most Important Tasks and Activities (Instructors' & Students' Views)

| Tasks | Instructors | Students |
|---|---|---|
| Extensive reading of articles and books prior to class discussions | 98.4 | 91.2 |
| Extensive reading to get informed about the developments in translation issues | 81.4 | 89.3 |
| Analysis and evaluation of theories | 80.4 | 89.1 |
| Writing summaries | 79.4 | 60.2 |
| Planning, designing and writing term projects | 84.3 | 82.3 |
| Writing exam papers | 88.9 | 95.4 |
| Comprehending the lectures in the classroom | 64.2 | 56.6 |
| Giving lectures in English | 84.1 | 55.1 |
| Participating in class discussions | 89.3 | 50.9 |

"Comprehending the lectures in the classroom", which requires listening ability, 64.2% of instructors and 56.6% of the students considered this task to be either important or very important.

Concerning the tasks that require speaking ability, 84.1% of instructors and 55.1% of the students asserted that "Giving lectures in English", and 89.3% of instructors and 50.9% of students considered "Participating in class discussions" to be very important tasks in MA English Translation program.

Regarding the language needs and requirements (Table 3) for reading and comprehending the books and articles, 85.4% of instructors and 81.2% of students selected "Understanding the rational and purpose behind the reading activities", 87.6% of instructors and 85.3% of students chose "Possessing the ability to skim and scan reading materials", 84.2% of instructors and 82.1% of students selected "Possessing the ability to make inferences".

Concerning the language needs for writing term projects and exam papers, 71.4% of instructors and 70.2% of students selected "Having organization in writing", 70. 9% of instructors and 69.3% of students selected "The ability to generate and develop ideas in writing". Furthermore, "Possessing knowledge of

vocabulary" was selected by 72.9% of instructors and 75.4 % of students. "Possessing knowledge of grammar", and "The ability to describe and explain in writing" were selected by 72.2% and 83.3% of instructors and 76.6% and 79.5% of students respectively.

Moreover, 89.2% of instructors and 80.6% of students selected "Possessing background knowledge on the topic", and 85.4% of instructors and 79.1% of students selected "The ability to take notes while following the lecture" as the most important requirements for comprehension of lectures.

Regarding the language needs for participating classroom discussions and giving lectures, 79.8% of instructors and 75.1% of students chose "The ability to convey the ideas clearly" and 79.3% of instructors and 70.9% of students selected "Unity and coherence in speech".

Table 3
The Most Important Language Needs (Instructors' & Students' Views)

| Tasks | Instructors | Students |
|---|---|---|
| Understanding the rational and purpose behind the reading activities | 85.4 | 81.2 |
| Possessing the ability to skim and scan reading materials | 87.6 | 85.3 |
| Possessing the ability to make inferences | 84.2 | 82.1 |
| Having organization in writing | 71.4 | 70.2 |
| The ability to generate and develop ideas in writing | 70.9 | 69.3 |
| Possessing knowledge of vocabulary | 72.9 | 75.4 |
| Possessing knowledge of grammar | 72.2 | 76.6 |
| The ability to describe and explain in writing | 83.3 | 79.5 |
| Possessing background knowledge on the topic | 89.2 | 80.6 |
| The ability to take notes while following the lecture | 85.4 | 79.1 |
| The ability to convey the ideas clearly | 79.8 | 75.1 |
| Unity and coherence in speech | 79.3 | 70.9 |

Also, an analysis of chi-square is run to compare the views expressed by instructors and students regarding the most important language skills, language needs and tasks of MA translation students. The chi-square observed value, .009 (Table 4) is lower than the critical value of 3.84.

Table 4
Chi-Square (Instructors' and Students' Views Regarding the Most Important
Language Skills, Language Needs and Tasks)

|                              | Value | Df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
|------------------------------|-------|-----|-----------------------|
| Continuity Correction[b]     | .009  | 1   | .924                  |
| b. Computed only for a 2x2 table | | | |

Based on the results it can be concluded that the instructors and students expressed similar views on the most important language skills, language needs and tasks of MA English Translation students.

As displayed in Table 5, the majority of the instructors and students believe that the mentioned language skills, language needs and tasks enjoy high importance.

Table 5
Frequencies and Percentages of the Most Important Language Skills, Language
Needs and Tasks

| JOB * READING Cross Tabulation | | | Reading | | Total |
|------|------|------|------|------|------|
|      |      |      | Yes  | No   |      |
| Job  | Professors | Count | 96 | 58 | 154 |
|      |      | % within Job | 82.3% | 17.7% | 100.0% |
|      |      | Std. Residual | -.1 | .1 | |
|      | Students | Count | 1339 | 784 | 2123 |
|      |      | % within Job | 83.1% | 16.9% | 100.0% |
|      |      | Std. Residual | .0 | .0 | |
| Total |     | Count | 1435 | 842 | 2277 |
|      |      | % within Job | 83.0% | 17.0% | 100.0% |

Figure 1 displays a better presentation of the conformity between the university professors and students in this regard.
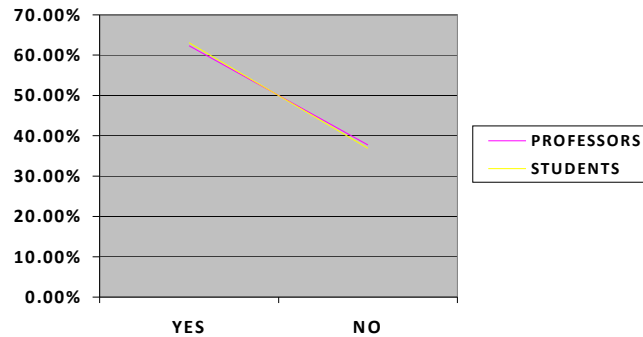


Figure 1. Instructors' and students' views regarding the most important language skills, language needs and tasks

*2. Has the MA English Translation Implemented Curriculum been designed according to the objectives of the program specified by the Supreme Council of Programming in the Ministry of Culture and Higher Education?*

The Supreme Council of Programming in the Ministry of Culture and Higher Education has defined two main objectives for the English Translation Program at MA level as follows:

1. To train "expert translators" in the field of Human and Social Sciences;

2. To train "experts in translation" and "qualified instructors", to teach translation courses in universities, as well as scholars/researchers to work on issues which are related to the translation and its application in different fields (translated from the Persian version of the MA English Translation Official Curriculum (1999).

The course distribution in general and the implementation of the curriculum in the MA English Translation departments in particular are not promising as far as the stated objectives are concerned.

53.84 % of instructors and 93.19% of students believe that "there is not a right balance between theory and practice in this program."  Students complain that "the courses presented in curricula are mostly theoretical and very little attention is paid to practical courses."

Tables 6 and 7 display the frequencies and the percentages of the two above-mentioned choices made by instructors and students in this regard respectively. The choices follow the order mentioned in the questionnaire # 6, (1= least agreement to 5= highest agreement).

Table 6
Instructors

| ITEM | | Choices | | | | | |
|------|---|-------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Total |
| 2 | N | 5 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 13 |
| | % | 38.46 | 15.38 | 15.38 | 15.38 | 15.38 | 100 |
| 3 | N | 3 | 0 | 2 | 4 | 5 | 14 |
| | % | 21.43 | 0.00 | 14.29 | 28.57 | 35.71 | 100 |

Table 7
Students

| ITEM | | Choices | | | | | |
|------|---|-------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Total |
| 2 | N | 150 | 28 | 6 | 5 | 2 | 191 |
| | % | 78.53 | 14.66 | 3.14 | 2.62 | 1.05 | 100 |
| 3 | N | 2 | 20 | 12 | 16 | 143 | 193 |
| | % | 1.04 | 10.36 | 6.22 | 8.29 | 74.09 | 100 |

Moreover, 64.28% of instructors and 82.38% of students believe that there should be more practical application of theories. Furthermore, 64.1% of instructors and 85.5% of students believe that the two-credit units as "Translation Workshop"

and "Reviewing and Criticizing Translated texts" (as the only practical courses in this program) are less than adequate.

Furthermore, there is no consensus among the participants regarding the program's overall aim. 55.3% of instructors believed that the program's aim is to educate "translators", 24.8% believed it intends to educate "experts in translation", and 19.9 % believed the program's aim is to train "qualified instructors to teach translation courses in universities." On the other hand, most of the students (96.4%) thought that the MA English Translation Program would help them with their professional development as translators. But now most of the students feel disappointed that the greater part of the courses is allotted to the theoretical issues than practical translation.

So, regarding the correspondence between the objectives of the program and the implemented curriculum in the MA English Translation departments, the answer is "Partially", which means that the first objective of this program- To train expert translators in the field of Human and Social Sciences, to the great extent is ignored.

*3. Is there any conformity between the instructors' view and that of MA English Translation students on evaluating students' command over language skills and components?*

An analysis of chi-square is run to compare the instructors and students' views on the students' command over language skills and components. The chi-square observed value, 6.01 (Table 8) is lower than the critical value of 7.81.

Table 8
Chi-square of Evaluating MA Translation Students' Command over Language Skills and Components

|  | Value | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 6.013[a] | 3 | .007 |

a.1 cells (12.5%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.38.

Based on the results it can be claimed that the instructors and students expressed similar views on the students' command over language skills and components.

As displayed in Table 9, the majority of the instructors (73.4%) and students (65.1%) believe that the admitted students' command over the language skills and components are poor and very poor.

Table 9
Frequencies and Percentages of Evaluating MA Translation Students' Command over Language Skills and Components

|  |  |  | Choices | | | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  |  |  | Very Good | Good | Poor | Very Poor |  |
| Job | Professors | Count | 1 | 25 | 56 | 16 | 98 |
|  |  | % within Job | 1.0% | 25.5% | 57.1% | 16.3% | 100.0% |
|  |  | Std. Residual | -1.3 | -.9 | .0 | 2.9 |  |
|  | Students | Count | 48 | 412 | 764 | 97 | 1321 |
|  |  | % within Job | 3.6% | 31.2% | 57.8% | 7.3% | 100.0% |
|  |  | Std. Residual | .4 | .3 | .0 | -.8 |  |
|  | Total | Count | 49 | 437 | 820 | 113 | 1419 |
|  |  | % within Job | 3.5% | 30.8% | 57.8% | 8.0% | 100.0% |

Figure 2 displays a better presentation of the conformity between the instructors and students' views. On the left side of the scale, the instructors'

evaluation on the admitted students command over language skills and components
is lower than the MA translation students' views. While on the other side of the scale
the reverse condition prevails. This shows that the instructors hold a more negative
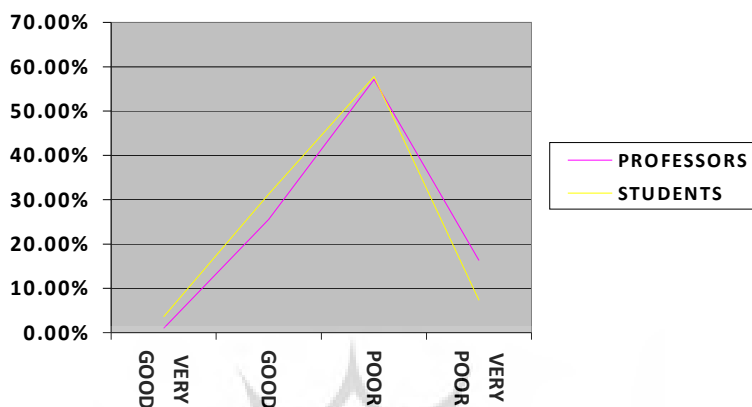view.



Figure 2. Evaluating MA translation students' command over language skills and
components

*4. As an indicator of the program's success or failure, is there any
correspondence between students' attained knowledge at the end of the
program and their overall level of satisfaction?*

Discussing about the success or failure of any achievement, the most
frequently used term for explaining them is motivation.

Based on the results, motivation as the drive that pushes students forward is
noticeably decreasing during the students' studying periods. Students are usually
motivated in the first term of their education. The source of this motivation is usually
their admission to the MA program which is a great success for the majority of

Iranian BA graduates. Their excitement and motivation usually diminishes as they reach the later terms of their study.

The underlying causes can be attributed to the following issues. The first one is their expectation from program which means the admitted students expected to acquire the type of knowledge and skill to make them qualified for obtaining a good job after their graduation as: an expert translator, teaching in the field of translation or becoming an expert in translation. But as it is mentioned before the program does not provide them with the different required skills of translation sufficiently to achieve their goals.

Moreover, the students' written answers revealed that they doubted about the compatibility of the program with their future employment. Most students said that regarding the current course design and implementation, they wondered how they could improve their practical translating skills and how the English Translation Program could help them meet the real challenges, and doubted the applicability of all these theories to their professional demands.

This revealed general uncertainty about the impact of the program on the graduates' professional life as translators and showed discrepancies among the students' and policy makers regarding the program's role in developing students' professional skills.

In planning for a translation curriculum, one of the rudimentary points to consider is presenting specialized translation courses in order to provide opportunities for students to put different theories in actual practice and mastering different translation techniques. In this way, selecting materials which the students are interested in for class work, tasks and assignments can increase their motivation.

## Discussion and Conclusions

According to the interviews and the results of questionnaires, the majority of instructors and students believed that most of students do not have sufficient and accurate information about the content of the major, prior to applying for it. The reason is that there is no a proper correspondence between the contents of the program "Translation Studies" and its title as "English Translation", which creates confusion and problems for students. The other reason is that, the contents of the curriculum of this major are mostly adopted from the similar curricula of the foreign countries such as USA, Australia, and England which the aim of this program in these countries is to train "experts in translation" which needs a curriculum that contains lots of theoretical courses for familiarizing the trainees with different theories, and models of translation, whereas in Iran the need of training "expert translators" in different fields and focusing on practical courses is felt more urgent.

The results of the questionnaires revealed that the majority of the students had problems in meeting course requirements due to low language proficiency level and such weakness caused them a lot of problems. Moreover, most of the instructors and students considered language ability to be the most important criterion for screening the candidates for this program.

According to the obtained data, the instructors and students did not consider all the language skills to be evenly significant. They believed that the most to the least important skills were: reading, writing, listening and speaking. They stated that the admitted students had very weak writing ability, whereas they were more satisfied with the reading ability of students.

Based on QSR analysis, the program does not have a quite positive impact on the students. The main reason is that the majority of students and graduates who are working in this field complain that there is a wide gap between what they have studied in MA program and what they actually encounter in the real work situations. The main reason for this inefficiency is that the course distribution contains lots of theoretical courses for familiarizing the trainees with different theories, and models of translation. So, during the period of their studying the students have very little opportunities to put their acquired knowledge into practice.

Taking the above-mentioned points into account and this fact that at the present time the highest educational system in Iran responsible for training and educating such qualified expert translators is MA English Translation Major, the results of  program evaluation of this major reveal that the present program is not capable to educate and provide the required knowledge and skills for its graduates to be able to meet the different complicated needs of translation in different fields in the country. Therefore this program should be revised and modified by the responsible authorities in such a way that the students having passed compulsory courses can attend  required specialized translation courses such as Humanities, Economics, Sciences, and oral translation to be able to meet the different complicated needs of translation in actual fields in society.
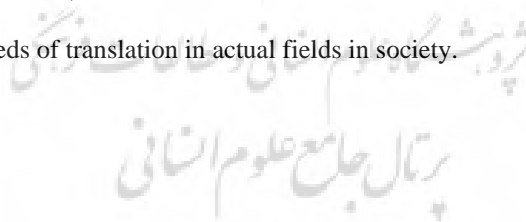
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