

# Teaching translation in Libyan universities: Translation Department at University of Tripoli as a case study

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## ABSTRACT

The introduction of translation studies as a distinct academic discipline within Libyan universities is a relatively recent development. However, several Libyan universities have incorporated translation as an independent department within their programs, including the University of Benghazi, the University of Tripoli, the University of Sebha, the University of Al-Jabel Algharabi, and others. Translation Department at University of Tripoli is one of the earliest programs opened in Libya. It was found in 2008. The establishment of the program was a result of pronounced demand of qualified translators in the Libyan market. However, since its establishment the design of the program has not been subject to scientific review to examine its success in achieving the objectives set for when established. This study aims to shed the light on the design of the program and its curricula, in addition to exploring the extent to which the academic program aligns with the continuously evolving demands of the translation market

## المخلص

يُعد تدريس الترجمة كتنخصص أكاديمي مستقل داخل الجامعات الليبية تطوراً حديثاً نسبياً. ومع ذلك، قامت عدة جامعات ليبية بتضمين الترجمة كقسم علمي مستقل ضمن برامجها، بما في ذلك جامعة بنغازي وجامعة طرابلس وجامعة سبها وجامعة الجبل الغربي وغيرها. يُعد قسم الترجمة في جامعة طرابلس أحد أقدم البرامج التي تم افتتاحها في الجامعات الليبية حيث تم افتتاح القسم في سنة 2008. وجاء إنشاء البرنامج نتيجة للطلب الملحوظ على المترجمين المؤهلين في السوق الليبية. منذ إنشاء القسم لم يخضع البرنامج العلمي لفحص علمي يحدد مدى نجاحه في تحقيق الأهداف التي وُضعت عند إنشائه. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تسليط الضوء على تصميم البرنامج ومناهجه، بالإضافة إلى استكشاف مدى تناسب البرنامج العلمي مع متطلبات سوق الترجمة المتغيرة باستمرار.

**KEYWORDS:** Translation training, Translation competence, Libyan translation market

## **Introduction**

Recently, the increasing demand for translators and interpreters worldwide which is a result of political, social and economic reasons has resulted in a growing interest in the study of translation education. This is supported by a number of reports, which predict that careers in the translation industry will continue to grow over the following decades. For example, a recent study by U.S. News and World Report ranked interpreters and translators as number one on their Best Creative & Media Jobs list of 2020.

The growing pervasiveness of translation has led to the development of translation into a full-grown independent scientific discipline at different educational levels (bachelor, master, and doctoral) (Pym and Caminade 1998, 280) in a range of universities and colleges. This is because translation is no longer seen simply as a technical skill, but as a complex and multifaceted process that requires a deep understanding of language, culture, and context (Zhang, Xu, Cui. 2019).

With the technological advancement our world is witnessing, translation education has become increasingly specialized, with programs offering courses in a variety of areas, such as translation theory, translation and technology, translation and terminology, and localization. Additionally, many programs now offer students the opportunity to gain practical experience through internships and translation projects.

The growing demand for translators and the increasing sophistication of translation education are both positive developments for the translation industry. They suggest that translation is becoming increasingly valued as a skill, and that

there is a growing need for qualified translators in a variety of fields (Kim, M. 2012).

Traditionally, translator training has been informal and unsystematic, relying on trial and error, arbitrary teaching methods, or the study of foreign languages and cultures (Caminade, and Pym. 2001). However, in recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of formal translator training, and many universities and colleges now offer degree programs in translation (Int, Aula 2005: 135) (Yan, Pan, & Wang. 2015).

Formal translator training programs, as we know them today, began to emerge in the early 1930s in many Western and Eastern European countries and in the United States. These programs offered undergraduate and graduate degrees in translation, as well as certificates and vocational diplomas (Al-Batineh, & Bilali. 2017). In the Arab world, translation has been a long-standing practice dating back to the early days of pre-Islamic era. However, later there were serious attempts to institutionalise the process of translation training.

For instance, “in 1835, Rifa’a al-Tahtawi (1801-1873), the imam (chaplain) of the first group of Egyptians sent by the viceroy to study in France, founded upon his return the School of Languages (مدرسة الألسن) (Madrasat al-alsun), where he trained the first generation of Egyptian translators who translated into Arabic dozens of books of history and geography, as well as pure and applied sciences” (Jacquemond 2009: 15). However, the formal study of translation in Arab universities is a more recent development. The first translation programs were established in the 1960s, and they have since grown in number and popularity (Al-Batineh, & Bilali. 2017, 3).

In Libya, the academic study of translation has been initiated in the High Academy of Post Graduate Studies in Tripoli city. The Department of Translation at the Academy began as an independent program within the Department of Languages at the School of Humanities in the academic year 2000-2001 to teach translation and interpreting and to grant a Master's degree in this field for the first time in the history of Libyan high educational institutions. The establishment of the Master's Program in Translation and Interpretation came in response to the country's need to provide translators, interpreters and academics of translation (<https://trans.lan.academy.edu.ly/ar/about>). However, students enrolled in the program were not exclusively holding a bachelor degree in translation studies, but they were graduates from English language departments.

The Department of Translation at the University of Tripoli, serving as the focal point of this research investigation, was instituted within the College of Languages during the academic year 2008. The inaugural cohort of students enrolled in the program successfully completed their studies and graduated at the end of the academic year 2012.

The principal aim of establishing the undergraduate translation program in University of Tripoli was due "to the dare need for qualified translators in the Libyan translation market". The program in the University of Tripoli consists of 57 modules divided through 8 semesters. These modules are distributed on 8 academic terms. The total credits of the program are 108 credits. In the first and second semesters, students start studying general modules. These modules mainly seek to enhance the linguistic competence of students. However, students will be exposed to an introductory theoretical material about translation and its history in "Introduction to Translation" and "History of Translation" modules. In the third term, students will study "Translation

Methodology” module where students learn how to deal with translational issues and how to approach texts to be rendered into the target language. Theories of translation are divided on two modules “Translation Theory 1” module in the fourth term and “Translation Theory 2” in the fifth term. Students learn about the emerging of translation theories and how Translation Studies developed to be fully fledged branch of knowledge.

From the fifth term onwards, students are introduced to the sort of hands on modules or practical modules “workshop modules”. Students start practising the analysis and rendering simple texts from Arabic into English and vice versa. The practical modules are designed to handle different text types such as translating journalistic texts, translating diplomatic texts, translating administrative and economic texts, translating religious and philosophical texts, and translating scientific and medical texts.

In addition to the practical courses, in the last three terms students study some advanced topics in translation such as “Translation and Cultural studies”, “Translation and terminology” “Translation and orientalism” “Machine translation” and “translating philosophical and religious texts”, “CAT tools”, and “Translating medical and scientific texts”. Furthermore, students in the last term are required to write a graduation research project. The translation graduation project module seeks to train students to conduct academic research and to discuss translational issues or to handle a translation problem.

To decide the efficiency of the modules of the Translation Program at the University of Tripoli in preparing competent translation students to the job market, the modules of the program will be compared to Kelly’s (2005) competence model. However, the following section will briefly shed the light on translation

competence models and how it could be used to evaluate translation academic programs.

### **Translation competence models**

Translation competence models are frameworks that describe the essential skills, knowledge, and abilities required for effective translation. These models help us understand what it takes to be a competent translator. Several scholars have contributed to the development of translation competence models such as Bell (1991) who focused on the knowledge and skills necessary for translation. Neubert (1994) explored translation competence from a cognitive perspective. Kiraly (1995) introduced the concept of social constructivism in translator training. Cao (1996) investigated the underlying system of knowledge and skills needed for translation. Hansen (1997) emphasised the strategic component of translation competence. Kelly (2005) developed a comprehensive model that integrates various sub-competences. However, Kelly's model (2005) is widely regarded as one of the most influential and comprehensive in Translation Studies. This can be attributed to the fact that the model breaks down translation competence into interconnected sub-competences:

- Communicative Competence: mastery of both source and target languages.
- Extra-linguistic Competence: cultural awareness and subject matter knowledge.
- Transfer Competence: ability to transfer meaning across languages.
- Professional Instrumental Competence: knowledge of translation tools and techniques.
- Psycho-physiological Competence: cognitive and emotional aspects of translation.

- Strategic Competence: problem-solving and decision-making skills.
- Holistic Approach: Kelly emphasizes that these sub-competences are interrelated and essential for effective translation.
- Pedagogical Implications: Kelly's model informs translator training programs and curriculum design.

Because of its inclusiveness and as it is "intended for curricular design purposes" (Al-Batineh, & Bilali. p:6) Kelly's (2005) Competence Model will be used as a framework for evaluating the effectiveness of translation academic programs at the University of Tripoli.

### **Research questions**

The curriculum of the Department of Translation at University of Tripoli seeks to equip students with a robust foundation in theoretical knowledge, practical skills, and a multifaceted linguistic competence, preparing students for diverse career paths within the translation industry. However, the contemporary translation landscape presents a dynamic and competitive environment, characterised by constant evolution in client demands, the integration of technological advancements, and ever-shifting industry trends. In light of these complexities, a critical evaluation is necessary to determine the efficacy with which the University of Tripoli's translation program equips its graduates to navigate the demands and challenges of the Libyan translation job market. This article seeks to answer the following questions:

1- To what extent does the translation program at the University of Tripoli facilitate the attainment of translation employment opportunities within the Libyan market for its graduates?

2- Are there significant disparities between the expectations of employers in the translation job market and the skills and knowledge imparted through translation education program at the University of Tripoli?

### **Research methodology**

This section outlines the research design, participant selection, data collection procedures, and data analysis techniques employed in this study. This study employs a quantitative and qualitative research methodology to investigate the relationship between translation teaching and the translation job market. The researcher utilized a structured questionnaire as the primary data collection tool to gather insights from translation graduates regarding their educational experiences and subsequent engagement within the translation market. The questionnaire was designed to elicit quantitative responses, enabling the analysis of trends, patterns, and correlations within the dataset. The qualitative aspect of the research includes the analysis and evaluation of the modules of the program using Kelly's (2005) competence model.

### **Participant Selection:**

The participants in this study consisted of 57 graduates from the translation program at the University of Tripoli. The inclusion criteria for the study encompassed individuals who had successfully completed the translation program and were actively seeking or employed in translation-related and non-translation roles within the Libyan market. Participants were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses to encourage candid feedback.



### Data Collection Procedures:

The data collection process involved the administration of a structured questionnaire to the selected participants. The questionnaire was designed to gather information on various aspects, including the perceived effectiveness of the translation program in preparing graduates for the translation job market, the acquisition of relevant skills and knowledge during their education, and the challenges encountered in securing employment or advancing within the translation profession.

The evaluation of the translation program at the University of Tripoli will be conducted through comparing the program modules to communicative and textual competences as suggested by Kelly's (2005) competence model. The skills and competences that will be evaluated are language skills, cultural and intercultural competence (extra-linguistic skills), subject-area competence, professional and instrumental competence (research and technology), strategic competence (transfer), interpersonal competence and attitudinal or psychological competence.

Table 1 Kelly's (2005) competence model.

communicative and textual competence	The cultural and intercultural category	subject-area competence	Professional and instrumental competence	strategic competence	interpersonal competence	attitudinal or psychological competence
linguistics, grammar, semantic	courses on source and target	law and economics, field-	computer literacy, CAT tools,	general translation practice		

s, syntax, discourse analysis, source and target language skills, and communication.	text culture and on translation theory.	specific translation, and technical writing.	terminology, and audio-visual translation (AVT).	and quality assurance.		
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### Data analysis

The initial phase of the data analysis will entail juxtaposing the modules within the Translation Program at the University of Tripoli against Kelly's (2005) competence model. This step seeks to ascertain the program's efficacy in equipping trainees with the requisite skills demanded within the translation industry.

Table 2 Distribution of the modules of Translation Program on Kelly's competence subskills

	Communicative and textual competence	The cultural and intercultural category	subject-area competence
	Foreign language 1 Foreign language 2 Foreign language 3 Foreign language 4 Writing (1) Grammar (1) Phonetics (1)	Introduction to Translation  Translation Theories 1  Translation	Translation & Orientalism  Consecutive Interpreting  Translating

	Comprehension (1) Phonetics (2) Grammar (2) Writing (2) Grammatical structures Introduction to Linguistics History of languages Varieties of English Introduction to English Literature Introduction to Semantics Comparative Linguistics English Literature History of Libya Translation & Lexicography Geography of Libya Islamic culture Comparative Literature Translation and Terminology  Creative Writing  Translation and World Literature	Theories 2  Translation Methods  Cultural Studies	Journalistic texts  Translating diplomatic texts  Translating Economic & Administrative texts  Translating literary & Philosophical texts  Audio-visual Translation (1) (Dubbing)  Translating medical & Scientific texts  Audio-visual Translation II (Subtitling)
Total of credits	54	10	28

Table 3 Distribution of the modules of Translation Program on Kelly's competence subskills

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	professional and instrumental competence	strategic competence	interpersonal competence	attitudinal or psychological competence
	General Research Methods  Machine Translation  Translation Tools (CAT Tools)  Translation Research Methods  Graduation research project writing  Translation and international organisations		Presentation skills 1  Presentation skills 2	
Total of Credits	12	0	4	0

To examine the balance between translation competences and the design of the academic program of Translation Department, the modules were assigned to Kelly's (2005) subskills (as shown in Tables 2 and 3). The aim of this distribution is to find out which competences are highly focused on when designing the program, and in what way the program design helped graduates to obtain the necessary competences required for translation market.

Unquestionably, the translation program at the University of Tripoli prioritises the cultivation of both communicative and textual competences in their students. This is apparent as communicative and textual competences represents 50% of the total credits of the program. This emphasis is demonstrably justified, as the program seeks to develop a comprehensive range of language skills. By fostering these competencies alongside robust communication skills, the program equips graduates with the necessary foundation to navigate a diverse range of translation scenarios.

Following the development of communicative and textual competence, the design of the program prioritises the developing of subject-area competence. Subject area competence represents 25.93% of the total credits of the program. Subject area competence refers to the knowledge and understanding of the specific subject matter that a translator is working with. This goes beyond just language proficiency and includes familiarity with the concepts, terminology, and conventions of the particular field. Kelly ((2005, p:76) suggests that “the more subject area knowledge a professional translator has, the better for the practice of specialized translation”. This conforms to the results reached by Al-Batineh and Bilali (2017) as their analysis shows that subject area competence is the second most emphasized competence in undergraduate programs (20% of courses) and the most emphasized competence in graduate programs (36% of courses) in MENA region.

In fact, the subject-area competence is essential in translation training programs for various reasons:

1. Ensuring accurate and effective Translation: A strong understanding of the subject matter enables translators to grasp the nuances of the source text accurately, facilitating

precise and faithful translations that convey the intended meaning.

2. Utilizing appropriate terminology: Each subject area has its own specialized terminology, and possessing subject area competence allows translators to identify and employ the correct terms confidently, ensuring accuracy and professionalism in their translations.
3. Enhancing research efficiency: Translators often need to conduct research to comprehend the source text fully and locate the appropriate terminology. Having prior knowledge of the subject area streamlines this research process, making it more efficient and productive.
4. Establishing credibility and trust: Clients expect translators to possess expertise in the subject matter they are translating. Demonstrating subject area competence not only enhances translators' credibility but also fosters trust with clients, leading to stronger professional relationships and increased opportunities for work.

The following subskill covered in the program curriculum is the professional and instrumental competence. According to Albaitanih and Lili (2017, p: 8) this subskill “aims to enhance the students’ ability to use translation tools and to conduct research, terminology documentation and task management. This competence has become essential in order to face the variety of demands introduced by the market.”

As the table shows that attitudinal or psychological, strategic competence receive the least emphasis, with each constituting only 0% of the program content. This minimal focus warrants further investigation to determine if alternative curricular

structures could optimise the development of these crucial competencies for future translators. Underplaying such competences may have major consequences on translators training programs. Kelly (2005) contends that the main reasons for overlooking the attitudinal, psychological, strategic competences are the focus on technical abilities, the difficulty in teaching and assessing such competences, lack of awareness of the importance of such competences by trainers. The subsequent stage of the data analysis will involve examining the responses provided by the translation graduates who responded to the questionnaire distributed to them.

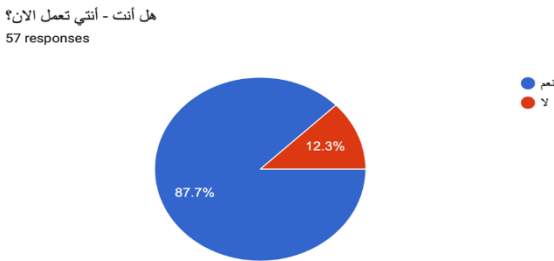


Figure 1 Percentage of working / non-working graduates

In the context of employability for translation graduates, Figure 2 shows that (78.7%) of the respondents are currently employed, whereas (12.3%) are not currently working. The fact that a significant majority (78.7%) of translation graduates are employed is generally positive. It suggests that the skills and qualifications acquired during their studies are translating into job opportunities.

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Although the high percentage of employed graduates is a positive sign, it is essential to consider other factors such as the quality of employment; are these graduates in full-time positions, part-time roles, or freelance work? Are the jobs directly related to translation or language services? Geographic variation cannot be overlooked as well as employment rates can vary by region. Some areas may have more opportunities for translators than others.

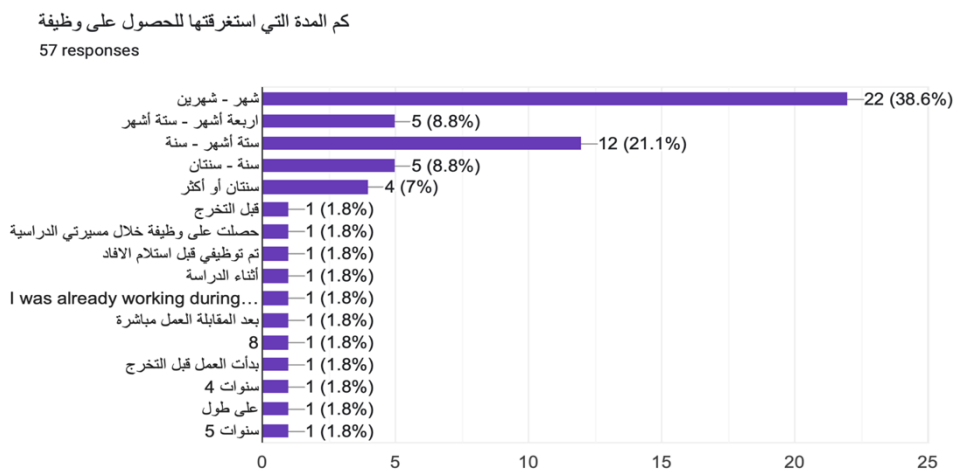


Figure 3 Duration of time to obtain a job

As Figure 4 shows, the majority of graduates who responded to the questionnaire (22 + 5 + 12 = 39 out of 57) secured employment within the first year after graduation. A smaller portion (5 out of 57) took longer, possibly due to specific circumstances such as the variation in applying time for the translation opened positions. This trend in the data suggests that translation graduates generally have good employability prospects, especially in the initial months after completing their studies. Furthermore, the short time within which graduates secure employment within the



Libyan job market serves as an indication that the Translation Department at the University of Tripoli has adeptly equipped its students to competitively pursue employment opportunities, whether within the public or private sector.

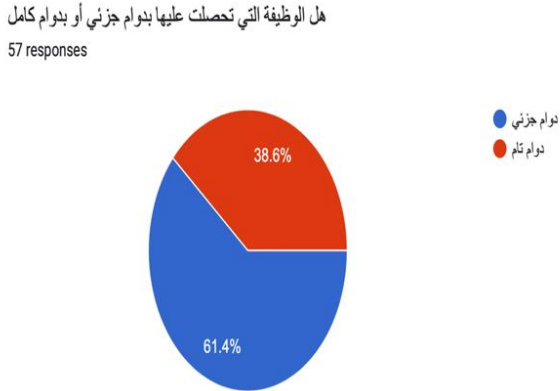


Figure 3 Full time / Part time job percentages

Figure 3 provides some insights into the employability of graduates in the translation job market. The chart suggests positive aspects regarding the employment rate of translation graduates. Combining part-time and full-time positions, a total of 100% (61.4% + 38.6%) of graduates reported being employed. This suggests strong initial employability; however, a high percentage (61.4%) are in part-time roles. The high percentage of part-time employment could indicate:

- Demand for part-time translation work: The market might favor project-based or freelance work.
- Difficulty securing full-time positions: Translation jobs might be competitive, leading to graduates taking part-time roles initially.

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- Preference for part-time work: Some graduates might choose part-time work for flexibility or to pursue other interests.

هل الوظيفة التي شغلتها كانت في مجال الترجمة أم غير ذلك

57 responses

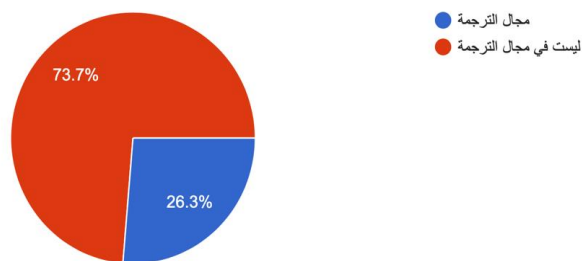


Figure 4 Graduates working in translation / non translation field

Figure 4 explains the number of graduates working in translation jobs comparing with the number of graduates working in non-translation jobs. The chart suggests that nearly three-quarters of graduates are not directly working in translation jobs. This could suggest several interpretations. Firstly, the program might not be fully preparing graduates for translation job market. Secondly, graduates might be actively pursuing careers outside translation realm. The fact that a significant majority of translation graduates (73.7%) are working in non-translation jobs may indicate potential issues regarding the perceived relevance or applicability of what they studied in the translation program to their current employment. This raises questions about whether the skills and knowledge acquired during their studies adequately prepared them for the demands of the job market outside the translation field.

On the other hand, it is essential to recognize that skills acquired in a translation program are often transferable to various

professions and industries. The high percentage of graduates working in non-translation jobs does not necessarily mean that their education was irrelevant. It could suggest that they are applying their language, communication, analytical, and cultural competency skills in different contexts beyond traditional translation roles.

Upon initial observation the discrepancy between the number of graduates working in translation jobs (26.3%) and those in non-translation jobs (73.7%) may highlight a potential mismatch between the skills acquired through the translation program and the specific demands of the translation job market. However, it is possible that the job market may not have enough opportunities aligned with graduates' skill sets, leading them to pursue alternative career paths. The subsequent interpretation may align most closely with reality. Owing to the civil unrest and conflicts experienced in Libya, a considerable portion of foreign enterprises, diplomatic missions, and international bodies withdrew from the nation. Consequently, graduates may find themselves compelled to seek employment opportunities beyond the confines of their translation specialization.

The questionnaire asked the translation graduates whether they are working in public or private sector now. The aim of the question was to find out how outputs of Translation Program at the University of Tripoli contribute to the national economy.

هل الوظيفة في قطاع عام أو خاص  
57 responses

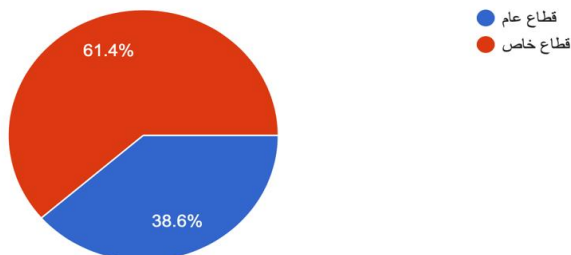


Figure 5 Graduates working in public / private sector

Figure 5 shows the number of graduates working in public and private sectors. The higher percentage of graduates working in the private sector (61.4%) may indicate that the skills and knowledge acquired through the translation program are highly valued in industries outside translation field such as business, finance, technology, and marketing. Translation graduates in the private sector may be involved in various roles such as translation, localization, international business, content creation, and cross-cultural communication and secretariate. This highly proportional presence of graduates working in the private sector is clear evidence of the contribution of translation graduates in enhancing the national economy. Translation graduates contribute to facilitating communication and collaboration between businesses across borders, thereby promoting trade, investment, and economic growth. Additionally, translation services provided by translation graduates play a vital role in attracting international visitors, promoting cultural exchange, and boosting revenue in the tourism and hospitality sectors.

On the other hand, the presence of graduates in the public sector (38.6%) suggests that their skills are also relevant in governmental institutions, education, healthcare, legal, and diplomatic sectors. Public sector roles may involve translation of official documents, international relations, policy development, diplomatic missions, and public service.

Table 4 Type of jobs occupied by graduates

Occupation	Count	Percentage
Schools	14	31.11%
Establishing non-Translation business	8	17.78%
International Organizations (in Libya)	6	13.33%
Private Companies	6	13.33%
Higher Education sector	5	11.11%
Foreign Embassies in Libya	2	4.44%
Establishing Translation Companies	2	4.44%
Ministry of Justice	2	4.44%

Table 5 explains the sort of jobs Translation Department graduates occupied. As the table shows that 31.11% of the respondents are employed in schools. However, translation graduates are not meant to be employed as teachers. This may conform to the interpretation that a scarcity of translating job opportunities exists prompting bilingual translation graduates to utilize their language skills to pursue teaching positions. It is interesting to note that a relatively high proportion of graduates (17.78%) have chosen to establish their own non-translation businesses. This could be due to several factors, such as a lack of job opportunities in the translation sector, or a desire to be self-employed. International organizations, private sector and higher education sector come

next as a source of employment for translation graduates. Unpredictably, foreign embassies, translation companies and ministry of Justice are not promising places for translation graduates.

### **Conclusion**

This study sheds light on the intersection between academic translation programs and the translation job market in Libya, aiming to assess the effectiveness of undergraduate translation program at University of Tripoli in facilitating graduates' employability. Through a comprehensive examination of various factors such as program design and comparing the curriculum of the translation program at University of Tripoli to Kelly's (2005) translation competence model, it becomes evident that the program plays a crucial role in equipping translation graduates with the necessary skills and knowledge for success in the translation profession. Although the program covers intensively the communicative and textual competences, there is a need to inject it with more modules to enhance the strategic and attitudinal or psychological competences.

Regarding employability, the data indicates that translation graduates typically attain employment shortly after graduation. Nevertheless, it is important to note that not all graduates are able to secure positions within the translation market. Nonetheless, this observation could suggest that the transferable skills acquired by graduates in the Translation Department are highly advantageous for obtaining employment beyond the confines of the translation profession. The data suggests that translation graduates follow various career paths such as teaching, working in non-translation businesses, and working in international organizations or private companies.

While academic programs for teaching translation undoubtedly provide a solid foundation for translation trainees, the dynamism of translation job market and evolving demands highlight the importance of continuous adaptation and collaboration between academia and industry. Therefore, future research and academic programs should focus on enhancing industry relevance, fostering practical experience, and fostering lifelong learning to better align academic preparation with the realities of the translation profession. By addressing these aspects, academic translation programs can further empower graduates to navigate and thrive in the competitive translation job market.

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