

## The Availability and Use of Technology and Learning Resources in Translation Programmes

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### Abstract

The purpose of the current descriptive analytic study was to explore the availability and use of technology and learning resources in translation programmes at Saudi universities. The sample of the current study was comprised of 200 translation students selected randomly from Saudi universities. The two research instruments for data collection both consisted of a 3-point Likert scale. Data were analyzed quantitatively and the results revealed that most participating students perceived a lack of translation labs, machine translation, translation software, printed media, audio and visual materials in universities. In addition, the findings showed a deficit in the utilization and adaption of technology and learning resources in translation programmes. This study suggests that Saudi universities not only need to acquire technologies and learning resources, but should also recruit motivating instructors who can use these tools in translation instruction.

**Keywords:** CALL, learning resources, technology, translation, translation programmes

**Introduction**

This paper seeks to consider how technology can benefit translational courses in the Arab world. In doing so, a number of pedagogical approaches and teaching styles are discussed, and a number of failings highlighted. These include that observation that translation courses remain fixed in a traditional teaching methodology and, as a result, more students fail. This paper also discusses the increased usage of technology and highlights how altering teaching models can aid in increased student attainment levels.

According to Bowker (2002:12) the demand for translation skills across the world is still growing; this is increasingly needs-driven rather than research driven, leaving many current translation firms and their professional staff ill-equipped to maintain the speed and quality of work that modern industry requires. There is therefore a strong economic reason for ensuring that current students of translation should be up to date with the many technological aids that have been designed to support the translation process, particularly in terms of reducing its cost to the consumer.

Alongside a general trend towards internationalization there is also a great deal more complexity in the work those translators do, since the process known as “localization” (Esselink, 2003) involves teams of people providing all kinds of language services across multiple media. Translation in this context is just one part of a much bigger operation; consequently, it is vital that translators have an understanding of how their work fits with larger projects, and that they are able to modify their output in order to complement the work of others (Pym, 2004). In order to participate in this kind of work, translators need a firm grounding in a wide range of computer and Internet skills.

Over the last thirty years a revolution in the presentation of written texts has taken place in which authors and translators have moved from handwriting and typewriters to computer-based systems connected to each other over the Internet. Commercial customers often turn to localization vendors who “will receive batches of HTML files to translate and return, or database tables of information that will be used to generate web pages” (Esselink, 2003:74). This means that trainee translators should be at the very least familiar with word-processing, email, hypertext and macros, basic programming, database use and certain elements of web design before seeking employment in the professional translation market. Beyond these general skills it is also advisable for students to have excellent research skills using search engines, online dictionaries, and library resources so they can locate the specialized and technical concepts and terminology that will likely be needed in their work. In practical terms this means that some undergraduate translation teaching sessions will need to take place in computer laboratories and learning resource centers with staff qualified in those technologies.

At the bachelor level of education, it is unlikely students know whether or not they will become translators as a career choice, or, if they do continue in the field after graduation, which type of translation they will work in. For the vast majority of translation students, the likelihood is that they will find work in the areas of commercial, legal or technical translation, rather than in literary or academic fields. Many will work as freelancers for at least part of their career, and so it is necessary to impart a range of skills that are transferable to different areas.

Quah (2006:6-21) distinguishes between four different types of translation skills and activity, namely human translation, machine translation, human-aided machine translation and machine-aided human translation. Human translation without the aid of machines is at the traditional end of the spectrum, while machine translation is the opposite end of the spectrum, involving the use of computers to automatically translate pieces of text. Even in systems that are

heavily reliant on computers, there is still a need for significant human involvement, both in the system's design and in its operation before, during and after the machine does its work. Globally, most translation work now involves some machine and some human input in various combinations. Texts are pre-edited to make sure the system can process them, and the output is then post-edited to correct any errors, remove unhelpful ambiguities and improve the style (Quah 2006:11). Translators are advised to learn how to accomplish all these different tasks.

Freely available translation software, such as *Babelfish*, *Bing Translator*, or *Google Translate*, and many other websites, can provide a number of choices for trainee translators. It is immediately apparent, even to beginners, that these systems cannot offer much more than single word and short phrase equivalents, which at most can provide building blocks for a proper translation. There are, however, several products designed for professional translators that offer a much more reliable and high-level output, and which require correspondingly more training and practice. Many professional translation companies, particularly in the west, stipulate that applicants for employment should have experience with specialized translation software, such as *Trados*, which is the most frequently used system, or *Wordfast*, or *Déjàvu*, which are also popular with companies and freelancers (Lagoudaki, 2006). These systems provide banks of translated text that suggest solutions for translators in ways that preserve in-house consistency despite the input of many different translators over months or even years. They provide a kind of collective memory translators can access. A trainee who has learned how to use these systems will be at a distinct advantage when seeking employment.

Students of translation have to deal with two major problems in their work: the need to access linguistic knowledge from both of the two languages involved in the translation process, and the need for a much broader kind of extra-linguistic knowledge. Ping (2011:165) notes "the treatment of extra-linguistic problems is more difficult than that of linguistic problems because extra-linguistic knowledge is much harder to codify." The implication for translation is that students must be able to combine the advantages offered by technology with the high-level skills that only human beings are able to provide. In other words, traditional linguistic skills are still absolutely key, but new technology skills must also be acquired, because both types of knowledge complement the other.

Learning how to determine which tools are appropriate for each task is a critical skill that must be taught and practiced at the undergraduate level so students can advance into the translation profession ready to evaluate, use, and adopt the myriad new technologies that are appearing at a rapid rate. Evidence for the necessity of this flexibility is found in the European Commission's ideal "Translator profile" document (European Commission, 2013:1), for example, which stipulates alongside the usual competencies in the various languages, there must also be "a capacity to master computer-assisted translation and terminology tools, as well as standard office-automation software." The role of the teacher at the bachelor level must therefore be qualified to introduce a variety of technological tools, and to foster both enthusiasm and confidence so students are encouraged to find out for themselves what the benefits of new technology are. Somers (2003) notes that translation software can be expensive, but it should be feasible for any university department to have some systems available for students to try out.

### Research Methodology

Mertens (2005:2) described research as a "systematic investigation or inquiry whereby data are collected, analyzed, and interpreted in some way in an effort to understand, describe, predict, or control an educational or psychological phenomenon or to empower individuals in such

contexts.” Research is “best conceived as the process of arriving at dependable solutions to problems through the planned and systematic collection, analysis, and interpretation of data. It is a most important tool for advancing knowledge, for promoting progress, and for enabling man to relate more effectively to his environment, to accomplish his purposes, and to resolve his conflicts” (Mouly, 1978, as cited in Cohen & Manion, 2003:45).

Walter (2006:35) defined methodology as the “frame of reference for the research which is influenced by the paradigm in which our theoretical perspective is placed or developed.” Somekh & Lewin (2005: 346) argued that methodology is the “collection of methods or rules by which a particular piece of research is undertaken and the principles, theories and values that underpin a particular approach to research.”

In this study, the questionnaire was employed as the primary means of collecting the research data. The research study consisted of a single questionnaire for students. Questionnaires are “any written instruments that present respondents with a series of questions or statements to which they are to react either by writing out their answers or selecting from among existing answers” (Brown, 2001:6).

The questionnaire consisted of six statements about the availability and use of technology and learning resources in translation programmes. The scale for the availability of technology offered three choices: normally available, rarely available, and never available. The scale for technology offered three choices: always, sometimes, and rarely.

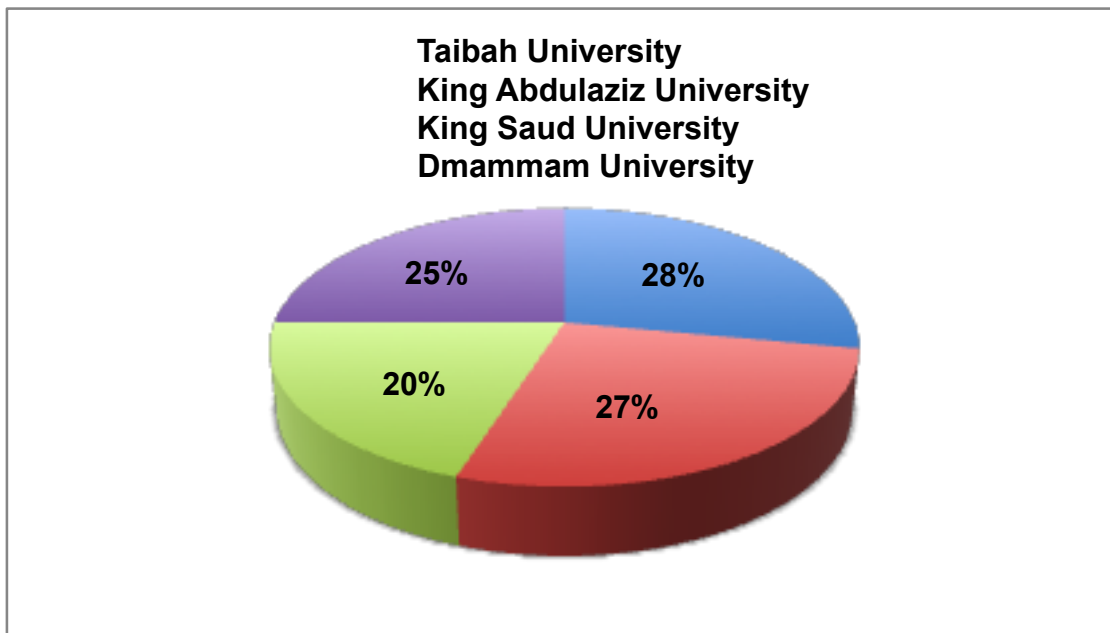
## Study Findings

### *Background of the Students in the Sample*

Over half the completed questionnaires in the sample (55%) were received from female students, and the remaining 45% from male students. Most of the participants were aged between 20 and 22. A total of 28% of the students were studying in Taibah University, 27% in King Abdulaziz University, 20% in King Saud University, and 25% in Dammam University. All of the students were pursuing bachelor degrees in English and most were also taking more than three modules in translation. The following table and figures illustrate these results

**Table 1**  
*Distribution of the Sample According to Gender*

Gender	N	%
Male	90	45
Female	110	55
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>



*Figure1. Distribution of the Sample according to their University*

**Result of the Questionnaire**

**Table 2**

*The Availability of technology and learning resources in translation programmes*

NO	Statements	Never available		Rarely available		Normally available	
		n.	%	n.	%	n.	%
1	Availability of translation labs.	168	84	5	2.5	27	13.5
		161	80.5	1	.5	38	19

2	Availability of machine translation.						
3	Availability of translation software.	23	11.5	114	57	63	31.5
4	Availability of printed media.	162	81	17	8.5	21	10.5
5	Availability of audio materials.	168	84	9	4.5	23	11.5
6	Availability of visual materials.	121	60.5	74	37	5	2.5

Based on the Table. 2 the results of item 1, ‘Availability of translation labs,’ ‘labs’, illustrate that 27 (13.5%) of the respondents confirmed the presence of a translation labs at their university, whereas a majority of 168 respondents (84%) stated the opposite. The remaining 5 respondents (2.5%) said that a translation labs areis rarely available. This item has been ranked as #4 of the 6 items in the first section of the questionnaire (Availability of technology and learning resources in translation programmes).

Based on the Table. 2 the results of item 2, ‘Availability of machine translation systems’, illustrate that 38 (19%) of the respondents confirmed the presence of machine translation systems at their university, whereas 161 (80.5%) of the respondents stated the opposite. The one remaining respondent (.5%) said that machine translation systems were rarely available. This item has been ranked as #3 of the 6 items in the first section of the questionnaire (Availability of technology and learning resources in translation programmes).

Based on the Table. 2 the results of item 3, ‘Availability of translation software,’ illustrate that 36 (31%) of the respondents confirmed the presence of translation software at their university, whereas 23 (11.5%) of the respondents stated the opposite. The remaining 114 respondents (57%) said that translation software was rarely available. This item has been ranked as #6 of the 6 items in the first section of the questionnaire (Availability of technology and learning resources in translation programmes).

Based on the Table. 2 the results of item 4, ‘Availability of printed media’, demonstrate that 21 (10.5%) of the respondents confirmed the availability of printed media at their university,

whereas 162 (81%) of the respondents stated the opposite. The remaining 17 respondents (8.5%) said that printed media was rarely available. This item has been ranked as #1 of the 6 items in the first section of the questionnaire (Availability of technology and learning resources in translation programmes).

Based on the Table. 2 the results of item 5, "Availability of Audio materials," demonstrate that 23 (11.5%) of the respondents confirmed the availability of audio materials at their university, whereas a majority of 168 respondents (84%) stated the opposite. The remaining 9 respondents (4.5%) said that audio materials were rarely available. This item has been ranked as #5 of the 6 items in the first section of the questionnaire (Availability of technology and learning resources in translation programmes).

Based on the Table. 2 the results of item 6, "Availability of Visual materials," demonstrate that only 5 (2.5%) of the respondents indicated the availability of visual materials at their university, whereas 121 (60.5%) of the respondents stated the opposite. The remaining 74 respondents (34%) said that visual materials were rarely available. This item has been ranked as #2 of the 6 items in the first section of the questionnaire (Availability of technology and learning resources in translation programmes).

**Table 3**

*Use of technology and learning resources in translation programmes*

No	Statements	Rarely		Sometimes		Always	
		n.	%	n.	%	n.	%
1	Use of translation lab.	164	82	36	18	0	0
2	Use of machine translation systems.	160	80	40	20	0	0
3	Use of translation software.	160	80	40	20	0	0
		41	20.5	105	52.5	54	27

4	Use of printed media.						
5	Use of audio materials.	161	80.5	38	19	54	27
6	Use of visual materials.	140	70	60	30	0	0

Based on the Table. 3 the results of item 1, “Use of translation lab,” show that none (0%) of the respondents claimed to use a translation lab at their university, while 164 (82%) of the respondents said they rarely used a translation lab. The remaining 36 respondents (18%) said that they sometimes used a translation lab. This item has been ranked as #4 of the 6 items in the second section of the questionnaire (Use of technology and learning resources in translation programmes).

Based on the Table. 3 the results of item 2, “Use of machine translation systems,” illustrate that none (0%) of the respondents claimed to use a machine translation system at their university, while 160 (80%) of the respondents indicated that they rarely used a machine translation system. The remaining 40 respondents (20%) said that they sometimes used a machine translation system. This item has been ranked as #3 of the 6 items in the second section of the questionnaire (Use of technology and learning resources in translation programmes)

Based on the Table. 3 the results of item 3, “Use of translation software,” illustrate that none (0%) of the respondents claimed to use translation software at their university, and 160 (80%) of the respondents indicated that they rarely used translation software. The remaining 40 respondents (20%) said that they sometimes used translation software. This item has been ranked as #3 of the 6 items in the second section of the questionnaire (Use of technology and learning resources in translation programmes).

Based on the Table. 3 the results of item 4, “Use of printed media,” demonstrate that 54 (27%) of the respondents claimed to always use printed media at their university, whereas 41 (20.5%) of the respondents claimed to use it rarely. The remaining 105 respondents 105 (52%) said they sometimes used printed media. This item has been ranked as #1 of the 6 items in the second section of the questionnaire (Use of technology and learning resources in translation programmes).

Based on the Table. 3 the results of item 5, “Use of audio materials,” demonstrate that 54 (27.5%) of the respondents claimed to always use audio materials at their university, whereas a majority of 161 respondents (80.5%) indicated that they rarely used them. The remaining 38 respondents (19%) said that they sometimes used audio materials. This item has been ranked as #3 of the 6 items in the second section of the questionnaire (Use of technology and learning resources in translation programmes).



Based on the Table. 3 the results of item (6), “Use of visual materials,” show that none (0%) of the respondents claimed to always use visual materials at their university, and 140 (70%) indicated that they rarely used them. The remaining 60 respondents (30%) said that they sometimes used visual materials. This item has been ranked as #2 of the 6 items in the second section of the questionnaire (Use of technology and learning resources in translation programmes).

Tables 2 and 3 reveal that this study corroborates the views of Al-Khatib (2005) and Gaber (2002), who claimed there are shortcomings in the availability and use of technology and learning resources in translation programmes. Gaber (2002: 6) stated that there is a “severe shortage in resources and classroom facilities [...] [which] limits the choice of appropriate teaching methods and keeps teachers from distributing handouts and correcting assignments. It further undermines the roles played by the teachers.” Also in line with this current work, Al-Khatib (2005) found that the use of technology in Arabic translation is poor, as there are unclear and uncertain strategies to promote translation in this domain.

### Conclusion

This paper has assessed the availability and use of technology and learning resources in undergraduate translation programmes in Saudi Arabia. There is a clear benefit to the increased usage of technology within translational studies classes. This literature review and subsequent findings have highlighted that translation courses are suffering from a lack of technological tools and learning resources, such as translation labs, machine translation, translation software, printed media, and audio and visual materials in Saudi universities.

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