



Translation Degree in Iraq: Graduates' Perception of its Value

Aus Adil Abdulwahhab

Lect./Dept. of Translation
College of Art/ University of Mosul

Article Information

Article History:

Received June 22, 2023
Reviewer July 16, 2023
Accepted July 22, 2023
Available Online March 1, 2024

Keywords:

Perception of value
Translation degree
Higher education

Correspondence:

Aus Adil Abdulwahhab
aus.a@uomosul.edu.iq

Abstract

This study examines the degree value as perceived by the graduates of Translation Departments. The study is guided by the general Theory of Value and driven by the tenets of social construction theory. It argues that degree value is context-bounded and governed by a complex set of factors. The study also assumes that alumni perception of the value of a translation degree is mediated by the opportunities available on the ground. In line with the framework of higher education, value is viewed via three dimensions: personal, economic, and academic.

The researcher administered a modified survey based on McGivney's (2002) model to gather information about the graduates' background, utilization of translation degree, and assignment of value. One hundred and sixty-two participants (N=162) took part in the study. Despite the negative economic, political, and security conditions and the limited channels of employment, most of the participants perceive the degree as valuable.

DOI: [10.33899/radab.2023.141282.1953](https://doi.org/10.33899/radab.2023.141282.1953), ©Authors, 2023, College of Arts, University of Mosul.
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شهادة الترجمة في العراق: رؤية الخريجين لقيمتها

اوس عادل عبدالوهاب*

المستخلص:

تبحث هذه الدراسة في قيمة الشهادة كما يراها خريجو أقسام الترجمة. تسترشد الدراسة بالنظرية العامة للقيمة ومدفوعة بمبادئ نظرية البناء الاجتماعي. تجادل الدراسة بأن قيمة الدرجة مرتبطة بالبيئة وتحكمها مجموعة معقدة من العوامل. تفترض الدراسة أيضاً أن إدراك الخريجين لقيمة درجة الترجمة يعتمد على الفرص المتاحة على أرض الواقع. وتماشياً مع إطار التعليم العالي، يُنظر إلى القيمة من خلال ثلاثة أبعاد: الشخصية والاقتصادية والأكاديمية.

أجرى الباحث مسحاً معدلاً بناءً على نموذج McGivney's (2002) وذلك بجمع معلومات عن خلفية الخريجين، والاستفادة من شهادة الترجمة، وتحديد قيمتها. شارك مائة واثنان وستون مشاركاً (162) في الدراسة. وعلى الرغم من الظروف الاقتصادية والسياسية والأمنية السلبية، وقنوات التوظيف المحدودة، يرى معظم المشاركين أن الشهادة العلمية ذات قيمة.

* مدرس / قسم الترجمة / كلية الآداب / جامعة الموصل

Introduction

Twenty-five years ago, I was admitted as one of the top students to the Department of Translation at the University of Blue (pseudonym) in Iraq. I and my colleagues used to be amazed by stories we would hear from the professors about the movement of translation during the Abbasid Caliphate era (656-1258). History tells that during the reign of the caliphate Al-Mamoun (813–833), the House of Wisdom '*Bait Al-Hikma*' was founded in Baghdad. In this academic institution, the ancient texts of the Romans, Greeks, and Indians were translated into Arabic. Back in that time, translators were generously rewarded. A good translator might receive up to 500 gold dinars which is equivalent to nearly \$24,000 per month -- a very decent payment which reflects the value of the work. Some translated books were weighed in gold in return for the efforts made to complete them. (Bennison, 2009, Al-Khalili, 2010) These historic pieces of information gave us as students a lot of excitement, motivation, and hope for the future.

Now, as a recent doctoral degree holder in Studies of Higher Education from a US university, I wanted to reflect on the value of translation in the current times in Iraq; a country often called the cradle of civilization. Using philosophical conceptualizations of value and social construction theory as the main framework, this research examines Iraqi graduates' perception of the value (PoV) of a translation degree. The concept of value in its multiple dimensions and meanings is a quite useful construct to unravel the complexities, conditions, and realities of this program of study and higher education. The study tries to examine the perception of the value of a translation degree from three dimensions: personal, economic, and academic. The questions that seek an answer in this research are the following:

- (1) How the graduates of Iraqi Translation Departments perceive the value of their degrees?
- (2) Are the graduates of Iraqi Translation Departments satisfied with the outcome of their educational experiences?
- (3) What are the factors that affect their perceptions of degree value?
- (4) How does the socio-economic environment affect the usability of a translation degree?

While this research examines a single program of study, it sheds light on ways we can study the intersections among higher education, socio-economic reality, alignment between output and work opportunities, and nuances of satisfaction concerning how graduates value their studies. The study also critically debates the implications of graduates' responses and how to interpret these based on the prospects of opportunities that exist on the ground.

Perception of Value

We perceive the world through the five senses which act as receptors of information that integrate into our brain through complex cognitive processes. Perception involves an interaction with the surrounding environment that ultimately produces knowledge about the world. Understanding perception depends on understanding the surrounding conditions. The perception of reality varies across cultures, societies, institutions, fields, times, and even individuals (Judd, 1909, Efron, 1969).

Perception has a sociological dimension, since society represents the environment of interaction that mediates the process of internalization about the world in which we live. Friedman (2011, p. 189) states that "the sociology of perception emphasizes that perception is a culturally constructed process, and

seeks to identify the perceptual conventions, perceptual traditions, perceptual norms, and processes of perceptual enculturation associated with membership in different perceptual communities.” Although many studies have been concerned with the cognitive aspect of perception, including the complex processes between the outside world and the neurological interaction in the brain (Keating, List, Merriman, 1985, Smith and Miller, 1978, LoBue, 2014), this study is mostly concerned with the outcome of perception as related to the concept of value. Keating et al. (1985) for instance were mainly with investigating roots of cognitive capacity and growth variation among individuals. They also examined factors such as memory retrieval and mental rotation processes. Smith and Miller (1987) on the other hand studied the mechanism of cognitive processes. In their counter argument of Nisbett and Wilson, they challenged the position that access to mental processes is unattainable. Whereas LoBue (2014) and through experimental examination showed that perception, cognition and emotion interact consistently together to explain the response in human being.

The perception of value (PoV) is the outcome of organic interaction among environment, experience, and cognitive processes in the mind (see figure 1).

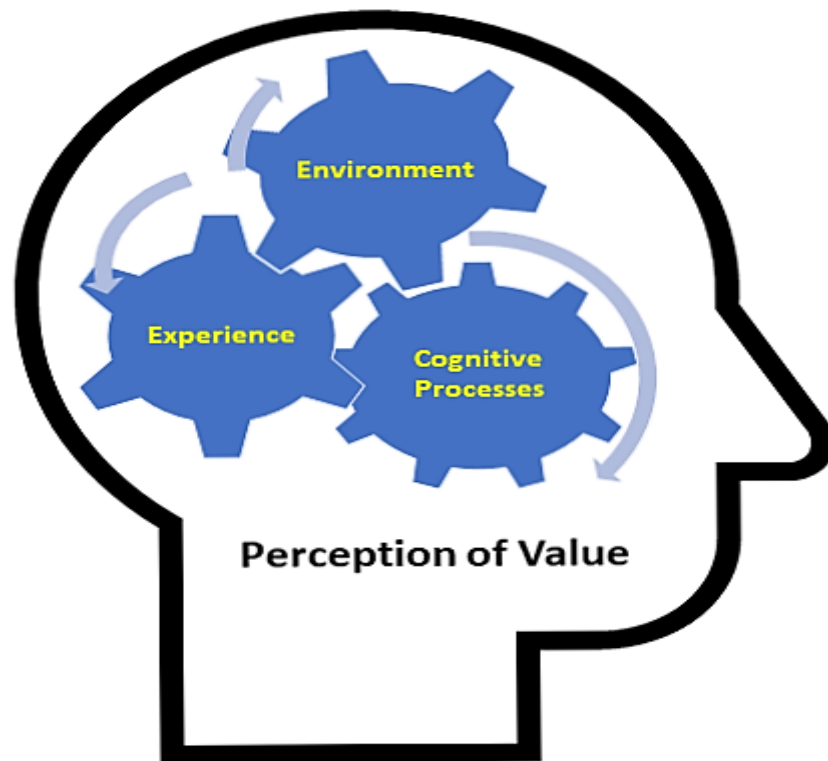


Figure 1 Perception of value: Elements and processes

This study utilizes the tenets of Social Construction Theory (Berger and Luckman, 1966, Boghossian, 2006, Andrews, 2012) to help understand the perceived value of a college degree. According to the early twentieth century psychologists such as Pavlov, Skinner, and Piaget, the human is viewed as a socially conditioned creature. The progressive theory of Social Construction explains behavior and thinking as socially built and transmitted within the socio-cultural realm of family, social group, and

social structure. Society is seen as a producer of knowledge. The production of socially transferred knowledge is contextually dependent on realities that exist in a certain society (Boghossian, 2012).

The society we live in creates representations, symbols, meanings that shape our perception of reality. Andrews (2012, p. 5) states that “social constructionism places great emphasis on everyday interactions between people and how they use language to construct their reality. It regards the social practices people engage in as the focus of inquiry. Therefore, this theory remains always alive and active because it deals with organic and ever-changing constructs of society and culture.

Social constructionism helps to make sense of PoV because value-meaning and understanding are enveloped within the contingencies of the socio-cultural context. Building on Dewey’s ideas, Mallon (2019) contends that assignment of value does not result from attributes that exist intrinsically in objects, rather it is a consciously constructed process that involves appraisal and valuation. The social environment encapsulates the foundational elements for the act of value-assignment.

Meanings of value in higher education

Perceived value has been defined as a process of weighing the things given and the benefits received. It was also viewed as an assessment of sacrifices and gains; the judgment made by a customer about a service, product, or an object; the preferences an individual has towards something (Boksberger and Melsen, 2011, Chang and Dibb, 2012, Zauner, Koller & Hatak, 2015). PoV could at the least be described as multidimensional, interdisciplinary, relational, and relative. There are diverse distinctions and taxonomies of value perception. However, every field might define its criteria and characterizations of value. For this study, PoV represents an evaluation of educational experience in its multiple academic, social, and personal dimensions.

Philosophers, theorists, and educationalists alike have diverse propositions and views about the value of education and benefits for the human being. Broadly speaking though, education derives its value from three integrative elements: knowledge, understanding, and well-being. The value of education is also viewed through an intrinsic/ extrinsic dichotomy. It could be pursued for its own sake or as a means towards an end (Reid 1998, Snorrason, 2005, Fatah Yasin and Shah Jani, 2013, Arjmand, 2018).

The meaning and manifestation of the concept of value in higher education are important to study. Partly because higher education is a service that is concerned with human development academically, morally, personally, and socially. Moreover, knowledge about the implications of value within the context of higher education “indicates an increased realization that value can offer the means by which to evaluate and tailor educational offerings that both optimize the learning experience and deliver higher student satisfaction (Ledden, Kalafatis, Samouel, 2007, P.966).

Within the realm of higher education, value is examined in relation to economic feasibility, employability, and quality assurance. Higher education is seen as the station where knowledge and skills are obtained by individuals and transferred into society and economy as usable assets. Considering the graduates as consumers of higher education, the Gallup report shows that the consumers of education think always about the link between education and career. A well-planned education with clear endpoints creates motivation for success.

Employability, as the relation between the qualifications of the graduate and the ability to get a job, is an important indicator of institutional effectiveness. Employability is influenced by the educational institution’s capacity to equip learners with the appropriate competencies and skills. The name of the

institution and its reputation are significant indexes for employers who may prefer graduates of certain schools more than others. Moreover, preparation for the job market should be flexible and dynamic in a way that makes the graduates ready to serve different market needs.

Ledden, Kalafatis, and Samouel showed in their study the importance of value as a construct for measuring different aspects of higher education including quality and satisfaction. Value and satisfaction have an interchangeable relationship; both move in tandem. If satisfaction increases, the perceived value increases as well. According to their findings, “feelings of satisfaction are more heavily influenced by what students perceive that they gain (i.e., get) from the educational experience than the personal sacrifices (i.e., give) they have to make in order to obtain the specific qualification.” (Ledden, Kalafatis, and Samouel 2006, p. 971)

Value as quality also includes the degree obtained by the graduate, its usability, and benefits to the economy and society. Therefore, talking about the degree obtained should include several issues such as the type, field, institution, need besides other aspects. PoV is contingent upon a complex set of conditional factors such as the time, macroeconomic, and sociopolitical context. Understanding the dimensions of value through the students’ perceptions is one of the significant doorways for qualitative education. Endut et al. (2013) think that an effective way to understand the different perspectives of stakeholders is through listening to the graduates mainly through conducting interviews and making sense of their stories. This study takes a different approach by examining the PoV by conducting a survey that covers the economic, personal, and academic aspects (Ingham, 2016).

Method

The concept of value was examined via three main dimensions: personal, academic, and economic. Using a survey in this research was intended to find out how the Iraqi graduates of Translation Departments assign value to their degrees through close-ended questions. The survey used in this research is a modified version of McGivney’s (2002) model. Some of the questions in the original version were modified and were others were added to be consistent with the field of translation and its domains of value.

Based on the purpose of the study, the individuals who were invited to take part in this research were graduates of the Translation Departments of Iraqi Public Universities. Therefore, the holders of BA, MA, PhD., and residents inside and outside Iraq were all included in the research (Cowles and Nelson, 2015, Nardi, 2015). Before launching, the survey was piloted to verify the appropriateness and understandability. Ten participants provided feedback about the wording, eligibility, and clarity of the items. Two of the pilot study participants were academics. One of them is a professor at the Department of Translation at the University of Blue and the other was a professional evaluator and educationalist at the University of Kentucky (Hassan, Schattner, and Mazza, 2006).

The total number of participants who took the survey was 162 graduates of Translation in different departments across Iraq. Due to familiarity and accessibility, most of the participants were from Blue University (pseudonym).

The statistical tool used to process the data was SPSS. Descriptive analysis was the method utilized to analyze the results of the survey. A univariate analysis provided an evaluation of the variables and frequencies of all categories. Chi-Square analysis was used to examine the relationship between certain items in survey questions to find any possible correlations. The analysis was also used to account

for the subgroup differences including gender, year of graduation, degree obtained, and other independent variables. As part of the invitation to take part in the study and consistent with the IRB regulatory framework, participants were provided with a consent form for the survey explaining the purpose of the study and voluntary participation. Participants were reminded that they could skip questions or ask for clarification about the research.

Results

This study attempted to find out how the graduates of Iraqi Translation Departments assign value to this degree. The study utilized a modified survey to explore graduates' perceptions of value according to personal, economic, and academic dimensions consistence with the core components of the degree of translation. The first set of questions about the background of the participants revealed that almost 70% were male, whereas females made up 30% of the participants. Degree holders of translation from Iraq are geographically distributed across the continents. However, most of the participants live in the North of Iraq; some are located in the Mid and the South; others live across various countries in Europe, Asia, and North America. Additionally, 87% of the participants' mother tongue was Arabic, and only 13% non-Arabic. Those languages include Kurdish, Assyrian, Armenian, and Turkish respectively. The target language of translation programs in Iraqi universities is typically Arabic. Participants in the study were distributed across seven universities in Iraq with the majority from the University of Blue, University of Green, Red University, University of Brown, Yellow University College, Orange College, and the University of White. Degree completion in Translation varied: 57% of the participant have a BA only, 35% have a BA and an MA, and 8% have a BA, MA, and a Ph.D. Twenty-seven percent of the participants in the study have another degree in addition to translation. The majors they hold besides translation include law, microbiology, medical analysis, architectural engineering, business administration, computer science, Russian literature, linguistics, microbiology and immunity, psychology, agriculture, and mathematics.

Admission to the Department of Translation came into four categories (figure 2, A): 72% had this department as their first choice, 14.4% as the second choice, 4.4% moved from another department or major, whereas 9.2% were admitted through central selection. The reason for joining this major (figure 2, B) varies between personal aspiration 68.8%, specific career goal 9.4%, fulfill parents or family expectations 2.5%, or a mix of all the aforementioned reasons 19.3%. The participants also had various individual reasons why they joined this major such as the departmental ranking of this major compared to others in the college, personal passion for the English language, willingness to learn a foreign language or inability to join a different college.

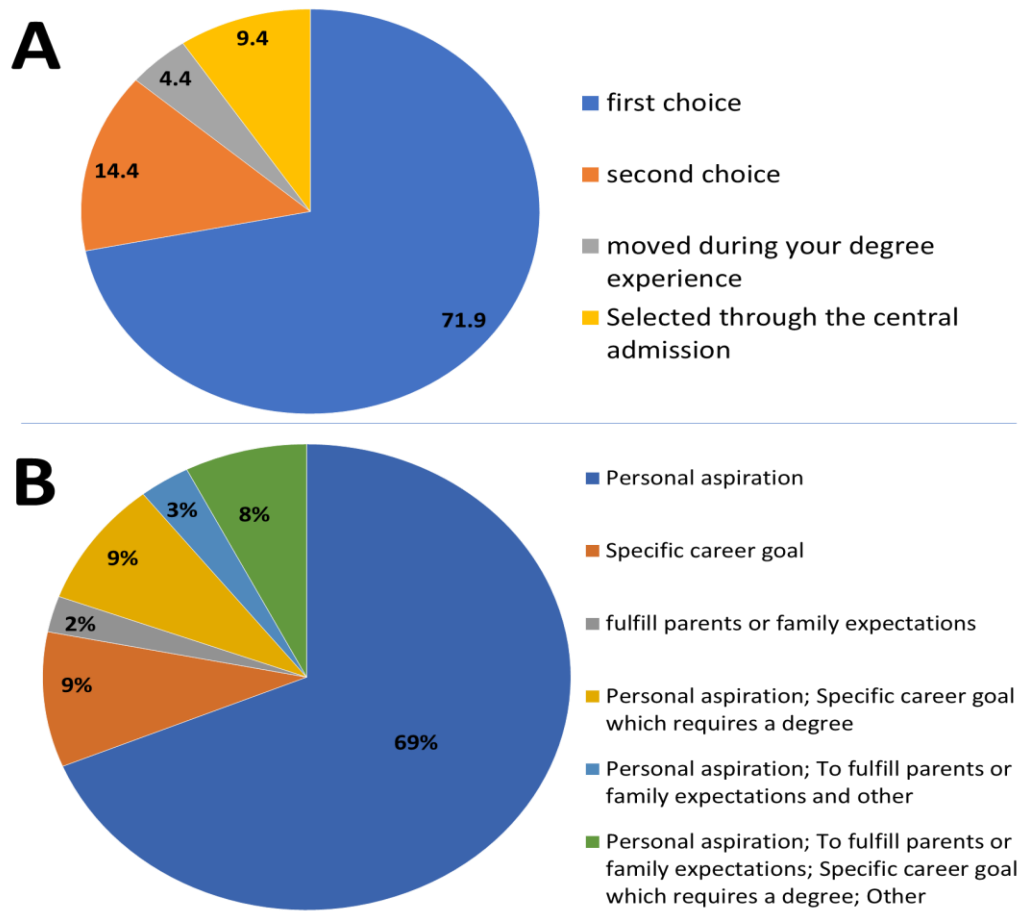


Figure 2 Pie chart showing (A) the way of admission to the Department of Translation. (B) the reasons for joining the Department of Translation

In response to the question whether the participants received any work-based training relevant to translation, the responses showed (figure 3, A) that 72% said none, 15.8% said they worked for a period in a translation-related field, 3.8% said other, and only 8.2% received training in an institution affiliated with the department. In conjunction with the previous question, very few of the respondents said that they worked with an international organization as freelancers. Few participants said they received a scholarship or grant (12%), while the remaining 88% responded with none (figure 3, B). Additionally, 35% of the survey responses showed that participants were employed in an area outside the field of translation because of financial needs during their studies.

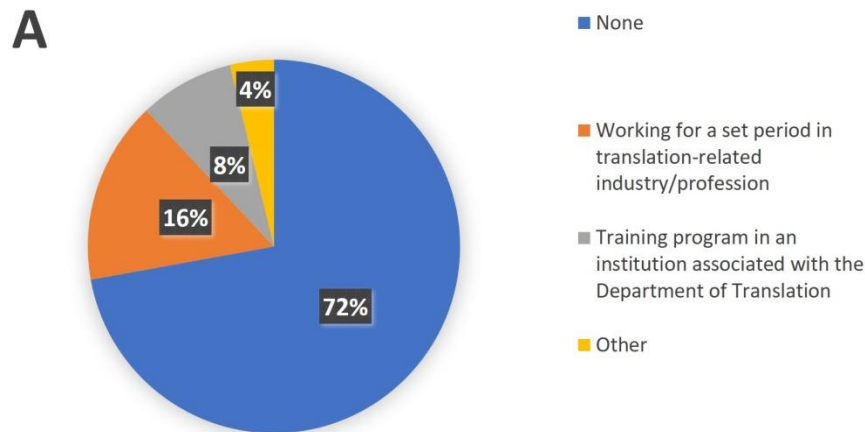
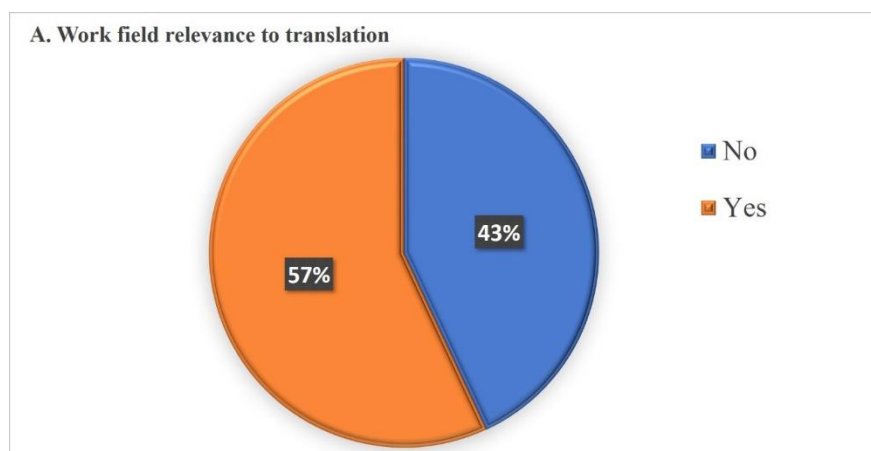


Figure 3. (A) Participants who received work-based training relevant to translation. (B) Participants who received a scholarship or grant

Results also showed that 64% of the participants were employed, while the remaining ones were unemployed or studying at the time of the survey. Employment categories were divided into various domains such as teaching at the university, freelancing, working as a schoolteacher, or working as a businessman. Responses also showed (figure 4.A) that 43% of the participants work in an area not relevant to translation, while 57% said they work in a field relevant to this major. Job titles of the participants include assistant lecturer, professor, English language teacher, freelance translator, manager, logistics officer, school principal, merchant, accountant, commercial manager, besides many different others. In terms of the description of the work as related to the field of translation, 23.6% said they work as teachers or instructors, 13.4% work as interpreters or part-time translators, 10.2% do paid-translation occasionally, 10.8% work fully as paid translators, 4.5% rarely do paid translation, and 37.6% said they never work in the field of translation in any form (figure 4.B).



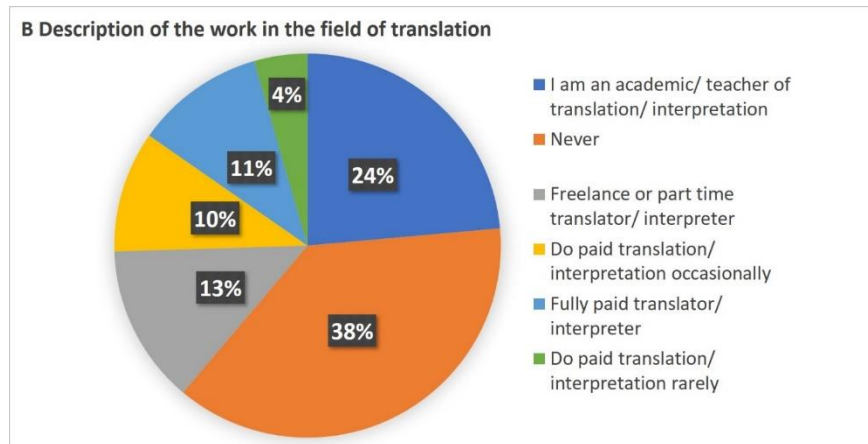


Figure 4. Participants' work-field relevance to translation (A), and their description of the work as related to the field of translation (B).

Most of the participants (77.4%) said they do not have professional membership in a translation association, while (22.6%) responded positively (Figure 5). Those professional associations include the Iraqi Translators Association, Kurdistan Translators Association, Arab Professional Translators Society, and American Translators Association.

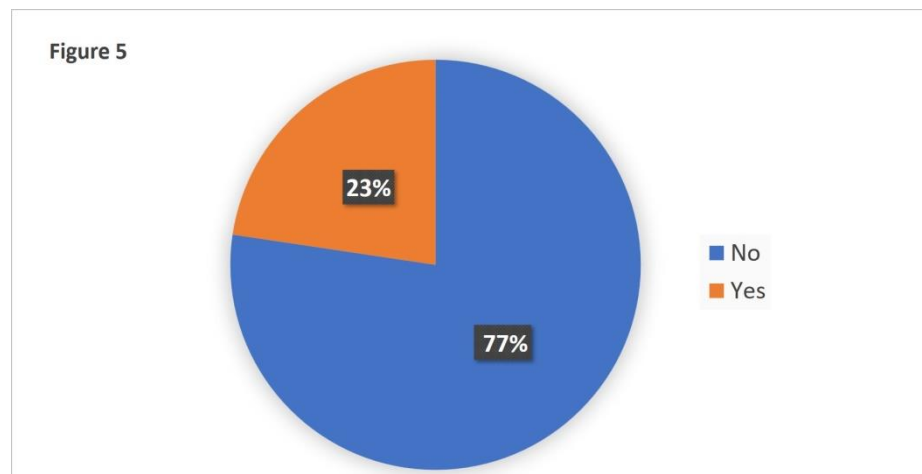


Figure 5 Participants' membership in a translation association

Skills Acquired

The research addressed various skills that encompass specific areas related to translation, language, communication, social, personal, and cognitive as perceived by the graduates of translation departments in Iraq. Table provides the participants' evaluation of the skills acquired according to the scale used in the survey.

Table 1. Participants' evaluation of the skills acquired

Skills acquired	No Value	Little value	Some value	Considerable value	Great value
Written translation skills	6%	8.1%	19.9%	41.6%	29.8%
Consecutive translation skills	3.1%	14.8%	28.4%	37.7%	16%
Interpretation skills	6.2%	14.2%	29.6%	31.5%	18.5%
Writing skills	1.2%	11.1%	16.7%	38.3%	32.7%
Speaking skills	1.9%	14.8%	24.1%	33.3%	25.9%
Improved reading skills	2.5%	7.4%	19.1%	37.7%	33.3%
listening and understanding skills	1.2%	8.1%	28%	33.5%	29.2%
Cultural awareness	3.7%	7.5%	29.2%	32.2%	27.3%
Mediation skills	9.4%	11.3%	33.8%	31.9%	13.8%
Analytical skills	6.8%	15.5%	32.9%	32.9%	11.8%
Critical thinking	7.4%	17.9%	33.3%	27.2%	14.2%
Use of technology	13.6%	16.7%	27.8%	27.2%	14.8%
Presentation skills	8.6%	16.7%	25.9%	29%	19.8%
Self-discipline	4.3%	11.1%	32.7%	30.2%	21.6%
Self-confidence	3.7%	8.7%	21.7%	32.9%	32.9%
Ability to work on my own	4.9%	11.7%	20.4%	34.6%	28.4%
Team and group work	13%	11.2%	30.4%	25.5%	19.9%
Social skills	6.2%	11.2%	24.8%	32.2%	25.5%
Tolerance of others	8%	15.4%	25.9%	30.9%	19.8%
Knowledge of own capabilities	3.7%	9.3%	19.9%	42.2%	24.2%
Sense of self-worth	4.9%	8%	28.4%	36.4%	22.2%
Understanding others	6.2%	8.7%	23.6%	34.8%	26.7%
Shouldering responsibility	5.6%	8.7%	16.1%	38.5%	31.1%
Political awareness	9.3%	14.2%	33.3%	30.2%	13%
Awareness of new opportunities	6.9%	11.3%	29.4%	33.1%	19.4%

Participants were also asked whether they would recommend their major, department, and university. Results showed that 4.9% said they would definitely not recommend a degree in translation, 5.6% said they would probably not; 32.1% said probably yes, and 54.9% said definitely yes. In respect to department recommendation, 11.3% said definitely not, 10.7% said probably not, 30.2% said probably yes, and 47.8% said definitely yes. As for the recommendation of the university, 3.8% said definitely not, 10.1% said probably not, 32.9% said probably yes, while 53.2% said definitely yes.

At the end of the survey, participants were given a space to textually express their thoughts about value. Responses showed multidimensional categories that incorporate concepts already covered in the survey as well as others which alluded to broader dimensions. Career advancement was one of the recurrent themes in participants' responses. Speaking in general, one of the participants said that studying this major allowed him/ her to achieve his/ her dream. For other participants, this educational experience changed their life, allowed them to pursue higher education, or opened up language-related job opportunities. As expressed by one participant, "translation opened the way to work with humanitarian

organizations.” However, one of the participants said that acquiring a degree in this major did not change anything in his/ her life.

Some participants viewed value as related to learning another language, broadening cultural awareness, passing knowledge to others, communicating with people and individuals from a different culture, and a better understanding of the world we live in. One participant said: “Because I have learned in those 4 years a lot about the English language and that makes me understand it and gave the ability to read and write properly. Speaking another language, makes you feel that YR more educated individual.” Along this line, some participants were focused on the value of translation itself as a field of profession. They saw that this major is multidisciplinary by nature; it grants the holder a decent social reputation and allows the learner to obtain knowledge in a broad spectrum of disciplines. One of the participants said that this major gives the skills of knowing how to navigate different societies and cultures, “To be a translator is to be aware of two different cultures, societies and civilizations.”

Participants also highlighted the impact as related to personal growth, development, and role-identity formation. The whole educational experience including interaction within the environment of the department and university allowed the participants to be self-reliant and confident. One of the participants thought that the major is quite valuable and enriching, but the experience needs to be enhanced by having the opportunity to study abroad where you could mix with different environments and cultures.

Among the participants, some were more critical, challenging both the meaning of value and questioning whether this degree was worth acquiring. A participant argued that despite the importance of a college degree, it could not be regarded as the only source for the evaluation of value; “Even though degrees of all sorts are great achievement, I believe that true value and self-worth are not necessarily determined by them.” Another participant critically thought of the relationship between quantity and quality, raising a question about the large number of graduates versus limited venues of practice. Another participant was completely dissatisfied with the educational journey in the department of translation, pointing at some aspects of injustice; “I smelled nepotism and experienced discrimination in the department by some professors.”

Value-relevant correlations

Running chi-square analysis, the researcher found some correlated variables. The reported results focus on instances that help understand meaningful causal relations as well as the ones pertinent to the main topic of the study.

Gender had significant correlations with the degree obtained by the participant. More male participants have MA and Ph.D. degrees than females, $p < 0.013$. Gender also was found to have a correlation with having a degree other than translation, $p < 0.024$, employment for financial needs outside degree field, $p < 0.008$, and with interpretation skills, $p < 0.014$ with more males proportionally to females across those three variables.

Another background question that correlated with various variables was the country of the participants. First, chi-square analysis revealed a statistical significance of the residence of participants with having a membership in a professional organization, $p < 0.002$. Participants in the Middle and South of Iraq had a higher percentage of membership than those in other locations. The other item that was found to have a correlation with the country of residence was self-discipline, $p < 0.004$ with participants living in other continents seeing less value compared to those living in the North and Mid of Iraq. The other significantly correlated variable with residence was recommending a degree in translation, $p < 0.05$,

and written translation skills, $p < 0.026$. Those residing in the US or other continents were less likely to recommend a degree in translation.

The language was found to have a significant correlation with social skills, $p < 0.018$. Non-Arabic participants saw 'greater value' in terms of acquiring social skills compared to Arabic participants.

The questions that asked participants about any work-based or training relevant to translation showed correlation with graduation university, $p < 0.001$, and having a membership in a professional translation association, $p < 0.002$. Graduates of Red University had higher percentages working for a set of periods in a translation-related field than other universities. The majority who graduated from Blue said they did not get training. They also had comparably less membership in a professional association than other universities. The other items that correlated with graduation university include:

- Listening and understanding skills, $p < 0.011$.
- Recommending the Department of Translation, $p < 0.006$.
- Description of work in the field of translation, $p < 0.045$.

For the three aforementioned variables, the graduates of Blue university had higher percentages than other universities.

Discussion

This research tried to understand the way that graduates from different Iraqi universities perceive of the degree value of Translation. It suggested that certain contingencies affect how the participants think about the economic, personal, and academic dimensions of degree value. Figure 6 shows the main factors that have an impact on the dimensions of value and its perception. The research argued that the perception of value is the outcome of processing information in the mind about the social reality and the way the students experience it. The discussion will focus on three main themes based on the conceptual frame adopted and the analysis of the results.

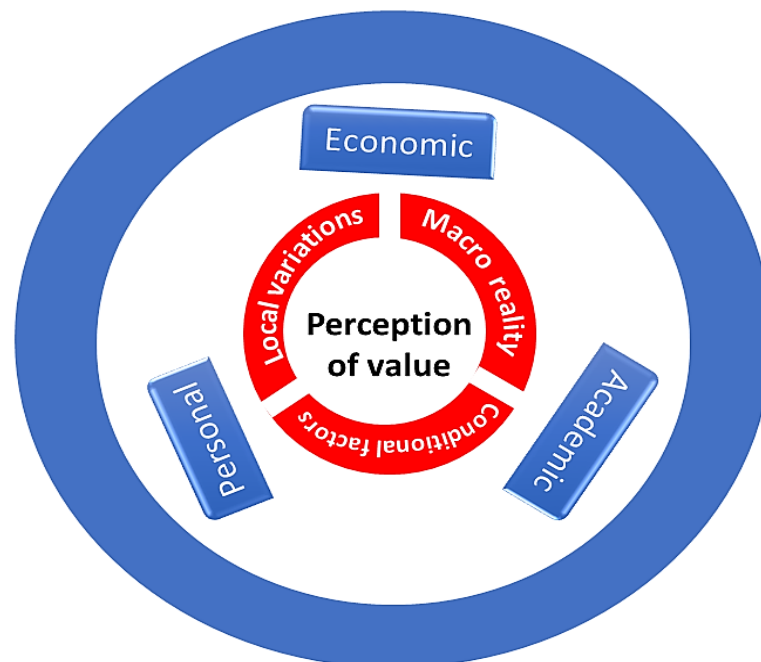


Figure 6 Perception of value: Overarching factors and dimensions

Theme 1: economic aspect, training, and development

First, the economic value of the degree defined through the work venues, channels of employment, and other mediating factors such as the training and scholarship is contingent upon a complex set of contextual conditions. (Berger and Luckman, 1966). The troubled security in Iraq and the economic, social, and political instability make working with international organizations that recruit bilinguals and interpreters dangerous. This may represent a major constraint against creating a safe atmosphere for the graduates of translation to thrive and find the proper channels of employment. Following the invasion of Iraq in 2003, many of those who worked as interpreters for the alliance troops were either assassinated, threatened or abandoned practicing the profession they learned. The climate for interpreters and translators is considered to be quite unsafe because of the destabilized environment (Glionna & Khalil, 2005, Daragahi & Rotella 2005, Coon, 2017, Rayment, 2007, Bluemel, 2020).

Nearly one-third of the graduate participants (36%) are unemployed. Approximately half of the employed participants work in areas not relevant to translation such as management, school teaching, business, accounting, and commerce. Those who work as fully paid translators make up only 10% of the sample size. This could be related to a whole set of macro-economic factors, the sequence of violence and conflict, and the shortage or absence of well-recognized companies concerned with translation. There is still variation across the areas of the country. The percentage of Green University graduates who work as freelancers or part-time translators are higher (75%). Green lies in the capital and has more venues for translation job opportunities. The study also showed that higher degree holders are more likely to work in the field of translation. This is something normal given the scope of work in academia and the reputation associated with having a graduate degree which opens up more employment opportunities in comparison to those with a bachelor's degree. Creating alignment between educational institutions and the job market is a central concern for higher education. The Iraqi educational institutions encounter several challenges and problems including the mismatch between input and the quality of output on the one hand and real market needs on the other (Al-rubai'y, 2020, Guedenet, Grajek, Kaghed, & Dezaye, 2009).

Training relevant to translation is reported to be scanty; seventy percent of the participants said they did not receive any training. This is a major issue especially in terms of getting the practical experience and having the venues in the job market ready to embrace the graduate translators. Studies that critically investigate and examine the programs of study in Iraqi universities in general and translation program, in particular, are very rare. A recent publication by Al-Maryani (2019) made a small-scale examination of interpreting and translation programs in Iraq. Dividing those programs into academic and non-academic, this research found that across the two tiers there are deficiencies and weaknesses concerning the competency of instructors, utilization of technologies, duration of the training programs, availability of premises, and overpacking of classrooms. The research claims that there is an increasing demand in the Iraqi market for translators and interpreters. However, this claim is hard to prove given the non-presence of professional companies or international institutions that recruit interpreters and translators in this country. Demand in the local market might be expanding for those who know two or more languages and especially English for being the global language of business and commerce, but not necessarily for translators within the Iraqi setting. In the United States for instance, the need for bilinguals

in the job market shows an optimistic image. The New Economy Report (2017) demonstrates that there is a strong demand for bilinguals in sectors that involve interaction such as the banking, healthcare, tele communications, as well as an auto parts retailer, "From 2010 to 2015, the number of jobs requiring Chinese and Arabic abilities increased by roughly 230% and 160%, respectively." (2017, P. 21)

Despite the limitations within the Iraqi market, some students make a personal effort to find temporary or sporadic work opportunities through translating texts in collaboration with local small businesses. This mainly depends on the social network and personal relationships, but it is not by any means structured, systemic, or organized. Recently, there have been initiatives by some department's chairs and professors to establish communication and reach out to international agencies concerned with translation. The Department of Translation in Blue University embarked on an international project to translate the content of Wikipedia and Coursera Association with the participation of talented students.

The study also showed a low percentage (12.3%) of those who received grants or scholarships among the participants. This shortage could be attributed to reasons such as the lack of institutional funding, bureaucracy, lack of preparation, and knowing how to navigate the application, and satisfy the requirements of scholarship opportunities such as the Fulbright, Chevening, and DAAD. Those who succeed to receive a scholarship rely on their own efforts by applying straight to the granting institution without institutional support or guidance. Participants mentioned in the survey's textual space the importance of finding an opportunity to study abroad to ameliorate their language skills.

The study also found that 77% of the participants do not have a membership in a professional translation organization. Membership in a translation association reflects aspects related to care about the profession, investment in degree, continuity, and career commitments. Accessibility, interest, value, and method used for application could be some of the reasons that stand behind the low percentage of membership in a translation association.

Theme 2: personal satisfaction and assessment of the acquired value

The researcher found a combination of reasons, not only a passion for translation but also a willingness to learn the English language, that attracts the participants to this major. The majority were admitted to the department based on their own interests (72%) and willingness to study this major. This is an important point to underscore given the fact that admission in Iraqi universities is based on the average score of high school. Positive perception of degree value is inherently associated with the spectrum of reasons that motivated the participants to study in the department in the first place. Moreover, a correlation was found between having personal aspirations, fulfilling parents' expectations, and career goals with the participants recommending the major to others. Personal aspiration also correlated higher with employment status. This shows that there might be a relationship between initial aspiration when joining the major and future opportunities. Interest is a basic pillar of commitment, perseverance, and success. Expectancy value theory (Wigfield and Eccles, 2000), Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1999) as well as research that address intentions and attitudes (Rummel, 1976, Esparragoza et al., 2017) help to understand the interplay between value and interest. Both mutually enhance each other either positively or negatively. As the sense of interest increases the index of value increases as well and vice versa.

For the set of skills, the majority of participants see value in the various areas covered in the research. The range between no value and valuable is considerably wide. This tells us in the first hand that the participants are quite satisfied with the acquired skills. Moreover, most of the textual responses, drawn from the comments in the survey, reflect a positive attitude towards the outcome of the educational

experience. Consequently, a high percentage of the participants recommend the major, department, and university. Few participants expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of teaching, complained about a mismatch between the output as the quantity on the one hand and quality as venues for employment on the other.

Theme 3: critical review of value perception

Although the responses clearly show satisfaction with the skills acquired, it is believed that the participants did not critically examine the meaning and implication of some of the skills in their academic sense. Emotional attachment to the years of study and the university climate might have influenced how the participants recover their educational experience (Smith, 1922, Abdullah, Wasiuzzaman, Musa, 2014, Lewicka, 2010). Moreover, the positive perception of the subject area skills contradicts with the limited employment opportunities in the field of translation and interpreting.

On the question of ‘critical thinking and use of technology’ in the Iraqi educational system, this exists at a narrow level. “Banking education” (Freire, 1970) is still commonly practiced. Instructors have a traditional role as the conveyors of knowledge and the students as recipients with little structural change in the curriculum, instruction, and assessment methods. “Critical consciousness” or having the freedom to challenge, question, or discuss the educational content with rival views is not taught to the students (Abdulwahhab, 2022). This represents an important obstacle that stands in the way of reforming and developing the educational system (Kaghed and Dezaye, 2009, Kamkad, 2013, Issa and Jamil, 2010).

Finally, the study showed that participants whose first language was non-Arabic saw greater value in terms of the acquired social skills. This may be attributed to those participants' impressions about the value of learning more than one language including the English and Arabic to strengthen social bonds with speakers of other languages. To those participants, this could represent a utility or relational value. The other correlation found was between the university and listening and understanding skill which showed that Blue graduates saw a greater value. This could possibly be related to different factors such as teaching, the technical method used, and so on. A statistical association was also found between graduate degree and writing skills. Those who have an MA and Ph.D. degrees saw a little value in terms of the acquired writing skills. They might be more critical and consider value from a complex perspective as shown in some of the textual responses.

Concluding remarks

This conclusion is not simply intended to echo the findings of this research, but rather to derive lessons and provide recommendations about the perception of the value of Translation degree in Iraq. Consistent with the conceptual framework adopted, the researcher asserts that the PoV is the outcome of organic interaction among the environment, experience, and cognitive processes in the mind. There is a web of social, economic, and political contingencies that determine the reality of a degree value on the ground. These contingencies need to be carefully considered for a meaningful process of degree valuation.

Graduates' perception of a degree value could be influenced by an abstract as well as a concrete set of attitudes. The constraints of the environment and the limited chances of value's comparison with

other settings and educational contexts regarding the functionality of a college degree could influence the graduates' perception.

Within the scope of higher education in Iraq, there is a paramount need for systemic studies to look carefully at quality assurance, feasibility, and accreditation. There is also a need to create a balance between the outputs and the available employment venues in the public and the private sectors. Universities, colleges, and departments should have integrated plans and efficient management for admission, sustainability, and operationalization of programs of study. Opening venues for training and creating outlets to put the acquired knowledge into usage is extremely significant. Educational institutions need to be aware of the local as well as the global need for areas of specialty. We are not living alone in this world and higher education should adapt to the competition criteria among the institutions. They are supposed to equip the students with the skills and competencies in consistence with market needs according to short- and long-term reform plans. Without proper planning and management, the university could just be an incubator of bad eggs. Creating the right conditions on the ground for the graduates to succeed and thrive is a big mission that requires a structural reform by the government, higher education, department, and job market.

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