
Educating the Future Workforce: Soft Skills Development in Undergraduate Translation Programs in Iran

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Abstract

The present study set out to investigate the concept of soft skills in academic translator education in Iran. To this aim, a needs assessment was conducted with two groups of stakeholders: i.e. translation professionals and translation students. The professionals were asked to indicate the importance of a set of soft skills in the context of the translation profession. Next, we examined through the basis of a self-assessment survey for students to what degree these skills are felt to be acquired by the translation students. Our comparative study revealed that four soft skills pairs that professionals consider important for the translation profession seem to be lacking among students of translation in Iran: i.e. 'critical thinking and rational inquiry', 'problem-solving and creativity', 'motivation and satisfaction', and 'responsibility and autonomy'. This study produced results that corroborate the findings of a great deal of previous research into the shortage of soft skills highly demanded by the professional market among university students and graduates. The article concludes with suggested instructional methods to develop soft skills among undergraduate translation students. This provides valuable guidelines for translation educators in their decisions on the whats and hows of course design and the evaluation of current courses to identify the shortcomings and refine them to meet the needs of the stakeholders.

Keywords: Needs Assessment, Professionalization, Soft Skills Development, Survey Research, Translator Education

INTRODUCTION

Before developing any training course, it is essential to assess the needs, expectations, and opinions of the major stakeholders involved in and affected by the program. Needs assessment, as the process of collecting this

information, is defined as "the systematic investigation of needs for the design of a [...] course and the optimization of [...] teaching and learning"(Bocanegra-Valle, 2016, p. 560). For Gupta(2007, p. 20), "a needs assessment frames the problems or opportunities of interest and builds relationships among the people [...] who have a stake in the issue [and] pro-

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vides the foundation for planning and action to improve learning, training, and performance.”

The results of needs assessments guide educators' decisions on *whats* and *hows* of the course not only before but also after its design and implementation. It helps them to find out whether there is a gap between “what or how is” and “what or how should be”. Therefore, needs assessment also allows for the evaluation of current courses to identify the shortcomings and refine them to meet the needs of the stakeholders. As Bocanegra-Valle (2016, p. 561) states, needs assessment should not thus be considered “as a single-act procedure or one-off activity but as a cyclical process.”

Students' needs and expectations, as the primary stakeholders of training programs, should be considered as an indispensable factor in course design. Professionals are also important contributors whose opinions can help educators in their decisions towards the professionalization of courses and curricula.

The present study conducted a needs assessment to investigate the under-researched concept of soft skills development in undergraduate translation programs in Iran. To this end, two major stakeholders of translation education, i.e. students and professionals, were surveyed with regard to their needs and attitudes on the topic. The results of the two surveys were then compared to identify the gaps and differences between students' current and desired situation with regard to soft skills considered essential for a professional career. The findings of this study can provide helpful guidelines for translation educators involved in curriculum design.

Soft skills in education vs. profession

Ample research indicates the importance of soft or transferable skills for professional performance and its lack in higher education programs. A research conducted by the Stanford Research Institute International and the Carnegie Mellon Foundation found that “75% of long-term job success depends on people skills, while only 25% on technical knowledge”(Klaus, 2010, p. 15). Another study

showed that “hard skills contribute only 15% to one's success, whereas 85% of success is due to soft skills”(Watts, 2008).

Davidson (2016) mentions several surveys confirming this importance and lack. She mentions a recent LinkedIn survey of 291 hiring managers, 58% of whom believed that the lack of soft skills among job candidates has limited their companies' productivity. A Wall Street Journal survey of nearly 900 executives conducted in 2015 further indicated that 92% of the respondents believed that “soft skills are equally important or more important than technical skills [...] but 89% said that they have a very or somewhat difficult time finding people with the requisite attributes”(Davidson, 2016, p. 2).

A more comprehensive survey was conducted in 2018 lead by Cengage, an educational content, technology, and services company for the higher education. The participants consisted of 500 hiring managers, 150 human resource professionals and more than 1500 current and former college students(Bauer-Wolf, 2019). The study showed that 70% of the employers indicated that attention to details and effective communication were the most in-demand features, while 73% believed that finding qualified candidates with these traits was challenging. On the other hand, 77% of the students expressed concerns over whether they had the skills needed for a job.

The importance of soft skills in translator education

Various models of translation competence have discussed the concept of soft skills and provided valuable guidelines for translation educators. The European Masters in Translation, the so-called EMT Framework refers to soft skills as one of the five pillars of translation competence and the skills that “enhance graduate adaptability and employability”(2017, p. 10). This competency area falls under the personal and interpersonal skills set and includes skills such as planning, teamwork, self-evaluation, etc. Kelly (2014, p. 33) also discusses this concept in terms of *attitu-*

dinal or *psycho-physiological competence* (self-confidence, concentration, etc.), *interpersonal competence* (teamwork, negotiation, leadership skills, etc.) and *strategic competence* (organizational, problem-solving, monitoring skills, etc.).

The PACTE group discusses the same topic in the *psycho-physiological* component of their translation competence model. PACTE's competence includes cognitive components (perception, attention, emotion, etc.), attitudinal aspects (perseverance, critical spirit, confidence, etc.) and other abilities such as creativity, logical reasoning, etc. (PACTE, 2003, p. 93). Although soft skills are not included among the sub-competencies of several other models of translation competence (Schäffner, 2000; Neubert, 2000; Pym, 2003), their significance has always been discussed in the overall framework.

Before looking into Iranian undergraduate translation programs, it is helpful to first sketch the significance of soft skills in the general higher education system in Iran. The following section will elaborate on this topic.

The significance of soft skills in Iran's higher education system

Iran's 2025 *Vision Plan* (also called the *20-Year National Vision*) lists several core properties of the Iranian society in 2025 including "active, responsible, selfless, faithful, satisfied, endowed with [good] work ethic, discipline, and a cooperative and collaborative social mentality" (2005, p. 8). The roadmap to the country's scientific and technological development towards its 2025 *Vision Plan* is called *The Comprehensive Scientific Map* (2010). This dynamic guideline which includes the prospective objectives, policies, requirements, and strategies, was introduced and ratified by The Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution in 2010. Chapter Four of this map identifies 13 macro-strategies, which are further subdivided into micro-strategies, as the national measures towards scientific and technological development. These macro-strategies cover a wide range of topics such as policymaking, revision,

and modification of the current educational policies, with a focus on Islamic and national values. They also take into consideration the effect of education on society, culture, politics, and economy.

Macro-strategy No. 8 is stated as "the education and empowerment of human capital, with an emphasis on cultivating pious, entrepreneurial, self-confident, creative, innovative, and capable in producing science, technology and innovation based on Islamic values and social needs" (The Comprehensive Scientific Map of Iran, 2010, p. 42). In addition, several micro-strategies focus on skills such as 'creativity' (The Comprehensive Scientific Map of Iran, pp. 1, 6 and 40), 'negotiation' (p. 27), 'responsibility' (pp. 2, and 7), 'collaboration' (p. 2), 'self-esteem' (pp. 12, and 22), 'critical thinking and inquiry' (pp. 7, and 27) and 'motivation' (p. 28).

Above all, personal and social skills development is highly valued and emphasized in Iran. Consequently, academic institutions are expected to base their educational objectives and strategies on the national principles and guidelines stated in the *Vision Plan* and *The Comprehensive Scientific Map*.

Academic translation education in Iran

The education of translation at the academic level started in 1973 in Iran. Although translation programs are offered in various language pairs including English, Arabic, German and French, this study exclusively investigated undergraduate English translation (English-Farsi) programs. This highly popular major is offered by many universities in Iran at various levels. In 2018, English-Farsi translation programs at the undergraduate level were offered by a total number of 250 higher education institutions including 23 public universities, 35 non-profit universities, 192 branches of Payam-e-Noor University¹ and 84 branches of Islamic Azad University². In the same year, 8 public universities, 13 non-profit universities, 2 branches of Payam-e Noor University and 29 branches of Islamic Azad University (52 higher education institutions in total) offered Eng

1. Payam-e-Noor University, with more than 500 centers in the country, is based on distance and online learning.

2. Islamic Azad University is a semi-private organization with many colleges and branches around the country.

lish-Farsi translation programs at the graduate Level. The Ph.D. programs were also offered by 3 public universities.

The first official curriculum for the English-Farsi translation program at the undergraduate level was designed and ratified in 1990. This curriculum stayed put for almost 28 years with little modification. In 2018, as a significant step toward the professionalization of the undergraduate translation education in Iran, a new curriculum with much more emphasis on the practical and professional aspects of the field was ratified by the Ministry of Science, Research and Education. This curriculum was designed at AllamehTabataba'i University with the collaboration of 17 universities including the University of Tehran, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, the University of Isfahan and ShahidBahonar University in Kerman.

Based on the new curriculum, to obtain a bachelor's degree in English-Farsi translation, students must earn 136 credits by passing 68 courses. These fall into one of the following 4 course types (Farahzad, 2018, pp. 7-20):

1. *General Courses*: 11 courses with 22 credits in total, including courses like Islamic Revolution, Islamic Morality, Human in Islam, Farsi Literature and Physical Education.
2. *Basic Courses*: 11 courses with 22 credits in total, including courses like Basic Reading Skills, Basic Grammar, Paragraph, and Essay Writing and Study Skills.
3. *Specialized Courses*: 41 courses with 82 credits in total, including courses like Translation and Technology, Morphology and Terminology, Consecutive and Simultaneous Interpreting, Research Methodology and Translation Practicum.
4. *Optional Courses*: 5 courses with 10 credits in total, including courses like 2nd Foreign Language (French, Spanish, etc.), Children's Literature, Online Journalism and Introduction to Comparative Literature.

The new curriculum has been designed based on the objectives stated by the *Council of Human Sciences Evolution* (Farahzad, 2018, p. 5) including "updating, efficiency, localization, and Islamization of academic educational programs and also with an emphasis on strengthening the connection between academia and translation labor market." Complying with these objectives, the stated goals of the new curriculum ratified by the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology have been described by Farahzad (2018, pp. 5-6) at three levels:

1. *Developing linguistic skills both in English and Farsi,*
2. *Developing translation competence including*
 - a. *introduction to translation principles and techniques,*
 - b. *developing skills in translating from English into Farsi and the other way around in the written, spoken, auditory and multimedia domains,*
 - c. *applying translation tools and technologies to do translation in the market,*
3. *Making the field of English translation more specialized.*

Although the new curriculum puts much focus on market needs and developing skills that are essential for translation students' prospective careers, it seems that this attention has been limited to linguistic, translation and instrumental competencies. The soft skills including social and personal competencies required by the translation market in particular and the society in general, have not received due attention. Therefore, it is essential that translation educators take a further step toward embracing these highly valued skills, as demanded by the *Vision Plan* and *The Comprehensive Scientific Map* of the country.

METHODS

The present study aimed at addressing this shortcoming (see the previous section) by doing a survey-based needs assessment of the

two major stakeholders of translation education in Iran. To assess the real needs of translation students and professionals in Iran, the present study sought to address the following questions:

- RQ 1. How important are the soft skills for a professional translation career?
- RQ 2. How do translation students assess themselves in terms of soft skills?
- RQ 3. Is there any difference between the hierarchies of skills suggested by professional translators and mastered by translation students?

There are indeed countless soft skills which students need to acquire. However, for the purpose of the present study, the focus was on ten soft skills suggested as being highly required for a professional career. Overlooking previous research on the topic, this study addressed the following ten soft skills pairs essential in the translation workplace:

1. Critical thinking and rational inquiry
2. Problem-solving and creativity
3. Self-esteem and confidence
4. Teamwork and collaboration
5. Planning and organizing
6. Leadership and negotiation
7. Flexibility and adaptability
8. Motivation and satisfaction
9. Self-evaluation and self-correction
10. Responsibility and autonomy

The researchers admit that no clear-cut distinction can be made among these skills and proposing this categorization does not challenge their shared properties. The skills have also been viewed in terms of a progressive continuum, not a dichotomous categorization.

This study utilized a survey research design to conduct a needs assessment. Compared with other forms of needs assessment such as interviews and focus group discussions, surveys are more convenient instruments for working with a larger group of participants in a relatively shorter period of time. The surveys used in the

present study (see the English translations in the Appendix) opened with a brief introduction about the research followed by sections eliciting demographic information on age and level of education from students and age, work experience, and field of education from professional translators. For the purpose of this survey, a professional translator was defined as an individual who has been making his/her living as a translator for at least 5 years. The questionnaires were presented in Farsi and to ensure confidentiality and protecting participants' privacy, the surveys were filled in anonymously. The English translations of the questionnaires are included in the Appendix.

The targeted population comprised 84 master's and senior (last year) under graduate students of English Translation and 57 professional translators working at two state-run media organizations. Data drawn from the professionals were collected manually through paper questionnaires while the responses from the students were elicited both manually and through several virtual groups in Telegram Messenger. The paper questionnaires were filled in by the students at Allameh Tabataba'i University. The online surveys in Telegram Messenger were taken by a range of master's and senior students from various universities and institutions in Iran. The research was conducted between December 2018 and February 2019.

Both questionnaires employed 5-point Likert scale items aimed at gathering quantitative data. The survey for the professionals asked them to rate the ten essential soft skills pairs for a translation career based on the importance scale comprised of the following descriptors:

1. *Unimportant*
2. *Slightly important*
3. *Moderately important*
4. *Important*
5. *Very important*

Each skills pair was presented to the students as two indicators (mentioned in Table 1) which were scattered randomly throughout the

questionnaire. To reduce response bias, the items were presented in reverse wording. The participants were asked to assess themselves in terms of the skill indicators based on the five frequency scale including the following descriptors:

1. *Never*
2. *Seldom*
3. *Sometimes*
4. *Often*
5. *Always*

Table 1.
Soft skills and their indicators

	Skills	Indicators
1	Critical thinking & rational inquiry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Being able to develop sound arguments ● Using valid evidence to support one's claims
2	Problem-solving & creativity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Developing new and creative ideas to solve problems ● Using one's prior knowledge to solve new problems
3	Self-esteem & confidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Being proud of one's capabilities and achievements ● Being optimistic about life and one's future
4	Teamwork & communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Working effectively as part of a team ● Asking questions whenever one needs to
5	Planning & organizing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Writing down one's to-do list and deadlines ● Being good at keeping to deadlines
6	Leadership & negotiation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Being able to take the leadership role in a team ● Negotiate one's ideas with others
7	Flexibility & adaptability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Adapting to new contexts ● Getting along with new people
8	Motivation & satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Being motivated to achieve the academic goals one sets for himself ● Being satisfied with the academic decisions one has made in his/her life
9	Self-evaluation & self-correction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Identifying and solving one's learning gaps ● Reviewing one's progress toward goals and revising one's plans if required
10	Responsibility & autonomy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Being able to manage a large-scale translation project ● Being able to deal with one's feelings

The data collected from the questionnaires were inserted manually into a spreadsheet in order to calculate the means and standard deviations for each soft skills pair.

RESULTS

The student respondents' age ranged between 20 to 32 with 23.71 as the mean and 3.54 as the standard deviation. Out of 84 responses, 28 participants held master's degree and 56 were senior bachelor's students. The professional participants also aged between 27 and 62 with 38.16 as the mean and 9.03 as the standard deviation. Their work experience ranged between 5 and 31 years with the mean and standard deviation of 18.23 and 7.75 respectively.

Out of 57 participants, 22 (38.59%) were students or graduates of the field of translation and 35 (61.4%) were students or graduates of other fields including English Teaching, English Literature, Journalism, International Relations, etc. This ratio is significant since it indicates a relatively low employment rate of translation students or graduates in the two major state-run organizations taking part in the survey.

The data to answer the first research question regarding the degree of importance professional translators attached to each skills pair is presented in Table 2 and Figure 1. The skills are presented in order of importance where 1 means *Unimportant* and 5 stands for *Very Im-*

portant. As the following data demonstrate, the first three important skills pairs for professional translators included (i) ‘critical thinking

and rational inquiry’, (ii) ‘self-esteem and confidence’ and (iii) ‘motivation and satisfaction’.

Table 2.
Results of the professionals’ needs assessment

	Skills	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	Critical Thinking & Rational Inquiry	4.81	1.18
2	Self-Esteem & Confidence	4.77	0.83
3	Motivation & Satisfaction	4.74	0.96
4	Planning & Organizing	4.72	1.27
5	Problem-Solving & Creativity	4.69	1.02
6	Flexibility & Adaptability	4.69	0.92
7	Self-Evaluation & Self-Correction	4.62	0.98
8	Responsibility & Autonomy	4.56	0.84
9	Teamwork & Communication	4.41	1.11
10	Leadership & Negotiation	4.23	0.84

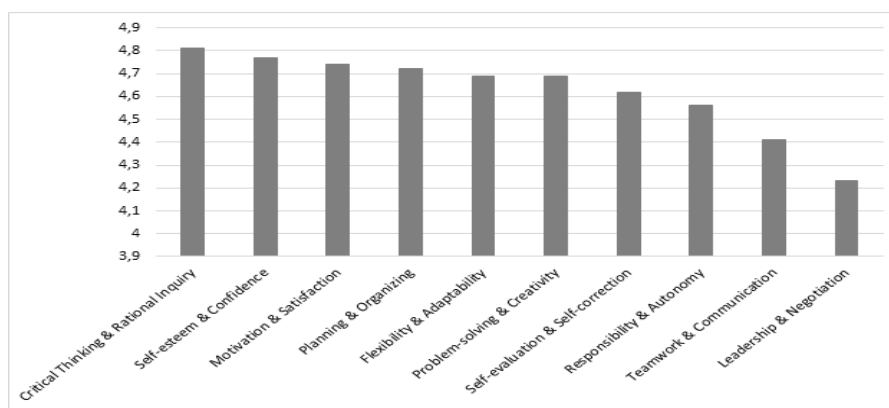


Figure 1. Results of the professionals’ needs assessment

The results of the needs assessment survey taken by the students are reported in Table 3 and Figure 2. The skills are present in order of frequency where 1 stands for *Never* and 5 for *Always*. As the following data reveal, the first

three skills pairs that students find themselves good at include (i) ‘planning and organizing’, (ii) ‘flexibility and adaptability’ and (iii) ‘self-evaluation and self-correction’.

Table 3.
Results of the students’ needs assessment

	Skills	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	Planning & Organizing	4.42	0.83
2	Flexibility & Adaptability	4.37	1.12
3	Self-Evaluation & Self-Correction	4.32	0.91
4	Self-Esteem & Confidence	4.17	0.97
5	Motivation & Satisfaction	4.11	1.03
6	Teamwork & Communication	3.99	0.99
7	Leadership & Negotiation	3.98	1.45
8	Responsibility & Autonomy	3.93	1.68
9	Problem-Solving & Creativity	3.87	1.13
10	Critical Thinking & Rational Inquiry	3.79	0.94

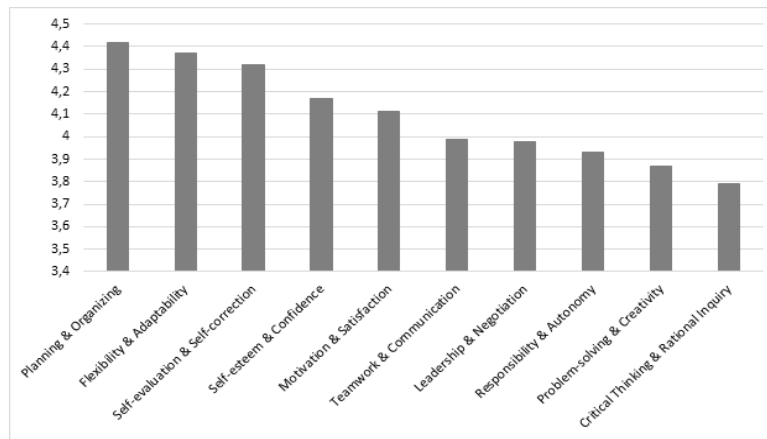


Figure 2. Results of the students' needs assessment

In order to be able to infer the answer to the third research question from the above-mentioned information, a comparison should

be made between the two types of results, as presented in Table 4 and Figure 3.

Table 4.
Comparison between the students' and the professionals' needs assessment results

	Skills	Students	Professionals
1	Critical Thinking & Rational Inquiry	3.79	4.81
2	Problem-Solving & Creativity	3.87	4.69
3	Self-Esteem & Confidence	4.17	4.77
4	Teamwork & Communication	3.99	4.41
5	Planning & Organizing	4.42	4.72
6	Leadership & Negotiation	3.98	4.23
7	Flexibility & Adaptability	4.37	4.69
8	Motivation & Satisfaction	4.11	4.74
9	Self-Evaluation & Self-Correction	4.32	4.62
10	Responsibility & Autonomy	3.93	4.56

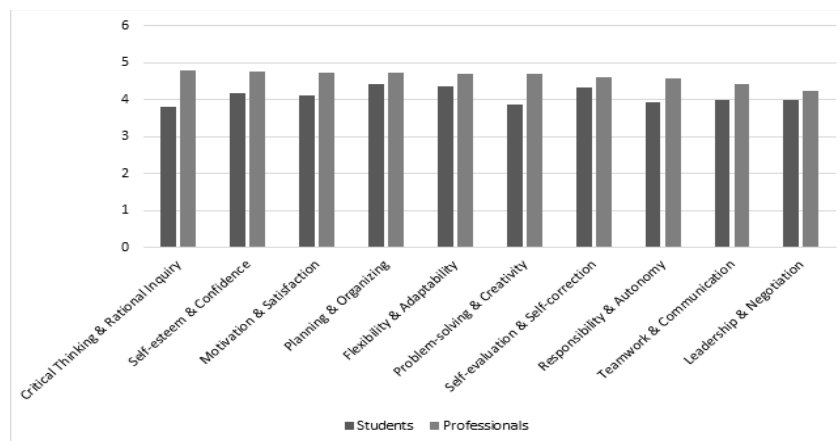


Figure 3. Comparison of Students' and Professionals' Needs Assessment Results

In order to find the relative difference between the level of importance translation professionals assigned to a skill and the extent the students find themselves good at that skill, the means were subtracted. The more the differ-

ence between the means, the less the students' skills are congruent with the requirements of the professional labor market. The results are shown in Table 5 in order of difference and a clearer comparison is presented in Figure 4.

Table 5.
Difference between the students' and the professionals' perceptions

	Skills	Difference
1	Critical Thinking & Rational Inquiry	1.02
2	Problem-Solving & Creativity	0.82
3	Motivation & Satisfaction	0.63
4	Responsibility & Autonomy	0.63
5	Self-Esteem & Confidence	0.6
6	Teamwork & Communication	0.42
7	Flexibility & Adaptability	0.32
8	Planning & Organizing	0.3
9	Self-Evaluation & Self-Correction	0.3
10	Leadership & Negotiation	0.25

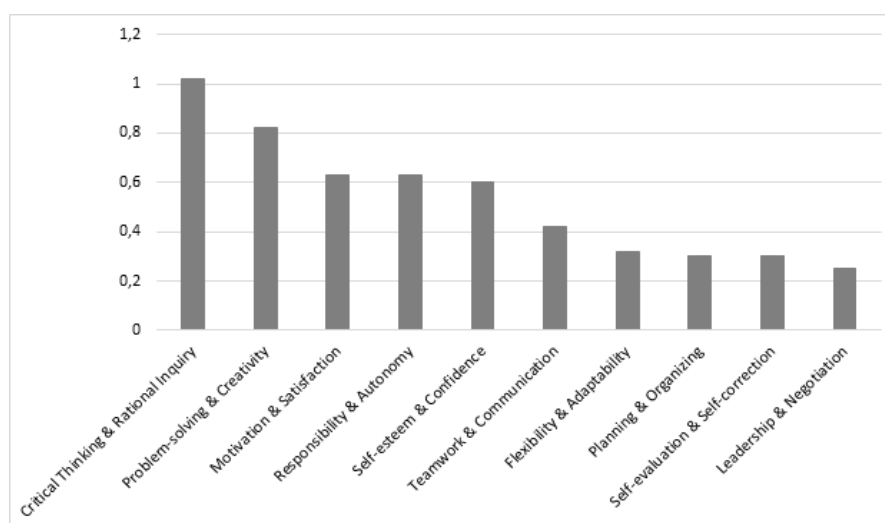


Figure 4. *Difference between Students' and Professionals' Perceptions*

DISCUSSION

This section intends to investigate the results of the needs assessment presented earlier and provide answers to the three research questions. The questions addressed the level of importance professional translators attached to each skills pair, the extent to which students find themselves good at these skills, and the difference between the two hierarchies provided. Due to space limitations, for the first two research questions, the discussions will be restricted to the top three skills pairs.

As presented in Table 2 and Figure 1, the most important skills for the surveyed professional translators comprised (i) 'critical thinking and (ii) rational inquiry'. These skills are processes of reflective and objective thinking that involve evaluation and application of analytical tools to generate an idea. Critical thinking and rational inquiry help individuals to follow a logical and consistent path to develop sound arguments and conclusions. Therefore, as a fundamental requisite of the workplace, higher education translation programs should

provide students with training on basic thinking processes and the use of logic and reason in their arguments.

The second soft skills pair professional translators found essential was ‘self-esteem and confidence’. To be able to deal with the workplace challenges and thriving to improve constantly, translation students should develop a high self-esteem and confidence. By engaging and encouraging students, universities can help them recognize their strengths and cultivate a positive mindset about themselves. Knowing one’s real values and potentialities is a key factor not only in landing a job, but also in flourishing and enjoying a lucrative career.

‘Motivation and satisfaction’, as the third important skills pair for professional translators, lead to a better and higher level of performance. The extent to which a translator is motivated and satisfied with his/her job directly influences his/her productivity and efficiency in the workplace. Universities can play a key role in making students motivated and interested in their field of study and their prospective career as a translator. This will not only enhance students’ learning abilities, but it will also have a long-lasting effect on their lives in general.

The top skills pair students found themselves good at, as presented in Table 3 and Figure 2, is ‘planning and organizing’. The results of the survey indicated that the majority of translation students are competent in ordering their tasks, estimating time and effort needed to allocate, and establishing priorities. They generally follow a neatly arranged schedule to maintain their daily planner more easily and less stressfully. Getting a job done neatly and on time brings a sense of accomplishment and achievement that makes learning more engaging for students.

The second skills pair translation students described themselves as being good at was ‘flexibility and adaptability’. These qualities mainly entail openness to new contexts and attitudes. The results indicate that the students are highly flexible and can easily make modifications to suit varying and uncertain situa-

tions. This property enhances learning outcomes and academic performance of the students.

‘Self-evaluation and self-correction’ was the third skills pair rated highly by the students. The results suggest that the students can effectively track their learning progress and close its gaps. Self-evaluation and correction foster lifelong learning skills in students and bring a sense of ownership of their learning process and product. These skills make students more engaged in learning and assessment activities and provide valuable guidelines for translation instructors.

Addressing the third research question, a comparison was made between the hierarchies of skills suggested by professional translators and possessed by students. As presented in Table 4 and Figure 3, the skills pair showing the biggest gap is ‘critical thinking and rational inquiry’. This finding confirms the results of two studies conducted by the Wall Street Journal in 2016 (entitled “Employers Find Soft Skills like Critical Thinking in Short Supply”) and 2017 (entitled “Many Colleges Fail to Improve Critical Thinking Skills”).

This gap is partly caused by the fact that the problems presented in translation classes do not adequately require students to use evidence and develop cohesive arguments. Many classes are still predominantly in the traditional form of lectures or controlled exercises where students do not enjoy the autonomy to make their own interpretations and reasoning. As the first essential skills for a professional career, translation programs especially at the longer undergraduate level should try more to cultivate critical thinking and rational inquiry in students.

The second skills pair highly lacking in translation students is ‘problem-solving and creativity’. These skills are the result of students’ attempt to generate and evaluate novel ideas to solve demanding problems. Excessive focus in transmissionist teaching approaches on reproduction rather than novel production has considerably reduced their problem-solving ability. Creativity and problem-solving

abilities cannot be appropriately determined in such translation classes where students are not faced with challenging questions requiring their innovative reflections.

‘Motivation and satisfaction’ is the third skills pair where a big gap was identified between the results of the surveys filled in by professional translators and students. To develop these skills, it is very important that students find the course materials interesting, meaningful and relevant to their concerns. If they don’t recognize the way a coursework can be applied to their personal interests and professional lives, the result would be their unwillingness toward learning. In order to encourage more effort in translation students and enhance their academic performance, educators should provide them with regular reinforcements and help them develop not only extrinsic but also intrinsic motivation and satisfaction.

Similarly, ‘responsibility and autonomy’ is identified as an important skills pair that seems to be under-developed among translation students. In traditional learning environments where students are expected to comply with a set of rules developed by an authoritative and controlling teacher, they are not given the opportunity to acquire these skills. Students are barely given a voice in various levels of course development including setting the syllabus and assessment methods. Translation teachers should maintain a balance between order and freedom in the classroom where students are provided with choices and enjoy their right to make decisions.

CONCLUSION

The quantitative comparisons revealed that translation educators should extend their efforts beyond teaching technical skills to developing soft skills sets such as ‘critical thinking & rational inquiry’, ‘problem-solving & creativity’, ‘motivation & satisfaction’ and ‘responsibility & autonomy’ in students.

The very first step might be taken by giving translation students’ the voice they often lack. For Sands et al.(2007, p. 324)“perhaps the most critical voice that could inform the de-

bate on how to increase student achievement, is sorely lacking: that of students themselves.” This not only helps translation educators to be informed of learners’ real needs and concerns, but also gives students the opportunity to express themselves. Involving students and valuing their insights in all aspects of the training process, including curriculum design, course activities and assessment, both has positive outcomes for their academic success and develops more confident, motivated and autonomous learners.

Numerous instructional methods contribute to developing the lacking soft skills in students. Among others, problem-based instruction, as a student-centered approach, “encourages learners to apply critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and content knowledge to real-world problems and issues” (Levin, 2001, p. 1). In this approach, as Tan et al. discuss, high-level thinking skills are expected to be attained “by having authentic problems rather than content as the focal point, and with students assuming the role of active problem solvers and teachers as facilitators or guides”(2009, pp. 19-20). Problem-based instruction provides students with opportunities to learn through problem-solving processes and develop basic skills such as teamwork and cooperation, chairing and presentation skills, integration, reflection and feedback, critical thinking and evaluation, managing and using information resources, active and lifelong learning, constructive self- and peer-assessment, and reasoning and decision-making ability (Wood, 2003; Tan, 2009; Gorghiu, 2015). This contributes to their future professional performance outside the classroom as confident and autonomous individuals on the one hand, and motivated and responsible members of potential teams on the other(Martin, 2008; Rotgans & Schmidt, 2011; Wijnen, 2018).

Inquiry-based instruction is another teaching method contributing to students’ soft skills. Once synonymous with ‘hands-on exploring’, as Zimmerman & Weible discuss, it is nowadays referred to as a ‘minds-on’ in-

structional method, where “inquiry is an open-ended, discovery-based way of allowing learners to ask and answer questions”(2017, p. 369). Ernst et al. (2017, p. 570) describe this method as “a form of active learning in which students are given a carefully scaffolded sequence of [...] tasks and are asked to solve and make sense of them, working individually or in groups.” For them, inquiry-based instruction has two core principles: deep engagement in the subject in hand and opportunities to collaborate. By the first principle, they mean students should actively and intentionally work on challenging problems and do a significant portion of the development of subject-related ideas. The second pillar can also come in different forms such as “structured group work [...] where students learn how to work collaboratively as a team to think [...] and effectively communicate” (p. 571).

Inquiry-based Instruction, essentially based on the learning cycle model, allows students to take responsibility for the learning process and to evaluate their own progress. Therefore, applying student-centered approaches to learning makes them more creative and independent learners. In the same way, inquiry-based instruction is well-suited to collaborative learning environments and team projects. Active engagement of students in guided inquiry enhances not only their problem-solving and critical thinking skills (Duran & Dökme, 2016; Longo, 2012) but also their intrinsic motivation (Margolin, 2014; Marx, 2004; Bayram, 2013) and confidence (Madden, 2011; Beck & Blumer, 2012; Gormally, 2009).

Project-based instruction, focusing on students’ taking part in real life and authentic activities, is another teaching approach that fosters the mentioned soft skills in students. For Krauss and Boss (2013, pp. 5-6), in this teaching approach, “students gain important knowledge, skills, and dispositions by investigating open-ended questions to make meaning that they transmit in purposeful ways [...] which arouse their curiosity, activate and drive them to enquire”.

Project-based instruction helps students build not only content knowledge, but also professional and practical skills essential for their future career. Moreover, being relevant and embedded in the context makes the task more interesting and memorable for students. As a result, students are connected to the real world through the learning material which is in accordance to their personal interests and concerns. Ultimately, since in project-based instruction, the outcome of students’ activities is practically applied and thus more visible, it can be used as an effective tool to motivate students and make them more confident and autonomous learners (Iwamoto, Hargis, & Vuong, 2016; Weber, 2016; Loi, 2017).

Collaborative learning as another major instructional method which looks at learning as a social activity taking place in the interactive pursuit of educational goals. For Kiraly (2000, p. 33), “if student-student interdependence is structured carefully and appropriately, students will [...] use higher level reasoning strategies more frequently, have higher levels of achievement motivation, be more intrinsically motivated [...] have higher self-esteem and be more skilled interpersonally.” Collaboration and interaction are vital elements of a healthy community and result in high group and individual achievement. Moreover, group work as a learning method based on discussions, brainstorming and active inquiry, contributes to building high self-esteem and critical thinking skills in students (Loes & Pascarella, 2017; Modaber & Bayan Far, 2017).

The above-mentioned instructional methods are based on the social constructivist approach to education which looks at learning as primarily the result of meaning co-construction. It presupposes that any interpretation is basically subjective, thus students can always express their varying interpretations of the problem posed by the teacher. It also stresses that the problems should not be below or much higher than students’ current knowledge, taking into consideration their Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978). The focus on this approach is mainly on the learn-

ing process rather than its product, where roles are assigned to students based on their interests and capabilities.

The findings of this study expanded the work of previous researchers on the shortage of soft skills essential for professionals and possessed by students. This research, among others, provided strong evidence for the rising

need for a paradigm shift in translator education and moving to learner-centered approaches where the overlooked soft skills are taken into consideration. However, more research on this topic needs to be undertaken to test the applicability and effectiveness of these instructional methods on teaching soft skills in translator education.

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APPENDIX

1. Students' questionnaire

Dear student,

This anonymous survey is part of a Ph.D. research on "Undergraduate Translator Training in Iran". Your help and patience in filling in this questionnaire are truly appreciated in advance.

Age:
.....

Level of education:

To what extent do the following statements describe you?

	<i>Never</i>	<i>Seldom</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Always</i>
I can develop sound arguments	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I develop new and creative idea to solve problems	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I'm proud of my capabilities and achievements	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can't work effectively as part of a team	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I write down my to-do list and deadlines	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can take the leadership role in a team	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can't easily adapt to new contexts	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am highly motivated to achieve the academic goals I have set for myself	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can identify and solve my learning gaps	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe I can manage a large-scale translation project	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I use valid evidence to support my claims	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can use my prior knowledge to solve new problems	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am not optimist about life and my future	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I ask questions whenever I need to	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am good at keeping to deadlines	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can't easily negotiate my ideas with others	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can positively get along with new people	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am satisfied with the major academic decisions I have made in my life	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I review my progress toward goals and revise my plans if required	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can't easily deal with my feelings	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

2. Professional Translators' Questionnaire

Dear colleague,

This anonymous survey is part of a Ph.D. research on "Undergraduate Translator Training in Iran".

Your help and patience in filling in this questionnaire are truly appreciated in advance.

Age: Level of education: Work Experience:

.....

In your opinion, how important is each of the following skills for a professional translator?

		<i>Not Important</i>	<i>Important</i>	<i>Moderately Important</i>	<i>Slightly Important</i>	<i>Very Important</i>
1	Flexibility & Adaptability	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2	Leadership & Negotiation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3	Responsibility & Autonomy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4	Teamwork & Communication	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5	Critical Thinking & Rational Inquiry	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6	Self-Evaluation & Self-Correction	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7	Motivation & Satisfaction	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8	Problem-Solving & Creativity	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9	Self-Esteem & Confidence	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10	Planning & Organizing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>