

Translation Profession Status in Vietnam

Document and Empirical Analyses

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Received: 02/03/2020
Accepted: 01/06/2020

Abstract

Although Olvera-Lobo et al. (2005) found that the volume of documents needed to be translated for cross-national purposes have multiplied manifold globally, including Vietnam, there is no research on the extent of professionalization of the translator in this market until now. This study thus aims at giving a comprehensive overview on the status of the translation profession in Vietnam by analyzing documentary and empirical data and to indicate the degree of professionalization of this profession in Vietnam. While the findings showed academic attempts to enhance the professionalization of this profession in Vietnam, legal instruments' analysis indicated the lack of official development evidence, especially in the full-time freelancing type. Via empirical survey and interview data, gaps between university translation degree and the real industry were also pointed out. Implications are then given out for pedagogical purpose.

Key Words

Translation profession, translator, professionalization, translator training, translation association.



1. Introduction

The debate over the status of translation profession has long attracted the academic community in line with the increasing need for the translation from the real market for cross-national purposes (Olvera-Lobo et al., 2005). Since then, a plenty of both empirical studies and theoretical studies on this topic are

conducted ranging from professionalization in translation (Mu and Pan, 2005; Godbout and Tran, 2012; Fang, 2012; Xue, 2012; Jones and Askew, 2014; Liu, 2006; Volga, 2018; Sela-Sheffy, 2006; Dam & Zethsen, 2010; Daniel, 2007; Han, 2007; Sergey, 2015), status of professional translators and translation profession (Hoang, 2020; Choi & Lim, 2002; Dam & Zethsen, 2008, 2009, 2011, 2016; Ignacio, 2009; Katan, 2009a, 2009b, 2010; Lynne, 2004; Ruokonen, 2016; Pym et al., 2012; Kafi et al., 2017; Nicolai, 2014) to the changing nature of the translation profession (Séguinot 2007; Yves, 2004). Besides, several other research outcomes such as the history of the translation profession (Nicolai, 2014), women dominance in the profession (Daniel, 2007), the major contributions of such studies are the confusing status of the translation profession from multiple perspectives of translation professionals (Volga, 2018; Dam & Zethsen, 2009, 2011), translation teachers and students (Katan, 2009b; Ruokonen, 2016; Volga, 2018); discussions on the role of certification and academic qualification (Chan 2013; Yves, 2004), shortcomings of professional codes of ethics (McDo-nough Dolmaya, 2011; Kafi et al., 2017), lack of public recognition (Dam & Zethsen, 2010; Choi & Lim, 2002), gaps between what is taught in the academic programs and the industry (Lynne, 2004; Pym et al. 2012; Kafi et al. 2017; Volga, 2018), and translation as a part-time occupation (Pym et al., 2012:89; Volga, 2018). The findings from the studies generally showed that translation is often considered as a part-time job/semi-profession, or even just as an activity in which not all traits of an occupation shall be completely developed (Dam & Zethsen, 2016:175). Especially, Volga (2018) indicates in a country-specific study for Turkey the academic and government attempts to enhance the degree of professionalization for translation profession, the high proportion of female and the confusing role of freelancing type.

Looking more specifically into the Vietnam context, there are only a few studies related, to some extent, to the state of the translation profession with a reference back to the academic curricula or training program only. Some examples are studies of Diep (2018); Pham & Tran (2013); Hoang (2017); Hoang (2020); Doan (2010); Pham & Ton (2009), mostly studies concentrating on the gaps between the translator training and the industry requirements rather than professionalization in the real industry environment. It thus can be said that despite academic attempts to bridge the gaps in the current years to some extent, there seems to be a huge space in defining and locating the translation profession in reality in Vietnam.

The present paper thus aims at giving a comprehensive overview on the status of the translation profession in Vietnam by analyzing documentary and empirical data and to indicate the degree of professionalization of this profession in Vietnam. Additionally, hopefully, this paper will also be a supporting factor to the professionalization of the translation profession from the industry perspectives. Finally, it is expected that this study will also contribute the knowledge about the translation profession globally together with previous researches, supporting the profession from the academic viewpoint.

2. Previous researches

The present study focuses on two main themes to define the state of the translation profession in Vietnam: the degree of professionalization and the indicators of the translation profession.

2.1. The degree of professionalization in translation around the world and in Vietnam

The debate over translation as a profession, or as job, activity, or even skill, and characteristics of an official profession are mostly the focus of many previous studies (Mu and Pan, 2005; Godbout and Tran, 2012; Fang, 2012; Xue, 2012; Jones and Askew, 2014; Liu, 2006; Katan, 2009b). The occupation has had quite opposite position to the historically well-established professions such as law and medicine. While there is still no consensus on what makes something become a profession until now, Millerson (1964 cited in Abercrombie/Hill/Turner, 2006:309) successfully framed a list of some characteristics as follows from previous literature:

- (1) the use of skills based on theoretical knowledge;
- (2) education and training in these skills;
- (3) the competence of professionals measured by examinations;
- (4) a code of conduct to ensure professional integrity;
- (5) performance of a service that is for the public good; and
- (6) a professional association that organizes members.

In translation studies, an increasing number of studies that refers to these characteristics has also been conducted to describe the state of the translation profession in many culturally different contexts. “Specialized skills” based on theoretical/advanced knowledge were mentioned from previous studies, commonly linked to “education or training” required to exercise a profession. Specifically, Godbout and Tran (2012) discussed comprehensively from the sociological perspectives the profession practicing in Canada with the focus on solutions to practice this profession systematically. Moreover, Dam & Zethsen (2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2016) employed four measuring criteria to determine and compare the status of Danish translators in a series of studies where status refers to perceptions of being well-known and value and one of them is education/expertise. Furthermore, Dam & Zethsen (2011:986) found that jobs that require a high degree of education and significant expertise and specialized knowledge are at the top of the scale. Pym et al. (2016:33) also include academic and professional qualifications as signals of status where they “indicated the trustworthiness of a translator to some extent”. Similarly, in a study where around 1,000 professional translators and interpreters, lecturers, and students worldwide participated, Katan (2009a:123; 2009b:192) found almost all of the respondents described translating and interpreting as a profession, particularly mentioning skills/competences/expertise, knowledge and education. Currently, in a new survey and announcement of requirements for translation services on ISO17100:2015, it is reported that translation is a profession officially. However, it is noted that the applicable scale might only be in European nations and other developed ones currently. Furthermore, OPTIMALE’s survey of employers (Toudic, 2012:6) also showed that from employers’ perspectives, professional experience is considered slightly more important than an academic degree (88% of the employers see experience as important or essential).

From several previous studies, another characteristic which helps distinguish occupation from profession is “the competence of professionals measured by examinations”. This competence usually linked to legal procedures to regulate the entry to the profession, legal instruments related to translation and translator certification, and a fully code of conduct to ensure professional integrity. Particularly, Weiss-Gal/Welbourne (2008:283) stated that it should be “the existence of laws and licensing procedures” as an indicator of public recognition for a profession. Katan (2009a:113) also contended that the translation profession “at the time of this study is almost totally unregulated [in Italy]” due to lack of regulations relating to the entry to the profession, a full

professional conduct and quality control approaches. In another study in 2009 Katan (2009b:193), went further when found that the respondents of his study did not consider translation as a profession, but rather a job with additional skills from foreign language proficiency, mentioning the lack of a certification system and the public misunderstanding of this profession.

The next characteristic of a profession is the existence of a professional related organization that regulate the members and influence the market. Several researchers (Hoang, 2020; Pym et al, 2012:33; Uysal et al, 2015:260; Ruokonen 2016:204) critically discussed that translators associations are reported evidently to play an indispensable role in enhancing the profession status. Pym et al. (2012:33) particularly mentioned the professional association membership as an indicator of professional status, and “a professional association’s authority derives from collective factors rather than individual members’ expertise”. The key factors in the evaluation of professional associations are their admission criteria, history of establishment/their prestige, membership scale and number of members, parentship/affiliates, specialization description, and even in some cases the number and quality of services to members and public impacts (Pym et al. 2012:33).

On a critical previous research of Volga in 2018, education, regulatory documents and professional organizations are hypothesized as characteristics of professionalization of translation in Turkey. Looking closely to the Vietnam’s context, in 2020, Hoang discussed in a review article that the lack of a professional translation association in Vietnam had led to several professional issues: from the linguistic to the credential certification problems. However, there was no empirical data investigated in this article. Finally, Since most relevant studies are only around the gaps between the translation training program and the real market only (Diep, 2018; Pham & Tran, 2013; Hoang, 2017; Doan, 2010; Pham & Ton, 2009), the present study thus decided to employ these three aspects as well, considering the similarities between the profession status, government’s, academic’s and public community’s misunderstanding to the profession between the two nations.

2.2. Indicators of the translation profession solidity around the world and in Vietnam

Similar to the state when Volga (2018) conducted his study, no consensus is reached on what makes a profession clear and solid, but at least, from previous literature, there were indicators which can be used to frame one. Dam

& Koskinen (2016:3) actually connected the translation profession solidity to the profile of translators and how the profession develops. They also mention the relationship between untrained and trained professionals (2016:4). Similarly, they also refer to several modes of working such as part-time, full-time and freelance as signs of a profession that “is porous and lacks a solid core”. As for the gender aspect, Pym et al. (2012:85) in a systematic review found that the translation market is globally characterized by the predominance of women. An explanation for this is that the profession allows part-time and freelance working modes, which is often considered to be appropriate to women (Pym et al. 2012:86). Additionally, Olohan (2007) also found that after graduation, translators in Canada, the United Kingdom, and Germany mostly have to work freelance. Particularly, the training programs in these nations, at the beginning of their training, make students aware that they may be employed as freelancers in the translation industry, and that freelancing is “a mode of working” with several advantages. Fraser & Gold (2001) similarly also found that in the United Kingdom, the respondents chose freelancing for change of circumstances (23%), real aspiration to be a freelancer (22%), and need for a change from a non-translation job (17%). Further interviews in this study showed that “no in-house jobs were available” for translation-major graduates aged between 25 and 34, which possible indicate that freelancing is a way of entering the market for new graduates in the U.K. A study by Byrne (2003) also support Fraser & Gold’s (2001) results on the scarcity of in-house positions, showing that only eight of 37 graduates in 1999 and six of 38 graduates in 2000 from a BA program in Ireland found employment as a translator.

However, when it comes to the global scale, Lagoudaki (2006:8) found that of 874 translation professionals, 48% of the respondents mentioned that they were freelance translators, just under a half of the participants. Setton & Guo Liangliang’s (2009:221) survey with 62 translators and interpreters in Shanghai and Taipei also showed that just nearly half of the respondents were freelancer translators. Pym et al. (2012:89) concluded the general proportion of freelancers of around 78.4 percent averagely, ranging “from 50 to 89 percent, depending on the country”.

Although Dam & Koskinen (2016) consider to define the solidity of translation profession is practitioners’ perspective on the transitory or life-long status of this occupation, the author sees that life-long or transitory is not enough to show the solidity. Instead, the author considers the priority of translation profession from the respondents is a more solid and specific criterion. Dam &

Zethsen (2010:196–197) in a critical study directly defined translation [in Denmark] only as a semi-profession or a temporary job.

As for Vietnam's context, in a current research, Le (2018) investigates many relevant issues described above. Specifically, although according to Ho (2016a), translation is put into most of the language training programs in general, translation is considered just as “important/value skills”, the findings of Le's (2018) study suggest that the time spent for translation courses (subjects) is very limited. Furthermore, many teachers spent most of the time on theoretical training and offer few practical activities since most of the teachers have not received intensive training course in translation studies or they are even not professional translators. Additionally, “training contents often revolves around the familiar/old issues, slow innovation and not keep up with demand in the market” (Le, 2018). As reviewed and observed in syllabuses of universities in 2 years, the contents inside the curricula and subjects to be taught is old, out-of-fashion and so far away from the real market materials. Ngoc et al. (2016) also found that good books for translation only compiled by lecturers for private (internal) use purpose, otherwise, most of the textbooks are not revise by time (updated) or wrote in general only. These authors also found that teaching methods are out-of-date, where students are required to seat for a hard-copy text with no dictionary or any technical assistance. As for the test content, Ngoc et al. (2016) also found that the test content centers around grammar, structuring and difficult words only. Hoang (2017), Pham and Tran (2013), Doan (2010), Pham & Ton (2009) also found a significant mismatch between the curricula, its contents/modules and the real market needs of translation-major graduates.

In conclusion, translation as an occupation globally has developed quite well. However, in Vietnamese context, there was no directly relevant study. The aim of the present study thus is to investigate translation profession in the Vietnam context with regard to professionalization and solidity.

3. Methods and data

This study will directly employ Volga's (2018) methods so that later in the discussion, it is possible to compare the findings with previous study, and also to make a consistence to any future similar study from another nation. Both qualitative and quantitative methods thus were used to address the two major

themes in this study: the degree of professionalization and indicators of a professionalized occupation.

Table 1 provides an overview of the methods and data used to describe each aspect.

Aspect	Source of data	Method and specific research question
1) Professionalization		
Education/expertise/training	Information collected from websites of university-based training programs Survey of translation graduates	Qualitative: Comparing and summarizing the data from websites of university-based training programs to establish an overview of translator training Quantitative: - How do graduates see the role of education? - How did the training prepare them for work?
Legal instruments/certification/standards	Information collected from regulations, standards and reports related to profes	Qualitative: Summarizing the data from the relevant sources to provide an overview of legal instruments and standards that indicate professionalization
Professional associations	Information collected from websites of associations, and Translation Platform	Qualitative: Comparing and summarizing the data from websites of associations to provide an overview of translators'

	proceedings	associations especially with regard to longevity, number of members, and admission criteria
2) Indicators of a professionalized occupation		
Men vs. Women proportion	Survey	Quantitative: What is the proportion of men and women among graduates?
Graduates working as translators	Survey	Quantitative: - How many graduates work as translators? - How many graduates indicate translation as their first role?
Freelance vs. in-house	Survey, interviews	Quantitative: How many graduates work as freelancers?

Table 1. Methods and data used to describe the degree of professionalization and the solidity of the profession
Source: Volga (2018)

The aspects of professionalization in this study mainly showed from the analysis of documents, including the university-based translator-training program overviews, professional association or forum, the government regulation or standard relating to the translation profession if any.

Then how far the indicators of the profession developed also were pointed out from data of surveys of translation graduates, teachers and further interviews with some of them. The data were collected between 2015 and 2016 as part of a larger project that explores whether translator training in Vietnam responds to the expectations of the translation market.

The survey data of this study were collected from the graduates of six (6) undergraduate translator-training programs in Vietnam. Compared to Volga's

(2018) original number, I raised the population since the number of translator - training programs has been increasing currently in reality. I categorized the graduates to two types- those who graduated from public universities (University of Languages and International Studies, Hanoi National University; Foreign Trade University; Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam; Hanoi University) and those who came from private (Thang Long University) and international (RMIT) universities. While the public universities have the advantage of a well-established period of time and government support in translation training program, private and international universities have that of a modern, practical (for private university) and internationalized (international university) environment.

The data-collecting instrument was an online questionnaire including 21 questions. The language of the survey was English. The 21 questions respectively ask for demographic data, (sex, age, and educational background), roles of graduates, professional data (years of experience, specialization areas), continuing professional development course status, perspectives on the translation degree as a career prospect and finally, their perceptions of how well their academic training prepared them for professional work.

Following completion of the survey, interviews were conducted with twenty-four graduates as representatives of in-house translators, freelancers and language teachers. In the survey forms, 120 out of the 250 respondents agreed to be interviewed and provided their contact information. These respondents were categorized into three groups according to their main role: in-house translators, freelance translators, and language teachers. Language teachers were also interviewed, as they constitute about 25% of the respondents, which is a figure worthy of note, given that students were originally trained as translators and interpreters in the university-based programs included in this study. I further categorized the respondents according to the university they graduated from. Maximum variation sampling, which is a type of purposive sampling, was used to ensure that each profession (main activity) and university was represented in interviews.

The present study reports on the particular survey results related to the professional profile of translation graduates, and adds data from interviews, when required. Other results of the study fall beyond the scope of this paper, and are presented elsewhere (Hoang, 2017).

4. Findings

4.1. Education

As summarized in Section 2.1., specialized skills and expertise based on education constitute one of the typical and traditional traits of a profession. University-based translator training started in Vietnam in the first half of the 1980s with the launch of four-year undergraduate programs. In the last decade, particularly with the establishment of some private and international universities, the number of translation and interpreting programs has grown thanks partially to that. Undergraduate programs are still considered the main workforce provider to the market, except for rarely times of teaching short foundation course/advance course for translation and interpretation.

When students enter an undergraduate translation and interpreting program, they graduate as a translator and an interpreter. Although some universities offer a specialized translation/interpreting program in the final year to students that fulfilled certain criteria, they give the diploma of translator and interpreter to all their graduates, regardless of the difference between the two. In most of these universities, the program is named Translation and Interpretation jointly.

University-based programs not only train professionals for the knowledge base related to translation studies but also did provide academic exchange. Although it is not so common, but at least, there is now specialized channels in Vietnam used to disseminate and exchange knowledge of translation at the national and international (rare times) level, including academic journals, textbooks and conferences that bring together academics and professionals. However, it should be noted that while the translation curricula mostly deal with traditional issues of translation studies such as specialized translation, translation structural/grammar assessment, the state-of-the-art technologies and other non-translation issues such as market, life skills for success have not been developed yet.

4.2. Legal instruments and standards

Any regulations regarding entry to the market, earning credibility on the market, and setting standards also have implications for the degree of professionalization. The translation market in Vietnam employs the graduates of not only translator-training programs, but is open to those of foreign-

language teaching, linguistics and foreign language and literature departments, or in many cases, anyone speaking a foreign language with a proficiency certificate. The only certification system concerns certified translation is of Circular 20/2015/TT-BTP dated Dec 29, 2015 of the Ministry of Justice guiding Decree No. 23/2015/ND-CP dated February 16, 2015 of the Government on issuance of copies from master registers, issuance of certified true copies from originals, authentication of signatures and contracts, in which translators are required to apply to a public notary or to be a translator collaborator of department of justice at provincial or municipal levels to become a sworn translator, and submit proof that they have foreign language degree. The related clause of the Regulation on the Public Notary reads that the public notary should ensure without any doubt that the translator knows said language or script accurately, seeing their diploma or other documents, or by other ways. In case of collaborating directly to the departments of justice, the translators only self-certify their translation by an oath where there is no measurable way to see whether it is indeed good enough or not. Since the Circular 20/2015/TT-BTP, there was nothing more about translation or translators from the instrumental/legal perspectives.

4.3. Professional association

Although it is clear that the degree of professionalization of a particular profession is closely related to the establishment of association(s) established to defend the rights of professionals of this industry. However, there was no official association for translators and interpreters in Vietnam.

On the whole, despite of the increasing number of university-based training programs and a basic government document to guide the requirements for sworn translators, there was a lack of establishment of an association to regulate the market and to professionalize the profession. They are all indicative of an under-developed/mis-categorized profession of translation. The degree to which these efforts have contributed to professionalization is discussed and evaluated in Section 5.1. below.

4.4 Survey and interview results of the indicators of the professionalization of an official occupation

The survey conducted with 250 graduates of six university-based translator-training programs and further exchanges and interviews with graduates provide significant data with regard to the profile of translators in Vietnam. The factors analysed below, bearing on the indicators of the profession, include the proportion of men versus women, proportion of graduates working as translators, proportion of freelancers, graduates' commitment to the profession and their perspectives on the training programs.

4.4.1 Female predominance in the translation profession

Table 2 below presents the distribution of respondents in gender:

Gender	Number	Rate
Women	187	74.8
Men	63	25.2
Total	250	100

Table 2. Distribution of respondents in gender

A total of 250 respondents completed the survey. Table 1 showed that the number of female respondents (187, corresponding to 84.0% of the total respondents) outweighed the number of male respondents (20, or 16.0%)

4.4.2 Main roles of translation graduates

The given Table 3 indicates the results related to main professional activities of respondents:

Professional activities	First	Second	Third	Response count
Translator:				
- In-house translator in an institution	3 (16.67%)	12 (66.66%)	3 (16.67%)	18
- Translator in a translation company	70 (93.33%)	4 (5.33%)	1 (1.34%)	75
- Freelance Translator	25 (24.5%)	77 (75.5%)	0	102
Intepreter	60 (61.22%)	28 (28.57)	10 (10.21%)	
Language teacher/researcher/trainer	125 (97.65%)	3 (2.35%)	0	128
Editor	8 (100%)	0	0	8
Translation project manager	4 (30.77%)	8 (61.54%)	1 (7.69%)	13
Other (Administator, Online product selling as main job)	80 (100%)	0	0	80

Table 3. Main professional activities of the respondents as percentages of respondents in each activity

Out of 250 graduates, 120 individual respondents (48% of all respondents) reported that they were working as translators. These respondents had translation either as their first, second, or third role. The data were a bit different below given the fact that the respondents were allowed to select more than one option as their first, second or third role.

It should be noted that for those with translator as first role, most of them are full-time in-house translator of companies (70 out of 74) while for those with translator as second role, most of them are freelance translator (77 out of 102). Also, it is noticeable that language teacher/researcher/trainer profession as the 1st role accounts for a great number of those who said they are translators (125 out of 128). Finally, it is important to note that there were a great number of those who said they are translators indicated that they work primarily as non-translation/language worker such as administator and online product selling (80 out of 80). All these numbers showed several issues on professionalization of translation profession. Firstly, only under a half of translation-major

graduates entered the workforce of translation industry (120 out of 250). Secondly, most of them still consider full-time in-house as the common way to be translator, otherwise, for those who said they are freelance translators, they admitted that this was only their second role, and many said they work primarily as non-translation/language worker such as administrator and online product selling.

4.4.3. Freelancing as a temporary/transition option

Table 3 above also showed that 75.5% of the respondents defined freelance translation as their second role (77 out of 102) rather than the first role (24.5%) among the respondents that chose freelancing as one of their roles. About 40% of the graduates mentioned freelancing as their main role together with another main role such as in-house translating, language teaching, interpreting and research, which means that they gave equal weight to freelancing and another role. The results indicated that although a great number of graduates were freelancing, they did not prefer it as their sole profession. Table 4 presents the breakdown of freelancers by graduation year.

Graduation year	Number of freelancing translator	Total number of graduates	Freelancing translator rate
1996 or earlier	20	30	66.67%
1996-2005	30	78	38.46%
2006-2016	88	155	58.67

Table 4. Distribution of freelance translator by graduation year as percentage of the total number of respondents falling under the respective category of graduation year

With respect to graduation year, the rate of freelancers in the oldest age ranging was the highest (66.67%), which was reported by interviews later by these freelance translators that they had a chance to enter the international freelance translation market, not the domestic freelance translation market. It should be noticeable as the other two categories (1996-2005 and 2006-2016) were reported to be freelance translator of domestic translation market more than international market. Additionally, the increasing rate of freelance

translators in the current years also showed a tendency to work as freelance translators in general.

4.4.4. Commitment to the profession

Commitment to the profession was addressed directly in the Table 3. The data on the respondents' main roles reported showed that, on the one hand, 120 individual respondents (48% of all respondents) reported that they were working as translators at least part of their time. On the other hand, about around half of the respondents chose teaching and just under 35% chose something other than language-related job as their first role.

The graduates were asked to state their reasons if they did not work in the translation, interpreting and localization sectors. The responses of 89 participants to this open-ended question can be classified into the following three categories:

1) working conditions (mainly financial dissatisfaction, i.e. the respondents believe that translators are underpaid given factors such as heavy workload, irregularity of working hours, high stress and little respect for the profession),

2) lack of job opportunities (two mentioned that it was hard to work as a translator in smaller cities, and others said they could not find work as a translator or interpreter),

3) other reasons (such as no room to advance in their career, translation is "boring", and the market is "challenging" because translator rate in Vietnam is extremely low for fresh graduates (\$1.5-2/350-400 words).

A significant finding of this survey was that language teaching is the best alternative to translating among the graduates of translation and interpreting programs. Out of 250 respondents, a large proportion defined language teaching as their first roles (97.65%). In order to discover why these students studied translation and interpreting if they were to be employed as language teachers after graduation, I had further exchanges with eight survey respondents currently working as language teachers via follow-up interviews.

Eleven interviewees mentioned that they started studying translation with no intention of being a full-time translator, but just because of university assignment of those with highest scores in general programs in language studies degree. They were all planning a career related to foreign languages in general, rather than specifically translation. Regarding the factors that led them

to work as language teachers after graduation, twenty-eight translation graduates, now employed as teachers, had many reasons from financial status to private life for preferring teaching to translating. The reasons that led translation graduates to choose teaching after graduation are mostly linked to disadvantages of the translation profession as this job has not been considered as a real profession but just as an additional skills in foreign language only, and partly similar to the open-ended responses reported above: imbalance between the effort and income in translation jobs, lack of standards related to the profession, lack of job opportunities in smaller cities, and insufficiency of training programs in preparing trainees for the market. Advantages of the teaching profession also influenced their choice: more favorable working conditions especially in terms of working hours and holiday, job security (when employed in public schools and universities), scholarship opportunities, etc.

4.4.5 Graduates' perceptions of the training programs

	Translation Degree	Foreign Language Degree + Experience	On-the-job training + foreign language proficiency
Agree	32.7%	52%	15.3%

Table 5. Formal training or experience

Firstly, via Table 5 and the follow-up interviews, participants were asked to assess the role of a formal degree and about one-third of the respondents (32.7%) agreed that all professional translators should have a degree in translation while 52% said that foreign language degree is enough, no need for translation degree, to do translation together with some years of experience. Further, many respondents claimed that translation can be learned on the job. While many people agreed that there is need for at least a degree in foreign language study to be employed in the translation market, many translators – the respondents expressed via the follow-up interview that they did not feel prepared to enter the market when they graduated although generally, the majority of the respondents said their academic training were very good. It is thus possibly that there is a need for curricula update for university-based

translation training/degree so that it could catch up with the real market. One hundred and sixty three participants replied to this question.

5. Discussion

In this section, data and results gained from the document and the empirical data shall be discussed in detail. There are two main parts including what have been achieved so far and have not been done yet in education, legal instruments and professional association, and the lack of complete indicators for an official translation profession.

5.1. Translation as a semi-profession/skill

From the analysis of translation education and training, legal instruments and professional associations, it is shown that translation is still a semi-profession in Vietnam's context. Compared to the global perspective, it showed that translation had not been fully considered as a professional occupation as it should be in European nations and in countries where English is spoken as native language. However, this result is consistent with the results from developing Asian nations. Specifically, with regard to the aspect of education, translator-training programs in universities in Vietnam have been increasing in number however, when looking closely into the "career prospect" section, it is interestingly noted that some training programs only considered translation as a skill for other official job such as public relations, marketing writer, administrator, communication officer, rather than a profession. Furthermore, there is no graduate translation training program or associate program, showing a lack of diversification of training programs. It is also well noted that several national or regional universities also saw translation as a profession academically.

Additionally, while there were no exact data on the proportion of translators holding a translation degree getting jobs in the market, job advertisement requirements relating to translation degree of Vietnam market are separately divided into domestic and international markets. Whilst Vietnam's translation international market often seeks specifically a translator either with a degree in translation, or specialized non-language degree, the domestic market shows a misunderstanding of translation as profession. More particularly, job

advertisement requirements in domestic market of Vietnam usually consider anyone with a language degree, or even IELTS certificate is enough to translate well, which means translation is not a profession but only another language skill. This study is consistent with the results of Pym et al. (2012:20), where academic (or formal) qualification is reported to be not required for translators. Furthermore, while several well-established university-based training programs are an evident sign of enhanced professionalization, there has also been a growing discussion on the increasing number of translator-training programs with reference to the practical needs on the job market and employment issues. A study of Pham & Tran (2013) showed a significant gap between the demands of the translation employment market and the curriculum within the context of Vietnamese tertiary education. In a conference paper in Vietnam in 2017, the author of this paper also pointed out that although the translation graduates in Vietnam, in general, have positive perceptions about the translation training courses received, they later did not join the translation industry or admitted that they lacked several industry skills.

As for the legal instrument, the only relevant legal instrument until now in which the translator's quality is mentioned to a very basic extent and only mentioned because of the certified translation, not of the translator's specific quality or criteria, is the Circular 20/2015/TT-BTP dated Dec 29, 2015 of the Ministry of Justice guiding Decree No. 23/2015/ND-CP dated February 16, 2015 of the Government on issuance of copies from master registers, issuance of certified true copies from originals, authentication of signatures and contracts. However, there is no report on the real quality of such certified copies and of the translation collaborators of the provincial departments of justice. It is thus can be seen clearly that the government also do not involve in the consideration of translation as a profession. It is reported in "Requirements for translation services" in ISO 17100:2015 the need of standardized criteria for translation assessment. Compared to such international view, it is also believed that Vietnam should take into full consideration of the same ISO or the translators with significant fame should call for a collaboration on the issue with the Ministry of Justice of Vietnam, or any possible relevant authority.

Despite of the previous literature pointing out that academics in translation-training programs act as a stakeholder in initiatives taken to improve the profession (e.g. adoption of national standards) and produce knowledge (e.g. academic journals and conferences) to contribute to the cultivation of professionals and to ensure public recognition, there was no official national association until now in Vietnam. Together with the fact that the academic

communities also have not developed any specifically designated organization for translation studies, it can be seen that Vietnamese translators also faced difficulties in looking for Continuing Professional Development (CPD) courses and professional/industry certifications/accreditations in language pairs relating to Vietnamese language (Hoang, 2020). Finally, it is shown that, usually, a great professional translation profession identity requires the establishment of a strict and reputable association/society of translators. It thus will be ironic that in a market of around 100 million people, there is no such an association. Actually, there was already some unofficial ones. All what the government authorities need to do is to be open-minded, or less politically sensitive, as said in Hoang (2020), and translators need to be more active and collaborative for the community benefits in the long future.

5.2. The lack of complete indicators for an official translation profession

Interestingly, the finding related to the profile of translators indicates that the general number of women far outweighs the number of men on the market. This is one of the factors that indicate a lack of complete indicators for an official profession. The result is also comparable with other studies conducted across the world, as reported in Pym et al. (2012:85) and Volga (2018). As for the professional profile of translation program graduates, only under a half of university graduates reported to work as a translator. Furthermore, not all the respondents selected translation as their major profession. The rate of the respondents whose first role was translation accounts only under one-third of the total number of translation-major graduates. Most of these respondents were in-house translators.

Additionally, freelancing translators also are reported to do other irrelevant jobs as the main source of income and this may also suggest that there is a lack of a professionalization. In this study, despite a great of number of the respondents were freelancing, the majority of them considered freelancing only as another “job” they did to earn money, among “jobs” such as “online product selling” or “language teacher”. It seems that in Vietnam context, translation is only a skill, in which a general language speaker can also tries so that they can earn some gig money from that. Secondly, probably there is a basic misunderstanding from the employees on translation profession that translation is only a skill, or activity, rather than an official profession. This finding, together with the low rate of freelancers working as a full-time

freelancing translator further suggests that freelancing is still considered a temporary job for additional income source only.

With regard to the commitment to translation as a profession, although the majority of the translation graduates showed positive perceptions on the university training programs, many of them are, however, admitted to be ready to get a more stable profession, mainly language teaching. Lack of industry standards in the domestic market, imbalance between effort and income, and the extremely low rate in the domestic market where fresh graduates tried whatever their efforts to take a job with so-called “unacceptable rates” (according to what the respondents said) explained further why they prefer to choose another profession to the translation profession. These results were consistent to Volga (2018), showing a consistent lack of professionalization of translation as a profession not only in Turkey, but also in Vietnam.

6. Conclusions

The present article has examined the status of the translation profession in Vietnam both in terms of the degree of professionalization and the indicators of an official profession. The results suggest that although definite steps have been taken on the way to professionalization from the academic context, there is still a lack of professionalization from the domestic market in Vietnam, the employers and indicators of a well-established profession.

The training programs, as workforce providers to the market, are quite well established however, there were a lack of diversification in types and levels of the programs. Until now, no direct legal instrument so far has been introduced to define the profession’s requirements and the indirect documents also were not enough to distinguish between language teachers and translators/interpreters. Qualifications required to enter the profession are also not specified. Anyone with bilingual competence can become a translator. This also applies to sworn translators authorized to translate official documents. Furthermore, no association relating to translation has been established to promote translators’ rights and to bring stakeholders together as well. Lack of certification or any other tool for earning credibility is an attribute to the misunderstand/de-qualification of the translation profession.

Translation program graduates generally have positive perceptions of training programs; however, when being asked for their commitment to the profession

and how well so far the program prepares them to enter the market, only a small number of the respondents committed to work as translators and know what they need to enter the market in reality. It seems the satisfactory rate is not a reasonable indicator of effective training professional in the case of translation profession. Furthermore, while there are a small number of full-time and freelance translators that showed their strong commitment to the profession, the majority of freelance translators considered translation as an additional job for further income only, rather than a career. Lack of regulation in the market also make them seek for more stable professions, most often, in language teaching or, in worse cases, selling irrelevant products.

In conclusion, considerable progress has been made in recent years to improve the translation profession academically. Nevertheless, translation curricula in Vietnam still need to be matched with the industry practice in reality and the solution must be from all stakeholders: universities, employers and government so that translation can offer their translators accreditations and credibility for a real profession. Furthermore, pedagogically, lecturers of translation should also try to emphasize the occupational identity of the profession, instead of mixing it implicitly or explicitly with into another occupation (e.g. communication officer).

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