



Translation Graduates and the Labor Market: A Qualitative Study of Employability Challenges and Professional Readiness at Misurata University

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خريجو الترجمة وسوق العمل: دراسة نوعية لتحديات التوظيف والاستعداد المهني لدى خريجي كلية
اللغات والترجمة بجامعة مصراتة

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Abstract:

This study investigates the employment challenges faced by graduates of the Faculty of Languages and Translation at Misurata University and explores the gap between academic preparation and labor-market requirements in the field of translation. The study aims to identify the main barriers that hinder graduates' employability, examine the factors contributing to these challenges, and explore possible strategies for improving graduates' professional readiness. A qualitative phenomenological design was adopted to understand graduates' lived experiences after entering the labor market. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 20 translation graduates selected through purposive and snowball sampling. The interview data were analyzed thematically following Braun and Clarke's six-phase approach. The findings revealed several interconnected challenges, including limited job opportunities, insufficient practical training, weak technological competence, and employers' demand for prior experience. Participants also highlighted a mismatch between university curricula and labor-market expectations, particularly regarding practical translation skills, CAT tools, and workplace preparation. In addition, the study found that many graduates shifted toward English-language teaching due to the scarcity of specialized translation jobs. Participants recommended increasing practice-based learning, integrating translation technologies into the curriculum, strengthening internship opportunities, and improving collaboration between universities and employers. The study concludes that enhancing translation graduates' employability requires a stronger alignment between translator training programs and the realities of the contemporary translation market.

Keywords: Translation graduates; employability; CAT tools; curriculum-market mismatch; Libya; qualitative research.

الملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استقصاء تحديات التوظيف التي يواجهها خريجو الترجمة في كلية اللغات والترجمة بجامعة مصراتة، والكشف عن الفجوة بين الإعداد الأكاديمي ومتطلبات سوق العمل في مجال الترجمة. كما تسعى إلى تحديد أبرز العوائق التي تحد من فرص الخريجين في الحصول على وظائف، والتعرف إلى العوامل الكامنة وراء هذه التحديات، واستكشاف السبل الممكنة لتعزيز استعدادهم للحياة المهنية. ولتحقيق هذه الأهداف، اعتمدت الدراسة المنهج الظاهراتي النوعي بهدف فهم تجارب الخريجين كما عاشوها بعد دخولهم سوق العمل. وجمعت البيانات من خلال مقابلات شبه منظمة أجريت مع 20 خريجاً من قسم الترجمة، اختيروا باستخدام العينة القصدية وعينة كرة الثلج. وحُللت بيانات المقابلات باستخدام التحليل الموضوعي وفقاً للمراحل الست التي وضعها Braun and Clarke.

أظهرت النتائج وجود عدد من التحديات المترابطة التي تواجه خريجي الترجمة، من أبرزها محدودية فرص العمل، وضعف التدريب العملي، ومحدودية الكفاءة في استخدام التقنيات الحديثة، إلى جانب اشتراط أصحاب العمل توفر خبرة سابقة لدى المتقدمين. كما كشفت النتائج عن وجود فجوة بين ما تقدمه المناهج الجامعية وما يتوقعه سوق العمل، ولا سيما في جوانب المهارات العملية في الترجمة، واستخدام أدوات الترجمة بمساعدة الحاسوب والاستعداد لمتطلبات بيئة العمل. وأظهرت الدراسة كذلك أن عددًا من الخريجين اتجهوا إلى مجال تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية نتيجة محدودية فرص العمل المتخصصة في مجال الترجمة. واقترح المشاركون عددًا من الإجراءات لتحسين فرص الخريجين في سوق العمل، من بينها زيادة التركيز على التعلم القائم على الممارسة، وإدماج تقنيات الترجمة في المناهج الدراسية، وتوسيع فرص التدريب الميداني، وتعزيز التعاون بين الجامعات وأصحاب العمل. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن تحسين قابلية خريجي الترجمة للتوظيف يتطلب تعزيز المواءمة بين برامج إعداد المترجمين ومتطلبات سوق الترجمة المعاصر.

الكلمات المفتاحية: خريجو الترجمة؛ القابلية للتوظيف؛ أدوات الترجمة بمساعدة الحاسوب؛ الفجوة بين المناهج الدراسية وسوق العمل؛ ليبيا؛ بحث نوعي.

Introduction

Translation has become increasingly important in education, business, media, diplomacy, and international communication. As translation programs have expanded across many countries, universities have also faced growing pressure to prepare graduates not only linguistically, but also professionally and technologically. Yet the transition from university to work remains difficult in many contexts, particularly when curricula do not fully reflect market expectations. Research from Vietnam, the Arab world, Yemen, and Saudi Arabia consistently points to a gap between translator training and the actual demands of the profession (Abu-Ghararah, 2017; Al-Batineh & Bilali, 2017; Alshargabi & Al-Mekhlafi, 2019; Mahmoud, 2019; Pham & Tran, 2013).

This issue is especially relevant in Libya, where translation education is still developing institutionally and where the local labor market offers limited and uneven opportunities for specialized graduates. Information obtained from the Registration Department at the Faculty of Languages and Translation at Misurata University indicated that the first cohort of translation graduates completed their studies in 2021. Observations and communication with graduates further revealed that many of them pursued careers in general English language teaching or enrolled in additional translation training courses rather than working directly in the professional translation field. The present study therefore investigates the employment challenges faced by graduates of the Faculty of Languages and Translation at Misurata University. More specifically, it examines the extent to which academic preparation meets the demands of the labor market and examines the role of practical training, technological skills, and institutional support in influencing graduates' employment opportunities.

Objectives of the Study

The study has three main objectives:

- to identify the major challenges that hinder the employment of translation graduates;
- to examine the factors contributing to the gap between academic preparation and labor-market requirements; and
- to explore strategies that may enhance graduates' professional readiness and employment opportunities.

Research Questions

1. What are the major challenges faced by translation graduates in obtaining employment opportunities?
2. What factors contribute to the gap between academic preparation and labor-market requirements in the field of translation?
3. What strategies can enhance translation students' preparedness for the labor market and increase their employability?

Limitation of the Study

This study is limited by its qualitative design, its focus on one faculty in one university, and its reliance on graduates' self-reported experiences. It offers depth rather than statistical generalization.

Literature Review

The Gap Between Translation Education and Labour Market Requirements

Translation programs around the world have increasingly faced criticism for failing to meet the practical demands of the labour market. Many scholars argue that translation curricula still rely heavily on theoretical instruction while giving insufficient attention to professional skills and real-world practice. Pham and Tran (2013) explain that translation education in Vietnam demonstrates a mismatch between university curricula and employment

market expectations, as students often graduate without the practical competencies required in professional environments. Similarly, Mahmoud (2019) emphasizes that Arab translation programs continue to struggle with balancing academic knowledge and labour market needs. According to the study, many university programs focus on linguistic theory more than professional preparation, which negatively affects graduate employability. This issue is also evident in Libya. Bala et al. (2025) found a significant gap between the skills taught in translation courses at Misrata University and the competencies expected by employers. Their findings indicate that employers place strong emphasis on practical translation abilities, technology use, and workplace readiness, while graduates often lack sufficient exposure to these areas during their academic studies. Likewise, Mabruk et al. (2021) reported that many translation graduates in Tripoli believed they were not adequately prepared for the labour market and consequently sought employment outside the translation profession, particularly in teaching. The literature therefore suggests that one of the major challenges facing translation graduates is the continuing disconnect between academic training and labour market realities. Universities are increasingly expected to redesign curricula that combine theoretical foundations with professional and technological competencies in order to improve graduate employability.

Professional and Technological Skills Required in the Translation Market

The modern translation market no longer depends solely on bilingual competence. Employers increasingly demand a combination of linguistic, technological, and interpersonal skills. Bowker (2004), through an analysis of translation job advertisements in Canada, found that employers seek translators who possess computer skills, specialization in professional fields, communication abilities, and familiarity with translation technologies. This reflects the transformation of translation into a technology-driven profession influenced by globalization and digital communication.

Recent studies have further highlighted the growing importance of technological competence in translator training. Alharbi (2024) argues that the emergence of artificial intelligence and neural machine translation has significantly reshaped employer expectations in the translation industry. Through the analysis of online job advertisements in Saudi Arabia, the study identified several essential competencies, including technological adaptability, project management, interpersonal communication, and ethical practice, in addition to linguistic competence. The study also emphasizes that translator education must adapt to rapid technological developments in order to prepare graduates for future professional demands.

Similarly, Salamah (2024) found that employers in Saudi Arabia expect graduates to possess not only translation competence but also awareness of professional practices and job-market skills. The study concluded that translator training programs still do not fully satisfy labour market requirements, particularly in relation to practical training and professional readiness. In the Libyan context, Mabruk et al. (2021) also identified IT skills and interpersonal abilities as important requirements for obtaining translation-related employment opportunities.

Overall, previous research demonstrates that the translation profession now requires a multidimensional skill set that extends beyond language proficiency. This shift has increased pressure on universities to integrate technology, workplace training, and professional development into translation programs.

Employment Challenges and Career Opportunities for Translation Graduates

Although translation remains an important field globally, graduates often experience difficulties entering the labour market. Several studies indicate that employment opportunities vary depending on economic conditions, institutional preparation, and market demands. Galán-Mañas (2019), in a study conducted in Spain, found that graduates in translation and interpreting generally achieved high employment rates; however, many worked in diverse language-related sectors rather than strictly in translation professions. This suggests that translation graduates increasingly depend on transferable and interdisciplinary skills to secure employment.

In contrast, studies conducted in Arab countries reveal more challenging conditions. The Yemeni study by Alshargabi and Al-Mekhlafi (2019) emphasized that the translation market requires specialized skills and stronger alignment between university programs and professional demands. Likewise, Mabruk et al. (2021) found that many Libyan graduates struggled to find translation-specific jobs due to limited opportunities and low salaries in the translation sector. As a result, a considerable number of graduates shifted toward teaching or searched for opportunities abroad.

The findings across different contexts indicate that translation graduates face several labour market challenges, including limited job availability, insufficient practical experience, technological changes, and competition within the profession. At the same time, the literature also demonstrates that graduates with broader professional competencies, technological knowledge, and adaptable skills tend to achieve better employment outcomes.

Previous Studies

Previous studies have shown that there is often a gap between what translation students learn at university and what employers expect from them in the workplace. This issue has been reported in different countries and educational contexts. Pham and Tran (2013), for example, found a clear difference between the translation curriculum in Vietnam and the skills needed in professional work. They argued that translation programs should give students more practical preparation for employment. In a similar way, Mahmoud (2019) examined translation programs in Arab universities and found that students need more than theoretical knowledge. The study emphasized the importance of practical skills that can help graduates deal with the actual demands of the translation profession.

The literature also shows that the skills required from translators have changed over time. Today, employers do not only look for good language skills. They also expect translators to have technological and communication skills and, in some cases, knowledge of specific areas of specialization. Bowker (2004), in her analysis of translation job advertisements in Canada, found that employers increasingly valued technological competence, specialization, and communication skills in addition to bilingual ability. Similar findings were reported by Salamah (2024) in Saudi Arabia, where the study found that a gap still existed between translator training and the skills required in the labour market. These findings suggest that translation programs need to keep up with changes in the profession, particularly the growing use of translation technologies and CAT tools.

This issue is also visible in the Libyan context. Mabruk et al. (2021), who explored the experiences of translation graduates in Tripoli, found that many graduates did not feel sufficiently prepared for professional work. The study also reported limited job opportunities and low salaries as important challenges. These findings show that graduates may face difficulties that are related not only to their university education but also to the conditions of the local labour market. More recently, Bala et al. (2025) examined translation courses at Misrata University and compared them with employers' expectations. Their findings showed weaknesses in practical training and the use of translation technology. This is particularly relevant to the present study because it suggests that some of the difficulties experienced by graduates may be connected to the type of preparation they receive at university.

Although the previous studies differ in their contexts, they point to several common issues. One of the main concerns is the difference between academic preparation and the realities of professional translation work. Another important issue is the lack of practical experience, which may make it difficult for graduates to compete for available jobs. The studies also highlight the growing importance of technology and the need for students to develop skills that go beyond language proficiency.

At the same time, there is still limited research on how these challenges are experienced by translation graduates themselves in Libya, particularly graduates of the Faculty of Languages and Translation at Misrata University. Most previous studies have focused on curricula, training programs, or general labour market requirements, while less attention has been given to graduates' own experiences after graduation. Therefore, the present study focuses on the experiences of translation graduates and examines the challenges they face in finding employment, the extent to which their university education prepared them for the labour market, and the changes they believe are needed to improve their professional readiness.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design because its primary aim is to understand how graduates themselves perceive and describe the employment challenges they experienced after graduation. More specifically, the study follows a phenomenological orientation, which is appropriate when the focus is on the shared lived experiences of individuals who have encountered the same phenomenon. Within this design, the study seeks to identify recurring meanings and patterns across graduates' accounts of entering the labor market.

Participants and Sampling

The study involved 20 participants, all of whom had graduated from the Faculty of Languages and Translation at Misurata University. Participants were selected through purposive and snowball sampling. Eligibility required that they had completed an undergraduate degree in translation studies and had already experienced the transition into the labor market. The first participant was selected because of her relevance to the topic and the researcher's prior contact with her. After that interview, additional participants were reached through referrals and through the researcher's existing professional and academic connections. To protect confidentiality, all participants were anonymized and assigned codes from S1 to S20.

Data Collection Instrument

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. This format allowed the researcher to ask a consistent set of questions aligned with the research questions while also following up on participants' experiences in greater depth when needed. The interview guide focused on three themes: the challenges graduates faced in finding work, the reasons behind those challenges, and participants' suggestions for improving graduate preparedness for the

labor market. The guide was reviewed by two colleagues with experience in translation studies and qualitative research, and a pilot interview was conducted with one graduate who was not included in the final sample.

Data Collection Procedure

The researcher contacted graduates individually through Messenger and WhatsApp, explained the purpose of the study, and arranged interview times according to participants' availability. The interviews were conducted online through video communication platforms, and each interview lasted approximately 10 to 15 minutes. During the interviews, participants responded to semi-structured questions about their experiences after graduation, the obstacles they faced in seeking employment, and their views on the relationship between university preparation and labor-market requirements. With their knowledge and consent, all interviews were audio-recorded. Participation was voluntary, participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage, and all data were used for academic purposes only.

Data Analysis

After the interviews, the researcher transcribed the recordings manually and analyzed the data thematically following Braun and Clarke's six-phase approach. The analysis involved repeated reading of the transcripts, initial coding of meaningful units, clustering codes into broader categories, reviewing and refining themes, and naming the final themes. An inductive approach was used so that themes emerged from participants' responses rather than being imposed in advance. Credibility was supported through repeated comparison between codes, themes, and the original transcripts, and pseudonyms were maintained throughout the analysis.

Findings

The interview data produced three broad areas of analysis: employment challenges, underlying causes, and suggested solutions. Across these areas, participants' responses showed that employability problems were not caused by one issue alone. Rather, they emerged from the interaction of curriculum design, limited practical preparation, weak institutional support, and restrictive labor-market conditions.

Employment Challenges Faced by Translation Graduates

Theme	Specific Issues
Job-related challenges	Lack of job opportunities; unstable market
Educational challenges	Theory-heavy instruction; lack of practical training
Skill-related challenges	Limited technical skills; little exposure to CAT tools and translation software
Professional barriers	Prior experience required for entry-level work

Job-related challenges. Most participants described the scarcity of jobs as the most immediate challenge they faced after graduation. Several said that translation jobs were rare or unstable and that the local market did not consistently depend on specialist translators. One participant stated, "there are no real job opportunities for translation graduates" (S1), while another noted that even when a job appeared, it was often temporary or insecure. These comments suggest that graduates encounter a structurally narrow market rather than only an individual skills problem.

Educational challenges. Participants repeatedly emphasized that their university experience was more theoretical than practical. They felt that they had studied translation as an academic subject but had not practiced it enough as professional work. This concern appeared in comments such as "most of what we studied was theoretical" (S5) and "we graduated without being prepared for real work" (S7). In effect, participants linked the absence of real translation practice to their difficulty entering the labor market.

Skill-related challenges. Many participants also spoke about weak technology competence. Several said they had not been trained to use translation software or other tools expected in contemporary translation work. One participant commented, "we were not trained to use translation software" (S2), while another added that "without technical skills, it is hard to compete in the job market" (S6). This theme shows that graduates themselves see CAT tools and digital competence as employability issues, not optional extras.

Professional barriers. A final challenge concerned employers' demand for prior experience. Participants found themselves in a familiar circular problem: they could not obtain work without experience, yet they had not been given enough training or internship opportunities to build that experience before graduating. For this reason, the requirement for experience was described not simply as a market condition, but also as a consequence of limited training pathways.

Causes of the Employment Challenges

Theme	Specific Causes
Educational-system factors	Heavy focus on theory; insufficient training
Institutional factors	Weak career support; limited internships
Market factors	Low demand for translators; limited specialized openings
Curriculum issues	Mismatch between course content and employer expectations

Participants saw the educational system itself as a major source of the problem. They argued that lecture-based delivery and limited application made it difficult to graduate with professional confidence. At the same time, they pointed to weak institutional support, especially the absence of internships or structured pathways into work. Participants also identified low market demand and a lack of strong translation-sector infrastructure in the local context. Finally, they stressed curriculum mismatch: what they had studied did not always resemble what employers expected them to do in practice. Taken together, these findings suggest that graduate employability is shaped by an ecosystem rather than by a single curricular fault.

Suggested Solutions

Theme	Specific Suggestions
Educational improvement	More practice-based training; workshops; simulated projects
Institutional support	Internships; partnerships; career guidance
Curriculum reform	Market-oriented modules; contemporary professional content
Skill development	CAT tools; translation software; digital-literacy training

Participants' suggestions were practical and consistent. They called for more hands-on training, workshops, and real or simulated translation tasks. They also asked for internship opportunities and stronger cooperation between the university and employers. Some directly proposed curriculum updates to reflect market needs, and others emphasized training in CAT tools and translation technology. These suggestions closely mirror the problems identified in the first two findings sections and therefore reinforce the internal coherence of the data.

Discussion

The findings support a growing body of research showing that translator employability depends on curriculum relevance, technology competence, and structured exposure to professional practice. Participants' accounts of theory-heavy instruction closely resemble the curriculum–market gap described by Pham and Tran, Mahmoud, and Al-Batineh and Bilali. In other words, the local concerns raised by graduates in Misurata are not isolated; they match a wider pattern in translator training across multiple contexts.

The technology-related findings are equally important. Participants did not describe software training as an optional enhancement; they described it as a condition of competitiveness. This aligns strongly with the EMT competence framework, which treats technology as central to translator preparedness, and with studies showing that the profession increasingly expects graduates to work across digital platforms, CAT environments, and evolving AI-assisted workflows.

The study also adds nuance to the question of career mismatch. International studies show that translation graduates often work in broader language-related roles rather than narrowly defined translator positions. That pattern can reflect professional versatility, but in the present case participants framed it more as displacement than as planned diversification. Their movement into English-language teaching was not always described as a positive career choice; often, it appeared to be a response to limited translation-sector opportunities and insufficient preparation for immediate entry into specialist practice.

Finally, the experience requirement identified by participants reveals the importance of work-integrated learning. Studies on job-market readiness and cooperative training suggest that internships, placement modules, and real-world professional tasks can significantly narrow the distance between graduation and employability. The present findings support that conclusion and indicate that local curriculum reform should be accompanied by institutional partnerships rather than classroom reform alone.

Conclusion

This study examined the employment challenges faced by graduates of the Faculty of Languages and Translation at Misurata University. The findings show that graduates encounter a cluster of interconnected barriers, including limited job opportunities, insufficient practical training, weak technology competence, and employers' insistence on prior experience. The study also found a noticeable mismatch between academic preparation and labor-market requirements, especially in relation to practical and technological skills.

More broadly, the findings suggest that graduate employability in translation is shaped by the relationship between curriculum design, institutional support, and local market conditions. When translation programs emphasize

theory but provide limited internships, professional simulation, or technology training, graduates may leave university linguistically capable but professionally underprepared.

The study therefore concludes that improving employability requires a stronger connection between translator training and the realities of contemporary professional practice. More applied curricula, more systematic exposure to CAT tools and translation technologies, and more structured partnerships with employers could help graduates move more confidently from university into work.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Translation programs should increase the proportion of practice-based learning, including authentic or simulated translation tasks.
2. CAT tools, terminology management, and other translation technologies should be integrated systematically into the curriculum.
3. Universities should create internship and field-training agreements with translation agencies, companies, media institutions, and public-sector employers.
4. Curricula should be reviewed regularly in light of labor-market needs and contemporary competence frameworks.
5. Workshops and short professional-development programs should be offered to strengthen graduates' technical and workplace skills.
6. Career guidance and graduate-support services should be strengthened within the faculty.
7. Further research should be conducted in other Libyan universities to build a broader national picture of translation graduate employability.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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