

Teachers' Opinion Concerning the Current Translation Courses at Undergraduate Departments of English in Kurdistan Region-Iraq

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Abstract

This study represents the views of a range of translation teachers concerning the translation courses offered at Departments of English, College of Languages in Kurdistan Region, Iraq. It aims at drawing a clear image of these courses from the teachers' points of view and exploring the difficulties they have encountered in teaching these courses. To achieve the aim of this study, the researcher interviewed eighteen teachers who have experience in teaching translation at Departments of English, (7) from Salahaddin University- Erbil, (4) from University of Sulaimani, and (7) from University of Duhok. Three main questions have been raised by the researcher to elicit teachers' opinions and find to which extent they were satisfied with teaching these courses. Accordingly, it has been found out that teachers of translation are satisfied with the translation courses to some extent, but there are some drawbacks which needed to be addressed and overcome to increase the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process in the courses understudy. So, in the light of the current drawbacks, setting clear objectives/ learning outcomes and aligning them with all the other translation courses' components are required.

Key words: Translation course, Teaching translation, Translation teachers' opinion

1. Introduction

Teaching translation at university level is still a problematic issue that is tackled by many scholars and writers. For some of them, translation competence is natural and it cannot be taught in formal teaching. For others, academic translation teaching is the only chance for many students to get translation competence to be translators and future professionals. Bearing in mind such aims, they expect translation courses to match their expectations and achieve their aims. To this end, curriculum and course designers, whether they are the administrators or the courses' teachers, have to take this into their consideration when they are on the planning stage of course design. In other words, they have to think about the social needs, objectives, learning outcomes, students' needs, material, methodology, and assessment and evaluation. In Kurdistan region, translation is offered in both Departments of translation, and Departments of English as part of their language courses. This study deals with the latter ones, i.e the translation courses which are offered to third and fourth year at Departments of English, College of Languages at Salahaddin University- Erbil (SUE), University of Sulaimani (UoS), and University of Duhok (UoD). The problematic issue of these courses is that there is no specific translation textbook to be taught at these Departments. Before 1991, textbooks that were proposed by the Iraqi Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research were used. But after 1991, and for social, cultural, economic and cognitive reasons, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research in Kurdistan Region canceled these textbooks, since they were designed to serve the Arabic context not the Kurdish one. This is due to the fact that Kurdistan region citizens are non-native speakers of Arabic. Thus, in an attempt to check the suitability of these courses according to the teachers' point of view, the researcher carried out this qualitative research to highlight the

merits and demerits of these courses from the teachers' perspectives.

1.1 Aim of the study

This study aims at drawing a clear image of the translation courses offered at the Departments of English from the teachers' points of view and exploring the difficulties that they have encountered in teaching these courses to identify the merits and demerits from their perspectives.

1.2 Research question

The following research question was raised to direct the study:

-To which extent are the translation teachers satisfied with the translation courses offered at the undergraduate Departments of English at the College of Languages?

1.3 Significance of the study

This study is of significance to teachers of translation, course designers, applied linguists and researchers. It provides some identifications, explorations, and reflections on specific issues pertinent to the translation courses from the perspectives of translation teachers who have experience in teaching translation at Departments of English at Kurdistan universities. It is also important for the administrative authorities and the course designer because the results of such studies can help them to plan and design translation courses accordingly.

2. Literature review

Teaching translation in foreign language classes is still a controversial issue among many scholars and researchers. Some believe that involving translation pedagogy in foreign language classes is useful; others disagree because they believe that teaching translation in language teaching is irrelevant and need to be avoided. For instance, Malmkjaer (1998: p.6) argues that translation: (1) is independent of the four skills which define language competence: reading, writing, speaking, and listening, (2) is radically different from the four skills, (3) takes up valuable time which could be used to teach these four skills, (4) is unnatural, (5) misleads students into thinking that

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expressions in two languages correspond one-to-one, (6) prevents students from thinking in the foreign language, (7) produces interference, (8) is a bad test of language skills, (9) is only appropriate for training translators.

In the same token, Newson (1998, P. 64) maintains that translation “does not allow or make easy the achievement of such generally accepted foreign language teaching aims” as (1) fluency in spoken language, (2) the controlled introduction of selected and graded structures or communicative competent strategies, or (3) the controlled introduction of any mastery of selected and graded lexical items, (4) the use of situationalized, contextualized language. Translation neither helps in learning new vocabulary or structural items, nor fosters communicative language use in a learner-centered language learning environment.

However, Malmkjar, (1998) indicates that there are “significant and visible signs of a revival of translation in language teaching according to recent literature and applied linguistics” (p.1). Teaching translation can be helpful to enhance the foreign language learner’s proficiency. For example, Newmark (1988) argues that translation makes a good exercise for foreign learners’ knowledge and language proficiency, and at the same time teaches them how to distinguish between rendering meaning and conveying message:

As a technique for learning foreign languages, translation is a two-edged instrument: it has the special purpose of demonstrating the learner's knowledge of the foreign language, either as a form of control or to exercise his intelligence in order to develop his competence. This is its strong point in foreign-language classes, which has to be sharply distinguished from its normal use in transferring meanings and conveying messages. (p. 7)

Similarly, Schaffner (1998, p. 125) points out that translation and related exercises could be beneficial to foreign language learning:

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1. To improve verbal agility.
2. To expand students' vocabulary in L2.
3. To develop their style.
4. To improve their understanding of how languages work.
5. To consolidate L2 structures for active use.
6. To monitor and improve the comprehension of L2.

According to Popovic (2001, p.22), teaching translation in the classroom is a means to an end, not an end to be achieved. It can help learners to develop their knowledge of English. However, some learners may become translators one day, and the basic knowledge of translation that they gain in the classroom can serve as a solid ground for building up translation skills. For this reason, teachers have to think carefully about planning and designing their courses. For instance, Delisle (1993) maintains that establishing clear and achievable objectives is prominent in the planning stage (Delisle, 1998, p. 21-22, as cited in Kelly, 2005, p.12). In the student-centered learning environment, it is necessary for teachers to think firstly of what do they intend the learners/ students to achieve by implementing the translation course, i.e the learning outcomes, which concentrate on "what students will be able to do at the end of the course". (Kelly, 2005, p.22)

ESSER (2014, p.950) observes that setting effective learning outcomes requires translation practitioners to identify what kind of competency and sub-competency they intend their students to develop.

Rezvania and Vakilinejad (2013) affirm that the course instructors are the ones who can best answer the question of whether the course curriculum can generate the intended outcomes, and if it not, how it can be improved.

Kelly (2005, pp. 62-63) sees that the context of the course is an influential factor on selecting the content, through which many elements have to be taken into account, such as whether the course is 'academic versus vocational', undergraduate versus postgraduate', 'levels of specialization', and 'duration'.

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Li (2000) affirms that “in planning translation programs/courses, students’ needs assessment is crucial, and when curriculum content, materials, and teaching approaches that match social needs, students’ motivation and success are enhanced” (p. 297). In the same vein, Dagilienė (2012) maintains that before selecting the texts, the teacher’s task is to assess students’ needs and select material to illustrate particular aspects of the language and the structure which present difficulties for students in the English language(p.125). To select the text for the translation exercises, Sevilla et al. (2003, p. 298) suggest some criteria: (1) the texts should come from a real source and should be able to become translation projects; (2) they should be complete texts; (3) they should be varied in terms of subject matter, type and degree of specialization; and (4) they should be able to be translated by students, since a text of excessive difficulty will lack pedagogical value.(As cited in Jordan-Núñez, 2014, p.98)

Regarding the theoretical part, many scholars agree upon integrating translation theory with practice. For example, Newmark (1988, p.9) argues that theory is concerned with the translation method appropriately used for a certain type of text, and at the same time, it is the body of knowledge that we have about translating. In addition, theory raises students’ “self-awareness, commitment, and professionalism” (Mackenzie, 1998, p.17)

Moreover, thinking about translation process leads to think about procedures and activities. The literature on teaching translation has revealed that there is a consensus among scholars and researchers on those class activities that help and develop trainees/ students’ translation competence or sub-competence like, instrumental competence, interpersonal competence, and systematic competence (Saeed, 2014, p.17). Futhermore, when thinking about giving a task to translation trainees/ students, it is necessary for teachers in each task to set the objectives that must be achieved, what type of text that will

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be translated, whether the task will be done individually or in groups, as well as the assessment and evaluation methods (Hurtado 1999a, pp. 46-50, cited in Jordan-Núñez, 2014, p. 94). To do these activities and tasks in a student-centered classroom, Kiraly (2000) proposes a social constructivist methodology, where team members can work together to accomplish the task and not dividing the work of a specific task. As Kiraly (2000) points out:

True collaborative learning does not mean simply dividing up the work on a task, a mere division of labour. It is instead the joint accomplishment of a task with the dual learning goals of meaning-making on the part of each individual group member
(p. 36)

Accordingly, the student is considered the main agent, and the teacher's role is to work as a guide and counselor; not providing direct answers to students' questions, but encouraging discussion, negotiating and team work, as well as introspection. (González Davies, 2004p. 3; Kiraly, 2005, pp. 17-18)

To assess students' work, teachers have to decide previously about what kind of assessment to follow, formative or summative. According to Gipps (1994, p. 3), the main aim of formative assessment is to provide continuous feedback to both the teacher and the learner/student regarding the progress of translation learning; while summative assessment provides evidence for decision-making and takes place at the end of instructional course. Here, Gipps suggests that since translation needs continuous feedback, the type of assessment should not be taken in the frame of mini-examination of a summative type. Instead, this can be achieved through providing various types of exercises to develop the learner's skill. (As cited in Hatim & Mason, 1997, p. 166)

Adab (2000,) confirms that the success of translation assessment in the university environment depends on the clarity of course objectives, what is the teachers' expectations from the students in the translation class, which type of sub-

competences do they intend to enhance, and through which activity, task, or exercises, based on what type of knowledge that they have such as, “ translation theory, language, culture, subject specific, other domain-specific, language and culture, in order to develop these sub-competences.” (p.227). According to Adab’s point of view, if teachers provide students with a framework of criteria or rubrics, they will understand that translation can involve systematic analysis and verification.

3. Methodology

3.1 Sample of the Study

The sample of the survey consisted of (18) teachers at Kurdistan Universities; (7 from SUE), (4 from UoS), (7 from UoD), who have an experience in teaching translation at Departments of English/ College of Languages at these universities. It was crucial to use all the subjects in the population, since the size of the population was small (Sekaran, 2003), as illustrated in the following table:

Teachers' Population

University	Teachers	Percentage
Salahaddin	7	39%
Sulaimani	4	22%
Duhok	7	39%
Total	18	100%

3.2 Instrument of the study

In this study, the qualitative method was used, and qualitative data was collected by interviewing eighteen teachers who have experience in teaching translation at the Department of English at Colleges of Languages in SUE, UoS, and UoD in Kurdistan Region. According to Boyce and Neal (2006), the interview is “a qualitative research technique which involves intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their views on a particular idea or situation”. The researcher used structured interview, since the small number of interviewees have to answer in the same order of questions without any additional comments, and the analysis of the data

obtained from this type of interview is quite straightforward and systematic. (p.3)

The aim of the interview questions in this study is to explore the teachers' opinions concerning the nature of the current translation courses, and to identify the merits and demerits of these courses.

3.3 Procedure of the study

To fulfill the aim of the interview, the researcher selected three questions to ask the interviewees. The questions are:

Q1). What is your opinion of the current Translation Courses of third and fourth year at the Departments of English, College of Languages? (Probs: courses' objectives, Courses' strengths', courses' weakness, etc.)

Q2). What problems have you faced during teaching these courses, in terms of:

- a. Teaching material and content
- b. Methods of teaching
- c. Assignments and exams
- d. Assessment and evaluation?

Q3). What suggestions do you have to develop the translation courses?

To decide on the face and content validity of the instrument of this study, the researcher gave the interview questions to a jury of eleven specialists in English Language Teaching (ELT), applied linguistics and translation studies to decide on their face and content validity. Then, the interviews were carried out during 26th Jan- 4th March, 2018. Two interviews methods were conducted with the teachers' sample; face-to-face and telephone interviews at the teachers' convenient time. The recorded data from the interviewees' responses were transcribed and content-analyzed to extract their main attitudes and ideas. Then the key findings were summarized as presented in the results.

3.4 Analyzing the results

The interview, as it is well known, is a qualitative tool of research. Therefore, its results are going to be presented

qualitatively with some simple percentages. The teachers' responses were divided into three categories: A. satisfied with the translation courses, B. neutral, giving neutral responses, or C. not satisfied with the translation course.

3.4.1 Results of the first question

I.) One teacher was satisfied with the translation courses. This number constituted (6%) of the teachers' group, (1 from SUE). The following reasons were the most important ones:

1. Translation courses are important in the curriculum of the Department of English since they prepare students to be translators and interpreters in the future.
2. The teachers are autonomous and have freedom to choose the syllabus they want to teach.

II.) Eleven teachers had neutral ideas about the translation courses. They constituted (61%) of the teachers' group. (5 from SUE), (2 from UoS) , and (4 from UoD). Again they gave many reasons. Below are the most important ones:

1. Translation courses are necessary at Departments of English but the time allocated for these courses is insufficient.
2. Translation courses have an essential role among other courses offered at Departments of English, but still objectives of these courses are unclear.
3. These courses provide students with good foundation of translation, but most of the students have inappropriate grammatical knowledge in both English and Kurdish Languages when they start to study translation in third year. This obliges teachers to explain grammar before teaching translation, which consequently affects the planned syllabus to be implemented in time.
4. Translation courses are beneficial to improve students' translation skills but unfortunately students have improper linguistic competence and poor general knowledge about different topics.

III.) Six teachers were not satisfied with the translation courses. (1 from SUE), (2 from UoS), (3 from UoD). They constituted

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(33%) of the teachers' group. They gave various reasons. Below are the most important ones.

1. There is no need for translation courses at the Department of English. Translation should be offered at the Departments of Translation.
2. The current translation courses are designed by the teachers who teach these courses. Unfortunately, they are not revised or approved by specialists in the field of translation.
3. The current translation courses do not take into account students' needs and do not try to address the problems and difficulties facing these students during the process of translation.
4. Students have low level linguistic competence when they start studying translation course in third year.
5. Students have weak of knowledge Kurdish vocabulary and grammar, since there is no standardized Kurdish language till now.
6. Students' diversity in the classroom makes teaching translation difficult.
7. Many Kurdish dictionaries are available but they lack reliability compared to those of Longman and Merriam-Webster, etc. So students lack authentic Kurdish sources to depend on when they translate the texts.
8. Many students have not mastered the basic grammatical elements and constructions. So when they make lexical errors, like choosing wrong word and producing unacceptable collocations. Besides, their lexical knowledge is rather limited.
9. There is a lack of well-designed translation courses, since teachers might teach some subjects which are not beneficial for students at these Departments.
10. The translation courses in third and fourth year are not complementary to each other.
11. Sometimes the department interferes in the teaching of these courses.

12. The high number of students in each class prevents translation teachers from attaining their teaching objectives in teaching translation.

3.4.2 Results of the second question

A. Material and content

I.) Three teachers were satisfied with the translation material and content. They constituted (17%) of the teachers' group, (1 from SUE), (2 from UoS). They gave various reasons. Below are the most important ones:

1. Teachers have the freedom to choose different material like texts from different sources and video recording, which gives them autonomy to choose the texts types according to market needs.
2. Teachers are satisfied with providing students with difficult text types to acquaint them with such types of texts for their future translation career.
3. Students share their teachers in selecting the text type, which leads to the satisfaction of students' needs.
4. Teachers were satisfied with choosing literary texts because students have good background in literature by taking different courses in literature.

II.) Neutral: (2) teachers had neutral ideas about the content and material. This number constituted (11%) of teachers' group, (1 from SUE), and (1 from UoD). Again they gave many reasons. Below are the most important ones:

1. Providing students with theories of translation is beneficial for these courses, but most of the teachers do not clarify in which case these theories should be used and how students can apply them.

III.) Thirteen teachers were not satisfied with the material and content. They constituted (72%) of the teachers' group, (5 from SUE), (2 from UoS), (6 from UoD). Again they gave many reasons. Below are the most important ones:

1. The absence of textbooks that contain translated samples of the English into Kurdish and vice versa is the most

- problematic factor in teaching translation courses, since this could provide a guide line to students in translation.
2. The teaching material does not satisfy students' needs.
 3. There is no balance between the theoretical content and practice.
 4. Due to the students' diversity, selecting texts for translation is not an easy task on the part of the teachers, since they have to provide students with the same Kurdish and Arabic texts to be translated into English.
 5. The low level of students' linguistic competence affects the teachers' plan to cover the material, since they have to explain the linguistic factors of the sentences in the text then teach translation.
 6. Little attention is given to the cultural component in the content of translation courses.
 7. Little attention is given to translation procedures, techniques, and strategies.
 8. The text types given to the students at Departments of English are supposed to be taught to specialized translation class, i.e., they do not correspond to those students' level.

B. Methods of teaching

I.) Seven teachers were satisfied with the translation methods. They constituted (39%) of the teachers' group, (2 from SUE), (3 from UoS), and (2 from UoD). They gave various reasons. Below are the most important ones:

1. Teachers use student-centred approach as one of the effective methods in teaching translation. This is done by giving tasks to the students to work in groups or pairs to be collaborative learners.
2. Teachers use technology in the classroom; data show and videos are used so that the students can read the text and translate or interpret.

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3. The strategy of predicting meaning from the linguistic context and not just from the use of dictionary in the classroom is beneficial for students of translation courses.

II.) Neutral: Four teachers had neutral ideas about the methods of translation. They constituted (22%) of teachers' group, (2 from SUE), and (2 from UoD).). Again they gave many reasons. Below are the most important ones:

1. Using data show in the classroom is a good method in teaching translation, but sometimes this method hinders the smooth progression of the teaching process because of technical problems.

2. The method of lecturing is beneficial to some extent, but using it most of the times leads to boredom.

III.) Seven teachers were not satisfied with the methods of teaching translation. They constituted (% 39) of the teachers' group, (3 from SUE), (1 from UoS), (3 from UoD). Again they gave many reasons. Below are the most important ones:

1. There is no certain method of translation at these Departments, and it is mostly a random-process.

2. Due to the large number of students in the classroom, teachers cannot use group activity.

3. The method of 'read and translate' is boring and teacher-centered learning.

4. There is no specific method to integrate translation theory with practice.

C. Assignments and exams

I.) Eleven teachers were satisfied with translation assignments and exams. They constituted (61%) of the teachers' group, (4 from SUE), (3 from UoS) , and (4 from UoD). They gave various reasons. Below are the most important ones:

1. Students showed progress in translation in their classroom assignments and homework.

2. Students got benefits from final and mid-term exams

II.) Neutral: One teacher had a neutral idea about assignments and exams. This number constitutes (6%) of the

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teachers' group, (1 from UoD). . Below is the most important reason:

1. Assignments are good enough, but in exams, some teachers provide students with the same level of questions as those of specialized translation subjects.

III.) Six teachers were not satisfied with the assignments and exams. They constituted (33%) of the teachers' group, (3 from SUE), (1 from UoS), and (2 from UoD). They gave various reasons. Below are the most important ones:

1. The assignments and exams are focused on written translation more than interpreting.
2. Teachers do not give enough assignments in the classroom because the students lack of interest in assignments.
3. Homework was just given to be completed at home then discussed in the classroom.
4. Due to the large number of students, large groups are not useful to accomplish the assignments. Accordingly, this prevents students' involvement in the translation task.
5. Due to the students' low linguistic competence in third year, students depend on 'Google translate' in their assignments.

D. Assessment and evaluation

I.) Eight teachers were satisfied with the translation assessment and evaluation. They constituted (44.5%) of the teachers' group, (2 from SUE), (3 from UoS), and (3 from UoD). They gave various reasons. Below are the most important ones:

1. Using self –assessment in the classroom enhanced students' knowledge about their drawbacks.
2. Participation and attendance as an assessment tool was beneficial to improve their translation skill.
3. There is no problem in assessing and evaluating students' translation work, since students are aware about of the teachers' rubrics.

II.) Neutral : No responses

III.) Ten teachers were not satisfied with the assessment and evaluation. They constituted (55.5 %) of the teachers' group,

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(5 from SUE), (1 from UoS), and (4 from UoD). They gave various reasons. Below are the most important ones:

1. Formative assessment is difficult to be followed in the translation classes due to the large number of the students.
2. Assessing students' translation is based on the holistic method, and the grading criteria are unclear.
3. Constructive feedback on the students' translation is absent. Consequently, students do not learn from their mistakes.
4. Assessment is concentrated on grammar and vocabulary.

3.4.3 Results of the third question:

The teachers provided various suggestions to develop the translation courses at Departments of English. Below are the most important ones:

1. Providing students of third and fourth year with pedagogical textbooks in translation from English into Kurdish and from Kurdish into Arabic.
2. Taking students' needs into consideration in selecting text type and topics.
3. Raising students' English proficiency level.
4. Allocating more credit hours for the translation courses at the Departments of English, since two hours per a week are not enough to learn translation skills.
5. Concentrating more on interpreting to motivate students, since they get bored with studying written translation only.
6. Providing students with more practice in both oral and written translation with concentrating much more on interpreting.
7. Giving more assignments to be done after classes.
8. Providing teachers who are specialized in translation studies.

3.5 Discussion

Findings of this study can be summarized as follows: The objective of the qualitative data analysis is to elicit the teachers' satisfaction with the current translation courses. The findings highlighted that several problems have impact on the teaching

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and learning processes. These problems consist of unclear objectives, inadequate students' linguistics competence, insufficient students' background in their formal first language (standard Kurdish language), large number of students in the classroom, insufficient credit hours for translation courses, insufficient number of specialized teachers in translation studies at the Departments of English.

Moreover, the outcomes of this research highlighted and revealed that the unavailability of translation textbooks for third and fourth year at the Departments of English affects the selection of comprehensive material that could achieve a balance between theory and practice. Besides, the selection of text types is not undertaken according to students' needs and their level. In addition, some teachers take market needs into consideration, but at the same time this should be done according to the students' level. Moreover, regarding methods of teaching, the outcomes of this research also showed that the teachers who were 'satisfied' and 'not satisfied' with the methods have gained the same percentage. The methods involve: students work in groups and pairs to practice translation in the classroom, using data show in the classroom, infer meaning from the context strategy. However, these teachers did not provide what kind of activities their students were using in the classroom. The teachers provided little number of methods of teaching which they considered as student-centered learning; however, there are more active learning methods that can be used in the translation classroom like, "giving two translations of a specific text to each group to compare and contrast them, giving texts with blanks to groups to find the proper terms, collocations, and expressions in the source language, giving texts in the source or target language to groups to edit them, etc" (Jafari, 2013). Furthermore, most of the teachers were satisfied with giving sufficient assignments and exams, since their students got benefits and showed progress in mid-term and final exams. These kinds of exams are

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required summative assessment, while students in the translation classroom need formative assessment more to improve their translation skill.

In addition, most of the teachers were not satisfied with the assessment and evaluation, since formative assessment could not be done usually due to the large number of students in the classroom. This goes in line with Gipps (2013) "The main aim of formative assessment is to provide continuous feedback to both the teacher and the learner/student regarding the progress of translation learning"(as cited in Hatim and Mason, 1997, p. 166). This means formative assessment plays an essential role in developing the students' translation competence.

Regarding the teachers' suggestion to develop these courses, they raised meaningful points; however, they did not forget to refer to training teachers for teaching translation, since intensive courses are required to be acquainted with the methods of teaching translation and how to put theory into practice.

4. Conclusions

The aim of this study was to explore teachers' opinions concerning undergraduate translation courses at the Departments of English, Colleges of Languages in Kurdistan Universities. Findings revealed that there is a shortage in these courses and many teachers were still dissatisfied with many translation course components. Any curricular changes of these courses must take into account the restrictions that undergraduate translation courses have considered, such as teachers specialization, course credit hours, students number in the classroom, students' needs, and students' linguistics background in both English and Kurdish language skills, etc. All these can be determined by setting clear objectives/ learning outcomes to clarify what are the teachers' expectations in the light of the current constraints and students' needs, and aligning these objectives with selecting appropriate text type, methods, assignments, activities, exams, and assessment and evaluation.

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