

PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES AND INSTRUCTIONAL VARIATIONS: A COMPARATIVE CURRICULUM ANALYSIS OF POSTGRADUATE TRANSLATION PROGRAMS IN MAINLAND CHINA, HONG KONG AND SAUDI ARABIA

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ABSTRACT

As we are advancing into an increasingly globalized era, changes occur constantly in all aspects of life and technology is shaping translation teaching and translator training. Against such a background, (re)assessment of translation curricula in order to keep abreast with the changing society has been exceptionally important. This study adopts a comparative approach to analyse the curriculum design of postgraduate translation programs in Mainland China, Hong Kong and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia by placing a special focus on the pedagogical approaches and instructional variations among the three regions. The purpose of this study is to offer a cross-regional perspective into the postgraduate translation programs by examining how and why these programs are similar to, or different from, each other from the perspective of curriculum structures. Based on a detailed survey of the curricula of three key universities selected from each region, we showed that differences exist among these three regions in terms of teaching foci, purposes, methods and content. It is believed that the different curriculum designs in the three regions are closely connected with the socio-cultural background of the respective region. In addition, the factor of market demands seems to play a key role in shaping the translation curriculum design. The results demonstrate that each region has its own strengths and weaknesses in terms of the application of the translation-related technologies, the role of theories in the translation curriculum, and the requirements of academic dissertation. While regional circumstances and departmental differences serve as key factors in shaping the overall curriculum design, all the three regions place a focus on the teaching of specialized translation courses in this age of globalization.

Keywords: Translation Teaching, Pedagogical approaches, Postgraduate Translation Programs, Curricular design

1. INTRODUCTION

Translator training may be a new concept, but the connection between translation and the classroom has always been a long tradition. For a long time, translation was taught in many parts of the world by foreign language teachers with the aim of enhancing students' foreign language proficiency. In comparison to foreign language programs which have established a relatively mature framework regarding curriculum analysis and evaluation, curricular investigations of translation programs are rarely done in the field of translation studies. According to Burnaby (1989: 20), "the curriculum content and learning experiences to take place in class should be negotiated between learners, teachers and coordinators at the beginning of the project and renegotiated regularly during the project". Flinders & Thornton (2004)

define curriculum in two ways. First, it is the entire range of experiences, both undirected and directed, concerned in unfolding the abilities of the individual. Second, it is the series of consciously directed training experiences that the schools use for completing and perfecting the unfoldment, our profession uses it usually in the latter sense". Therefore, from an educational perspective, the curriculum is aimed to achieve educational goals, and require that the curriculum's content and learning outcome can be met as planned. In order to ensure that translation programs keep abreast of the changing social needs, it is important to constantly evaluate the curriculum design to ensure that they are abreast of market developments and demands.

The current study adopts a comparative approach to analyse the curriculum design of postgraduate

translation programs in Mainland China, Hong Kong and Saudi Arabia by placing a special focus on the pedagogical approaches and instructional variations among the three regions. The purpose of this study is to offer a cross-regional perspective into the postgraduate translation programs by examining how and why these programs are similar to, or different from, each other from the perspective of curriculum structures. As translation programs are burgeoning all over the world, a non-Eurocentric cross-regional perspective should yield some valuable insights into the intricacy and complexity of postgraduate translation programs in different regions.

1.1 Translation curriculum analysis

Curriculum design is the purposeful and systematic organization and planning of curriculum within a program or course. As such, it plays a central role for teachers to plan instruction and design learning experiences for students. According to Taba (1962:42), “curriculum design is a statement which identifies the elements of the curriculum, states what their relationships are to each other, and indicates the principles of organization and the requirements of that organization for the administrative conditions under which it is to operate. A design, of course, needs to be supported to make explicit a curriculum theory which establishes the sources to consider and the principles to apply”. Due to its complex and intricate nature, the many issues underlying curriculum design can be viewed from a diverse perspective. Johnson (1969:4) specifically pointed out that there are a number of factors at play in curriculum design, including objectives, content (substantive, operational, and valuative), activities, needs, interests, problems, functions, and disciplines.

As curriculum design is closely connected with the basic goals or outcomes of educational programs, researchers have long devoted much effort to the (re)assessment of curriculum development and design. Analysis and (re)evaluation of curriculum structures have been an essential part of curriculum development and improvement to ensure that the curriculum is effective in promoting improved quality of student learning.

When required, such activities will also give opportunities to bring about some necessary changes. Li (2002) contends that in order to ensure that translation programs best meet the constantly changing social needs and the needs of students, assessment must be carried out to ascertain the real needs of both students and professional translators apart from evaluation of teaching content.

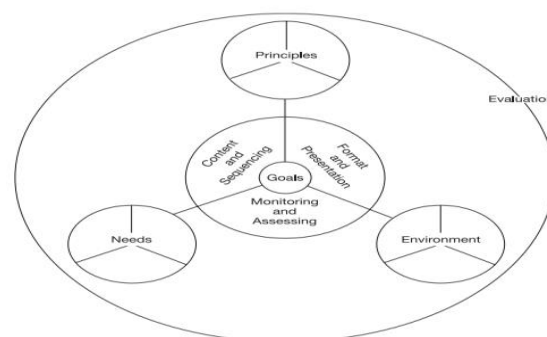


Fig. 1 A model of the parts of the curriculum design process (Nation & Macalister 2010:3)

It is generally agreed that there are three major types of curriculum designs: subject-centered, learner-centered, and problem-centered. As a matter of fact, curriculum design can be perceived as a writing process which includes many sub-processes (gathering ideas, ordering ideas, putting ideas to text, reviewing, editing) (Nation & Macalister 2010:1). The curriculum design model in Figure 1 presented by Nation and Macalister (2010:3) comprises three outside circles and a subdivided inner circle. Principles, environment, needs make up the outer circle while content and sequencing, format and presentation, monitoring and assessing make up the inner circle. This shows that different national circumstances and needs of the trainees play a substantial role in designing the actual curriculum. For this reason, a systematic survey of different postgraduate translation programs in different countries/regions can shed light on translation teaching. The development and implementation of a particular country's curriculum is aligned with its educational objectives and learning outcomes.

Li (2000, 2001, 2002, 2007) is one of the pioneers in surveying curriculum designs and needs of translation programs in Hong Kong. In a number of studies, he investigates the different

stakeholders in translation programs to address whether the translation programs reflect social and market needs. These stakeholders include professional translators (Li 2000), translation students (Li 2003), and administrators of translation services (Li 2007). Li (2001) contends that translator training should respond to market needs and translator training can be improved through curriculum development based on careful and systematic need assessment of the local and international translation market carried out in a regular fashion (Li 2001). Torres-Simón¹ and Pym (2019) also conducted a curriculum analysis of 67 European Masters in Translation (EMT) programs and specifically compared the admission requirements, hands-on language-specific translation classes, courses on the translation profession, internships, and the role of translation theory and research. They found a considerable variation within the EMT programs and identified a number of elements which seem not to fall in line with the objective of training professional translators for the market.

Al-Batineh and Bilali (2017) survey translator training programs and job market demand in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and identifies a gap between the curricula and market demands. Specifically in the graduate translation programs, the curricula place emphasis on cultural and intercultural competence while ignore communicative and textual competence.

With translation being established as an independent discipline that separates itself from applied linguistics, many translation programs have been set up to train professional translators all over the world. However, the translation curriculum might not fully reflect the market and social needs. As argued by Al-Batineh and Bilali (2017:199), “one of the serious challenges that curriculum designers face is ‘responsiveness’ e.g., the time lag between identifying curricular needs from analyses of market context, designing a pedagogical solution (curriculum, courses), implementing the solution, and then beginning another round of analysis”. In view of the time lag between the current curriculum and social and market needs, it is necessary to assess curriculum

design from time to time. Sawyer, Auster Mühl and Enríquez Raído (2019:1) also argue that “[t]o remain relevant to the contexts in which translators and interpreters perform their work, curricula must adapt to new demands and requirements. A curriculum frozen in time soon loses value as a course of action through which students reach their professional goals and employers see their workforce needs addressed”. Thus, it is important to (re)assess the translation curriculum and planning to see if it fully reflects social and market needs.

The current research adopts a comparative approach to analyse the curricula of postgraduate translation programs in Mainland China, Hong Kong and Saudi Arabia by placing a special focus on the pedagogical approaches and instructional variations among the three regions. It is believed that a non-Eurocentric cross-regional perspective should yield some more insights into the intricacy and complexity of postgraduate translation programs in different regions.

2. METHODOLOGY

Three key universities that offer postgraduate translation programs were selected respectively from the three regions for analysis. These three universities are The Guangdong University of Foreign Studies (GDUFS) in Mainland China, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (HK PolyU) in Hong Kong, and the Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University in Saudi Arabia. We conducted a detailed and systematic evaluation of the postgraduate translation curricula of the three universities. Specifically, our comparison focuses on the admission and matriculation criteria, offering of specialized translation and technology-related courses, the role of translation theory. We aimed to shed light on the following questions:

1. Are there any qualitative differences or similarities in the postgraduate translation curriculum design of Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Saudi Arabia?
2. If these differences or similarities can be identified, what are the possible justifications and motivations for their respective curriculum design?

Curriculum design of the three respective regions

2.1 Mainland China

At the end of the 1980s, translation courses in China burgeoned as a result of China's Reform and Opening-up policy and the impact of Translation Studies as an independent discipline. According to official details of *Important Events of Foreign Language Teaching in China 1949-1989*, almost four hundred universities and colleges all over China had a department of foreign languages and many of these departments offered translation and interpretation courses at the undergraduate level. According to Tao (2019:113), based on the statistics of the State Commission of Education, by 1990, more than 50 foreign-language universities or departments offered M.A. degrees in English language and literature, including translation as a branch of the specialty of English language and literature. In 2007, the National Degree Committee under the State Council authorized 15 universities to launch a new Master's vocational program in Translation and Interpreting (MTI); by 2017, a total of 215 colleges and universities were authorized to offer an MTI program (Tao 2019:115). GDUFS is one of approved universities that offer both M.A. and Ph.D. programs in translation and interpreting studies.

The MTI program in GDUFS states that it aims at turning out MTI graduates to be qualified and high-level interpreters and translators in different fields with professional integrity, language competence, and also with a good command of interpreting and translation skills and a wide range of knowledge. Students of various majors can be admitted to the MTI program after qualifying themselves in the nationally organized postgraduate entrance examination and the reexamination held by the applied school. The length of study is normally two years. Overall, students need to complete 42 credits in order to graduate from the program. The courses mainly fall into three components: common courses, compulsory courses and elective courses. Students are also required to complete a thesis (normally one semester) that can take the form of translation

internship report, translation project (translation plus analysis), translation experiment report, survey report, or a research thesis. The MATI program of GDUFS has seven directions: Conference Interpreting, Public Service Interpreting, Business Translation, Legal Translation, Media Translation, Translation and Localization Management.

Different from the research-oriented MA translation program that aims at cultivating translation academicians, the MTI programs are more practical, hands-on and job-oriented, aiming at training professional translation practitioners. The differences of the MA and MTI programs are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparison of MTI and MA programs in GDUFS (Zhao and Mu, 2013:80)

Type	MA in Translation	MTI
Name	Master of Arts in Translation	Master of Translation and Interpreting
Objective	Academic-oriented, research-oriented	Practice-oriented, job-oriented
Length of Study	3 years (full time)	2 years (full time)
Research Directions/Courses	Interpreting and translation research; translation teaching research; literary translation research	Conference Interpreting; Public Service Interpreting; Business Translation; Legal Translation; Media Translation; Translation and Localization Management

Credits required for graduation	42 credits	Conference Interpreting (82 credits); Other concentrations (42 credits)
Assessment	Mid-term assessment (A test based on a reading list of 10 books on translation studies)	Both translation practice and internship will be assessed; An achievement examination
Academic dissertation	Research-based academic dissertation written in English	Dissertation can take many forms including translation internship report, translation project (translation plus analysis), translation experiment report, survey report, or a research thesis, written in English.

As can be seen from Table 1, the MTI program is quite different from MA in translation program in its objectives, length of study, concentrations and assessment. Overall, the MTI program in GUDFS has developed its own curriculum structure that is in line with its own teaching objectives and requirements.

2.2 Hong Kong

As an international city bridging the east and the west, Hong Kong has always stood at the forefront in the development and offering of translation-related courses and programs. According to the Basic Law of Hong Kong and the Official Languages Ordinance, both Chinese and English are the official languages of Hong Kong with equal status. Because there is a high demand of translation, both from Chinese into English and English into Chinese, the education sector in Hong Kong was quick in responding to such a demand. In 1972, The Chinese University of Hong Kong set up the first translation department. Currently, seven of the eight government-funded universities offer translation programs or courses at different levels. However, not all these universities offer translation degree at the postgraduate level. Due to its historical traditions inherited from the British, Hong Kong has two types of master degree: Master of Philosophy (MPhil; a research-based degree) and Master of Arts (MA; a taught master degree that is similar to the MTI of Chinese mainland). Table 2 lists the differences between the MPhil and MA in translation programs in The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. As of 2021, six universities have offered (or will offer) MA in translation in Hong Kong. These include The University of Hong Kong (HKU), The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK), The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU), Hong Kong Baptist University (HKBU), City University of Hong Kong (CityU), and Lingnan University of Hong Kong (LU).

In line with the different expertise of the department, each translation program has its own uniqueness and strengths. For example, the translation program of the HKU is housed within Department of Chinese while the same program of the CityU is housed within Department of Linguistics and Translation. Some universities such as CUHK and HKBU have an independent translation department. For this reason, the different translation programs have developed their respective foci and specializations. All these programs are rather popular with students and an overwhelming number of students from the

Chinese mainland attend these programs each year to pursue their master degree in translation and interpreting. In the following, we will mainly use the MATI (Master of Arts in Translating and Interpreting) of the PolyU as an example for conducting the curriculum analysis.

Table 2. Comparison of MATI and Mphil in Translation programs in HK PolyU

Types	MATI	Mphil
Name	Master of Arts in Translating and Interpreting	Master of Philosophy in Translation and Interpreting Studies
Objective	Practice-oriented, career-oriented	Academic-oriented, research-oriented
Length of Study	2 years (full time)	1 year (full time)
Research Directions /Courses	Theories of translation, empirical studies of translation, neuro-cognitive approaches to translation studies; assessment of interpreting quality, perception of interpreting performance, pedagogy of interpreting, court interpreting, community interpreting, simultaneous interpreting, and corpus-	Conference Interpreting; Business Translation; Legal Translation; Media Translation

	based interpreting studies	
Credits required for graduation	9 credits of coursework	10 subjects (30 credits), of which 6 must be compulsory subjects, and 4 elective subjects that are chosen from a pool of subjects in the general area of language studies.
Assessment	Completes the coursework, submits a thesis presenting the results of his/her research	Completes 30 credits as required
Academic dissertation	Research-based academic dissertation written in English	Optional

The MATI program of The HK PolyU is housed within Department of Chinese and Bilingual Studies (CBS) which has a comprehensive research profile in language sciences and linguistics, with special foci on Chinese, bilingualism and Asian languages. As stated in the program objectives, MATI program offers a broad-based curriculum with intensive training, which prepares students for future professional specializations. Students will be equipped with advanced knowledge and career-enhancing skills that are in great demand in both the private and public sectors. Different from the MTI program of the Chinese mainland, the MATI program of

PolyU has its own foci, characteristics and priorities.

As stated in program curriculum, the aims of the MATI program are:

- to promote intercultural and cross-linguistic co-operation through teamwork;
- to develop participants' learning and translating and interpreting skills;
- to build upon the diverse experience that participants bring to the course and extend their awareness of translating and interpreting, and the nature of the English and Chinese languages; and
- to assist graduates from the program to develop their careers by providing them with professional skills marketable in both the private and public sectors.

(The Hong Kong Polytechnic University:2021)

Students should have a bachelor degree and obtain IELTS 6.5 in order to qualify for admission to the MATI program. In addition, they also need to attend an interview to test if they are eligible for studying in the program. Similar to other taught translation programs in Hong Kong, the MATI program of HK PolyU has attached importance to the teaching of specialized translation courses. The specialized translation courses include Advanced Translation for Business and Commerce, Advanced Legal Translation, Advanced Media Translation. On the other hand, literary translation courses are not offered in the program. There is no independent course teaching translation theories. However, the teaching of theory is included in different courses to inform translation practice. For example, in the course of Advanced Translation, the course syllabus states that the course aims to "extend and develop students' awareness of the pragmatics of professional translation, through a wide variety of text types and topics, in a variety of text media. Issues of theory will be tested against practice to assist students to develop a high level of awareness of their own skills as practitioners, and a greater confidence in their own ability to work to professional standards."

In term of the length of study, the program is quite intensive as students must complete 30 credits in

one year of study. This is in direct contrast to the full time MTI program of GDUFS in which students only have to complete 42 credits in two years. Since the program is career-oriented with the aim of turning out professional translators, the academic dissertation is optional which also contrasts with GDUFS of Mainland China that requires students to submit a dissertation. Overall, we can see that the courses offered at PolyU fall into two streams of interpreting and translation, with the latter consisting mostly of specialized translation courses.

2.3 Saudi Arabia

As a fast-developing country situated in the Middle East that takes up 80% of the Arabian Peninsula, Saudi Arabia has witnessed a significant progress in higher education in the past two decades. As of 2020, Saudi Arabia has 21 public universities and 24 private universities/colleges. Due to its free tuition policy, a large number of high school graduates attend universities. As there is an increasing demand for translation, a number of translation courses and programs have been set up in various universities since 1976 (Alenezi 2015:13). Among the 24 public universities, 22 universities offer translation-related courses as translation is a necessary requirement for students to obtain a bachelor degree in English language and literature. In line with the fast development of BA translation programs, a number of universities have also setup postgraduate-level translation programs, for example, the Master of Science in Translation Studies of Effat University, MA in Translation of King Saud University and MSc in Translation Program of UMM Al-Qura University.

As is pointed out by Al-Batineh and Bilali (2017:189), "depending on the historical and colonial heritage of each country or region in the Arab world, curricular models from former colonial powers (e.g., France or Britain) were usually used and adapted to serve the local needs of the country". As is the case with Saudi Arabia, the British has exerted much influence on it since early twentieth century. Together with the recent influence of the United States, English has been a dominant foreign language in the region. For this

reason, most of the translation programs in Saudi Arabia are based on the two languages of English and Arabic, though some also offer French-Arabic translation courses. In the following, we will use the Diploma in Translation of Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University as an example to analyse and elaborate on the translation curriculum structure.

Formerly known as Prince Salman Bin Abdulaziz University or the University of Al-Kharj, Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University was established in 2007. As a relatively young university, it has made tremendous progress in a number of disciplines. The Postgraduate Diploma in Translation of Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University enrolls female students only. Students need to fulfil 30 credits in one year (two semesters) in order to complete the diploma. Since the program is not a degree course, the admission threshold is comparatively lower than the master degree translation programs of Mainland China and Hong Kong. Students need to have a bachelor degree and IELTS 5.5 to be admitted to the program.

Unlike the curriculum structures of Mainland China and Hong Kong which have both compulsory and elective courses, the graduate diploma program only offers compulsory courses. These courses include technology and translation, textual analysis and interpretation, theories in translation, computer-assisted translation, consecutive and simultaneous interpreting, audiovisual translation and translation localization. It can be seen that most of the translation courses emphasized specialized rather than literary translation. It is also worth noting that the curriculum has taken technology into consideration, as reflected in the two courses of computer-assisted translation and translation localization. Besides, the program has an independent course to teach students translation theories. Overall, the courses offered are closely aligned with the program objectives as follows:

1. Provide students with advanced skills in translation in both Arabic and English;
2. Enable students to acquire critical knowledge and skills in the field of oral and written translation;
3. Prepare and train students to be able to translate in a variety of fields;

4. Train students to be able to use technology in the field of translation efficiently

In summary, the graduate diploma program of Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University has its own uniqueness and characteristics that are distinctly different from those of Mainland China and Hong Kong. Such a curriculum design is closely related to the program objectives and social circumstances of the country.

3. DISCUSSION

3.1 Specialized translation

The current study has taken a cross-regional perspective to look into the curriculum design of the three regions of Mainland China, Hong Kong and Saudi Arabia. It is found that the postgraduate translation curricula of these three regions share some similarities but also retain their own uniqueness. For example, all three programs surveyed in the current study have attached much emphasis to specialized translation courses. The predominant proportion of specialized translation courses is reflective of the recent changes brought by globalization which is evident in nearly every aspect of life and has greatly affected various fields of study, particularly translation. Due to globalization, specialised translation has grown exponentially and accounts for more than 90% of the market-oriented translation work (Chan 2015:44). At the same time, students have also taken a great interest in studying specialised translation which includes courses such as commercial translation, news translation, translation of government materials, scientific and legal translation (Li 2001:87). Traditionally, the importance of specialised translation has often been neglected by translation scholars. For example, Cronin (2003:2) asserted that 'the cultural and intellectual stakes of non-literary translation are rarely spelled out in any great detail and are generally referred to in only the vaguest possible terms ("promoting understanding", "encouraging trade")'. Based on the current study, such a situation has been improving as greater emphasis has been given to the offering of specialized translation courses.

3.2 Technology in translation curriculum

We live in a world where technology is developing at an unimaginable speed. There is no doubt that technology is shaping every aspect of how we work, communicate and live. Translation as an important means of facilitating communication between different language communities and cultures is one key area falling under the impact of technology. Today, machine translation is developing at an astonishing pace in the translation and localization industry. This recent development has not only transformed the operation of the translation industry, but also made an immediate impact on the translation curriculum. In this study, it is also found that the translation curricula of the two universities of Mainland China and Saudi Arabia have incorporated the technology-related courses in their curriculum design. On the other hand, the curriculum of The Hong Kong Polytechnic University does not have a course that is directly relevant to translation technology. Although translation technology is integrated in other translation-related courses such as Advanced Translation for Business and Commerce and Advanced Legal Translation, the curriculum seem a bit lagging behind the market needs and development.

3.3 Translation theory

The teaching of translation theory has always been a debatable issue in translation teaching. The question of whether translation theory is useful to translation practitioners remains the subject of heated debate. Some translation theorists believe that theory is conducive to students' acquisition of macro translation knowledge and awareness (Boase-Beier 2011) while others contend that theory is of little use and should be excluded from the translation teaching curriculum (Nida 1981). Li (2002) has found that students were in general disapproving the inclusion of translation theory in the curriculum. Based on the current survey of three different universities, we can see that translation theory remains an important component of the translation curriculum despite regional variations. It is likely that translation trainers share a different view from trainees regarding the role of theory in translation teaching. Nonetheless, the status quo of translation theory in

the translation curriculum also demonstrates a certain degree of prescriptiveness of translation teaching from trainers' perspective.

3.4 Academic Dissertation

Based on the comparative analysis of translation curricula of the three regions, it is also found that different universities have requirements regarding academic dissertation. Although all three programs are all career-oriented with the aim of training professional translators, there are slight differences in terms of their requirements of academic dissertation. The Chinese university has made it a compulsory component although students can choose to complete it in different forms such as translation internship report, translation project or a research thesis. As is the case with the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, the academic dissertation is an optional component consisting of 9 credits and students can choose to do either translation work or a research-based thesis. The translation curriculum of Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University has a course named "translation project" which requires students to do translation work instead of conducting research-based investigations. Overall, despite the variations between the three universities, research-based translation project does not form an important part of the translation curriculum due to their practical and career-based nature.

4. CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

The current study adopts a cross-regional perspective to investigate the curriculum design of three non-European regions. By systematically analysing the curricula and course syllabi of three university cases selected from Mainland China, Hong Kong and Saudi Arabia, we have identified some similarities and variations among the three regions. As far as similarities are concerned, all three regions have attached importance to the teaching of specialized translation courses to keep abreast of the social changes and demands. Besides, all three programs also emphasize the teaching of translation theory despite the controversies surrounding its usefulness for translation practice. On the other hand, there also exist some variations due to different regional or departmental circumstances. For example, the

curriculum designs of Mainland China and Hong Kong are relatively more systematic and sophisticated than that of Saudi Arabia, possibly owing to its long history and connection with the translation industry. The postgraduate translation programs in Hong Kong and Mainland China offer both compulsory and elective courses for students to choose while the university in Saudi Arabia has a fixed curriculum offering compulsory courses only. Other differences are also found in a number of areas such as the offering of technology-related translation courses and requirements of academic dissertation.

The current study has its limitations in that it only surveys the curriculum design of three case studies selected from three different regions. To a certain extent, the idiosyncrasy of the case study may aggravate the possibility for a generalization of the results. Future research can conduct interviews with some key stakeholders of translation programs including translation instructors, translation students or even employers to gain their insights into these issues in translator training.

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Acknowledgement

This research is supported by a GRF grant (Ref: 15605520) from the Research Grants Council of Hong Kong and a Faculty Development Scheme Grant (Ref: UGC/FDS15/H11/17) from Hong Kong University Grants Committee of Hong Kong.