
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Saudi Arabia-Certified Translator Programme: Impact on Translation Competence and Employability

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ABSTRACT

There is growing scholarly interest in the influence of translation certification on translation competence and the translation profession. The current study investigated certified translators' perceptions of how the Saudi Arabia-Certified Translators Programme (SACTP) enhanced their translation competence and influenced their employability as well as the improvements deemed necessary. The study recruited 74 translators certified by the Literature, Publishing and Translation Commission (LPTC) of Saudi Arabia. A questionnaire was employed for data collection, and qualitative and quantitative analytical methods were applied. The findings revealed that respondents generally perceived the SACTP as moderately enhancing their translation competence. Overall, respondents perceived a moderate impact of the SACTP on their employability. Additionally, the findings provided insights into recommended improvements, such as incorporating more practical sessions or mock translation/certification test samples, integrating CAT and AI tools into the certification to replicate industry practices, introducing additional language pairs and certification types, launching collaborations with translation agencies and mandating certification for government translation projects to increase the credibility and value of LPTC certification. The study recommends launching pre-certification initiative, such as paid certification test samples and post-certification initiatives, such as professional self-marketing, translation project management and translation technologies to equip certified translators with the knowledge and competences required to compete effectively in the translation market. The study also identifies areas for future research, including investigating translation agencies' perspectives on the LPTC certified translator programme and examining how the programme influences the translation market in Saudi Arabia.

KEYWORDS

Certified translator, translation certification, translation competence, certified translator employability, certified translator programme improvements

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1. Introduction

Translation certification programmes globally aim to regulate the translation market by attesting that translators are sufficiently qualified to perform translation tasks. Certification is a procedure in which a professional organisation officially acknowledges an individual's level of competence upon achieving predetermined qualifications (Stejskal, 2003). Central to translation certification is translation competence, which constitutes the core focus of this study. This key concept encompasses various skills and knowledge that enable translators to provide complete, accurate and faithful translation. Biel (2011) distinguished between two often-debated terms: translation competence and translator competence. Translation competence refers to "the ability to translate to the required standard," whereas translator competence denotes "skills required to function as a professional on the market" (p. 164). The European Master's in Translation (EMT), a quality standard for master's-level university translation programmes created by the European Commission, defined competence in its Competence Framework (2022) as "the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development" (p. 3). The ISO/IEC 17024 defined competence as the "ability to apply knowledge and

skills to achieve intended results” in accordance with the certification scheme (International Organization for Standardization, 2012, Section 3.6).

The Saudi Arabia-Certified Translators Programme (SACTP) is an official certification accredited by the Literature, Publishing and Translation Commission (LPTC) of Saudi Arabia. It aims to support the professional practices of Saudi translators across various translation fields. The programme comprises two tracks: Practitioner and Experienced Translator. Practitioners are translators with between 3–10 years of professional translation experience; they must complete a 60-hour preparatory training programme offered by the LPTC before applying for the certification exam. Experienced Translators have 10+ years of experience and are exempt from preparatory training, instead being categorised into two groups: those following the exam route and those eligible for direct certification (LPTC, 2024). Within each track are four core certification types: General Translation, Medical Translation, Legal Translation and Interpreting. Two additional certification types, Audiovisual Translation and Conference Translation, have recently been introduced. The certification is offered in English and French. Overall, the programme is designed to ensure that translators meet the minimum professional standards required to practice translation effectively (LPTC, 2024).

The impacts of the SACTP on translators’ translation competence and employability have not yet been explored in the literature. To address this gap, this study aims to assess the extent to which the SACTP enhances certified translators’ translation competence both directly, i.e., through the skills and knowledge acquired from the certification exam itself and indirectly, i.e., through the activities or practices undertaken in preparation for the exam. Furthermore, the study examines how translators perceive the SACTP’s influence on their employability and documents the improvements they deemed necessary. The findings of this study offer a valuable academic reference for the LPTC as well as university translation programme designers seeking to align their programme objectives with the SACTP, thereby helping bridge the gap between the theory and practice of translation to prepare highly competitive translators for the translation job market in the Saudi Arabia.

2. Literature Review

According to Quinci (2023), the literature has long sought to form a robust theoretical basis for translator training programmes and professional practice, emphasising the practical implications of understanding translation competence. This section reviews the literature on translation competence and its correlation with the objectives of translation certification to ensure high-quality translation output.

2.1 Translation Competence

Translation competence has received considerable attention in the literature among translation scholars, particularly since the mid-1980s (Hurtado Albir, 2017). It has been widely used in the literature as a benchmark for assessing translators’ capabilities (Alharbi, 2024; AlShaye & BinSultan, 2024; Alzamil, 2024; Hazaea & Qassem, 2024; Korinska, 2023; Korinska et al., 2025; Prieto Ramos, 2024; Robert et al., 2024; Salamah, 2022). The PACTE (Process of Acquisition of Translation Competence and Evaluation) Group (2019) described translation competence as a comprehensive set of translators’ knowledge and capabilities. Neubert (2011) argued that translation competence comprises language, textual, subject matter, cultural and transfer competences. Røvik (2023) conceptualised translation competence as two core pillars through which a translator employs their knowledge and skills to transfer knowledge across language boundaries: The first pillar involves understanding the source and target contexts, whereas the second comprises familiarity with translation principles and the ability to effectively choose and apply suitable rules according to specific situational demands. Yao (2024) conceptualised seven basic components of translation competence: linguistic, field-specific ability, strategic, translation technology, cross-cultural knowledge and skills, translation theoretical and practical knowledge and translation project management competences. Project management was also identified as a key competence by Liu (2023).

Translation competence has become a fundamental requirement for professional translators, particularly given the evolution of information technology and artificial intelligence (AI) (Yao, 2024). The translation industry has recently undergone significant transformations in both processes and paradigms. For example, Yao (2024) introduced a new translation competence integrating the technological skills necessary for translators to meet the needs of the contemporary translation market. Other studies have identified the importance of understanding information culture and technologies for translators in developing adaptive professional competence. Korinska (2023) argued that to master professional competences, translators must be able to gather, evaluate and apply different cultural information effectively and ethically; to use information and communication technologies in professional contexts; and to adhere to ethical and legal standards when dealing with information. According to Ehrensberger-Dow (2019), translation increasingly requires the use of computers and familiarity with translation technology, particularly computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools. In a survey of 1,285 language service providers across 55 countries, nearly all translation companies and 87% of professional translators indicated that they used CAT tools. Liu (2023) emphasised that translation technology skills are crucial for helping translators “stay competitive in this technological-driven field” (p. 9).

Despite their importance, however, technological skills and competences in translation remain a challenge for Saudi translators, who often lack comprehensive understanding of this technology (Asiri et al., 2024). In a study of translation programmes at six different Saudi universities, Hazaea and Qassem (2024) investigated learners' knowledge and skills in instrumental translation competence based on the translation competence framework developed by the PACTE Group. The study analysed translation programme documentation and courses, learners' instruction in and ability to use translation technologies and other tools, and learners' perceptions. They found that translation technology courses are limited to one or two courses across the entire 4-year programme, and learners reported insufficient translation technology training, limited knowledge of advanced translation technologies, challenges in using these technologies effectively and lack of awareness of the impacts of these technologies on translation quality. This is a crucial issue, since Al-Batineh and Al Tenaijy (2024) have noted that the translation industry across the Arab world requires technological competence.

In this study, the 2022 EMT Competence Framework was adopted as the theoretical model. Although this framework was originally introduced in 2009 to assess postgraduate translation programmes, the competences outlined therein also offer a comprehensive structure for assessing translators' knowledge and skills. Accordingly, it was implemented in this study to evaluate competences relevant to the SACTP context. The 2022 framework is structured around five primary competences: translation, language and culture, technology, personal and interpersonal skills and service provision, defined as follows (EMT, 2022):

- Translation competence is the foundation for all other competences in the EMT framework. This multifaceted ability encompasses the entire translation process—whether interlingually, intralingually or involving pivot languages. It encompasses thematic, strategic and methodological competences applied before, during and after the translation process, starting from document analysis to the final step, which is quality assurance.
- Language and culture competence entails “all the general or language-specific linguistic, sociolinguistic, cultural and transcultural knowledge” (p. 6) and skills that form the foundation of advanced translation competence.
- Technology competence encompasses the knowledge and skills necessary for the use of current and emerging translation technologies, including machine translation.
- Personal and interpersonal skills competence comprises soft skills that contribute to translators' adaptability and enhance their professional employability.
- Service provision competence relates to the body of skills necessary for translation implementation and for language services within professional settings, including understanding of clients, commissioners and end-users, as well as negotiation, project management and quality assurance.

2.2 Translation Certification

There is increasing interest among translation scholars and professional translators in evaluating translation certification and its effect on translation students and training programmes as well as recruiters (Chan, 2011; Dybiec-Gajer, 2014; Javadi & Khezrab, 2020; Koby & Melby, 2013; Ordóñez-López, 2020; Pym et al., 2014; Salmi & Kinnunen, 2015; Yusoff et al., 2023; Zhao & Gu, 2016). The American Translators Association (ATA) (n.d.) asserts on its website that certification is “the only widely recognized measure of competence for translation.” The Canadian Translators, Terminologists and Interpreters Council (n.d.) upholds and advances professional standards by administering national standardised examinations. According to Stejskal (2003), translation certification examination is a major objective of the Arab Translators Network (ATN) to enhance the competences of professional translators.

In a systematic review, Yusoff et al. (2023) revealed four major themes in the literature: translator certification concepts, certification methodologies, certifying authorities and challenges associated with certification schemes. Examination-based certification, preferably aligned with real practical translation needs, is widely accepted as the standard best practice (Yusoff et al., 2023). In a study of certification theory and best practices in translation certification, Koby and Melby (2013) drew on ISO standards and outlined the function of job task analysis (JTA) in establishing the validity of translation certification examinations. The requirements outlined in ISO 17024 for the operation of certification bodies emphasise ensuring universal fairness in the certification process; maintaining thorough documentation of procedures pertaining to certification granting, renewal, suspension or withdrawal; and engaging all relevant stakeholders through an advisory council. Koby and Melby concluded that certifying bodies benefit from providing translation certifications, as they serve as reliable indicators of the professional competence of their certified translators. Moreover, certification contributes to elevating translators' status within the translation profession and to enhancing the quality within translation services (Salamah, 2022).

Despite the benefits of translation certification, translators and employers of translation services do not universally appear to appreciate them. Although a study of professional translators conducted by the ATA in 2011 indicated that 73% of respondents valued both professional association membership and translation certification as instrumental to translators' professional

development (Koby & Melby, 2013), Yusoff et al. (2023) noted a need for greater awareness among Malaysian translators of the importance of certification to the long-term sustainability of the field. Employers are even less consistent in recognising the value of translation certification. In an evaluation of 151 job advertisements for translation positions across 5 years, Bowker (2005) found that only 35 advertisements (23.2%) requested professional certified translators. Along similar lines, although Chan (2010) reported that translators themselves perceived translation certification as an enhancement to the translation profession, a later study (Chan, 2011) involving interviews with eight Hong Kong translator recruiters reported that employers considered official qualifications and work history as key factors in hiring translators, whereas translation certification was considered secondary. Such discrepant perceptions may be due to limited knowledge and misunderstandings of certification procedures. To address this issue, greater collaboration among translation companies, training institutions and professional associations is recommended to signal the value of certification more clearly to translators and those who hire them (Chan, 2010, 2011; Yusoff et al., 2023).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Questions

The following research questions (RQs) address the study objectives:

1. How do certified translators perceive the SACTP's contributions to enhancing their translation competence?
2. To what extent do certified translators believe the SACTP influences their employability?
3. What improvements do certified translators identify as necessary for the SACTP?

3.2 Study Sample

This study recruited 74 male and female certified translators based in Saudi Arabia. All participants were officially accredited by the LPTC through the SACTP. Although the SACTP distinguishes between Practitioner and Experienced Translator tracks for certification procedures, this study did not. Participants were informed that participating was completely voluntary and they could withdraw at any time without consequences. Their answers were treated with the utmost confidentiality. Ethical approval of the study was granted by the Committee of Research Ethics, Deanship of Graduate Studies and Scientific Research, Qassim University, Saudi Arabia (Reference No. 25-47-04).

3.3 Research Design and Instrument

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to combine the benefits of qualitative and quantitative methods in comprehensive data analysis. Because the study aimed to gather a broad range of information (Horvat, 2025), the author developed a two-part questionnaire with reference to the EMT Competence Framework (2022) as the main instrument for data collection. This design balanced the widely adopted close-ended questionnaire format (Baburajan et al., 2020) with the greater depth and richness afforded by open-ended questions (Harland & Holey, 2011). The first 23 items were close-ended and addressed RQs 1 and 2. Questionnaire Items 1–18 investigated certified translators' perceptions of the SACTP's effects on enhancing their translation competence, whereas Items 19–23 investigated perceptions of the SACTP's influence on their employability. Respondents rated close-ended items on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly agree, 5 = strongly disagree). The final open-ended question (Item 24) provided supplementary insights into respondents' perspectives on potential enhancements of the SACTP to address RQ3.

To establish content validity of questionnaire items, extensive feedback was first solicited from an academic and an expert in translation, and their suggested amendments were incorporated (Bowling, 2023; Priest et al., 1995). Subsequently, 8 participants were selected to pilot-test the study instrument (Nemoto & Beglar, 2014; Rattray & Jones, 2007). Pilot-testing aims to establish whether the questionnaire consistently measures what it is intended to measure (Radhakrishna, 2007) and can provide early warnings regarding suitability and complications (Van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001). Upon successful pilot-test completion, the questionnaire was distributed online to the study sample via Microsoft Forms.

3.4 Data Analysis Procedures

The responses to close-ended questions were analysed quantitatively, whereas the open-ended question data were analysed qualitatively. Quantitative responses were analysed in SPSS (version 28) to derive descriptive statistics (i.e., means, standard deviations and frequency) (Alabi & Bukola, 2023). Inferential statistical procedures (e.g., hypothetical means, t tests) were administered to identify these items' statistical significance and ranking.

The study followed Schreier (2012) in analysing the open-ended response data via qualitative content analysis (QCA) to summarise and describe essential information. A concept-driven (deductive) coding frame was defined prior to data collection and comprised seven main categories (Fraenkel et al., 2014): certification requirements—mandatory criteria for applicants prior to applying for the exam; training—content, duration, delivery mode, etc., of the training programme offered by LPTC; actual exam—the official exam administered for translator certification; exam results; available language pairs—existing language pairs

offered; types of certificates; and certification recognition in the translation market. The author and another researcher both tested the reliability of the coding frame, and coding was found to be consistent.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents the descriptive statistics for the close-ended question data and the QCA results for the open-ended data. The study results are addressed in the same sequence as the research questions. Correlation coefficients were used to calculate the relation of each item in the close-ended questionnaire to its respective variable (translation competence or employability) (range 0.54–0.96). Statistical significance was set to 0.01, and results demonstrated robust reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.851$). A comprehensive discussion of the findings follows the results.

4.1 The SACTP's Contributions to Enhancing Translation Competence

The first research question aimed to assess the extent to which certified translators believe the SACTP enhances translation competence. Table 1 summarises the descriptive statistics for questionnaire Items 1–18, which measured this concept.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics for Items Measuring SACTP Contributions to Enhancing Translation Competence

Statement No.	Frequencies and ratios	Response options					Mean	Std. Dev.	Hypothetical mean	t	Relative mean	Sig. (2-tailed)	Impact	Rank
		Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree								
01	F	16	23	20	3	12	3.38	1.32	2.6	5.06	67.6%	0.01	Moderate	15
	%	21.6	31.1	27	4.1	16.2								
02	F	16	31	16	2	9	3.58	1.21	3.4	1.28	71.6%	0.20	Moderate	7
	%	21.6	41.9	21.6	2.7	12.2								
03	F	14	22	23	3	12	3.13	1.29	2.6	4.73	62.6%	0.01	Moderate	17
	%	18.9	29.7	31.1	4.1	16.2								
04	F	12	27	24	5	6	3.45	1.10	3.4	0.46	69%	0.64	Moderate	12
	%	16.2	36.5	32.4	6.8	8.1								
05	F	14	32	16	3	9	3.52	1.21	3.4	0.90	70.4	0.37	Moderate	8
	%	18.9	43.2	21.6	4.1	12.2								
06	F	31	16	16	2	9	3.78	1.34	3.4	2.45	75.6%	0.02	High	2
	%	41.9	21.6	21.6	2.7	12.2								
07	F	24	30	11	0	9	3.81	1.24	3.4	2.83	76.2%	0.01	High	1
	%	32.4	40.5	14.9	0	12.2								
08	F	25	25	13	2	9	3.74	1.29	3.4	2.28	74.8%	0.02	High	3
	%	33.8	33.8	17.6	2.7	12.2								
09	F	17	29	17	5	6	3.62	1.15	3.4	1.65	72.4%	0.10	Moderate	6
	%	23	39.2	23	6.8	8.1								
10	F	19	32	12	2	9	3.67	1.23	3.4	1.91	73.4%	0.06	High	4
	%	25.7	43.2	16.2	2.7	12.2								
11	F	18	22	20	5	9	3.47	1.27	3.4	0.49	69.4%	0.62	Moderate	11
	%	24.3	29.7	27	6.8	12.2								
12	F	17	16	24	8	9	3.32	1.28	2.6	4.85	66.4%	0.01	Moderate	16
	%	23	21.6	32.4	10.8	12.2								
13	F	13	28	17	7	9	3.39	1.23	2.6	5.50	67.8%	0.01	Moderate	14
	%	17.6	37.8	23	9.5	12.2								
14	F	15	29	16	5	9	3.48	1.24	3.4	0.60	69.6%	0.55	Moderate	10
	%	20.3	39.2	21.6	6.8	12.2								
15	F	7	27	16	15	9	3.10	1.20	2.6	3.64	62%	0.01	Moderate	18
	%	9.5	36.5	21.6	20.3	12.2								
16	F	9	30	24	5	6	3.41	1.05	3.4	0.15	68.2%	0.87	Moderate	13
	%	12.2	40.5	32.4	6.8	8.1								
17	F	10	35	20	0	9	3.50	1.12	3.4	0.76	70%	0.45	Moderate	9
	%	13.5	47.3	27	0	12.2								
18	F	21	31	10	0	12	3.66	1.34	3.4	1.69	73.2%	0.09	Moderate	5
	%	28.4	41.9	13.5	0	16.2								
SUM	Mean of means = 3.51						63.26	19.50	61.2	0.91	63.18%	0.83	Moderate	

As shown in Table 1, the total mean of the items addressing the first research question was 3.51, with a relative mean of 63.18% (range 62%–73.2%), indicating a moderate correlation. Study participants thus perceived the SACTP as generally having a moderate impact on enhancing the translation competence of certified translators. Nevertheless, Items 6, 7, 8 and 10 had high correlations, with relative means ranging between 73.4% and 76.2%, indicating that participants perceived these items as having greater impacts on enhancing translation competence.

The highest-rated statement was Item 7, “the SACTP enhanced my skills in dealing with specialised terminology.” Overall, certified translators agreed that the certification programme enhanced their competence in dealing with precise terminology in a specialised domain, such as legal terminology. The second highest-rated statement was Item 6, “the SACTP strengthened my confidence in engaging with specialised texts in my domain.” Translators viewed the programme as strengthening their self-confidence—crucial for optimal translation—when translating texts in their specialisation domain. This finding is consistent with Chan’s (2010) report that certification enhances translators’ self-esteem. The third highest-rated statement was Item 8, “the SACTP improved my ability to translate various types of materials in my specialisation domain for diverse target audiences.” Overall, respondents believed the programme enhanced their capabilities when translating distinctive materials for different target audiences. The final highly rated statement was Item 10, “the SACTP improved my problem-solving strategies during the translation process.” Translators believed that the SACTP improved their problem-solving strategies—another key competence as, according to Ibrahim (2017), translation is essentially “a problem-solving activity” (p. 579).

Moving to the moderately rated statements, the top-ranked was Item 18, “the SACTP fostered my commitment to lifelong learning and personal skills development.” Overall, respondents felt more committed to ongoing learning and personal competence development after completing the SACTP. This finding highlights that learning and personal development are not restricted to a specific period, which aligns with Vishwakarma’s (2023) argument that continuous development is required for translators to produce high-quality translation. The second-ranked moderate statement was Item 9, “the SACTP advanced my capability in analysing and justifying translation solutions and choices.” This competence is crucial for successful translation as it demonstrates the translator’s appropriate theoretical grounding in choosing and explaining the appropriate solution for translation issues (Vottonen & Kujamäki, 2021). The third-ranked moderate statement was Item 2, “the SACTP enhanced my ability to use lexical choices appropriately in the target language.” Overall, translators believed that the SACTP enhanced their ability to produce an optimal translation. The fourth-ranked moderate statement was Item 5, “the SACTP helped me to identify cultural nuances, to address cultural references and translate them appropriately.” Translators saw the SACTP as improving the nuance of their cross-cultural translation capabilities—a key role of professional translators (Boluwatife, 2025; Vishwakarma, 2023). The fifth-ranked moderate statement was Item 17, “the SACTP deepened my understanding of ethical practices and standards in translation.” Most translators viewed the SACTP as enhancing their ethical practices and standards in translation. This finding supports the value of the SACTP in addressing a major challenge faced by Saudi translators in adhering to the code of ethics, i.e., the lack of widespread translation certification in Saudi Arabia (Asiri et al., 2024).

Although less highly ranked than the previous groups of statements, the remaining items addressing RQ1 nevertheless showed a range of moderate correlations between the SACTP programme and important aspects of translation competence. Overall, multiple respondents agreed that the SACTP enhanced their time management skills and ability to meet deadlines (Item 14); improved their proficiency in using online dictionaries and other translation resources (e.g., corpuses, termbases) (Item 11); increased their ability to use appropriate syntactic structures in the target language (Item 4); helped them bridge the gap between academia and the translation industry to address the practical demands of real-world translation situations (Item 16); enhanced their implementation of translation quality assurance techniques (Item 13); deepened their understanding of language variations and contextual and social functions (Item 1); broadened their awareness of technical implementations such as CAT tools (Item 12); enhanced their ability to use idiomatic expressions appropriate in the target language (Item 3); and equipped them with the skills to organise and manage translation projects (Item 15). These findings largely align with the literature, although there are a few notable divergences. For example, although several respondents indicated that the SACTP programme broadened their awareness of translation technologies such as CAT tools, they ranked this item third-lowest. This low ranking is supported by the literature, as both Asiri et al. (2024) and Hazaea and Qassem (2024) documented that translation technology use remains a considerable skills gap among Saudi translators; thus, this area could be a productive focus for the SACTP. Additionally, project management is a central skill required by the translation industry and is in high demand in Saudi Arabia. Although several respondents agreed that the SACTP taught them the competencies needed to manage translation projects, they ranked this item the lowest, indicating that project management skills are another fruitful area for targeted development in the SACTP.

4.2 Certified Translators' Perspectives on the SACTP's Influence on Their Employability

The second research question aimed to examine the extent to which certified translators perceived the SACTP as influencing their employability.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics for Items Measuring SACTP Influence on Translators' Employability

Statement No.	Frequencies and ratios	Response options					Mean	Std. Dev.	Hypothetical mean	t	Relative mean	Sig. (2-tailed)	Impact	Rank
		Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree								
19	F	18	31	9	7	9	3.56	1.29	3.4	1.11	71.2%	0.27	Moderate	1
	%	24.3	41.9	12.2	9.5	12.2								
20	F	17	18	20	7	12	3.28	1.36	2.6	4.32	65.6%	0.01	Moderate	3
	%	23	24.3	27	9.5	16.2								
21	F	11	29	15	10	9	3.31	1.27	2.6	4.94	66.2%	0.01	Moderate	2
	%	14.9	39.2	20.3	13.5	12.2								
22	F	6	11	24	9	24	2.54	1.30	1.8	4.88	50.80%	0.01	Low	5
	%	8.1	14.9	32.4	12.2	32.4								
23	F	12	25	17	7	13	3.21	1.32	2.6	3.99	64.20%	0.01	Moderate	4
	%	16.2	33.8	23	9.5	17.6								
SUM	Mean of means = 3.18						15.92	4.96	13	5.07	63.68%	0.83	Moderate	

As presented in Table 2, the total mean of the five items addressing the second research question was 3.18, with a relative mean of 63.68% (range 50.80%–71.2%), indicating a moderate impact overall. However, Item 22 had a much lower relative mean (50.80%) than the other four items (64.20%–71.2%), indicating that translators perceived this item as having much less impact on their employability than Items 19, 20, 21, and 23.

The top-ranked statement was Item 19, "the SACTP helped me network with other professional translators." Overall, majority of the respondents perceived the SACTP as helping them build collaborative relationships with other professional translators. To continue to enhance this support, the LPTC has recently launched a platform for certified translators that facilitates clients' access to their services and promotes translator collaboration. The second-ranked statement was Item 21, "the SACTP increased my chances of receiving more translation job offers." Multiple respondents perceived that they were offered more jobs because of their certification by the LPTC. This finding aligns with studies reporting that translation certification increases the job opportunities available to translators (Chan, 2010); however, recent studies suggest that, in some parts of the world, certification demand remains low (Li, 2021). The third-ranked statement was Item 20, "the Certified Translator helped me adopt effective market strategies for the translation industry." Respondents perceived that the SACTP helped them meet various clients' expectations and market themselves effectively. The fourth-ranked statement was Item 23, "as a Certified Translator, I have been recognised by clients and agencies as a trustworthy professional." According to the perceptions of SACTP-certified translators, not all agencies and clients recognised their certification as a trusted credential when recruiting translators. These findings align with those of Alharbi (2024), Bowker (2005) and Chan (2011), who reported that agencies often do not prioritise certification when recruiting translators. The lowest-ranked statement was Item 22, "as a Certified Translator, I have been offered higher payment rates." According to most respondents, translation rates for certified and uncertified translators are nearly identical, indicating that translation certification does not generate higher compensation for translators. This finding does not align with those reported by the ATA (n.d.), which claimed that ATA-certified translators receive 21% higher rates, nor with those of Belanich et al. (2019), who asserted that certification increases payment rates.

4.3 Improvements Identified as Necessary by Certified Translators for Improving the SACTP

A final open-ended question gave respondents the opportunity to share their insights into potential improvements to the SACTP and recommendations to the LPTC. Qualitative content analysis was used to describe, categorise and analyse these data (Fraenkel et al., 2014; Schreier, 2012). Seven main categories were predefined prior to data collection. The results are presented by category below.

4.3.1 Certification Requirements

The LPTC has established mandatory criteria for applicants prior to submitting their certification applications. These criteria include holding an academic qualification in translation, linguistics, literature or another discipline pertinent to the certification type, such as law or medicine; demonstrating proficiency in a second language (L2); and a minimum number of years of professional experience in translation (≥ 3 years for the Practitioner track and ≥ 10 years for the Experienced Translator track). Respondents expressed no concerns regarding the academic qualification or L2 proficiency prerequisites. However, multiple respondents emphasised the experience requirement as a significant barrier to recent translation graduates seeking to pursue LPTC certification. For instance, Respondent 19 argued that “years of experience should not be compulsory for translation programs graduates.” These findings suggest that the LPTC should consider offering a waiver for translation graduates without prior professional experience or conversely reducing the mandate years of experience. Such a measure could increase the number of applicants, thereby enhancing both students’ translation competence and the Saudi translation industry. However, the literature has noted that professional experience is generally mandatory for the certification process (see, e.g., Hlavac, 2013; Petrocheilou, 2025).

4.3.2 Training

Practitioners are required to complete an LPTC training programme prior to the certification examination. Multiple respondents offered their thoughts on the content, duration or delivery mode of this training programme. Many asserted that it should not be obligatory, e.g., Respondent 11 stated that “training should not be mandatory for any track, this is redundant to what universities do.” Others argued that it should be substituted with more practice-oriented sessions, e.g., Respondent 67 suggested that “the training can be useful to focus more on practicing translation tests to better prepare the participants for the exam.” Furthermore, several respondents emphasised that training should be delivered through recorded rather than live online sessions, e.g., Respondent 32 noted that the “lectures need to be recorded and viewed at our own convenience as most of us are working full time.”

These findings indicate that the current mandatory training programme replicates translation programmes at Saudi universities and should be reconsidered. It could incorporate more practical sessions or mock translation/certification test samples to prepare applicants more effectively for the certification test. Moreover, to meet the needs of working applicants, a blended delivery mode of recorded and live online sessions (perhaps scheduled on weekends) could be adopted. Notably, Hlavac (2013) found in a survey of 21 certification organisations worldwide that translation certification programs typically do not provide training, as their central role is to examine and certify translators. Thus, the training requirement for the SACTP does not align with common global practices.

4.3.3 Actual Exam

Several respondents noted the duration of the test (currently, 2 hours) as a substantial challenge and advocated either for additional time or a shorter examination. Respondent 8 argued that the “exam time is not realistic with the number of words needed for translation, even for experts.” Because examinees must have at least 3 years of professional translation experience, thus reflecting a certain level of expertise, their common endorsement of this theme underscores that the LPTC should consider extending the time limit to allow examinees sufficient time to review their translations and check the quality of their translation. By comparison, ATA’s certification exam lasts for 3 hours, comprising two passages of 225–275 words each (ATA, n.d.).

Many respondents also argued for making a wider range of translation resources (e.g., specialised dictionaries or corpora) accessible during the exam. Participant 70 emphasised that such resources “are [an] important part of [the] translation process.” Accordingly, the LPTC should consider making a broader selection of resources available during the exam, as their use reflects professional translators’ real-world practice.

Multiple respondents emphasised the need to integrate CAT and AI tools into the certification, asserting that this usage replicates “real-world tools” (Respondent 52) and translation procedures and meets the contemporary demands of the translation industry. To strengthen certified translators’ technology competence and enhance the credibility of the certification outcomes within the industry, integrating such tools into the certification exam or as part of the mandatory training should be considered. Such integration would also align with the Arab translation industry, where technological competence is in high demand and is often considered mandatory (Al-Batineh & Al Tenaijy, 2024).

4.3.4 Exam Results

Various respondents argued that thorough marking criteria should be made publicly accessible and that written feedback should be provided to examinees. Participant 66 emphasised that the “marking and correction process should be more transparent and detailed feedback should be given.” Publishing the marking criteria on LPTC website to guide translators on the competencies being assessed would enhance examination transparency. Moreover, providing comprehensive written feedback alongside results would help examinees understand their weaknesses and recognise their strengths. Nevertheless, global certification practices reflect that credentialing organizations typically provide only pass/fail scoring, not comprehensive feedback (ATA, n.d.).

4.3.5 Available Language Pairs

The LPTC offers two distinct language pairs for the SACTP, English–Arabic and French–Arabic. Several respondents argued that examinees should not be required to translate bidirectionally and that single-direction translation (e.g., Arabic–English or English–Arabic) should be permitted. Participant 8 noted that “it should not be mandatory to take both directions for a language pair. ...One direction should be an option when signing up for the test.” Accordingly, SACTP should offer a single-direction translation certification option to align with the unidirectional examination offered by the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) (n.d.).

Many respondents recommended expanding the LPTC certification to additional paired languages. Participant 39 suggested “offering more language pairs such as (Arabic–Spanish, Arabic–Japanese);” other languages mentioned by respondents included Chinese and Italian. This finding highlights considerable demand for broadening the range of available languages to satisfy applicants’ needs. To evaluate the practicality of expanding available language pairs, the LPTC may consider surveying translation students in Saudi universities, professional translators and translation agencies to identify the language pairs in most demand.

4.3.6 Types of Certificates

The LPTC offers four distinct certification types via the SACTP: General Translation, Medical Translation, Legal Translation, and Interpreting. Multiple respondents articulated the necessity of offering additional certification types. For instance, Respondent 28 requested “certifications in various specialised domains, such as business or finance,” while Respondent 49 argued that “certification should be offered in localisation and different domains, such as military, sports and audio-visual.” These findings indicate growing demand for additional certification types, which help enhance translators’ specialisation within these fields. Moreover, Budin et al. (2013) reported that businesses seeking translators for product localisation tend to place limited value on general translator certification, as it often fails to examine the specialised competencies required by localisation processes. A certification that reflects greater specialisation or localisation could thus be more valuable for professional translators.

4.3.7 Certification Recognition

Multiple respondents reported that the translation market in Saudi Arabia did not recognise their certification as adding professional value to their services. For example, Respondent 25 noted that “the certificate is still not important in the market,” while Respondent 14 claimed that “I have not been recognised as certified translators [sic] among translation agencies and no value has been added to my career.” Respondents identified various contributing factors, such as insufficient promotion of the SACTP within the industry, the absence of government restrictions limiting translation projects to certified translators and the lack of official mechanisms to verify certified deliverables. These findings suggest that LPTC could collaborate with local and international translation agencies to increase certified translators’ access to translation projects and boost their practical experience. Further, the Saudi translation market has recently expanded through government measures aimed at supporting Saudi economic growth and attracting foreign investment. As translation plays a central role in this process, respondents argued that mandating SACTP certification for certain translation projects could enhance its credibility. This suggestion aligns with Stejskal’s (2005) report that in some contexts, such as Argentina and parts of Europe, only certified translators are authorised to undertake most official translation projects.

5. Conclusions and Implications

The current study sought to assess to what extent certified translators believed the SACTP enhanced their translation competence and influenced their employability and to document the improvements deemed necessary to enhance the programme. A total of 74 male and female LPTC-certified translators based in Saudi Arabia participated in a questionnaire study, and the data were analysed qualitatively and quantitatively.

The first research question asked: “How do certified translators perceive the SACTP’s contributions to enhancing their translation competence?” The findings indicated that respondents perceived the SACTP as moderately enhancing their translation competence overall, although four items indicated high impact. Specifically, respondents believed that the SACTP enhanced their

approach to specialised terminology and diverse materials and target audiences, strengthened their self-confidence, improved their problem-solving, motivated continued learning and personal and professional development, enhanced their use of online dictionaries and translation resources, reflected real-world, practical translation applications and broadened their technical awareness. Nevertheless, only some participants agreed that the SACTP taught them project management skills.

The second research question asked: "To what extent do certified translators believe the SACTP influences their employability?" Overall, respondents perceived the SACTP as moderately influencing their employability, although one item had low impact. The findings revealed that the SACTP helped respondents build collaborative relationships with other professional translators, enhanced future job opportunities, helped them get more jobs and facilitated their successful approach to the translation market. Nevertheless, few agencies and clients recognised the SACTP as a trusted credential when recruiting translators, and certified and uncertified translators receive nearly identical pay.

The third research question was: "What improvements do certified translators identify as necessary for the SACTP?" Respondents offered insights and potential improvements for the SACTP. Although participants expressed no concerns regarding the academic or L2 proficiency prerequisites for the certification examination, many argued that the minimum required years of experience was a significant barrier for recent translation graduates seeking to pursue SACTP certification. Moreover, the current training programme replicates translation programmes at Saudi universities; the incorporation of more practical sessions or mock translation/certification test samples and hybrid delivery modes should be considered. Several participants emphasised the need to integrate CAT and AI tools to replicate industry practices. The findings also noted a desire for greater transparency through comprehensive, publicly accessible marking criteria. Respondents also indicated demand for additional language pairs (e.g., Chinese–Arabic) and certification types to enhance translation specialisation. Finally, several respondents reported that the Saudi translation market had not recognised the added value of their certification, indicating the importance of collaborating with translation agencies locally and internationally and mandating certification for government translation projects to strengthen its value and credibility.

Alongside the abovementioned improvements, the study recommends that the LPTC launch pre-certification, such as paid certification test samples and post-certification initiatives for certified translators, e.g., professional self-marketing, project management and the use of translation technologies, especially CAT tools to equip them with the knowledge and competences needed to compete effectively in the translation market. Future research should investigate translation agencies' perspectives on the SACTP and its influence on the Saudi translation market.

Note: The LPTC has been actively working to enhance the SACTP; consequently, several measures (e.g., the certified translators' platform) were implemented during manuscript finalisation.

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