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**Are we teaching what they need? Going beyond
employability in Translation Studies**
**¿Estamos enseñando lo que necesitan? Más allá de la
empleabilidad en los Estudios de Traducción**

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Abstract: As lecturers and researchers in translation and interpreting, we are aware of the need to design curricula so that students are well equipped, and able to respond to the requirements of modern society. In the world today, there is an evident gap between what is actually taught in higher education and what should be taught to meet student needs. Even though various studies have already focused on the impact of constructs, such as self-regulation, empathy, or creativity, on performance quality, there is still a long way to go. In order to bridge this gap and highlight the role of the university as a transformational agent, our study uses LifeComp, the European framework for the personal, social, and learning to learn key competence. The objective of this research was firstly to discover the transversal competences that are most highly valued by employers in the language industry sector; and secondly, to identify the competences that need more attention in curricula. For this purpose, a questionnaire-based study was designed and administered to translation companies based in Spain. The results obtained indicate that these competences are necessary to foster employability as well as real wealth creation in a lifelong learning context. This study is part of a broader project within the LifeComp framework, in which a competence-based psycho-educational intervention was designed and is now integrated in the translation and interpreting degree programme at the University of Granada (Spain).

Keywords: Competence-based learning, LifeComp, Curriculum design, Higher education, Employability

Resumen: Como docentes e investigadores en el ámbito de la traducción e interpretación, somos conscientes de la necesidad de diseñar los currículos para que los estudiantes de traducción e interpretación estén preparados y, como consecuencia, puedan responder a las necesidades de la sociedad. Hoy en día, hay un amplio consenso sobre el desfase que existe entre lo que se enseña y lo que debería enseñarse para satisfacer las necesidades del estudiantado. Aunque hay algunos estudios que se han centrado en el impacto que constructos como autorregulación, empatía o creatividad tienen en la calidad del rendimiento, aún queda mucho por hacer en el entorno universitario. Para poder solucionar esta situación y con la intención de contribuir al papel que la universidad debe tener como agente transformador, LifeComp, el marco europeo para las competencias clave personal, social y aprender a aprender, se toma como base para (1) explorar cuáles son las competencias transversales que los empleadores del sector de las industrias de la lengua consideran más importantes y, como consecuencia, (2) detectar cuáles son las que necesitan más atención en los currículos. Para este fin, se diseña un estudio basado en cuestionarios que se distribuyen entre las empresas de traducción con base en España. Las conclusiones de este estudio apuntan a la necesidad de este tipo de competencias no solo para mejorar la empleabilidad, sino para un crecimiento real en un contexto de aprendizaje de por vida. Este estudio se inserta en un proyecto de mayor envergadura en el que se ha diseñado una intervención psico-educativa basada en el marco LifeComp que ha sido integrada en el currículo de los estudios de Grado en Traducción e Interpretación de la Universidad de Granada (España).

Palabras clave: Aprendizaje basado en competencias, LifeComp, Diseño curricular, Educación superior, Empleabilidad

INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 has accelerated the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). The current social transformation is now the source of unparalleled challenges. Nevertheless, despite the immediate cost of the 'double disruption' of the pandemic and increasing automation (WEF, 2021), there is also room for opportunities for growth if we can acquire the necessary skills and are ready to use them (Sala *et al.*, 2020). This challenging context is also transforming the labour market at an extraordinarily fast pace. Although many jobs have been destroyed, new job profiles are also emerging (WEF, 2020a).

According to Burning Glass, one of the leading labour market analytics firms, these new jobs, which are of extraordinary complexity, are growing at a faster rate than those in the overall job market. They require a combination of right-brain and left-brain thinking combined with highly technical knowledge. However, they also involve more 'human' skills, such as collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking, among others (Sigelman *et al.*, 2019). We are thus dealing with a new skill set (Arroyo, 2019) for an emerging professional profile, defined by a rich combination of cognitive and non-cognitive competences (Porcaro, 2021). Employers and society as a whole are currently demanding people who have the potential for these soft skills as well as a knowledge of hard skills (Khaouja *et al.*, 2019; Frankiewicz and Chamorro-Premuzic, 2020).

In academia, there is a general consensus that because of the rapidly changing labour market, there is a gap between what is taught at university and the skills actually required to meet the current demands of society (Chinn *et al.*, 2020). As a result, we are now witnessing a shift of focus from content-based instruction and hard technical competences to a broader perspective (Chatterjee and Duraiappah, 2020). Despite the current interest in developing soft skills in formal and informal settings, they are still not explicitly taught in the vast majority of degree programmes (Birtwistle and Wagenaar, 2020). In fact, these extremely complex skills are deeply embedded in and shaped by culture, social status, specific professions, and personal context, among other factors (Hora *et al.*, 2020).

In 2001, the Tuning project first identified this skills gap (Moore and Morton, 2017) and showed that more generic and non-academic competences, though critical for employability and overall wellbeing, were not addressed in degree programmes (González and Wagenaar, 2003). However, now 20 years later, the disconnect between what is taught and what is needed in the labour market has become even more evident. As a result, Higher Education institutions (HEIs) are frequently blamed for being detached from the labour market and not preparing students for the professional world (Balcar, 2014; Succi and Canovi, 2020).

HEIs will have to align curricula and research with the emerging competence profiles. This change of paradigm is imperative for university survival (Moscardini, Strachan and Vlasova, 2020, p. 11) and has been highlighted in many research studies (Hora, Benvow and Smolarek, 2018; Damianakis *et al.*, 2019), and labour market reports (Sigelman *et al.*, 2019). It has also been included in the policy recommendations of many international organisations (OECD, 2019a; WEF, 2020b). In the EU context, this growing consensus on the need to equip citizens with the necessary skills for lifetime employability and self-fulfilment has brought about a shift from the provision

of external expert support to individual growth with an emphasis on the development and implementation of career adaptability as well as management skills (Barnes *et al.*, 2020, p. 4).

This study is the first step towards the development, promotion, and assessment of lifelong learning skills in undergraduate studies in Arts and Humanities. It provides insights from translation-related service providers, based on the European framework for lifelong transversal competences, LifeComp (Sala *et al.*, 2020).

1. TRANSVERSAL COMPETENCES AND THEIR TEACHING IN TRANSLATION AND INTERPRETING PROGRAMMES

Although recent research has focused on transversal competences, they are difficult to study and measure because of the many ways that they can be classified and named (Succi, 2019; Succi and Canovi, 2020).

Following the recommendation of the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation of Spain (ANECA) (2013), this paper calls such competences «transversal competences» as defined within the ModEs project:

[Transversal competences] represent a dynamic combination of cognitive and meta-cognitive skills, interpersonal, intellectual, and practical skills which help people to adapt and behave positively so that they can deal effectively with the challenges of their professional and everyday life. (Haselberger *et al.*, 2012, p. 67)

Many HEIs are promoting specific training in these competences, which can be acquired through formal, informal, and non-formal education (Seery, Serbati and Yarosh, 2017). Some scholars and practitioners are even calling for a shift of paradigm that challenges the *status quo* and encourages education, rather than psycho-pedagogical programmes in education (Sellman and Buttarazzi, 2019).

Within the context of Translation Studies, Rojo and Ramos (2016) analyse how emotions can affect translation performance. Their study measured the impact of positive feedback and constructive criticism, instead of using corrective feedback and plain criticism. In this line, other authors suggest moving from the notion of translator training to that of translator education, where teachers are seen as facilitators of knowledge and experience, who accompany students throughout the learning process (Haro-Soler and Kiraly, 2019). For example, Haro Soler (2017, 2018a, 2018b) shows how certain teaching practices can help students trust their own ability as translators and thus foster their self-efficacy beliefs. Furthermore, Hubscher-Davidson (2018) states that, given the potential for emotional involvement in

translation work, students should be taught how to control and cope with the emotions they may encounter in the translation profession.

At a postgraduate level, the Competence Framework established by the European Master's in Translation (2017) already includes certain generic skills, often referred to as «soft skills» that students should acquire, and which will enhance graduate adaptability and employability. During their education, translation students should learn how to plan and manage time, stress, and workload. They should also be able to work in a team, develop collaborative learning, and self-evaluate, among other skills.

However, recent studies have proved that some of these competences are rarely included in undergraduate translation and interpreting degree programmes. This means that all too frequently, curricula do not meet the demands of the professional market. This results in a skills gap «between the academic dimension of training and the actual requirements of employers» (Álvarez-Álvarez and Arnáiz-Uzquiza, 2017, p.155). For precisely this reason, certain scholars recommend that the Translation Studies curriculum should include specific training in transversal or lifelong learning competences (Rodríguez de Céspedes, 2017). Incorporating these competences in degree curricula would help to bridge the «skills gap» (Moore and Morton, 2017) and improve the employability of translation graduates.

2. LIFEComp: THE COMPETENCE REFERENCE FRAMEWORK OF THE EUROPEAN UNION (EU) AND ITS RELEVANCE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

Given the need for transversal competences, not to mention their key role in the quickly changing global context, the Joint Research Centre (JRC) in collaboration with the Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport, and Culture (DG EAC) released a competence framework to cope with complexity, uncertainty, and change in this global context (Caena, 2019). After an initial period of desk research, framework design and stakeholder consultations, LifeComp (the European Framework for PSLLC), was finally launched in 2020. Its aim was to identify the defining components of PSLLC and establish a common language and logic for further development and flexible implementation at different educational levels (Sala *et al.*, 2020; Caena and Stringher, 2020). LifeComp is closely linked to other European key competence frameworks and probably constitutes the base on which they are built, since LifeComp deals with the skills and competences that everyone should learn, develop, and master in life (Sala *et al.*, 2020).

LifeComp comprises nine teachable, interdependent, and culturally shaped competences that are structured in the three areas outlined by the 2018 Council Recommendation: the Personal, Social, and Learning to Learn. Each competence has been identified and validated by experts and

stakeholders and is further divided into three facets of development with the following descriptors: awareness, understanding, and action. The importance of the interdependence of these dynamic competences and the sociocultural ecosystem of the individual is metaphorically represented as a tree with roots (see Figure 1).

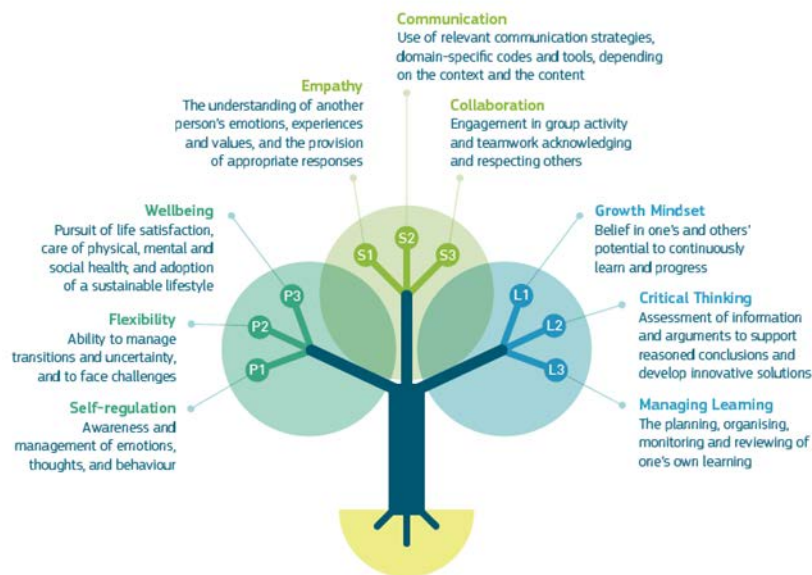


Figure 1: «LifeComp at a glance»

Source : Sala *et al.* (2020, p.9)

In the Key Competence framework model, not all competences are equally classified. More specifically, some are categorised as attitudes or values; others are envisaged as keys that unlock the rest; and still others are classified as competence sets. This complexity aligns with new trends in cognitive psychology and sociocultural constructivism (Caena, 2019), as well as with new theories of wellbeing that go beyond individual, and mere life satisfaction (Lambert *et al.*, 2020). This complexity is also attuned to the newest trends in positive psychology, where wellbeing is conceived as a nuanced and culturally shaped approach to the notion of the positive and negative that integrates both, in a fundamentally never-ending dialectical nature of wellbeing (Lomas *et al.*, 2020).

In the LifeComp framework, an interesting notion for scalable competence-based curriculum design is that of core elements. A similar approach can be found in OECD 2030 Learning Compass working papers (OECD, 2019b) and defines a set of cross-cutting framework components that are prerequisites for developing further framework areas (Caena, 2019). Another insightful approach at LifeComp is the importance given to attitudes (dispositions and orientations to actions¹) and values (principles or standards of behaviour, revealing one's judgement of what is important in life²) in the overall design of the framework with a focus on the overarching role of agency, as a «powerful driver for individual and collective wellbeing» (Caena, 2019, p. 12). As a complement to competences, experts in Higher Education research and practice are also envisaging attitudes and values as an important ingredient of the competence model. This signifies moving away from the more static model of knowledge and abilities to a more dynamic one, that empowers individuals with more agentic possibilities (Birtwistle and Wagenaar, 2020; Damianakis *et al.*, 2019).

Even though transversal competences can be trained, developed, and taught, they are also extremely complex (Hora *et al.*, 2020). Though there have been various initiatives in the European Union to close the gap between academia and the skills currently demanded by society, there has been little change in the learning paradigm in Higher Education (Wagenaar, 2021).

To the best of our knowledge, LifeComp has not yet been adapted to Higher Education. Nevertheless, the implementation and evaluation of the framework in diverse learning settings as well as feedback from different education practitioners and researchers are now being encouraged. Recent research has explored innovative teacher learning (Caena and Vuorikari, 2021), and a developmental model at all life stages (Caena and Stringer, 2020) within the LifeComp competence framework. In the context of university studies, others have focused on the Learning to Learn competence though without specifically using the LifeComp framework. For example, Gargallo *et al.* (2020) studied the competence model from a theoretical perspective, whereas Pérez Pérez *et al.* (2020) focused on its assessment.

3. UGRCOMP: THE COMPETENCE-BASED PROGRAMME OF THE UNIVERSITY OF GRANADA

A teaching innovation project was recently carried out at the University of Granada (UGR) in consonance with the Council Recommendation on Key

¹ Definition extracted from Sala *et al.* (2020, 19).

² Definition extracted from <http://data.europa.eu/esco/skill/A2>.

Competences for Lifelong Learning³. This interdisciplinary project builds on the groundwork laid in a previous one where two psycho-educational interventions were designed and included in the Translation and Interpreting degree programme. The methodology and protocol of the study were registered at clinicaltrials.gov, the U.S. National Library of Medicine database (Identifier NCT04392869) and its impact measured. According to preliminary results, all experimental groups experienced improvements in all outcome measures (e.g., emotion regulation, stress levels, and attention), despite the fact that the course and the parallel study took place during the COVID-19 pandemic (Cásedas *et al.*, 2022).

Encouraged by these results, UGRComp was created to scale up the methodology and implant it in other degree programmes at the UGR. The idea was to contribute to the existing work in competence-based learning studies. Given the geopolitical context of the UGR, LifeComp was chosen as the framework upon which to base curricular design (Sala *et al.*, 2020). The 3 ECTS credit course targets the three core competences (Self-regulation, Empathy and Growth Mindset). After it is implemented, its impact will be measured in an experimental randomised parallel study, which has also been registered at clinicaltrials.gov (Identifier NCT05598944). Reducing stress and increasing resilience, improving concentration and academic achievement, and developing self-regulation skills are some of the expected benefits of this intervention.

The project has already been included in the core strategy of the UGR, and its team is working closely with companies and start-ups to extend competence-based research, training, learning, and accreditation beyond the borders of higher education.

4. EMPIRICAL STUDY: SURVEY ON THE TRANSLATION AGENCIES' PERCEPTION

The basis for this empirical study was designed by one of the authors as part of his final research project for the Degree in Translation and Interpreting at the UGR within the framework of the teaching innovation project UGRComp. The original aim was to contribute to help close the divide between academia and the workplace (Section 2), based on the LifeComp framework. The study pursues the following specific objectives:

- To identify the most important transversal competences for companies in the translation and language services labour market.

³ Council of the European Union (2018b). Council recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning. Council of the European Union. 22 May 2018, Brussels. Available from: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0604\(01\)&rid=7](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0604(01)&rid=7)

- To identify the transversal competences that professional translators lack, according to translation and language-service companies.

To achieve these objectives and collect the necessary data, a survey was designed and subsequently administered.

4.1 Method

The online open-source tool, LimeSurvey, was used to publish, and collect survey responses. The questionnaire was designed and definitions for each competence were extracted from LifeComp framework. Since competences may be defined differently depending on the individual or the corporate/institutional culture (Cimatti, 2016), definitions were stated at the very beginning in order to avoid misconceptions and align our study with previous research as well as with previous work in LifeComp. The questionnaire was subsequently validated by two experts in translator education, transversal competences, and questionnaire design. When it was distributed, Spain-based companies were asked to communicate any errors or confusing questions to the main researcher of the UGRComp project and co-author of this article (M. García de Quesada). Since no problems were reported, the instrument was considered to be valid and the results obtained to be useful and publishable (Vigier, 2010; Huertas-Barros, 2013).

The questionnaire included five sections:

- Section 1: presentation of the study. Following the recommendations of Van Peer *et al.* (2012), the introductory section of our questionnaire included general information about the aims of the study, the researchers conducting it, and their respective institution(s). This was done without releasing any information that could bias the results. Moreover, this first section included instructions to help the respondents complete and save the questionnaire.

- Section 2: consent form. The respondents were informed that their answers would be anonymised and that the collective (not individual) results would only be used for research purposes. They were also told that this study would not involve any risk to their health, and that it would respect Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data. At the end of this section, the respondents who had agreed to participate in this study were asked to select the option «I voluntarily agree to participate» .

- Section 3: socio-demographic questions. The questions in this section collected data pertaining to the company profile, such as years of activity, work (exclusively translation and interpreting or related areas), the number of translators in the company, and the number of registered branch offices.

- Section 4: most valued transversal competences. This section defined each of the nine competences in the LifeComp framework. Moreover, to meet the first specific objective of this study, this section included nine questions (one for each competence) with four possible answers, ranging from 1 (not at all important) to 4 (very important). Respondents were asked to indicate how each transversal competence was valued in their company.

- Section 5: transversal competences that professional translators most lack. In line with our second specific objective, respondents had to rank the nine competences of LifeComp, by placing at the top of the list the competence that professional translators were most deficient in, and which would thus require greater attention in Higher Education. The competence in ninth place was the one that they thought that translators tended to possess or did not lack at all.

4.2 *Sample*

The questionnaire was distributed to Spain-based companies that provide only translation services or translation in combination with other language services. The Coordinator of the master's degree in Professional Translation at the UGR gave us the name and email of companies offering internships to master's students. We were thus able to contact 60 companies. The email sent out described the study as well as the participating researchers and included the link to the online survey. We also contacted ASETRAD, the Spanish Association of Translators, Reviewers, and Interpreters. After examining and approving the questionnaire, this association distributed it among its members along with a description of the study and the link to the questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed in April 2021.

A total of 91 companies agreed to participate. Although they were initially asked to complete the questionnaire in two weeks, the deadline was extended one week more to increase the number of participants. The sample population of our study was finally composed of the 55 companies that completed the questionnaire.

Of the participants, 54.5% exclusively offer translation and interpreting services, whereas 45.5% also provide other services, such as accessibility (4 companies, 16%⁴); audio-visual productions and education on scenic arts (4

⁴ Of the agencies not operating in the translation and/or interpreting market alone.

companies, 16%); language and translation courses (4 companies, 16%); technological services, such as automatic transcription (3 companies, 12%); cooperation for development (2 companies, 8%); cultural promotion (2 companies, 8%); voice-over (2 companies, 8%); consultancy (1 company, 4%); and immigration (1 company, 4%). Another two companies (8%) only specified that they perform other activities in the tertiary sector.

As shown in Figure 2, there was a high level of heterogeneity regarding the years of activity of the companies participating in this study, though the majority of them (94.55%) had been operating for more than 6 years.

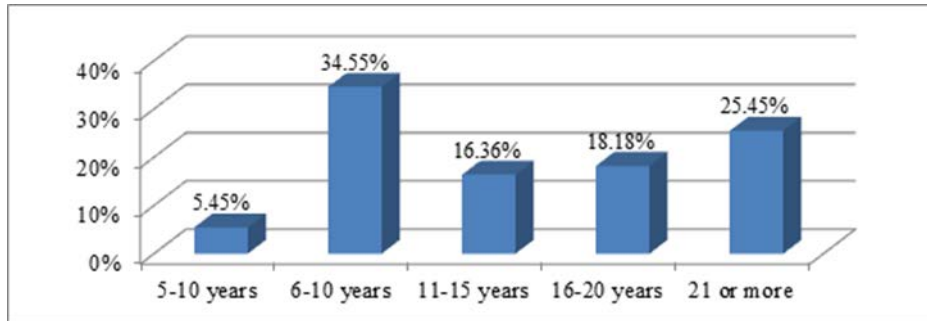


Figure 2: Graph of years of activity

Regarding size, the majority of the companies (40 companies, 72.7%) have 1-5 either partial or full-time workers. In contrast, 5 companies (9.1%) have 6-10 workers, and 21 (9.1%), 21 or more workers. Only 2 companies (3.64%) have 11-15 workers, and 3 companies (5.45%), 16-20 workers. As for branch offices, the numbers range from 1 branch office (36 companies, 65.45%) to more than 40 offices (3 companies, 5.45%).

Number of companies	Number of registered branch offices
36 (65.45%)	1
6 (10.91%)	2
2 (3.64%)	3
1 (1.82%)	4
2 (3.64%)	5
1 (1.82%)	11
1 (1.82%)	16

1 (1.82%)	40
1 (1.82%)	42
1 (1.82%)	44

Table 1: Branch offices

4.3 Findings: What employers are looking for

In line with previous studies (Rodríguez de Céspedes, 2017; Schnell and Rodríguez, 2017), the results obtained show that all the transversal competences studied were considered to be quite or very important by the vast majority of the respondents (see Table 2).

More specifically, as shown in Table 2, the three most important competences according to the companies, were Communication (87.3%, «very important»), Collaboration (85.5%, «very important»), and Flexibility (83.6%, «very important»). Critical Thinking was regarded as quite important (30.9%) or very important (69.10%), and Managing Learning was classified by 94.5% of the respondents as quite important (23.6%) or very important (70.9%). The remaining competences (i.e. Self-regulation, Well-being, Empathy, and Growth Mindset), though important, had lower percentages for the options «very important» and «quite important,» with some respondents classifying them as «barely important».

Competence	Not at all important	Barely important	Quite important	Very important	Mean
Self-regulation (SR)	0%	9.1%	49.10%	41.8%	3.33
Flexibility (F)	0%	0%	16.4%	83.6%	3.84
Well-being (WB)	0%	7.3%	41.8%	50.9%	3.43
Empathy (E)	0%	5.5%	43.6%	50.9%	3.45
Communication (Com.)	0%	0%	12.7%	87.3%	3.87
Collaboration (Coll.)	0%	0%	14.5%	85.5%	3.85
Growth mindset (GM)	0%	5.5%	52.7%	41.8%	3.36
Critical thinking (CT)	0%	0%	30.9%	69.1%	3.69
Managing learning (ML)	0%	5.5%	23.6%	70.9%	3.65

Table 2: Importance given to transversal competences by companies

4.4. Findings: what is lacking

In Table 3, which ranks the competences that translators are lacking, the top competence was weighted the highest (9) and the bottom-ranked competence was weighted the lowest (1). The total sum obtained by each competence is shown in the last row:

	Com.	F	Coll.	E	SR	WB	CT	ML	GM
1 st	16 (144)	6 (54)	2 (18)	5 (45)	7 (63)	6 (54)	5 (45)	4 (36)	4 (36)
2 nd	10 (80)	9 (72)	8 (64)	6 (48)	3 (24)	5 (40)	5 (40)	6 (48)	3 (24)
3 rd	8 (56)	10 (70)	9 (63)	6 (42)	5 (35)	7 (49)	3 (21)	5 (35)	2 (14)
4 th	4 (24)	8 (48)	9 (54)	7 (42)	8 (48)	3 (18)	8 (48)	4 (24)	4 (24)

5 th	4 (20)	7 (35)	5 (25)	8 (40)	6 (30)	6 (30)	8 (40)	2 (10)	11 (55)
6 th	7 (28)	4 (16)	7 (28)	9 (36)	5 (20)	6 (24)	6 (24)	8 (32)	3 (12)
7 th	3 (9)	5 (15)	6 (18)	5 (15)	8 (24)	6 (18)	10 (30)	8 (24)	4 (12)
8 th	3 (6)	6 (12)	3 (6)	5 (10)	8 (16)	7 (14)	5 (10)	8 (16)	10 (20)
9 th	0 (0)	0 (0)	6 (6)	4 (4)	5 (5)	9 (9)	7 (7)	10 (10)	14 (14)
Total sum	55 (367)	55 (322)	55 (282)	55 (282)	55 (265)	55 (256)	55 (255)	55 (235)	55 (211)

Table 3. Transversal competences that translators lack the most

According to the companies, the competences that translators and other language service providers tend to lack the most are Communication (367), Flexibility (322), Collaboration (282), and Empathy (282). Strikingly, the three transversal competences that companies regard as most important, namely, Communication, Collaboration and Flexibility, are also the ones that translation and other language service providers lack the most.

4.5. Discussion, limitations, and further research

The fact that Communication and Collaboration are considered to be two of the most important transversal competences in the translation and language services market coincides with translation competence models, which highlight them as competences that all translators should master (Kelly, 2005; PACTE, 2005; EMT, 2017). Furthermore, Communication is one of the competences that has received the most attention in translator education (Atkinson and Crezee, 2014; Haro-Soler, 2018b; Way, 2009). Various studies have also focused on Collaboration in translator education (Huertas-Barros, 2013; Kiraly, 2000, 2013).

This contrasts with Flexibility, which has not received the attention that it deserves in translator education research and practice, despite the importance given to it by the respondents. Given the lack of educational initiatives on Flexibility in translation degree programmes, it is hardly surprising that it is the second competence that translators lack the most. This is further evidence of the gap between academia and the labour market. It would thus be advisable to develop and/or adapt translation programmes and initiatives so that this competence is an area of focus.

Despite the focus on Communication and Collaboration in translator education research and practice, our results indicate that these two competences, along with Flexibility, are the ones that translators and other language service providers lack the most. It might be argued that since they

are so important in professional translation, this deficit is more glaringly evident.

Nevertheless, our results for Communication and Collaboration also underline the gap between academia and the world outside the classroom. This may be due to the fact that the approaches used so far to help students develop their communicative competence are not the most suitable ones and that more effective initiatives, such as UGRComp, are needed.

As for Collaboration, although some studies have addressed collaborative learning in translator education (Király, 2000; Huertas-Barros, 2013; Haro-Soler, 2019), our results show that further attention and/or a different approach may be needed. In this respect, the previously mentioned studies suggest training students to work with others collaboratively and effectively. They also propose that teachers be trained as guides or supervisors of collaborative work so that they will know when to intervene to facilitate effective collaboration among students.

Interestingly, Self-regulation, which is regarded as one of the least important competences in the translation and other language services labour market, is one of the competences that translators are most lacking. Quite possibly, the presentation sequence of the questionnaires accounts for part of the results. For Self-regulation to be regarded as important or desirable, employers might need to first think of actual problems and their root. This is perhaps due to the complex nature of competences or to the lack of knowledge about their interdependence and scalability. The fact that Well-being or Self-regulation are regarded as less important than Communication or Collaboration could signal a lack of understanding of the value of psychological capital (PsyCap) in the translation labour market, where PsyCap is beneficial for the sustainability of the profession (Hubscher-Davidson, 2020).

As for the limitations of this study, one of the most salient was the low number and heterogeneous nature of the companies that fully completed the survey. Though 91 translation companies initially agreed to participate in the study, only 55 completed the questionnaire. These data were thus the only ones that could be processed. Although the study was limited to Spain-based companies, their profiles were very heterogeneous, especially in regard to their size and the nature of their respective specialisations. Had the sample been larger, a more refined analysis would have been possible, since all these aspects would have been additional processing variables. For this reason this study is envisaged as an exploratory work whose results and conclusions will serve as a basis for a more in-depth research study not only in Spain but in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

Still another limitation was the broad scope of the meaning of transversal competences. Different agents often assign different meanings to these competences depending on their socio-cultural and professional context (Cimatti, 2016). For example, Empathy, for different sociocultural groups, can have different meanings (Park and Yu, 2017), and its definition could even be further refined, depending on the professional context activated (Holt *et al.*, 2017). Even within the language industry, Empathy in the field of Translation and Interpreting (T&I) can have different shades of meaning (Rojo and Ramos, 2016; Korpál and Jasielska, 2019).

Moreover, the importance attached to each competence may also vary depending on the business culture of the company. To limit sociocultural differences, the survey was only sent to Spain-based companies. Easy-to-read definitions for each competence were taken from the LifeComp framework and subsequently adapted to the context of Translation and Interpreting. These definitions were validated, and respondents were asked to report any errors or problems encountered. Since no issues were raised, the definitions proposed were considered to be appropriate for the purposes of our study.

Moreover, the complex nature of transversal competences means that each competence behaves and interacts with the others differently. Competences, such as Empathy and Self-regulation, have been classified as core elements, i.e., prerequisites for developing other framework areas, whereas others, such as Collaboration or Managing learning, are regarded as compound competences, i.e., complex sets of competences (Caena, 2019, p. 17), which may bias the respondent's choices. In this way, complex interpersonal competences, such as Collaboration and Communication, may be what the respondent thinks is lacking, whereas in reality, the deficit actually lies in Self-regulation. In other words, dysfunctional self-regulation can cause a communication failure and still go unnoticed by the respondent.

One might also think that the opinions expressed in the survey do not correspond to the views of the company as a whole but rather to the views of the individual that happened to receive the email and fill in the questionnaire. To avoid this problem, there was an exploratory research phase in which information was obtained regarding the person best suited for this task in each company. This was accomplished, thanks to phone calls, emails, and conversations with the Coordinator of the master's degree in Professional Translation, who kindly provided the authors with this information. Nevertheless, any questionnaire-based study where respondents are asked to express corporate views face this same challenge. Even though measures, such as those in our study, reduce the bias, it is something that is impossible to avoid.

A future course of action may include a mixed-method approach where the quantitative data obtained from the questionnaire is triangulated with qualitative data that permit a more in-depth understanding of the results. For instance, this would shed light on the reasons why communication and collaboration are two of the competences that translators lack the most despite their prominence in translator education research and practice. Another important issue is whether the traditional approach to translation teaching is still the most appropriate. One might also ask whether translators master specific components of these competences (for instance, teamwork), but not others (for instance, provision of constructive feedback to peers). The qualitative data collected to answer these and other questions could be obtained by adding open-ended questions to the questionnaire or by recurring to other techniques, such as structured interviews or focus groups. Another interesting possibility for future research would be to analyse the interdependence and scalability of competences and their relationship with other components of LifeComp such as attitude and values. Furthermore, our methodology could be used to explore the need for these competences in other labour markets, and consequently, their inclusion in other undergraduate programmes.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper offers valuable insights into the employers' view on which skills are most relevant and necessary in the labour market, and which should be given greater emphasis in higher education.

The results of the first block of questions show that all of the companies considered the nine LifeComp competences to be fairly or very important. However, a closer examination of the results reflects that Communication, Collaboration and Flexibility were regarded as competences that all translators should master. These three competences were followed by Critical Thinking and Managing Learning. The remaining four competences (Self-regulation, Wellbeing, Empathy and Growth Mindset) were the least favoured in this first block of questions.

The second block of questions indicates that Communication and Flexibility are the skills that are most lacking in the labour market and should thus be given greater emphasis in translator training. Likewise, skills, such as Collaboration, Empathy and Self-regulation, also highly considered by companies, emerged as skills that professional translators tend to lack. These results reinforce the conclusions derived from the first questionnaire, namely that Communication and Collaboration are essential in translator training. The lack of Flexibility ahead of Collaboration also deserves special attention, as Flexibility has been proven to enhance team performance (Lacaranza *et al.*,

2018). It is also essential in the current global context, which is increasingly uncertain, volatile, ambiguous, and complex (Bennett and Lemoine, 2014).

Strikingly, Communication, Collaboration, and Flexibility, the most important competences for the companies, were those most lacking in the workplace. This confirms the existence of a gap between academic institutions and employers (Rodríguez Céspedes, 2017). This gap becomes even wider when Communication and Collaboration, along with Critical Thinking and Managing Learning, are regarded as compound competences (Caena, 2019, p. 17), or broad-spectrum competences that encompass others. Accordingly, since these broad-spectrum compasses are the most in demand, this means that practically all of the others are as well since Wellbeing, Empathy, and Self-regulation are also part of these compound compasses. In a teaching-learning context, this could imply that the starting point of a competence development scheme would be these core foundation competences (OECD, 2019b), instead of the complex ones identified by companies as most important.

In our opinion, this and other studies on transversal competences are key factors in university-business communication and should be decisive in the design of any translation and interpreting degree programme. The endeavour ahead is urgent. Even though competence-based interventions have been found to be closely related to graduate employability (Rodríguez de Céspedes, 2017; Schnell and Rodríguez, 2017) with a high impact on social, cultural, and human capitals (Caballero, Álvarez-González and López-Miguens, 2020), there is the need for a more ambitious objective than merely equipping students with coping tools. The answer is not a «one size fits all» solution to commodify and measure competences, attitudes, and values. Nor is it only a question of perceiving employer demands, designing courses tailored to meet the labour market needs, and thus creating a surplus of talent. Our proposal transcends the concept of employability in terms of the professional profiles that the labour market requires (Birtwistle and Wagenaar, 2020), and also includes the need to promote and nurture one's personal, social and physical wellbeing (Sala *et al.*, 2020).

Our main goal is to develop, within the context of higher education, a proactive response to the new society that is currently emerging. This evidently signifies joining efforts to work collaboratively on the process rather than on the result with a view to transforming research into tools that foster real wealth creation in a lifelong learning context.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Due to privacy and ethical restrictions, the data that supports the findings of this study will be made available upon reasonable request.

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