SENIOR STUDENTS' REPORTS ON THEIR TRANSLATION AND INTERPRETATION ABILITIES, TEACHING METHODS, AND CURRICULUM AT HO CHI MINH CITY OPEN UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the senior students' self-assessment on their translation and interpretation abilities at Ho Chi Minh City Open University and their feedback on the teaching methods and curriculum. Twenty-four senior students in Business and Tourism Translation-Interpretation in the course 2008-2012 participated in the study. Data collection were from questionnaire investigating students' general knowledge, interpretation and translation skills as well as their problems in translation and interpretation, and their opinions of materials and teaching methods. The results revealed that the students did not meet the requirements of translation - interpretation skills. In terms of materials and teaching methods, the senior students were not satisfactory because of out-of-date information and monotonous teaching methods.

Keywords: translation, interpretation, curriculum, senior students, general knowledge.

Introduction

The major of Business and Tourism Translation-Interpretation at Ho Chi Minh City Open University (HCMC OU) has been introduced to the training program since 1998. The purpose of the program is to train students to be fluent in four language skills as well as to equip them with specialized knowledge to use in professional work. In the first two years, the students study general program that is the same to other majors of English. After choosing Business and Tourism Translation-Interpretation as their major, students will study major subjects such as Interpretation & Translation for Office Career, Translation on Tourism, Interpretation on Tourism, Translation on Business and Interpretation on Business. The graduates can find jobs in fields of translation and interpretation or other related fields including press organizations, international or government agencies, and tourism or business companies.

To the situation of translation in Vietnam in recent years, Dong (2007) states that there are not many translators or interpreters who can undertake the jobs in high quality, so translation and interpretation in Vietnam have not become professional yet. In order to limit the gap, HCMC OU, one of a few universities in Ho Chi Minh City, has offered the program of Vietnamese-English translation and interpretation to partly meet the requirements of the market. However, Razmjou (2003) claims that theoretical knowledge and practical skills alone are not adequate to prepare students to face the developments in the field. Only a sophisticated and systematic treatment of translation education can lead to the development of successful translators. The most arduous part of the journey

starts when translation trainees leave their universities.

Due to an increasing need for translators and interpreters in Vietnam, it is not surprised that lecturers and students in this major have attempted to investigate and discover problems and solutions to improve students' translation and interpretation abilities. A trend toward the translation-interpretation issues is to figure out the common difficulties or mistakes in this field and to suggest some solutions to overcome the problems. Previous studies were conducted by some students who have accumulated experience from learning and practical work such as Le Phuong Lan (2006) who investigated the unnaturalness in English-Vietnamese translation: causes and cures, Nguyen Xuan Ngoc (2005) who studied an investigation of mother tongue influence on English Translation, and Phan Ngoc Huong Thao (2005) who aimed to find problems in translating English-Vietnamese Business texts. In some sense, these studies focused on students' problems in translation and interpretation; the students strengths and weaknesses are still vacant in literature. The purpose of this study is to find out students' strengths, weaknesses, problems, and their attitudes when they took their studies on this major.

Research questions

This paper has been designed according to the following research questions that serve as guidelines to shape the target questionnaire survey as well as the whole paper:

(1) How do the senior students self-assess their abilities in translation and interpretation?

(2) What are the common problems that the senior students often face when they do their translation and interpretation?

What attitudes do the senior students express toward materials and teaching methods of translation and interpretation courses?

Method

The current study was conducted at HCMC OU with the students of Faculty of Foreign Languages. There were twenty-five 4th year students who majored in Business and Tourism Translation - Interpretation in the course 2008-2012 of which twenty-four participated in the study. That is, the full population was involved in except one of the researchers of this study. These students had access to translation since the second semester of the first year. After taking four basic courses of translation, the students continued to take classes of translation and interpretation in the business and tourism fields.

The current study employed the survey method which adapted from Lam Quang Dong' (2007), Do Minh Hoang's (2007), and Pham Hoa Hiep and Ton Nu Nhu Huong (2007). Thirty-one-item questionnaire was used to collect data. The questionnaires were emailed to twenty-four students and then were collected five days later. After that, the statistical analyses utilized within the study were manipulated using the program of Microsoft Office Excel 2007, in which COUNTIF was used to perform quantitative analysis and Analysis ToolPak was employed as for qualitative analysis to interpret data collected from respondents.

Findings and discussion

Research question 1: How do the senior students self-assess their abilities in translation and interpretation?

In order to respond to this research question, the students' general knowledge in translation and interpretation, the skills, the types, and the speed of translation and interpretation were analyzed.

Table 1: Self-assessment on general knowledge

Area \ Degree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Grammar	0%	8.33%	29.17%	54.17%	8.33%
Word Usage	0%	20.83%	50%	29.17%	0%
Vietnamese Fluency	0%	4.17%	25%	54.17%	16.67%
British and American Cultures	0%	29.17%	50%	20.83%	0%
Tourism and Business Terms	0%	37.5%	54.17%	4.17%	4.17%
Tourism and Business knowledge	4.17%	41.67%	45.83%	8.33%	0%

As can be seen in table 1, the students had studied English language at high school and university for years, but 37.5% of the students were not good at grammar and only about 29% of them were good at word usage. Moreover, 29% of the students were not good at Vietnamese in spite of their native language. The results also reveal that nearly 80% of the students did not have a good understanding of British and American cultures despite of taking the subjects of these fields. In addition, some selective subjects in the curriculum supplied a large number of terms of tourism and business, yet just roughly 8% of the respondents were confident in using the terms. Up to more than 91% of the students admitted that they did not have enough knowledge of tourism and business.

Table 2: Frequency of general knowledge

Means	Strongly Disagree 1 – 1.8	Disagree 1.9 – 2.7	Neutral 2.8 – 3.5	Agree 3.6 – 4.3	Strongly Agree 4.4 - 5
Respondents	0	5	15	4	0
Percentage	0%	20.83%	62.5%	16.67%	0%

Table 2 shows that the students self-assessed just average to their ability of general knowledge. In *Suggested Criteria for Student Selection and Interpreter Training* (2007), Dong suggested interpreters need to be fluent in both source and target languages in order to realize the similarities and differences between two languages and have language knowledge associated with deep understanding of cultures. Moreover, student-interpreters have good basic knowledge of specialized translation and interpretation fields. Compared the criterion with the students' results, 83% of the senior students did not meet the criterion of general knowledge for translation and interpretation courses.

Table 3: Self-assessment on interpretation skills

Area \ Degree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
English Pronunciation	0%	8.33%	45.83%	37.5%	8.33%
Speech Understanding	4.17%	8.33%	16.67%	54.17%	16.67%
Acquaintance with English Accents	4.17%	41.67%	25%	25%	4.17%

Degree / Area	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Voice	0%	20.83%	37.5%	29.17%	12.5%
Short-term memory	0%	20.83%	37.5%	29.17%	12.5%
Presentation Skill	8.33%	20.83%	29.17%	33.33%	8.33%
Concentration Ability	0%	12.5%	29.17%	45.83%	12.5%
Extemporaneous Speaking	0%	25%	41.67%	33.33%	0%
Shorthand Skill	4.17%	25%	54.17%	8.33%	8.33%

As revealed in table 3, more than 54% of the respondents could not pronounce English well although these students took the subject of American and British English pronunciation as well as practiced a lot in other subjects, In addition, the fact that nearly 30% of students could not understand English speeches at normal speed shows that their listening skill was not good enough to become interpreters. Moreover, interpreters were required to understand various English accents which are spoken in different countries, yet up to about 70% of the students did not meet the criterion. The results also indicate that more than 58% of the respondents were not good at one of the skills of voice and short-term memory. This was the same percentage to presentation ability although the students took the subject of public speaking. In addition, nearly 42% of the students could not concentrate well when interpreting; up to nearly 67% did not have a good extemporaneous speaking ability, and only about 17% could use shorthand well.

Table 4: Frequency of interpretation ability

Means	Strongly Disagree 1 – 1.8	Disagree 1.9 – 2.7	Neutral 2.8 – 3. 5	Agree 3.6 – 4.3	Strongly Agree 4.4 – 5
Respondents	0	3	11	8	2
Percentage	0%	12.5%	45.83%	33.33%	8.33%

As table 4 presents, about 42% of the respondents were good in the interpretation ability. However, up to about 58% of the senior students did not meet the criteria suggested by Dong (2007).

Table 5: Self-assessment on translation skills

Degree / Area	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Understanding & Analysis	0%	12.5%	50%	33.33%	4.17%
Writing Skill	4.17%	8.33%	45.83%	37.5%	4.17%
Computer Usage	0%	8.33%	25%	58.33%	8.33%

Table 5 indicates that nearly 63% of the respondents could not understand and analyze texts of tourism and business well and about 58% did not have a good writing skill although they took four courses of reading and writing during their first two years. Besides, the curriculum had two courses of computer, yet one third of the students could not use computer well.

Table 6: Frequency of translation ability

Means	Strongly Disagree 1 – 1.8	Disagree 1.9 – 2.7	Neutral 2.8 – 3. 5	Agree 3.6 – 4.3	Strongly Agree 4.4 – 5
Respondents	0	3	10	10	1
Percentage	0%	12.5%	41.67%	41.67%	4.17%

As shown in table 6, less than half of the students admitted to their good translation ability. Compared to the students' results to the criteria suggested by Hoang's (2007) in Đào tạo Phiên dịch theo Định hướng Chuyên nghiệp and Searls-Ridge's (2000) in thinking of taking up translation, or good translators are made, not born? about 54% of the students did not fulfill the requirement of translation skills.

Figure 1. Comparison between interpretation and translation abilities
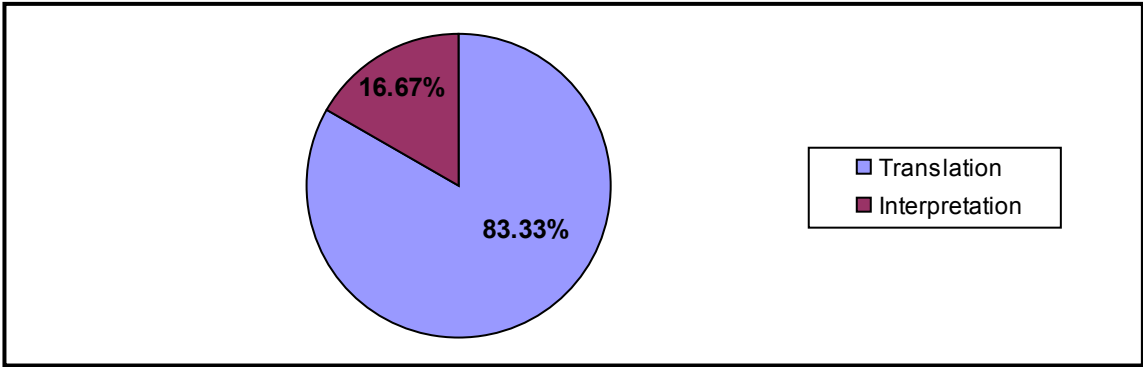
Figure 1 shows that most of the students were better at translation while only 16.67% admitted their interpretation ability was better. No one thought that he or she was good at both interpretation and translation or not good at all. There are some possible reasons for the different percentages. Interpretation might not be easy because the interpreters have to use their listening abilities combining with other related skills to do the tasks. In addition, interpretation tasks require time-constraint, not as translation tasks do. In the translation tasks, the students could deal with the text and they had more time to implement.

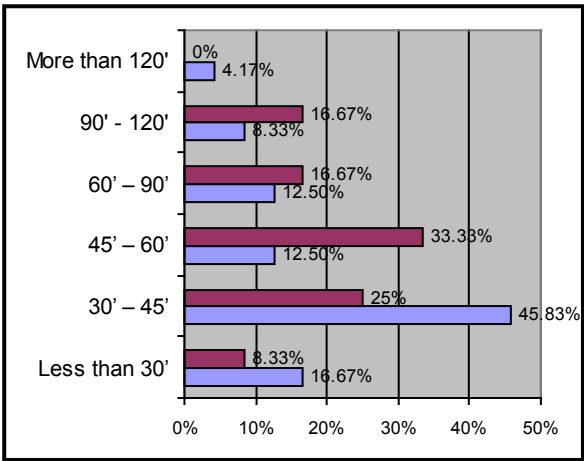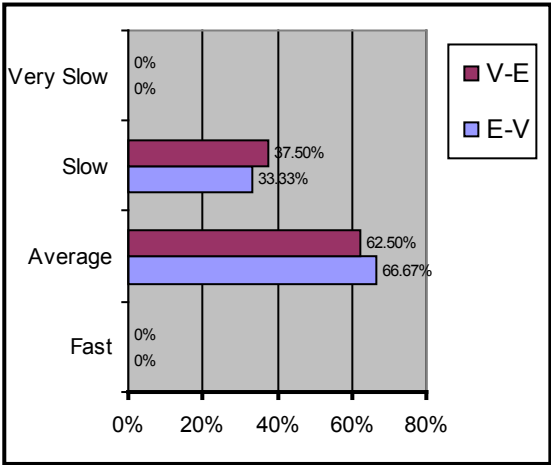**Figure 2. Time acquired to translate a 300 word specialized text**

Figure 3. Students' assessment on their interpretation speed

According to Hoang (2007), a student-translator's moderate translation speed is about 200 - 250 words an hour. Compared to the students' results, the moderate time required to translate a 300 word specialized text is about from 60 to 90 minutes. Thus, figure 2 indicates that although there were still some students whose translation speed was slower than the moderate speed, the students' general translation speed is quite good. On the contrary, figure 3 shows that the students' interpretation speed was just average and slow in both translation from Vietnamese into English and vice versa.

Considering the results of general knowledge and interpretation skills, there are two possible reasons for the fact of the students' interpretation speed. The first reason may be teaching methods that lecturers did not give many various situations for the students to practice their interpretation ability frequently. Another reason may be the students' learning methods. The students seemed to depend on lecturers much, so they did not self-study effectively. They might not practice their skills a lot and take methods and exercises actively to improve their abilities.

Research question 2: What are the common problems that the senior students often face when they do their translation and interpretation?
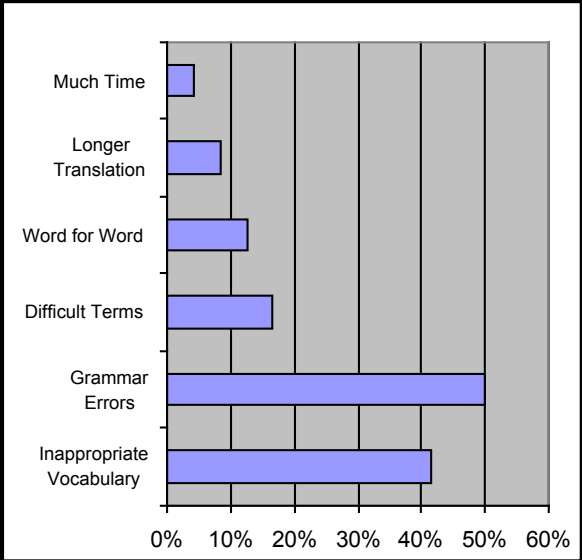
To find out the students' common problems and the areas that need training more, the open-ended questions were collected and analyzed.

Figure 4. Students' common interpretation problems

Figure 5. Students' common translation problems
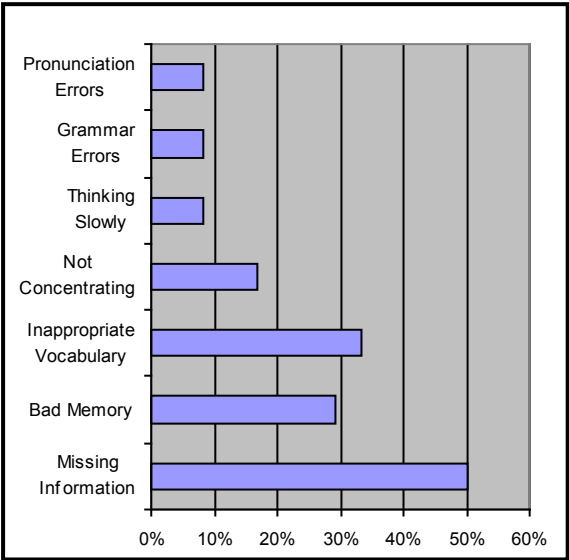
Figures 4 & 5 indicate some of the students' problems in both interpretation and translation. To interpretation, half of the respondents usually missed information in English speeches because they could not follow all what speakers said or they could not catch the different English accents. 29.17% of the respondents revealed that it was not easy to remember all details, especially numbers. 33.33% of the students found difficulties in vocabulary because they sometimes forgot vocabulary or used inappropriate words and terms. Less than 10% of the students reported that they committed to grammar errors, pronunciation errors, and were slow in thinking. This indicates that the students had difficulties in interpretation skills in terms of lacking listening strategies.

To translation, 41.67% of the respondents had some difficulties in using exact and suitable words in translation or did not understand meanings of all words in source texts while up to half of them admitted that they usually made errors in grammar. Specialized term was another problem in which 16.67% of the students felt difficult in translating new terms or misunderstood them. In short, the most problems that the students faced when they did translation related to word usages and grammar errors. While problems in word usages were found in both interpretation and translation skills, problems in grammar errors were less in the interpretation skills. This indicates that the students did not focus much on grammar when they listened to the speakers for interpretation while translation processes focused much on texts.

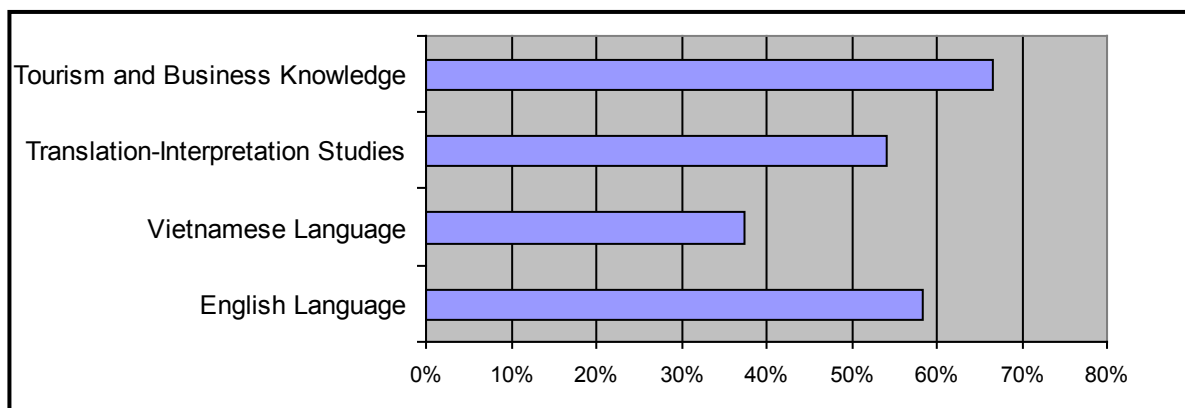**Figure 6. The area that needs to be improved**

Figure 6 presents the four areas that the students needed to be trained to improve their translation and interpretation abilities. The most area that the senior students needed to be well-trained related to their major, Tourism and Business English. 67% of the students stated that knowledge in tourism and business was as the crucial area for improving. The second area related to the English language proficiency. Nearly 60% of the students agreed that they needed to enhance their English language. That is, the senior students who majored in translation-interpretation were not actually proficient in English even though this was their last year of university. The third and the fourth areas that needed to be trained related to translation-interpretation skills and Vietnamese language. This indicates that during the four-year studies at university, the students depended much on the curriculum instead of autonomously improving and practicing their abilities.

Research question 3: What attitudes do the senior students express toward materials and teaching methods of translation and interpretation courses?
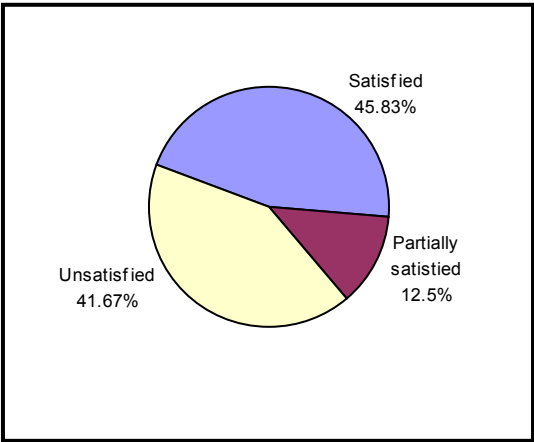
In order to respond this research question, the open questions were designed so that the students pointed out their level of satisfaction with materials and teaching methods used in the courses and provided reasons for their choices.

Figure 7. Students' satisfaction with translation materials

**Figure 8. Students' satisfaction with interpretation materials**
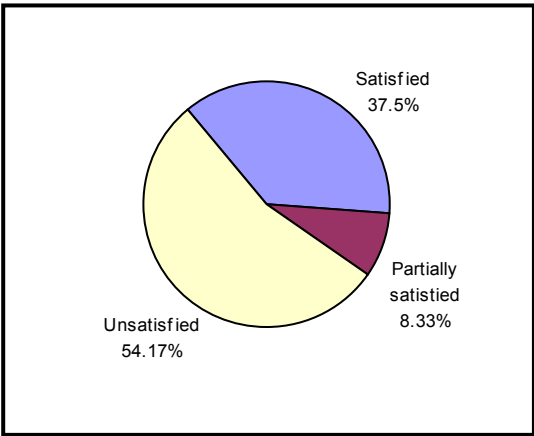
As shown in figure 7, only 37.5% of the students felt satisfied with the materials due to a lot of new sentence structures, necessary vocabulary, useful business and tourism knowledge and various translation methods in the materials. On the other hand, up to 54.17% of the students were not satisfied with the materials because they were out of date, not in range of various topics, and boring.

To interpretation materials, figure 8 presents that 45.83% of the students reported satisfaction with the materials because they were helpful, suitable to students levels of proficiency and provided general knowledge and variety of vocabulary in various fields. However, 41.67% of the students felt unsatisfied with the interpretation materials due to the similar reasons to the translation materials.

Figure 9. Students' satisfaction with methods of teaching translation

Figure 10. Students' satisfaction with methods of teaching interpretation
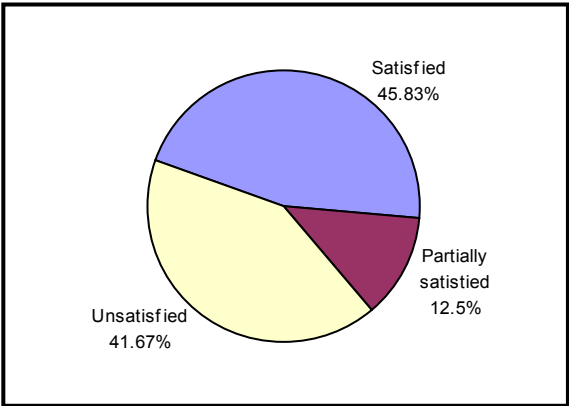
To teaching methods of translation classes, figure 9 reveals that 45.83% of the students expressed their satisfaction because they were interested in the teaching methods. They felt like the classroom activities that the teachers divided students into groups so that they could work together and found the best solution for translation activities. On the contrary, 41.67% of the
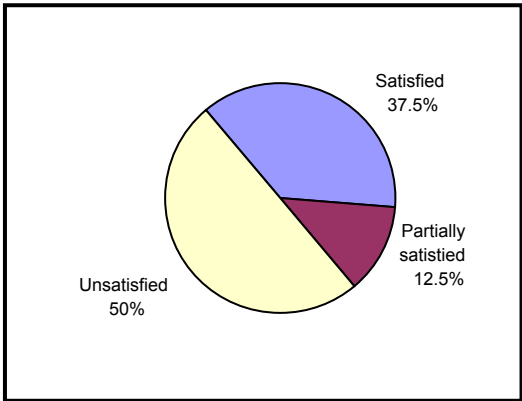
students were unsatisfied with the methods of teaching translation because they were not given time limit, practical skills, or some ways to evaluate their translation. In addition, some translation classes were boring because students were required to do the tasks, and then the instructors corrected them.

Figure 10 indicates that only 37.5% of the students were satisfied with the methods of teaching interpretation because they had chances to present in front of a lot of people that gave them real situations of interpretation. In addition, they felt interested in the method that the teacher asked students to interpret short sentences in the classroom activities. This way helps them practice their reactions in interpretation. However, up to half of the students were not satisfied with the methods of interpretation classes. They found some methods were not interesting because the students just listened to tapes even they had scripts in hands. This finding corresponds with Le Thi Thanh Thu et al. (2012) that the students whose major was in translation-interpretation were not very satisfied with their learning.

Conclusion

The thesis aimed at investigating the students' problems in translation - interpretation as well as their feedback on the curriculum. First, the study reveals that senior students were not equipped enough knowledge and language proficiency to undertake their major in translation-interpretation. The students' problems in translation and interpretation include language skills and lacking of translation– interpretation strategies. In terms of

materials and teaching methods, the senior students found not satisfactory because of out-of-date information and monotonous teaching methods.

Similar to Le Thi Thanh Thu et al. (2012), the study suggested that the students estimate their English proficiency before choosing this major to study. They need to improve their English and Vietnamese knowledge and skills well outside the classroom. Translation-interpretation major requires them to be active and enthusiastic during the learning process. Time constraint in the classroom is not enough for their studies. They need to be self-taught, take part in some activities outside the classroom to practice the skills.

Besides, the materials should be updated for the students to gain more vocabulary and knowledge in order to fill the gap. Secondly, more translation and interpretation theories, if possible, should be provided so that the student can understand different types of interpretation and translation and feel more confident in interpretation and translation. Thirdly, teachers should assign students more authentic exercises to do at home to help increase their self-study because it is not easy to train and provide students enough knowledge within the classroom.

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