Scrutinizing the most prominent competencies for a well-rounded translator from Iranian publishers' perspective

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Abstract

The present study aims to examine the competencies that Iranian managers of publishing companies consider when hiring translators. To achieve this, a Likert scale questionnaire with 16 items was designed to gather opinions from managers in publishing companies in Iran about the competencies necessary for a well-rounded translator A chi-square test was conducted to determine if there is a significant relationship between each competency and the publishers. As the results showed, there is a significant relationship between the publishers and translation service provision and language competencies. However, there is no significant relationship between the publishers and intercultural, information mining, thematic, and technological competencies. The results indicated that the most important competencies for enhancing a translator's productivity are technological, language, and translation service provision competencies. Additionally, the present study provides some pedagogical implications that can be beneficial to translation students and those involved in the translation sector, such as translation offices.

Keywords: Competence; translator; publishing company; well-rounded translator

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1. Introduction

Translation is an activity used to bridge the gap between languages and cultures. Gutt (2014) suggests that translation should produce a target language text that accurately reflects the original. Ardelean (2008) argues that translation goes beyond simply replacing source language material with target language material. This highlights the main purpose of translation, which is to effectively communicate with a target audience. However, there are situations where communication is not effectively established because the needs of the source text receivers and target text receivers are different (Gutt, 1990).

Translators play a crucial role in ensuring the quality of a translation as they are responsible for transforming a text from one language to another. Barslund (2011) states that ultimately, the translator is responsible for the quality of the translation and it is their area of expertise. Koby and Melby (2013) argue that translation competence is closely tied to the performance of a professional translator. In other words, the more qualified the translator, the higher the quality of the translation will be. Ismail et al. (2023) and Lavy (2022) emphasize the psychological well-being of the translators and tutors to deliver adequately.

Alongside translators, publishing companies, translation offices, and other related organizations play a crucial role in the profession as they are responsible for hiring translators. Therefore, it is important to understand the competencies they consider during the hiring process. One of the main challenges that translators often encounter is a lack of information about the competencies that can enhance their employment prospects. Having knowledge of the necessary competencies for a professional translator allows individuals to improve their qualifications and increase their chances of finding employment.

Universities, where translation courses are offered at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, bear the responsibility for this lack of information. The curriculum of these universities is outdated and requires major revisions, as it focuses more on theory rather than practice. A study conducted by Ranjbar et al. (2022) concluded that current translation programs should be modified to align with students' future careers. Surprisingly, this conclusion was reached after some revisions were made to the undergraduate curriculum. Similar results were obtained in postgraduate translation programs (Samir et al., 2019).

Besides, universities and translation institutions have a responsibility to train students using modern and up-to-date syllabi. This requires translation trainers who have significant expertise in teaching translation and developing programs to improve all the competencies required for a good translator, which unfortunately are in short supply. This is because a large number of teachers specialize in other language disciplines, such as Applied Linguistics and Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). Some of these teachers, as suggested by Jafari (2013), view translation teaching as an easy task, while others engage in it due to a lack of alternative options. All of these challenges have a significant impact on the productivity and employability of graduate students.

The European Master's in Translation (EMT) expert group (2009) identifies a series of competencies as the leading reference standards for professional translators and experts in multilingual and multimedia communication. These competencies include translation service provision, language, intercultural, information mining, thematic, and technological competencies (Wang, 2023).

1.1. Purpose of study

Based on this framework, the present study aims to investigate the competencies that Iranian publishing companies consider when hiring translators. This will help determine the competencies

that make a well-rounded translator and are of utmost importance to Iranian publishing company managers. To achieve this objective, the following questions were posed:

1. How can translators enhance their competencies to meet the demands and expectations of publishers?
2. What are the most prominent competencies for a well-rounded translator from the publishers' view?

The present study is significant because it addresses the existing gap in research by examining the hiring process of translators by managers of Iranian publishing companies. Moreover, this study focuses on the competencies that a well-rounded translator needs to enhance their efficiency, productivity, and chances of employment in a publishing company or other related organizations. The findings of this study can be beneficial for translation students and individuals who have invested in the translation sector, such as translation offices.

1.2. Literature review
1.2.1. Publishing companies in Iran

The publishing history dates back to 1820 when Abbas Mirza sent a few people abroad to learn printing technology (Azarang, 2010). Abbas Mirza also hired Edward Burgess to teach Iranians the printing technology and help establish the first publishing house. To do this, they imported the first printing machine and other related tools, as Azarang implies. According to available sources, Agha Zeinolabedin Tabrizi was the first to establish a printing house in Tabriz. During the reign of Naser al-Din Shah, letterpress was replaced with lithography (Azarang, 2010). This technology allowed publishers to print letters that letterpress could not, such as the letters of the Qur'an.

The first generation of publishing companies was founded around Bazar, such as Hajabolodolla, Beynolharameyn, and Naser Kesro Street. Due to the rapid expansion of Tehran, publishers had to sell their products far from their companies, like Shah Abad Street, and Naderi Avenue, and in front of the University of Tehran, which later became a bookselling center in Tehran (Roshangar, 2017). The first generation of Iranian publishers can be called family and hereditary because the publishing profession traditionally passed from father to son or brother.

In the 1930s, 40s, and 50s, the second generation of Iranian publishers gradually entered the publishing industry. Unlike the first generation, this generation included cultured individuals. In other words, the publishing profession was not passed down from father to son, and they did not have an inherited approach to this profession (Roshangar, 2017). Kharazmi, Dehkhoda, and Bamdad are examples of these publishing companies.

The third generation of publishers, as implied by Roshangar (2017), were those who worked for the first and second generations. They entered the profession after Iran's revolution when a censorship policy was established in the book industry. Many publishers expanded their business overseas, which led to a new group of publishers entering the industry and continuing the profession with similar motivations that led to the emergence of the third generation within Iran. Examples of these new publishers include Nashr-e-Baran, Nashr-e-Ketab, Nashr-e-Arash, and Nashr-e-Nima.

1.2.2. A well-rounded translator from different perspectives

Sheffy (2005) considers the translator's habitus as the most important requirement through which they are formally recognized and given credit for their "personal image and general outlooks" (p. 15). According to the author, the translator should be known by their disposition rather than their production. She identifies three important aspects through which the translator is recognized. The first aspect is the variety of translation norms, which depends on the translator's use of translation strategies in a specific historical context.

The second aspect refers to the dynamic construction of the profession. This stems from the translators' struggle to establish themselves as an independent source of symbolic capital and to make

internal distinctions within the profession. The third aspect points to the translators' preferred models of self-fashioning. They choose and signify their living conditions, gain credibility, and improve their position and terms of work based on these models.

For Setton & Liangliang (2011) and Rousan et al., (2024), the term 'professionalism' is influenced by various cross-cutting issues, including trust, fidelity, neutrality or loyalty, quality, reputation, and status or image. These notions are strongly influenced by cultural, social, and historical context, and they differ from country to country and even continent to continent. For instance, in China, unlike Japan, being eloquent has traditionally been one of the key characteristics of a professional translator.

Setton and Liangliang (2011) state that "speaking skills are widely encouraged and practiced in university competitions" (92). They argue that other cultural factors, such as neutrality, impartiality, and loyalty, may not be the same in Asian and European traditions. For example, intra-European interpreters may make adjustments to save face. Therefore, all these factors are interconnected and mutually influence each other.

Dodd (2012) believes that a good translator should possess "practice, skill, and patience" (p. 20). Dodd (2012) proposes a series of steps that a well-rounded translator needs to follow. The first step is to fully master the language in which one wishes to translate. The next step involves becoming proficient in the alphabet, as most languages have various types of letters.

The final step emphasizes the importance of being able to translate quickly, as there is a high demand for fast translation services. In addition to these three steps, Dodd offers the following tips for those who aspire to become well-rounded translators: a) immerse yourself in the language as much as possible, b) practice translating TV programs in multiple languages, such as Spanish, Italian, and English, and c) write a few lines in the target language to improve your skills.

1.2.3. The EMT expert group framework for professional translators

The framework proposed by the EMT expert group (2009) covers a range of competencies that can be applied to language professions or translation across various domains, including different modes of interpreting. However, the framework does not address the specific needs of those responsible for training translators or translation studies researchers, such as the resources needed to develop a program (human, financial, institutional, and technical).

According to the EMT expert group, the framework aims to determine what should be achieved, acquired, and mastered by the end of training or for specific job requirements, without considering the where, when, and how. They emphasize that all competencies are independent and contribute to the qualification of experts in multilingual and multimedia communication.

The competencies proposed by the EMT expert group (2009) are as follows:

1. Translation service provision competence: covers a range of skills that a translator needs to acquire to implement translation and language services in this profession. Translation service provision has two dimensions:

   a) interpersonal dimension: encompasses all activities relating to the translator and relationships or communication between him/her and the clients.
   b) production dimension: includes all activities relating to the act of translation.
2) Language competence: includes knowledge and skills related to general linguistics and sociolinguistics, serving as the foundation for advanced translation competence.
3) Intercultural competence helps the translator expand their cultural and intercultural knowledge, which is a fundamental requirement for advanced translation competence. Intercultural competence consists of two dimensions:
   a) Sociolinguistic dimension: this refers to the ability to understand the function and meaning of language variations, as well as recognize the rules for communication

Abdi, H. (2024). Scrutinizing the most prominent competencies for a well-rounded translator from Iranian publishers' perspective. *International Journal of New Trends in Social Sciences 7*(2), 66-77. https://doi.org/10.18844/ijss.v7i2.8933

within a specific community. It also includes non-verbal elements and the ability to produce appropriate language for a given situation, document, or speech.

b) Textual dimension: this refers to all activities related to the text, such as understanding and analyzing the macrostructure, as well as identifying presuppositions, implicit meanings, and allusions within a document. It also involves ensuring the overall coherence of the text.

4) Information mining competence: relates to all information about the translation of a text.

5) Thematic competence: is a sub-competence of translation competence which itself is located at the center of translation service provision competence. By acquiring thematic competence, the translator learns how to broaden and apply thematic and domain-specific knowledge relevant to translation needs.

6) Technological competence: contains all skills and knowledge about present and future translation technologies that a translator needs to acquire to employ in the translation process (Wang & Sun, 2023; Al-Batineh & Al Tenaijy 2024).

1.2.4. Recent studies in the recruitment of translators

Most studies conducted in the field cover various aspects of translation, such as translator certification, criteria used by translation agencies to admit translators, and translator training curricula (Chan, 2010; Mardani et al., 2013; Sohrabi et al., 2015). However, there have been very few studies specifically focusing on publishing companies and the competencies that their managers consider when hiring translators.

One such study was conducted by Moghadamizad et al., (2020), who examined the criteria that Iranian publishers use to recruit translators. The results of their study indicate that the majority of participants expressed a positive opinion about items included in the questionnaire, such as work experience and academic qualifications, and considered them to be the most essential requirements for recruiting translators.

Sales (2023) devoted special attention to the importance of information competence for professional translators and interpreters by seeking their opinions on the matter. The findings indicate that experts consider information competency to be crucial in the context of translation skills and suggest that information literacy education should be strengthened in undergraduate programs at universities. Abdi (2019; 2020) has focused on technology competence and investigated the use of technological tools by Iranian freelance translators. The results showed that Iranian freelancers primarily used general-purpose software applications that encompassed both information and communication technology, as well as computer-aided translation tools. However, the study also revealed a lack of interest among them in specialized software applications.

In other studies, Abdi (2021; 2022) examined the same competence and investigated the familiarity of master's students with relevant tools. The results indicated that M.A. translation students were highly familiar with general-purpose software applications but had below-average familiarity with specific-purpose software for both information and communication technology and computer-aided translation tools.

In the study conducted by Chodkiewicz and Sklodowska (2012), a questionnaire was prepared based on the competencies proposed by the EMT expert group (2009). The purpose of the questionnaire was to determine the competencies that participants, divided into two groups, believed they should acquire for their future work as translators. Additionally, the study aimed to investigate the degree of difference in the participants' perspectives. The results of the study indicated that both groups of participants considered the competencies included in the EMT reference framework highly relevant and essential. However, according to their views, the most important competencies were language and intercultural competencies. It is true that the studies in the field were constructive and provided helpful guidelines to improve translator training courses and the recruitment process.

Abdi, H. (2024). Scrutinizing the most prominent competencies for a well-rounded translator from Iranian publishers' perspective. *International Journal of New Trends in Social Sciences 7*(2), 66-77. https://doi.org/10.18844/ijss.v7i2.8933

However, their results are out-of-date and not suitable for prospective translators due to radical changes in today's market. These changes have affected the translators' needs and the approach of translation offices and publishers.

For example, the questionnaires used by Mardani et al. (2013) and Moghadamizad et al., (2020) had many similarities and did not focus on the qualifications and competencies required for a well-rounded translator. Some of the items, such as age, gender, and proficiency tests, were not relevant and did not yield satisfactory results. The present study is different from previous ones because it solely focuses on the competencies that Iranian publishers consider when hiring a translator. This is why the current study is valuable and worth conducting.

2. Method and materials
2.1. Data collection instrument

Given that a questionnaire survey was determined to be a cost-effective and time-efficient approach, in contrast to other research methods such as interviews and observational studies, it was considered appropriate for the current research. A Likert scale questionnaire consisting of 16 items was designed to seek the opinions of managers in publishing companies regarding the competencies that a translator needs to have.

The 16 items were categorized based on the six competencies proposed by the EMT expert group (2009): translation service provision competence, language competence, intercultural competence, information mining competence, thematic competence, and technological competence. The first two questions focused on the importance of the interpersonal and production dimensions included in translation service provision competence.

The third question aimed to recognize the importance of language competence from the participants' perspectives. Questions 4 to 7 addressed intercultural competence. In other words, these questions sought the participants' opinions on the translator's ability to understand and analyze the macrostructure of a document, its overall coherence, as well as their capability to grasp presuppositions, implicit references, allusions, stereotypes, and intertextual nature of a document.

Besides, the questions aimed to assess the translator's ability to bring together and compare cultural elements and methods of composition, as well as their proficiency in rapidly and effectively drafting, rephrasing, restructuring, condensing, and post-editing. The study investigated the participants' agreement with the translator's knowledge of how to extract and process relevant information for a given task. It also looked at their ability to develop criteria for evaluation, use tools and search engines effectively, and access documents on the internet or other mediums. This was assessed through question 8.

Questions 9 and 10 were asked to gather the participants' opinions on the translator's skill in identifying their information and documentation requirements. It also assessed their ability to develop strategies for documentary and terminological research. These questions aimed to understand the importance of information mining competence. Questions 11 to 13 focused on competencies related to the translator's thematic understanding.

In other words, these questions sought to gauge the participants' perception of the translator's in-depth knowledge in searching for appropriate information to better understand the thematic aspects of a document. It also assessed their ability to develop knowledge in specialist fields and applications. Additionally, it looked at the importance of creating a spirit of curiosity, analysis, and summary. The last three questions were raised to determine the importance of technological competence.

Therefore, questions 14 to 16 were used to gather participants' beliefs about the translator's knowledge and use of technological tools, specifically computer-aided translation (CAT) tools and information and communications technology (ICT) tools. A panel of experts in the field validated the

Abdi, H. (2024). Scrutinizing the most prominent competencies for a well-rounded translator from Iranian publishers' perspective. *International Journal of New Trends in Social Sciences 7*(2), 66-77. https://doi.org/10.18844/ijss.v7i2.8933

questionnaire by evaluating its face and content validity. Based on their feedback, some revisions were made to the content and structure of the questionnaire. The reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using the test-retest method.

2.2. Participants

The questionnaire was given to 20 publishers at a two-week interval, and the correlation between the two sets of results was calculated to determine the correlation coefficient of the test. The results showed good reliability (r = .781). The questionnaire was randomly mailed to 650 publishers, as their official website was available online. Out of the 650, 426 publishers responded to the questionnaire accurately.

2.3. Data analysis

To assess participants' viewpoints on the questionnaire items and their answers, each item and question was individually analyzed. This analysis followed the competencies outlined by the EMT expert group (2009) for professional translators. The objective of this study was not only to identify the specific criteria used by publishing companies in the process of selecting translators but also to establish comprehensive guidelines for those responsible for recruiting translators, including translation offices and affiliated organizations.

The tabulation form was used to display the percentage measured for each item. Since the researcher used a questionnaire survey method, a nonparametric test, chi-square (X^2) test, was conducted to evaluate the significant relationship between each competency and the publishers' opinions.

3. Results

According to Table 1, 61% of the participants disagreed with the importance of the interpersonal dimension of the translator, while 39% agreed with this dimension. Furthermore, the most important competencies in this category were sub-items "e" (knowing how to comply with instructions, deadlines, commitments, and interpersonal competencies) at 38%, "f" (knowing how to work under pressure and with managers of institutions, organizations, and publishing companies) at 34%, and "g" (knowing how to work in a team) at 28%.

The production dimension was deemed important by 94% of the publishers, while 6% did not consider it important. The three essential competencies in this category were sub-items "b" (knowing how to define stages and strategies for the translation of a document) at 45%, "e" (mastering the appropriate metalanguage) at 28%, and "g" (knowing how to establish and monitor quality standards) at 27% (see Table 1). The total number of participants who agreed with the competence of translation service provision (67%) was higher than the total number of those who disagreed (33%).

Table 1
Answer percentages of the participants to translation service provision competence

Items 1 and 2	Answers	*%*	Answers	*%*
	Yes	39.0	No	61.0
Interpersonal Dimension	Sub-items			
	e	38.0		
	f	34.0		
	g	28.0		
	Yes	94.0	No	6.0
Production Dimension	Sub-items			
	b	45.0		
	e	28.0		
	g	27.0		
Total		67.0		33.0

Abdi, H. (2024). Scrutinizing the most prominent competencies for a well-rounded translator from Iranian publishers' perspective. *International Journal of New Trends in Social Sciences* 7(2), 66-77. https://doi.org/10.18844/ijss.v7i2.8933

As indicated in Table 2, a majority of the participants (86%) expressed their agreement with the importance of language competence. The remaining 14% responded negatively to this competence. According to the participants' opinions, the three crucial competencies for translators in this category were sub-items "f" (knowing two or more languages other than their mother tongue) (56%), "e" (being faithful to the target language and using its structures and terms) (35%), and "d" (developing sensitivity to changes and developments in languages) (8%), respectively.

Table 2

Answer percentages of the participants to language competence

Item 3	Answers	%	Answers	%
	Yes	86.0	No	14.0
Language Competence	Sub-items			
	f	56.0		
	e	35.0		
	d	8.0		

More than two-thirds of the publishers (82%) did not consider "sociological knowledge" as an important competence for the translator. Only 18% of the publishers agreed with the importance of this competence (see Table 3). Less than half of the publishers (45%) answered "Yes" to the textual knowledge of the translator as a need, whereas more than half of them (55%) expressed their disagreement with this item. Based on Table 3, the majority of publishers (61%) did not have a positive opinion about intercultural competence.

Table 3

Answer percentages of the participants to intercultural competence

	Items	Answers	%	Answers	%
Sociological Knowledge	Item 4	Yes	17.0	No	83.0
Dimension	Item 5	Yes	20.0	No	80.0
		Total	18.0	Total	82.0
	Item 6	Yes	44.0	No	56.0
Textual Dimension	Item 7	Yes	46.0	No	54.0
		Total	45.0	Total	55.0
Total			39.0		61.0

Table 4 illustrates that the total number of positive answers (53%) regarding the importance of information mining competence was slightly higher than the total number of negative answers (47%) regarding this competence.

Table 4

Answer percentages of the participants to information mining competence

Items	Answers	%	Answers	%
Item 8	Yes	64.0	No	36.0
Item 9	Yes	54.0	No	46.0
Item 10	Yes	42.0	No	58.0
	Total	53.0	Total	47.0

According to Table 5, approximately equal numbers of participants agreed (51%) and disagreed (49%) regarding the need for thematic competence in a translator.

Table 5

Answer percentages of the participants to thematic competence

Items	Answers	%	Answers	%
Item 11	Yes	34.0	No	66.0
Item 12	Yes	46.0	No	54.0
Item 13	Yes	73.0	No	27.0
	Total	51.0	Total	49.0

Abdi, H. (2024). Scrutinizing the most prominent competencies for a well-rounded translator from Iranian publishers' perspective. *International Journal of New Trends in Social Sciences 7*(2), 66-77. https://doi.org/10.18844/ijss.v7i2.8933

Based on Table 6, a large majority of participants (91%) agreed on the importance of ICT competence, while a small minority (9%) disagreed with this qualification. Additionally, a significant majority of publishers (94%) agreed that translators need to be familiar with CAT tools. According to Table 6, the use of CAT tools was deemed highly important by most publishers (93%), but not by a minority (7%). In contrast to a small number of participants (7%), a substantial portion expressed their full agreement with the translator's need for technological competence.

Table 6

Answer percentages of the participants to technological competence

Items		Answers	%	Answers	%
Item 14	ICT Employment	Yes	91.0	No	9.0
Item 15	CAT Tools Familiarity	Yes	94.0	No	6.0
Item 16	CAT Tool Employment	Yes	93.0	No	7.0
		Total	93.0	Total	7.0

3.1. Chi-Square (X^2) test

A Chi-square (X^2) test, as argued by McHugh (2013), is designed to measure the dependent variable at a nominal level to identify group differences. In other words, the test is used to measure the discrepancy between the expected and observed frequencies. Therefore, the X^2 test was conducted to determine if there was a significant difference between each competence and the opinions of the publishers.

Table 7 shows that the *p*-value for the publishers' opinions on translation service provision and language competencies was lower than .05 ($p < .05$). Thus, the null hypothesis was retained for these two competencies, indicating a significant difference between them and the publishers. On the other hand, the null hypothesis was not retained for the other competences, as their *p*-values were higher than .05 ($p > .05$). This suggests that there was no significant difference between the publishers' opinions and intercultural, information mining, thematic, and technological competences.

Table 7

Summary of the X^2 for each competence and the publishers' opinions

Competences	X^2	p
Translation Service Provision competence	4.408	.035
Language competence	4.208	.04
Intercultural Competence	1.304	.253
Information Meaning Competence	.021	.884
Thematic Competence	.695	.404
Technological Competence	3.696	.054

Note: the sig value of X^2 is significant at $p < .05$.

4. Discussion

The first two items on the questionnaire focused on the importance of interpersonal and production dimensions, which are the main components of translation service provision competence. The interpersonal dimension refers to how the translator communicates and builds relationships with others, while the production dimension refers to the actual transfer of meaning between languages, as well as the strategic, methodological, and thematic competencies involved in the translation process.

Having this competence allows the translator to produce high-quality translations, which is why the publishers needed to hire a translator. The results of the questionnaire showed that a large majority of participants emphasized the importance of language competence for the translator. Language competence encompasses grammatical and linguistic knowledge, as well as the translator's ability to produce high-quality texts. The publishers considered language competence to be an essential requirement for the translator, recognizing the strength it brings to their work.

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Surprisingly, the publishers did not take into account any of the dimensions of intercultural competence as a significant requirement. Intercultural competence is essential for effective communication with individuals who do not share the same culture, ethnicity, language, or other common experiences (McCauslin, 2015). Therefore, this competence is important for companies hiring translators from different countries who do not share the same culture. However, most Iranian publishing companies do not have this opportunity as their translators are native speakers.

Additionally, intercultural competence allows the translator to understand and convey the meaning of cultural elements, such as idioms and allusions, to the target audience. The publishers also overlooked the importance of information mining competence, which involves the translator's ability to gather relevant information and use appropriate strategies for research and terminology. These two competencies should receive more attention from Iranian publishers as they can greatly impact the quality and efficiency of translations.

In the case of thematic competence, the publishers considered it to be an essential requirement for translators, which was not good news for the profession. Thematic competence plays a role throughout the entire translation process, from document analysis to final quality control procedures. It empowers the translator to improve the quality of the translation, just like the two previous competencies.

The publishers paid close attention to technological competence, which refers to the translator's mastery of translation tools. These tools enable the translator to produce cost-effective and high-quality translations. Therefore, this competence was rightly seen as an important skill for translators.

The results of the study differed from certain aspects of the study conducted by Chodkiewicz and Sklodowska (2012). In their study, participants did not agree on the importance of technological competence and translation service provision competence. They pointed out the limitations of technological competence, specifically machine translation, which they believed could only be effective with the intervention of human translators. Additionally, they emphasized the importance of working in a team, a component of translation service provision competence.

The results of our study had some similarities to the findings of Esfandiari, et al., (2017) study. Like our participants, they considered language competence to be the most important skill for translators. However, they did not fully agree on the significance of information mining competence.

5. Conclusion

The competencies that managers of publishing companies consider when hiring translators are based on the specific goals they have. Each manager applies the competencies that are relevant to the needs of their publishing company and hires a translator accordingly. For example, while one publisher may consider an academic degree in Translation Studies essential, another may not.

Furthermore, as discussed in the previous section, intercultural competence was not deemed important by the majority of publishers, as they employed native translators for their companies. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate the competencies that Iranian publishing companies take into account when hiring translators. This would help determine the most important competencies that contribute to a well-rounded translator.

The results of this study indicate that publishers place particular importance on competencies that enhance a translator's productivity and efficiency. These include technological competence, language competence, and translation service provision competence. While all competencies proposed by the EMT expert group (2009) should be considered by those aspiring to become well-rounded translators, these three competencies require more attention because they complement each other and provide the translator with a powerful set of skills to handle any type of translation.

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In other words, language competence and translation service provision competence work together to improve the quality of the translation, while technological competence allows for faster and more cost-effective translations. That is why these three competencies have a greater impact on a translator's utility and effectiveness compared to other competencies in the EMT framework. Therefore, translation students and trainee translators can use these three prominent competencies as a guideline for their future careers. If they plan to work as freelance translators, they should aim to improve all competencies included in the EMT framework, as freelancers have to handle all translation activities on their own (Abdi 2020, 811).

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