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# Ivory tower vs. workplace reality

Employability and the T&I curriculum – balancing academic education and vocational requirements: a study from the employers' perspective

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## ABSTRACT

These days employability has not only become a veritable buzz-word, but also one of the key indicators in the quality framework of Higher Education (HE) in so far as universities and degrees are regularly measured against the employability rates of their graduates and employers' satisfaction. Accordingly, HE seems to be torn between two conflicting priorities: legitimate academic freedom and teaching autonomy on the one side and the necessary adjustment to constantly changing professional demands and job requirements on the other. Drawing on the Spanish higher education context, the article touches on issues relating to the tense balance between academic and professional practice knowledge in curricular development and the embedding of employability enhancing contents and activities into the T&I curriculum. The main purpose of the present contribution is to take into consideration the TSP employers' view on T&I graduates' employability assets and to promote further discussion by trying to bridge the theory-practice gap and to advocate a curricular approach which allows for balancing academic subject matter and workplace skills in a way that they complement each other in a relevant and beneficial manner.

## Introduction

Employability has always dominated the political and economic discourse, but since the 1980s employability issues have also entered the academic field. Owing to the increasing pressure on Higher Education Institutions (HEI) to meet the needs of an increasingly knowledge-driven economy and to produce competent, knowledgeable, flexible and employable graduates, employability has been gaining relevance. Hence, since the turn of the millennium, the notion has attracted scholarly attention, as studies from the most diverse perspectives testify (See i.e. Morley 2001; Harvey 2001, 2002; Forrier and Sels 2003; Yorke and Knight 2006; Dacre Pool and Sewell 2007; Boden and Nedeva 2010; Schellekens 2006; Li 2002, 2007; Ulrych 2005; Katan 2009b, Chouc and Calvo 2010). With the advent of the Bologna Process and the successive implementation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), the linkage between academic education and employment has emerged as a second major strategic goal after the improvement of intra-European student mobility. Furthermore, there has been a major effort to reconsider how HE addresses the employment of graduates and to take structural measures accompanied by curricular reforms in order to tighten the relationship between academia and the world of work. Nowadays, in the aftermath of the economic crisis of 2008 and the Bucharest communiqué of 2012, employability is undoubtedly the area of focal interest and has established itself as one of the key indicators in the quality framework of HE. This development has prompted a major paradigm change in pedagogical practices and curriculum design from content based methodologies towards competence and skills-based approaches, so that today's Bachelor's and Master's degrees are clearly committed to the skills agenda. The same holds true for T&I degrees, where competence and

learning-outcome-based curriculum design has been generally established and strong emphasis has been placed on the acquisition of specific professional skills in order to enhance the employability of T&I graduates.

Since the last decade there are voices claiming that academic knowledge and disciplinary expertise is increasingly neglected, and academic education is abandoned for mere vocational training aimed at producing employable graduates. Morley (2001, 137) even draws the attention to the spreading fear in academia 'that intellectuals are being transformed into technicians, compelled to deliver skills transcontextually,' and Boden and Nedeva (2010) point out that due to prevailing conceptualizations of employability universities re-structure their curricula along vocational lines, educating graduates with specific job-oriented skills rather than the broad knowledge demanded by today's knowledge society. Resultantly, employability in HE is situated in the field of tension between the academic aloofness of the ivory tower reflected in the pursuit of the 'pure knowledge' and the total immersion in the real world of workplace practice, where knowledge is translated into professional action. The thrust of this controversial debate about employability in HE largely revolves around the fact that 'the term employability has the normative undercurrent of subordinating study to the prevailing demands of the world of work', as Teichler (2011, 29) puts it.

Consequently, inquiring into the nexus of education and employment in the field of T&I implies taking a closer look at the notion of employability, the competencies and learning outcomes established in T&I curricula and their assessment against the backdrop of the employers' perception of the workplace-readiness of T&I graduates.

## 1. The construct of employability: employability in HE and T&I

Addressing the issue of employability within the realm of HE and particularly the role of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in developing employability among their graduates, involves the need to conceptualize, an endeavor which has been embraced by a whole range of education scholars, as there are inter alia Hillage and Pollard (1998), Bennett, Dunne, and Carré (1999), Knight and Yorke (2004) or Yorke and Knight (2006). As a result, employability has emerged as a complex, multilayered and at the same time somehow elusive concept with a vast array of definitions which fall grosso modo in two main categories: definitions referring to the ability of a new graduate to obtain an initial graduate-level employment and to retain this employment, on the one hand, and on the other, definitions relating to the question of how to enhance the

future graduates' attitudes, skills and knowledge in order to empower them to perform competently in their future occupation.

This latter definition refers to the degree to which graduates are educated to be able to use their capacities in order to attain employment and sustain employment through successful performance. As Harvey (2002, 3) very rightly points out, it is necessary to draw a 'distinction between the employability potential of the individual (a matter of self-development) and the actual employment of the individual (a matter mediated by external factors)'. Following Harvey (2002) there is no such thing as a simplistic model of employability in so far as it is not the mere credential value of a university degree as such which together with employability development opportunities provided by the institution quasi automatically leads graduates to being employed. Rather there are a host of person-centred and external factors which provide the conceptual foundation of employability, as there are age, gender or ethnicity, personal attributes as for example flexibility, open-mindedness, empathy, etc., and external factors such as the sector- or region-specific economic situation which have a strong impact on recruitment and hence on employment.

Within the scope of this article and building on the conceptualization of employability as it has evolved in recent times, we focus on 'graduate employability' defined by Knight and Yorke (2004, 261) as 'the possession of understanding, skills and personal attributes necessary to perform adequately in a graduate-level job'. By enhancing employability among undergraduate students, we understand, much in line with Teichler's concept of 'professional relevance' that HE is 'bound to reflect on the outcomes of its activities for the world of work and draw conclusions from that' (Teichler 2011, 32) without becoming fully subordinated to the demands inferred from the changing trends of the employment market, especially given the fact that HE operates within an economic and social framework strongly determined by the rapid obsolescence of technological knowledge and practical skills.

### 1.1. Employability in T&I

Turning specifically to the issue of employability in the field of T&I, we should not overlook the fact that employability in addition to the above mentioned factors, is influenced by the discipline area. In this respect, Harvey (2002, 5) points out, that certain 'programme areas tend to be more active in promoting employability, either because they more readily lend themselves to developing particular employability attributes or because of a need to ensure engagement with the world of work'. Both aspects seem to apply to T&I, a field of study arising from a centuries-old practice, traditionally linked to specific occupational areas and engaged in the continuing debate about whether to put more theoretical or more applied curricular emphasis in translator and interpreter education.

As described above, employability in its pluridimensionality can be approached from various angles: from the governments' and policy-makers' perspective, in terms of measures and decisions regarding workforce planning (Betts and Calabro 2005); from the graduates' viewpoint, particularly with regard to how they perceive their preparedness for employment and their workplace competence; from the universities' perspective, with a view to promoting students' employability through curriculum design and

assessment of graduate outcomes, and from the employers' perspective, regarding the specific requirements they place on staff attributes and expertise in today's knowledge economy.

In order to bridge the gap between academia and workplace reality and in an attempt to reconcile the universities' and the employers' perspective, we advocate including the employers' dimension into the analysis of the competencies required to make graduates employable. As employers are the direct evaluators of the graduates' professional insertion and performance, their perception can provide universities with valuable insights which may prove very useful for employability enhancement through the development of the generic and subject specific competencies, which -following the Tuning approach- represent the essential building block of today's university curricula. Closely related to the question of generic and specific competencies is the long ongoing debate on translation and translator competence, one of the most controversially discussed notions in the field of translation.<sup>1</sup> Since the 1990s research there has been an increasing effort to define the nature of translation competence (Risku 1998; PACTE 2005; Hurtado Albir 2008; Kiraly 2013) and a variety of different proposals and models have been developed, which according to Pym (2003, 484–489) map on a continuum that ranges from 'competence as no such thing' to 'competence as just one thing' and includes 'competence as a summation of linguistic competences' as well as 'competence as multi-componential' construct. Given the inherent limitations of multicomponential models, such as the difficulty to determine the number of components or to account for the dynamic nature of translation competence, which is evolving alongside technological innovations, market demands and constantly changing professional profiles, we would like to adopt Weinert's (2001, 45) general definition of competence as a 'specialized system of abilities, proficiencies or skills that are necessary or sufficient to reach a specific goal'<sup>2</sup> and to argue that there are a variety of capacities, aptitudes, personal attributes and attitudes at play when performing a translation task in a professional setting.

As far as empirical studies centered exclusively on the employability of T&I graduates are concerned, reference should be made to a CIUTI-study (2014) aimed at Bachelor and Master graduates of CIUTI institutions carried out by Schmitt et al. (2014) and an ongoing study of the EMT-network. Furthermore, there are a series of studies exploring the relationship between translator education and market requirements (i.e. Li 2000, 2002, 2007; Milton 2001, 2004; Schellekens 2006; Ulrych 2005; Katan 2009a, 2009b; Toudic 2012). Most of the studies not only vary widely in relation to their geographic scope, but also with respect to the surveyed sample group. With the exception of the OPTIMALE survey targeting European TSP employers, the aforementioned studies surveyed heterogeneous stakeholders of translator education, as there are translation professionals, undergraduate students, translation graduates and translation teachers. With regard to the translation-related competencies, the OPTIMALE survey brought forth some very interesting results (Toudic, 2012, 7–12). TSP employers considered as essential or important the ability to produce 100% quality (97%), the ability to define and/or apply quality procedures (92%), the ability to translate materials in one or more highly specialized domains (89%), the awareness of professional ethics and standards (86%), the ability to use translation memory systems (76%) and the ability to extract and manage terminology (69%).

On the basis of the OPTIMALE study and building on Hillage and Pollard (1998), Bennett, Dunne, and Carré (1999), Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007), and Sewell and Dacre Pool (2010), we follow the assumption that employability in terms of individual development encompasses the following dimensions: knowledge, skills and attitude; that is to say more precisely, disciplinary content knowledge, disciplinary competencies and skills,<sup>3</sup> generic (transferable) competencies and soft skills (personal attributes). These employability assets are complemented by job-finding and job-getting skills as well as career management skills.

If we are to apply the above mentioned employability assets to the field of T&I and drawing on the generic and specific competencies established for the accreditation of official university degrees by the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation of Spain (ANECA) and the findings of Pegg et al. (2012 [2006]) on generic skills TSP employers expect to find in T&I graduates, the picture is as follows:

### DISCIPLINARY KNOWLEDGE, SPECIFIC COMPETENCIES AND SKILLS

- General translation into Spanish
- Specialized translation into Spanish
- General translation into the foreign language
- Specialized translation into the foreign language
- Terminology management and information mining
- Correction, proofreading and editing
- Project management
- Web, software and multimedia localization
- CAT Tools and Post-editing and Machine translation
- Audiovisual translation
- Speed/Productivity (number of words translated per day)
- Desktop Publishing
- Technical writing/summary techniques
- Professional ethics

### GENERIC COMPETENCIES

- Creativity and innovation
- Time management, planning and organizational capacity
- Ability to deal with pressure
- Autonomy and ability to work in an independent manner
- Ability to assume responsibilities
- Ability to work in a team
- Decision-making ability
- Interpersonal and communication skills (dealing with superiors, colleagues and customers)
- Concern for quality
- Self-evaluation capacity
- Entrepreneurial ability

## PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES

- Open-mindedness
- Empathy
- Flexibility and adaptation to changes
- Personal initiative
- Leadership skills
- Self-awareness
- Self-confidence
- Ability for self-criticism
- Personal ethics

Starting from the premise that T&I graduates' employability largely depends on whether or not they possess the aforementioned competencies, skills and attributes, our aim was to explore the importance Spanish employers' attach to them and the extent to which employers feel that today's T&I graduates fulfil these requirements given the curricular structure of Spanish Bachelor's degrees after the changes brought about by the Bologna Process. The present survey focuses on the employers' perception regarding the Bachelor's degree in T&I. The primary reason for this decision is the fact that Spain has opted for four-year Bachelor's degree courses, so that the basic model of 3 + 2 years of study (a Bachelor's degree followed by a Master's degree) has not become as widespread in the Spanish HE environment as in other European countries. In consequence, most T&I graduates try to enter the job market on completion of their Bachelor's degree.

## 2. Employability in T&I: the employers' perspective

### 2.1. Survey of employers' perceptions of employability assets of T&I graduates in Spain

With the aim of collecting data on the employers' perception of the Bachelor's degree in T&I, and after preliminary interviews with CEOs of Spanish TSP companies, a self-administered survey has been conducted among TSP employers and enterprises of other sectors which recruit translators for their translation departments. As the study was intended exploratory in nature, there was no prior selection of respondents. The targeted respondents were both employers and executives who are actively involved in translator recruitment processes. Thanks to the support of ASPROSET (Asociación Sectorial de Proveedores de Servicios de Traducción)<sup>4</sup> and the Internship and Career Office of the Pontifical University of Comillas (Madrid), the hypertext link to the Web-based survey application Gandía Integra was distributed via email to more than 200 companies throughout Spain.

Data were obtained by a semi-structured questionnaire designed in cooperation with the Research and Social Studies Unit of the Pontifical University of Comillas<sup>5</sup> comprising five sections. The first section aims at capturing the information about the respondents (size and industrial sector of the company, number of in-house and freelance

translators, academic degrees held by staff translators, information about trainee translators). Section two is aimed at gathering information about translator recruitment (selection process of T&I graduates, amount and type of in-house training necessary after joining the company, overall satisfaction with the work performed in the first three months after starting employment).

Section three seeks to determine the employers' perception on the importance of the disciplinary knowledge, specific competencies and skills, generic competencies and personal qualities of T&I graduates listed using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Not at all important) to 5 (Very important). Furthermore, respondents were asked to rate the degree of development of those competencies and skills in the T&I graduates hired. Open-ended questions have been included in this section requesting the respondents to indicate the competencies and skills which in their opinion are poorly or very well developed in T&I graduates.

Section four is devoted to the employers' perception of the impact of student mobility and internships on graduates' preparedness for employment. Section five focuses on curriculum design and development. Respondents have been requested to state which of the graduates' employability assets (disciplinary competencies, generic competencies and personal attributes) listed they believe should be developed within the study programme, outside the study programme or via in-house training in the company.

Section six concentrates on the employers' involvement in curriculum design and poses the question, whether the respondents deem their participation essential, advisable or unnecessary. The last item of the questionnaire relates to the procedure of participation. Respondents, who considered their participation essential or advisable were asked to state whether their participation in curriculum design and development should take the form of consultations, interviews or surveys addressed to employers and associations of companies of the sector, or rather the creation of an advisory board or the appointment of an employers' representative as an established member of the university's curriculum development committee. The questionnaire concluded with an open-ended question requesting the respondents to add any comment or issue not addressed in the questionnaire which they deemed as crucial.

A total of 155 respondents accessed the online-questionnaire, but many did not provide any company related information, others only completed part of the questionnaire and abandoned or failed to complete certain sections,<sup>6</sup> so that response rates varied considerably from section to section. 30 respondents completed the entire questionnaire and 9 respondents completed more than half of the questionnaire, thus depending on the item, these responses were also taken into consideration.

As can be seen on the chart below, the majority of the respondents were TSP companies, followed by consulting and healthcare companies, the category 'other' subsumes aid and development NGOs, companies from the education, e-commerce and telecommunication sector (Chart 1).

As far as staff numbers are concerned, 52% of the survey respondents reported that their companies employ fewer than 5 staff translators, 40% between 5 and 10 full-time staff, and 8 % didn't respond to the item. This is due to the fact that the Spanish



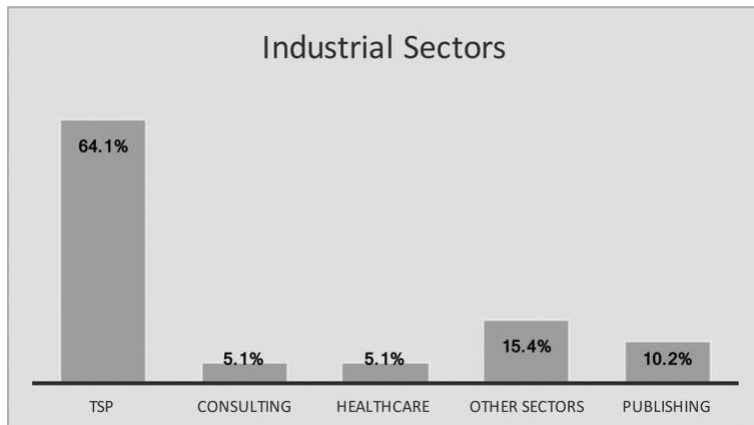


Chart 1. Survey respondents: industrial sectors.

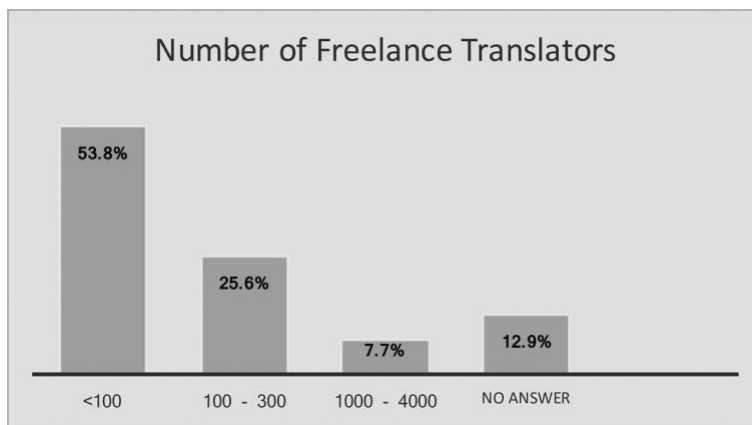


Chart 2. Survey respondents: number of freelance translators.

translation sector relies heavily on freelance translators and calls upon extensive networks of external collaborators. This result is also in line with the findings of the survey carried out in 2015 by the European University of Madrid (Rico and García, 2016, 63), according to which nearly 50% of the Spanish TSP companies contracted more than 51 external collaborators. As the following chart shows, the number of freelance staff ranges widely among the respondents (Chart 2).

## 2.2. Preparedness of T&I graduates for professional insertion and need for subsequent training

Before touching in detail on competencies and curricular issues, respondents were requested to provide an overall assessment of the university education received by T&I graduates and assign an overall rating, on a scale from 1 to 5, in respect of the degree of preparedness of T&I graduates. A broad majority of the respondents replied

that university training in general succeeds in preparing T&I graduates for both, the tasks related to the professional profile of a translator (82.1%) and professional insertion (84.6%).

Charts 3 and 4 display that the vast majority of the respondents regard T&I graduates as moderately or well prepared for the tasks related to the professional profile (87.5%) and professional insertion in the company (84.9%).

Similar results were obtained when inquiring about the level of satisfaction with the work performed by T&I graduates during the first three months of employment. By and large, the vast majority of the respondents was satisfied with the graduates' performance (Chart 5).



Chart 3. Preparedness for the tasks related to the professional profile.



Chart 4. Preparedness for professional insertion in the company.



Chart 5. Satisfaction with the work performed by T&I graduates.

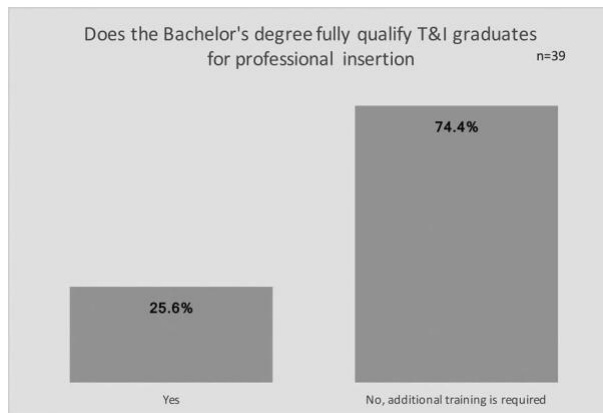


Chart 6. Qualification of the Bachelor's degree and professional insertion.

With regard to the necessity of additional training and the scope of in-house training of T&I graduates, 74.4% of the respondents stated that the Bachelor's degree in itself does not fully qualify for professional insertion and additional training is required, a result which contrasts sharply with the overall assessment of the university education (Chart 6).

As to the type of additional training, opinions are divided: 41% of the respondents were inclined towards a Master degree in specialized translation, whereas 59% prioritized other kinds of training, as there are: an additional Bachelor's degree in a specialty field (i.e. medicine, engineering, computer science) or practice-oriented training in translation (i.e. project management, CAT tools, administrative procedures, taxation). Furthermore, 50% of the respondents rated the effort by the companies to provide in-house training of T&I graduates high and 31.3 % moderate (Chart 7).

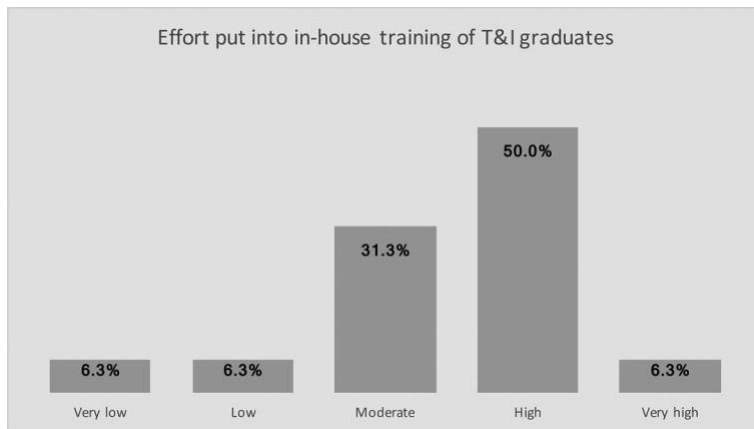


Chart 7. In-house training of T&I graduates.

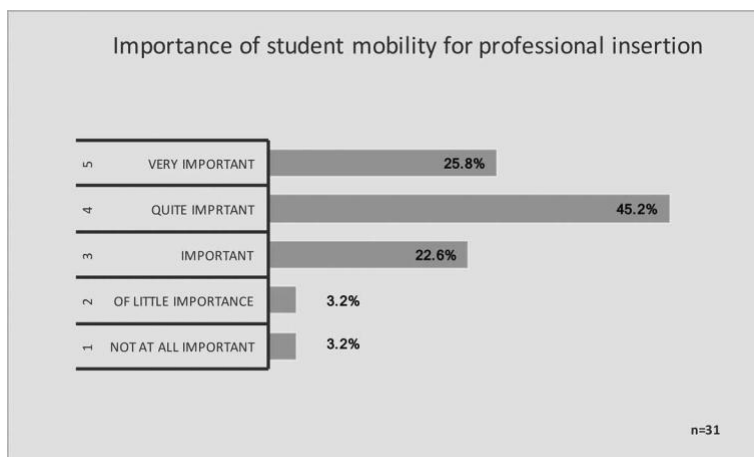


Chart 8. Importance of student mobility.

Regarding the professional aspects, competencies and skills targeted in the in-house training given to T&I graduates, respondents emphasized in particular: work-flow processes, interpersonal communication, customer service and support, project management and CAT tools.

If we turn now to the opinions held by respondents on implementing into the curriculum the contemporary reality and professional demands from the translation industry through student mobility and job placements, Chart 8 above and Chart 9 below show that a vast majority of the respondents of the present survey attached importance to student mobility and particularly to job placements as a means of facilitating job insertion.

Only a very small minority of the respondents (6.4%) considered student mobility of little or no importance for professional insertion, whereas a broad majority did not cast any doubt on its benefits; some respondents actually commented on the positive effect

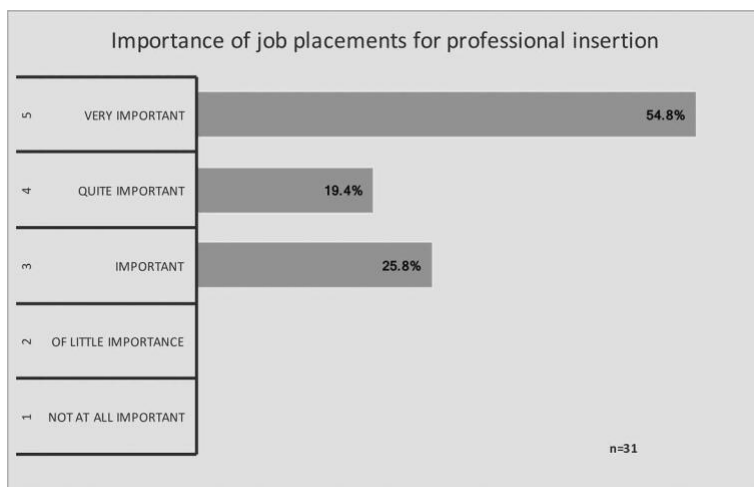


Chart 9. Importance of job placements.

of student mobility on personal attributes, such as open-mindedness, empathy and the willingness to adapt to changes which facilitate professional insertion.

As far as job placements are concerned, the results show even more clearly that employers attached great importance to job placements as a means to strengthen employment orientation.

## 2.3. Employers' perception of the importance of employability assets

### 2.3.1 Disciplinary knowledge and specific competencies

If we are to determine which employability assets are essential to develop in a Bachelor's degree in T&I, the value employers ascribe to these assets provides an important basis for curriculum design and development. Turning specifically to the importance attached to disciplinary (theoretical-translatological) knowledge and specific (translational-practical) competencies, General (97.4%) and Specialized Translation (97.5%) into Spanish, Correction, Proofreading and Editing (94.7%), Professional Ethics

(92.1%), Terminology Management and Information Mining (89.4%), Project Management (79%), Web, Software and Multimedia Localization (78.9%), CAT Tools, Post-editing and Machine Translation (73.7%), and Technical writing/summary techniques (68.4%) were rated by most respondents as important, quite important or very important (Charts 10 and 11).

As for General and Specialized Translation into the Foreign Language and Desktop Publishing the results of our survey do not show any clear tendency. As can be seen from the Chart 12 below, the employers' view concerning these competencies is divided.

47.3% of the respondents considered General Translation into the Foreign Language of no or little importance, 31.6% deemed it important or quite important, whereas only 21.1% attached high importance to this competence. With regard to Specialized Translation into the Foreign Language, results are not much different. 50% of the employers believed that this competence is of no or little importance, 36.7% stated

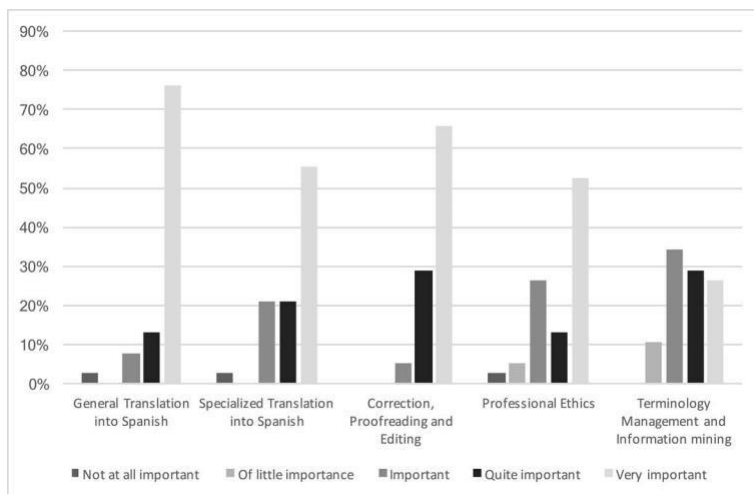


Chart 10. Importance attached to disciplinary knowledge and specific competencies (I).

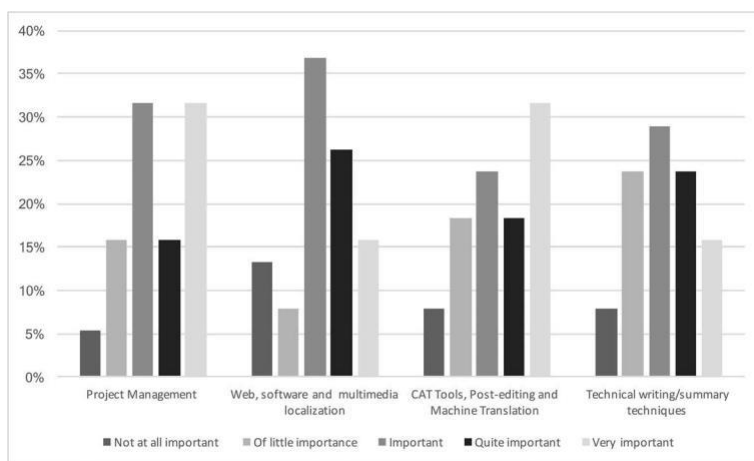


Chart 11. Importance attached to disciplinary knowledge and specific competencies (II).

that Specialized Translation into the Foreign Language is important or quite important and a minority of only 13.3% attached high importance to this competence. The only competence which was considered by most employers (65.7%) of little or no importance is Audiovisual Translation.

The finding that General and Specialized Translation into the Foreign Language were considered of relatively little importance may derive from two facts. First, Spanish TSP companies tend to hire external collaborators for specific subject field translations. Second, in response to international quality standards establishing that translators should only translate into their mother-tongue translations into foreign languages are frequently commissioned to translators in other countries, who are native speakers (see Rico and García 2016, 65–68).

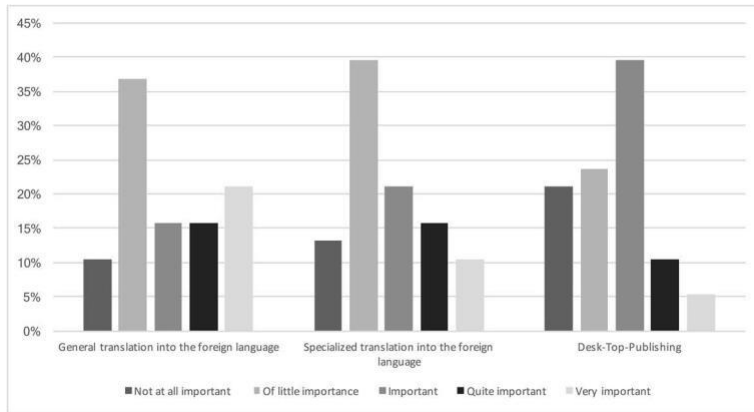


Chart 12. Importance attached to disciplinary knowledge and specific competencies (III).

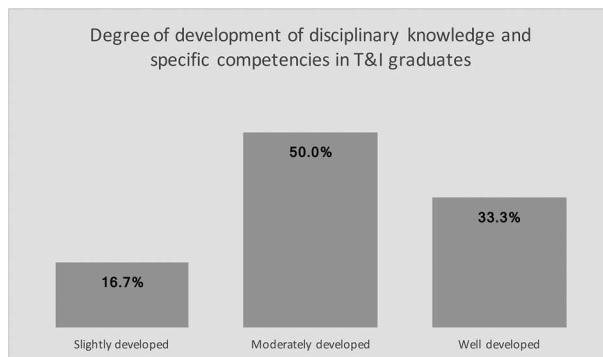


Chart 13. Degree of development of disciplinary knowledge and specific competencies.

When it comes to the question to what extent T&I graduates actually possess the disciplinary knowledge and specific competencies generally included in Spanish T&I degrees, almost half of the surveyed employers indicated that these are only moderately developed and there is even a minority of 16.7% who thought that they are only slightly developed (Chart 13).

When asked to elaborate on the disciplinary knowledge and specific competencies they consider poorly or well developed among T&I graduates, employers highlighted the generally well developed linguistic competence in their native and foreign language (especially English) and among the poorly developed competencies, lacking technological skills and subject field knowledge (Charts 14 and 15).

### 2.3.2. Generic competencies

As far as the generic competencies are concerned, these were unanimously rated by employers as important, quite important or very important, with a 94% to 100%, giving them a priority status. The only exceptions to this tendency were creativity and innovation and entrepreneurial ability, which showed greater fluctuations in the ratings (Charts 16 and 17).



Chart 14. Well developed disciplinary knowledge and specific competencies among T&I graduates.

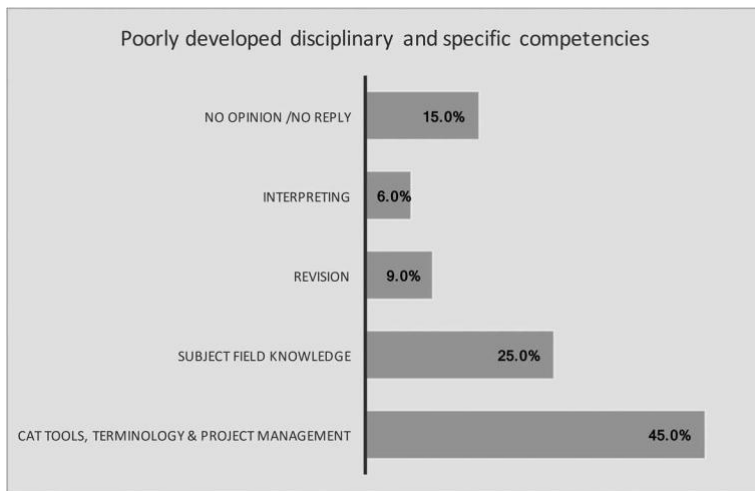


Chart 15. Poorly developed disciplinary knowledge and specific competencies among T&I graduates.

Concerning the degree of development of the generic competencies among T&I graduates, results indicate again that they are perceived by the vast majority of the employers (85.3%) to have been moderately or well developed.

In the open-ended questions relating to generic competencies, employers stressed that T&I graduates generally show high motivation for quality but a low degree of development of competencies related to time management and resistance to pressure.

### 2.3.3. Personal attributes

The results concerning the importance attached to personal attributes present a similar picture to those of the generic competencies. Except from leadership skills which were rated of little importance by 18.8% of the respondents, all the other personal attributes



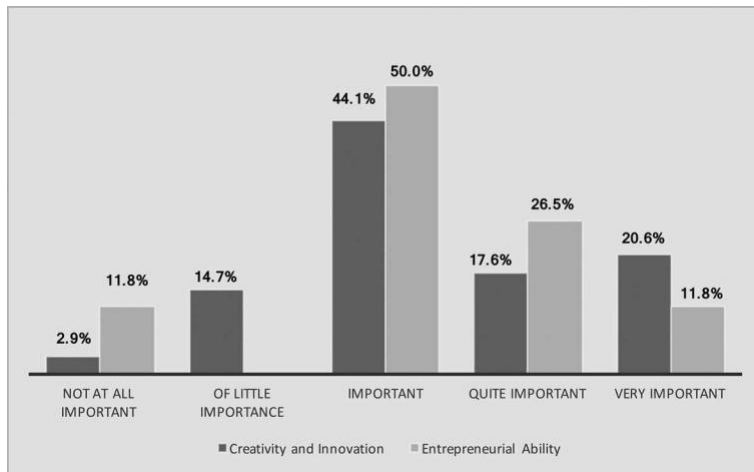


Chart 16. Importance attached to generic competencies.

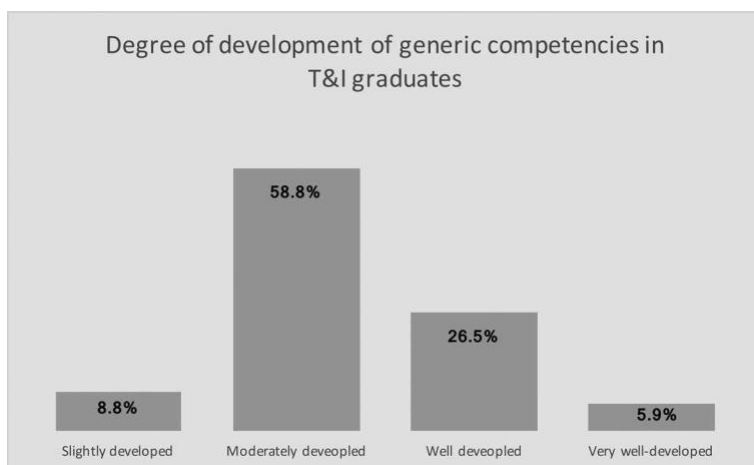


Chart 17. Degree of development of generic competencies.

(open-mindedness, empathy, flexibility and adaptation to changes, personal initiative, self-awareness, self-confidence, ability for self-criticism and personal ethics) were nearly unanimously rated as important, quite important or very important.

## 2.4. Curriculum design and development

The questionnaire concluded with a section focusing on curriculum issues. Hence, employers were asked which of the aforementioned competencies, skills and personal attributes they deem necessary to develop within the degree curriculum and which should be developed outside the study programme or via in-company training (Chart 18).

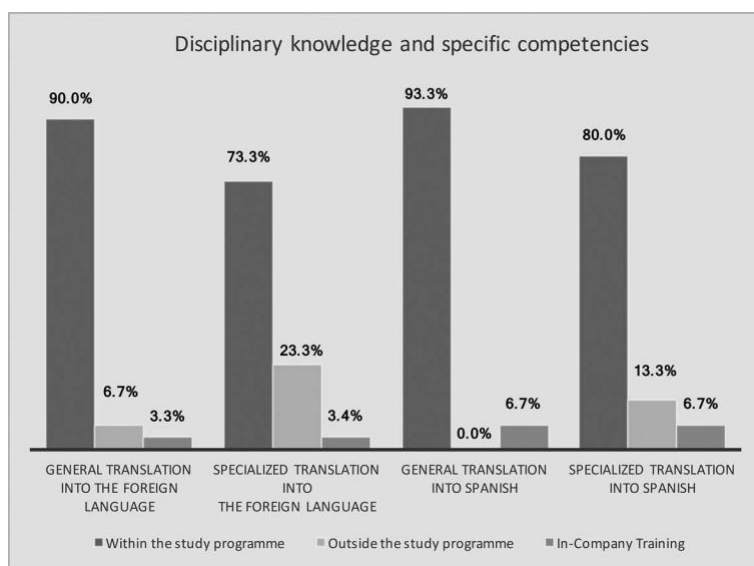


Chart 18. Curriculum design: Disciplinary knowledge and specific competencies (I).

Regarding disciplinary knowledge, specific competencies and skills, respondents stated that the following competencies should necessarily be developed within the degree curriculum: General (90%) and Specialized Translation into the Foreign Language (73.3%), General (93.3%) and Specialized (80%) Translation into Spanish, Terminology Management and Information Mining (70%), Correction, Proofreading and Editing (70%), CAT Tools, Post-editing and Machine Translation (56.7%), Professional Ethics (50%).

The finding that the overwhelming majority of the respondents would like to see General and Specialized Translation into the Foreign Language developed within the curriculum is in sharp contrast to the importance they attached to these two competencies. As illustrated before in Chart 12, only 21.1 % attached high importance to General Translation into the Foreign Language and 13.3% to Specialized Translation into the Foreign Language. A possible explanation for this discrepancy may lie in the fact that even though Spanish employers tend to commission translations into foreign languages to translators in other countries -as Rico and García (2016) point out- and thus attach little importance to this competence when recruiting Spanish graduates, they like to see these competences developed within the curriculum as a means to the enhancement of linguistic competence in the foreign language (pedagogical translation) (Chart 19).

As far as Audiovisual Translation, Technical Writing/Summary Techniques and Web, Software and Multimedia Localization are concerned, respondents indicated that they should be developed within the university framework, but opinions were divided as to the necessity of developing them within the proper study programme (Chart 20).

The only skill which according to the employers is rather to be developed via in-company training is Translation Speed/Productivity (Chart 21).

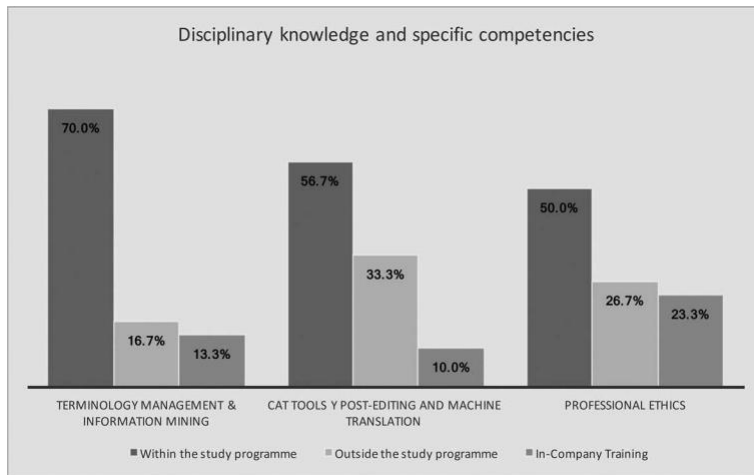


Chart 19. Curriculum design: Disciplinary knowledge and specific competencies (II).

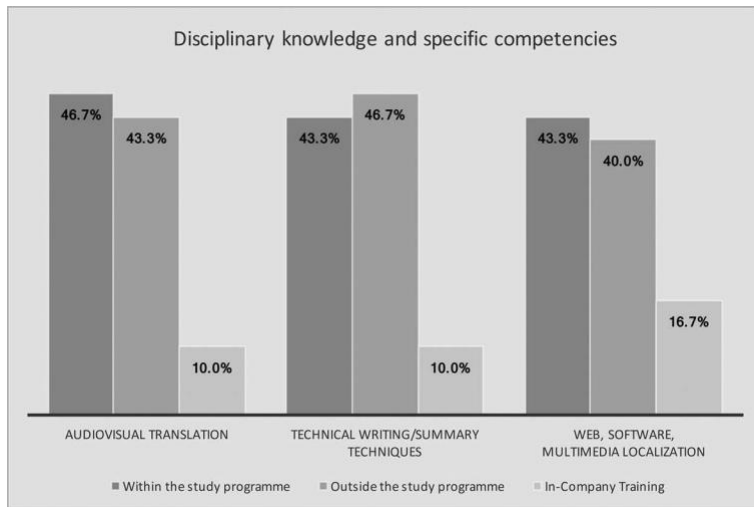


Chart 20. Curriculum design: Disciplinary knowledge and specific competencies (III).

With respect to generic competencies, results reflect that the majority of the respondents considered that time management, planning and organisational skills (63.3%), the ability to work in a team (60%), concern for quality (66.7%) and self-evaluation capacity should be developed within the study programme (Chart 22).

As Chart 23 shows, most respondents were of the opinion that creativity and innovation should be developed within the university, either within the curriculum (40%) or outside (40%) through additional modules and seminars. Much the same applies to autonomy (33.3% within the curriculum; 22.3% outside), ability to assume responsibility (40% within the curriculum; 20% outside), interpersonal and communication skills (43.3% within the curriculum; 16.7% outside), entrepreneurial ability

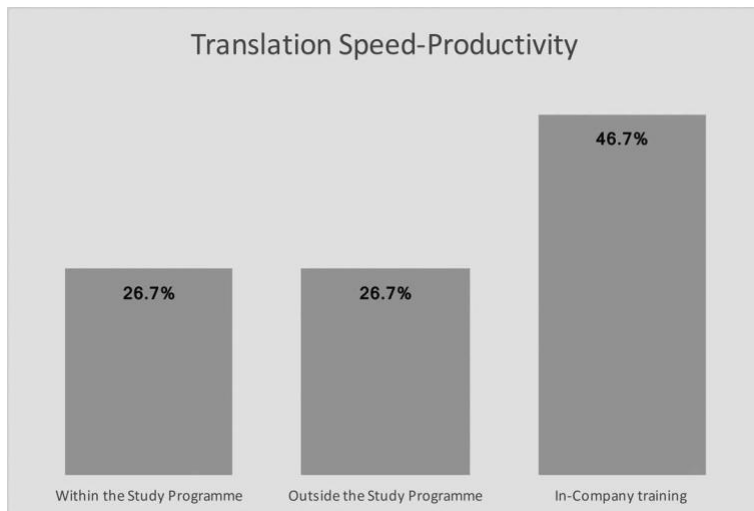


Chart 21. Curriculum design: Translation Speed-Productivity.

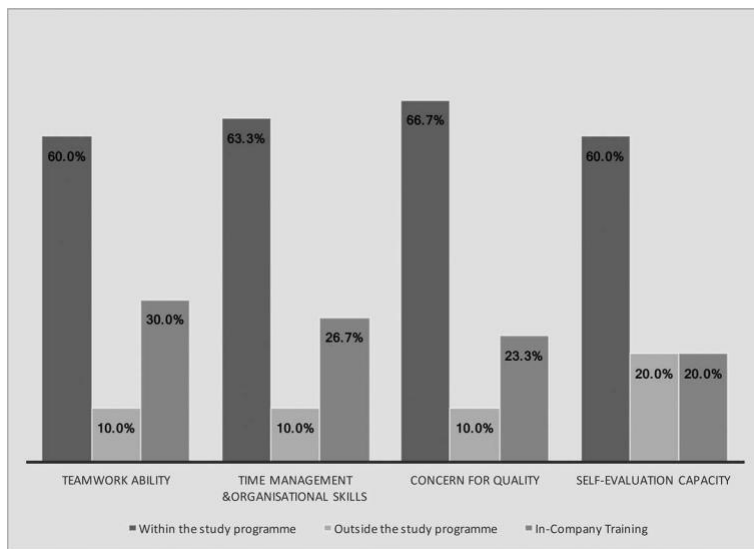


Chart 22. Curriculum design: Generic competencies (I).

(36.7% within the curriculum; 30% outside), and decision-making ability (43.3% within the curriculum; 23.3%). These results suggest that surveyed employers believe that the development of generic competencies is first and foremost the universities' responsibility.

It is interesting to note that the only generic competence whose development seems to fall within the employers' sphere is the ability to deal with pressure. 53.3% of the respondents stated that this competence should be developed through in-company training.

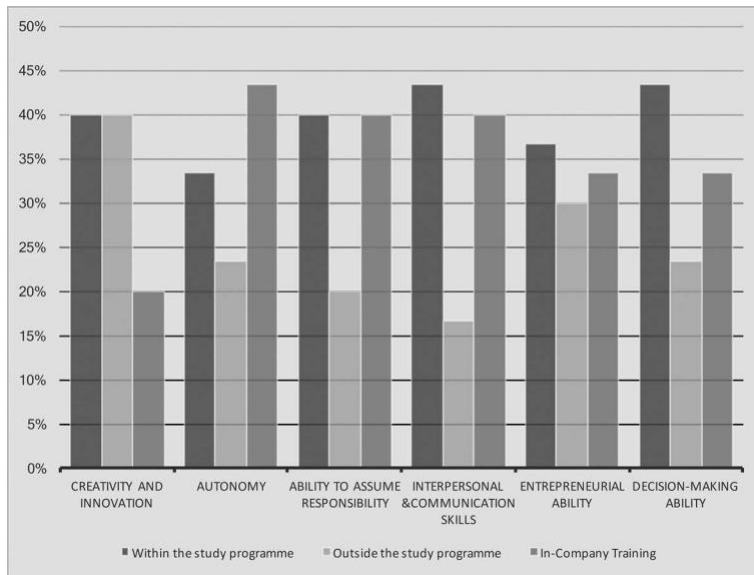


Chart 23. Curriculum design: Generic competencies (II).

According to the employers' view, the following personal qualities should be developed within the degree programme: personal ethics (70%), ability for self-criticism (60%), self-confidence (50%). Personal attributes such as open-mindedness, personal initiative, flexibility and adaptation to changes, leadership skills, self-awareness and empathy should be developed within the university, but opinions were divided as to the necessity of developing them within the curriculum or by means of extra-curricular modules or activities (Chart 24).

#### 2.4.1. Employers' involvement in curriculum design and development

In the closing section of the questionnaire, respondents were asked, whether universities should involve employers in curriculum design and development and if so, which should be the procedure. 43.3% of the respondents considered the participation of employers essential and 56.7% advisable (Chart 25).

Regarding the procedure, a slight majority favored active participation by means of an advisory board and one third preferred to have an employers' representative appointed to the university's curriculum development committee (Chart 26).

These results reflect that the surveyed Spanish employers have a serious interest in curriculum issues and would provide active support, if they were requested to. The following reply by one of the respondents to the last question of the survey requesting additional comments on the questionnaire or suggestions to the issues addressed, definitely points in this direction and clearly illustrates that cooperation between universities and employers would enhance employability and thus be beneficial for T&I graduates: 'a hand-in-glove cooperation between employers and universities with the purpose of tailoring realistic degree curricula would enhance employability.'

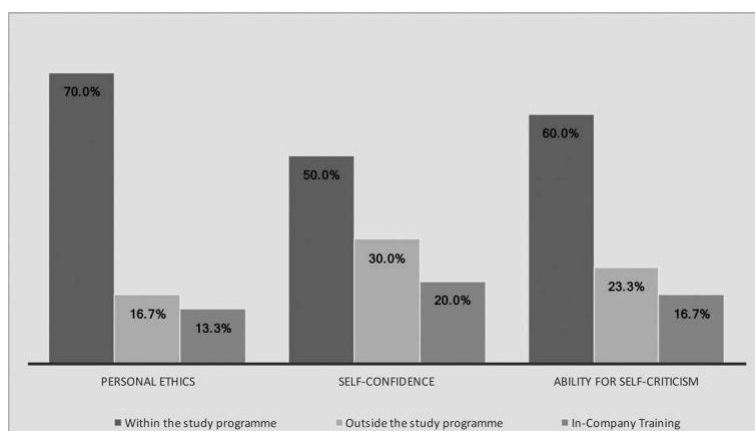


Chart 24. Curriculum design: Personal attributes.

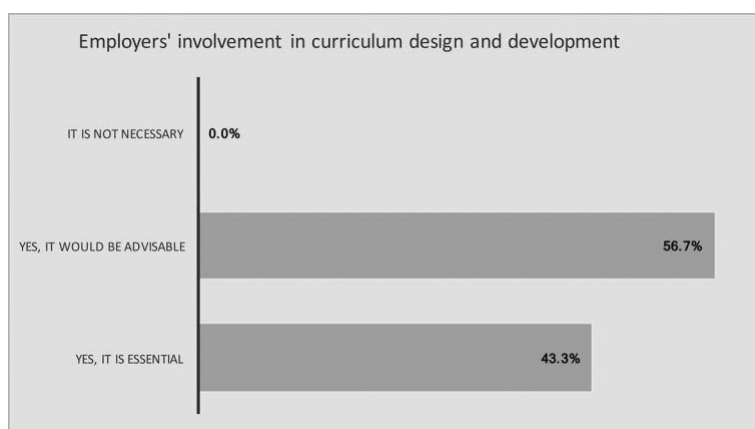


Chart 25. Employers' involvement in curriculum design and development (I).

What are the conclusions to be drawn from the obtained results? Starting from the last issue addressed in the questionnaire, it seems a sensible approach to encourage employer involvement in T&I curriculum design and development and to promote new ways of cooperation between universities and employers. So far, employers do not actively participate in curriculum design in Spain, and cooperation in curricular matters between universities and employers seldom goes beyond occasional informal contacts and consultations. The creation of employers' advisory boards, a common practice in the UK, would certainly be a good practice worth replicating.

In the course of the Bologna Process, the attention of universities engaged in translator education has been directed towards producing employable graduates via development of the generic and specific competencies of their students. For this purpose, curricular contents have been reshaped to allow for more practice-oriented courses that have been attuned to meet professional requirements; and job placements have been implemented in an attempt to embed employability development in

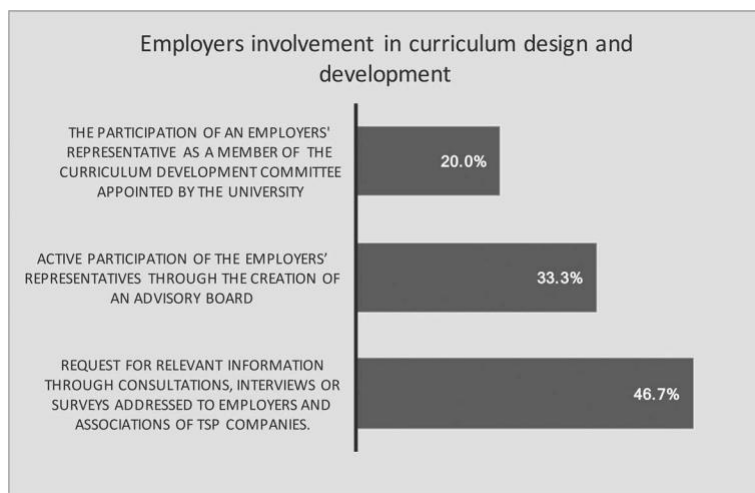


Chart 26. Employers' involvement in curriculum design and development (II).

undergraduate study programmes. The universities' efforts to that end seem to have been relatively successful, as the results regarding the preparation for the tasks related to the professional profile of a translator and professional insertion show. But the fact that only 35% of the employers are of the opinion that T&I graduates are well prepared in terms of disciplinary knowledge and specific competencies, should give rise to reflection. Neither should translator education ignore the fact that employers specifically state subject field knowledge as one of the poorly developed competencies among T&I graduates (see Chart 15), a result which is also reinforced by the comment of another respondent, who stated that 'the employability of T&I graduates improves exponentially with specialization, the earlier they start specializing the better for them and the market'. These findings suggest that alongside technological skills specialization together with a deepening of subject field knowledge should be among of the top priorities of T&I study programmes, especially in Spain, where Bachelor's degrees – unlike in the rest of Europe – are four year degrees with a total amount of 240 ECTS instead of only 180 ECTS, and particularly in view of the fact that due to the dismal economic situation Spanish graduates on completion of their Bachelor's degree do not necessarily engage in advanced studies within the scope of a Master's degree.

### 3. T&I curriculum: balancing academic education and vocational requirements

#### 3.1. Embedding employability in the T&I curriculum

The question of how to prepare T&I graduates for sustainable employability without neglecting academic quality in HE or compromising universities' fundamental educational missions has thus become the core challenge of curricular development. Regarding the enhancement of employability in HE, the literature on employability and curriculum development traditionally distinguishes three approaches. On the one hand, there is the integrated approach, which is centered on the provision of opportunities to develop employability across the curriculum by embedding employability skills

into existing modules and courses. On the other hand, the two other approaches attempt to enhance employability skills by bolting them onto the curriculum. The modular approach is based on specific complementary modules which can be generic in nature and hence may be implemented either in different degree programmes or customized in order to meet the specific needs of a particular degree. The extra-curricular approach, for its part, develops employability skills outside the study pro-gramme through a variety of different measures, as for example, career events, work-shops, mentoring programmes, entrepreneurship courses, etc.

If we are to consider that disciplinary knowledge still is the building block of HE and professional competence and that the main difference of university curricula and those of vocational training programmes is the substantive focus placed on advanced knowledge, academic reasoning and critical understanding, we have to make a distinction between employability enhancement within the study programme and outside the study pro-gramme. Enhancing employability within the curriculum means first and foremost to bestow the students with the necessary disciplinary competencies, that is to say, T&I curricula should foster the acquisition of disciplinary knowledge, subject field knowledge and transferable skills on which professional competency is eventually grounded. Drawing on the results of the survey, this means to attach priority to specialized translation accompanied by an effective subject field training, which allows for the acquisition of the basic subject field knowledge (in medicine, law, engineering, etc.), in order to provide a solid foundation on which T&I graduates can build. This becomes all the more relevant, if we bear in mind that in the course of the Bologna reform, T&I Bachelor's degrees in Spain have become more general in nature and thus place only very little emphasis on subject field training and specialized translation. This circumstance, combined with the fact that T&I graduates generally do not take specializing Master's degrees leads to the fact that employers' point to a lack of competence in these two areas.

Another cornerstone of employability development within the curriculum is job placements. Our survey results were conclusive about the importance of supervised job placements for the professional insertion of T&I graduates. When asked about the adequate duration (in months or hours of dedication) of curricular internships in order to improve T&I graduates' employability, the majority of the respondents stated that a minimum of 3–6 months would be necessary, but much more important than the total duration seemed to be that the placement should be completed as a full-time placement and without interruption. According to the employers' perception, this placement modality would facilitate the integration of the trainee in the company and allow for real work experience. So far, most T&I degrees in Spain only include part-time placements, which oblige students to combine classes and academic work with super-vised work experience to the detriment of both, students and companies. In terms of curriculum structure, it would be beneficial to introduce an entire placement semester without any classes.

As for the pedagogical implications of embedding employability into the T&I curriculum, there are a variety of instruments and didactic approaches which allow for the development of generic competencies and personal attributes: group-working experience fosters the ability to work in a team, self-and peer-assessment of translations develop self-evaluation capacity, the ability for self-criticism and the acceptance of criticism from others. Project-based learning via simulation of 'real' assignments or translation projects,



in the sense that a finished translation has to be delivered within a deadline, can help students to acquire competencies i.e. in project management, terminology management, translation speed but they also contribute to the development of generic competencies as there are time management, planning and organizational capacity, the ability to deal with pressure, to assume responsibilities or to work in a team.<sup>7</sup>

These employability enhancement measures should be complemented by modular approaches bolted on the curriculum, focusing on professional and career management skills. An important initiative in this direction has been started by the Pontifical University of Comillas with the implementation of a Diploma in Professional Skills which aims to improve the knowledge and skills acquired during the Bachelor's degree and to nurture and develop personal qualities among undergraduates. The main objective of the Diploma is to foster the students' oral and written communication skills, their ability to effectively manage their own work, their capacity for teamwork, stress management, self-motivation and time management. On completion of the Diploma, students will also become aware of the advantages of having a personal career development plan. The supplementary training of the Diploma in Professional Skills, comprising 24 ECTS credits and runs parallel to the Bachelor's degree.

## Conclusion

As discussed above, there is a wide range of approaches and methods to establish a link with the professional field in order to enhance employability among T&I graduates. These may be embedded in the curriculum, implemented in a complementary manner or both. Prior to making decisions about which employability issues to include in the learning experience in general, we advocate gathering information on this matter from employers and to give them the opportunity to play an active role in curriculum design and development. We would like to emphasize that taking into account the employers' viewpoint on graduate employability is by no means synonymous with subordinating academic translator education to the demands of translation market, but rather with generating professionals who are able to act professionally in different economic and societal settings and who are responsive to economic, social, and cultural changes. Developing employability among T&I graduates is about making T&I curriculum professionally relevant, not about neglecting other aims, as cultural enhancement, academic quality, critical awareness or innovative thinking. In the same vein, we would like to conclude with a quotation from Kearns (2006, 288) which seems particularly appropriate in this context: 'It is as centres of thought down through the centuries that universities have gained their standing within societies and it is for this reason that they have the potential to wield great power in the training of translators'.

## Notes

1. For a critical discussion of the notion translation competence see Lesznyák (2007), Rothe-Neves (2007) and Pym (2003).
2. In line with Pym's (2003, 489) minimalist approach to reach a specific goal means here to carry out successfully a translation assignment and to be able to generate as series of viable target texts and to select the one that best fits the assignment.

3. The term disciplinary content knowledge refers here to the declarative knowledge of theoretical-translatological nature and by specific competencies and skills we understand the procedural knowledge including the translational-practical competencies (terminology management, project management, proofreading and editing, etc.).
4. We are very grateful for this support and our thanks go especially to J.J. Arevalillo Doval (President of ASPROSET) and Dr. Marcos Aranda (Secretary of ASPROSET) for their valuable comments and help in disseminating the survey.
5. We wish to express our sincere gratitude to Dr. José Antonio López-Ruiz, Director of the Research and Social Studies Unit, for his advice and technical support.
6. The great discrepancy between access rate and the final response rate is mainly due to the intrinsic characteristics of online surveys. Concerning the limitations of self-administered online surveys, see also Wright (2005). The access to the web-based questionnaire via a link to the website was anonymous, so that a survey participant could easily skip through the questionnaire without completing it or abandon and re-access it at any time.
7. As for the advantages of project-based learning see Biel (2011).

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