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Profiling professional identity among translation students: A binational study

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Abstract: The construct of professional identity (PI) is gaining prominence in the exploration of graduate employability, which has traditionally been approached from a skills-based perspective. Despite this shift in focus, the investigation of PI formation in translator training programs remains limited. This paper examines the self-reported PI profiles of translation trainees nearing the completion of their university studies. An online survey was administered to students from two different educational settings, utilizing the Professional Identity Five-Factor Scale (PIFFS). Descriptive statistical analyses were conducted on the collected data. Results indicate that PI among the two investigated student groups is moderately developed, highlighting the limited success of curricula in fostering PI when it is not explicitly integrated as a key objective. Profiling of the identified PI reveals that the dimension of experience with the profession is particularly lacking. The study concludes that when designing translation curricula, educators need to consider PI as an essential objective rather than an incidental by-product. The research underscores the necessity for activities beyond standard classroom practices to further enhance PI. These activities should increase industry engagement within the curriculum through work-integrated learning, such as apprenticeships, internships, field placements, and practicum experiences.

Keywords: Professional identity (PI), translator training, industry engagement, curriculum design, employability

1. Introduction

Professional identity (PI) is a crucial construct in understanding how individuals perceive and navigate their roles within a profession. The investigation of PI has been carried out for different professions, and has been established to affect

different facets of an individual's professional performance and interaction (Bennett, 2010), such as job satisfaction, occupational self-esteem, organisational commitment, loyalty, improved performance, resilience, employee turnover, etc.

The development of PI has been analysed through various theoretical frameworks, including Social/Human Capital Theories, Social Identity Theory, Social Learning Theory, Intrinsic/Extrinsic Motivation Theories, Communities of Practice, Situational Learning, and Self-Authorship Theory (Goltz & Smith, 2014). While the breadth of inquiry is considerable (Jensen & Jetten, 2016, p. 1028; Nadelson et al., 2017, p. 706; Trede et al., 2012, p. 375), the literature converges on a broad conceptualisation of PI as “the sense of being a professional” (Paterson et al., 2002, p. 6). This conceptualisation involves a collection of attributes depicted as a career template (Bennett, 2010, p. 8) or a “relatively stable and enduring constellation” (Ibarra, 1999, p. 764) of values, behaviours, knowledge, beliefs, skills, and attributes. These correspond to (1) the expectations society holds for a profession (Paterson et al., 2002, p. 6) or (2) “in terms in which people define themselves in a professional role” (Ibarra, 1999, p. 764; Tan et al., 2017, p. 1505; Tomlinson & Jackson, 2019, p. 886; Worthington et al., 2013, p. 187).

Discussions of PI typically consider established professionals and early career graduates (see for instance Bennett, 2010; Kirpal, 2004). However, some studies explicitly shift the discussion to the academic context for a focus on students still undergoing their training. Jackson (2016, 2017), who focused on the development of PI among undergraduates, calls it pre-professional identity (PPI) and presents it as a construct that “may be considered a less mature form of professional identity” (2016, p. 926; Clanchy et al., 2021, pp. 174-175; Jensen & Jetten, 2016; Salo et al., 2020, p. 100; Tomlinson & Jackson, 2019).

PI is of particular importance for undergraduate students for at least two reasons. First, the development of PI among undergraduates has been shown to influence the way they evolve in their academic setting, with particular focus on such aspects as development and motivation (Jensen & Jetten, 2016, p. 1030) as well as retention and attrition (Clanchy et al., 2021; Worthington et al., 2013). Second, it is argued that an underdeveloped PI among students “may lead to misalignment of student expectations of study and the scope of the profession” (Clanchy et al., 2021, p. 193) and that, conversely, a well-developed PI favours transition and integration of graduates into the workplace.

The question of transition to the professional world is usually framed by Higher Education Institutions in terms of employability. Responses to the pressure for employment-ready graduates have typically adopted a competence-based approach, which tries to inventory the skills a specific profession requires in view of integrating them into the curriculum (Jackson, 2016). In the area of translation, competence frameworks such as the ones proposed in Neubert (2000), Beeby and colleagues (2003), and Kelly (2005) represent typical illustrations of this approach.

However, from a sociological perspective, competence-based approaches are considered “technicist” (Tomlinson & Jackson, 2019, p. 886) and restrictive as it is believed that the satisfactory completion of an educational program that favours the integration of the graduate into the profession, implies not just the assimilation of knowledge and skills related to a particular profession but the readiness to perform as a responsible member of that professional community (Clanchy et al., 2021, p. 174; Jackson, 2016; Paterson et al., 2002, p. 7; Tan et al., 2017, p. 3). Within this sociological approach, the question of employability is reframed in terms of social constructs; the social and cultural forms of capital

that define a profession (Tomlinson & Jackson, 2019, p. 886; Runcieman, 2022). Within this broadened view of employability, the construct of PI encapsulates many of the attributes that are believed to complement technical and interpersonal skills in the profile of the ideal fit-for-employment graduate.

Despite the importance PI has acquired as a field of investigation, relatively little research has explored the significance of PI for translator training. Translation is a professional activity that comes under the umbrella of language industries, a sector with an annual growth of 5 to 10% (Schäffner, 2020, p. 63). Its scope is increasingly diversifying with a proliferation of activities and job titles that do not always bear the label of translation, such as adaptation, internationalisation, localisation, transcreation, multilingual documentation, (post-)editing, language mediation, and linguistic transfer (Angelone et al., 2020, p. 2; Gambier, 2001, p. 91; Schäffner, 2020, p. 63). This diversification signifies that the professional identification of actors operating in the field is in a constant state of (re)negotiation, making PI an aspect that requires attention.

Limited as it is, the focus on PI within the translation sector bears all the traits of the general outlook on PI (see for instance Ferreira-Alves, 2011; Risku et al., 2020; Schäffner, 2020; Yoo & Jeong, 2017). Thus, we find the same arguments that competence-driven approaches are deemed insufficient to prepare translators for the workplace or do not “fully address the complex needs of current or future working life” (Salo et al., 2020, p. 98; Haro-Soler, 2017; Runcieman, 2022, p. 559).

Another shared trait between general and translation-focused investigations of PI is the relative scarcity of studies focusing on the educational context compared to those centred on professionals (Salo et al., 2020, pp. 98; 99). References to the necessity for the pre-graduation stage to include aspects that come under the umbrella of the construct of PI are available. For Kiraly (2000, 2013), aspects such as self-concept, confidence, and awareness are key components of translator training. Gouadec argues that “[t]ranslators should be trained at university, not simply taught at university and then trained on the job” (2003, p. 13). This is also discussed in the edited volume by Schlesinger and Sela-Sheffy (2011). However, other than theoretically driven projects that consider PI tangentially (see for instance Gambier, 2001; Hurtado Albir, 2008), to our knowledge, only a handful of projects have explicitly focused on PI among translation students. Salo and colleagues (2020) investigate the emerging PI of MA translation students, identify its components, and discuss its implications for training and employability. Lee (2020) extends this focus to MA students of interpreting, exploring the features of an emerging PI and the factors influencing its development. Singer (2022) builds on the premise that PI development is a non-linear evolving process and investigates fluctuations in translator identity statuses among undergraduate students during the last year of their training. Addressing ways to enhance PI, Runcieman (2022) explores the impact of work-integrated learning (WIL) on the undergraduate students’ development.

Contributing to the growing interest in this topic and building on the definition of PI as “the sense of being a professional” (Paterson et al., 2002, p. 6), the project reported on here sets as an initial goal to investigate the development of PI among undergraduate student translators in their final year of study. In alignment with this aim, our initial research question is the following:

RQ1: How clearly defined are the PIs of the students in the contexts of the study?

Research converges on the idea that PI is a complex construct. This implies that PI development can be broken down into different interacting constituents, including familiarity with professional roles and practices, the identification with role models, an understanding of workplace culture, and active participation in the professional socialization process (Bennett, 2010; Jackson, 2016, 2017; Tan et al., 2017). Focusing on these constituents can reveal different trainee profiles and inform which of these constituents require attention. Given the lack of empirical exploration of this aspect among translator trainees, the following additional research question is posed:

RQ2: What are the key characteristics of the PI profiles of the investigated students?

In the next sections, the methodology adopted for this project will be delineated, followed by a section presenting and discussing the findings in terms of the aforesaid research questions.

2. Research methodology

The investigation of PI has followed both qualitative and quantitative research paradigms. Examples of projects adopting a qualitative paradigm include for instance De Lasson and colleagues (2016) and Wyatt and colleagues (2021). Within Translation Studies, Salo and colleagues (2020) employed a self-reflective open-ended questionnaire administered at different stages of a Multilingual Translation Workshop course. Lee (2020) applied a descriptive inquiry method to a collective case study. Singer (2022) conducted a longitudinal study using semi-structured interviews, while Runcieman (2022) adopted “small story” analysis in his investigation.

In contrast to the qualitative explorations outlined above, other projects adopt a quantitative perspective, aiming to provide measurable insights into PI formation (Chen et al., 2023; Xu and Ibrahim, 2023). These studies often focus on psychometric properties, employing validated scales such as the Clarity of Professional Identity (CPI), the Macleod Clark Professional Identity Scale (MCPIS), the Nurse Self-Concept Questionnaire (NSCQ), and the Professional Self Identity Questionnaire (PSIQ), among others (see Matthews et al., 2019). According to Matthews and colleagues, while qualitative approaches delve into “the effect of different experiences on the development of professional identity from students’ perspective” (p. 2), quantitative approaches complement these efforts by providing input on how to develop strategies to strengthen professional identity (ibid). Building on the rationale outlined above, the present project adopted a quantitative approach to investigate professional identity among translation students. This methodology enables profiling PI among students by examining how well it is defined globally and identifying the attributes that characterize it.

2.1 Data collection tool

This approach was implemented using a survey questionnaire. Given that quantitatively oriented comprehensive research into PI within the area of translation studies is virtually non-existent, the need arose to look outside the discipline for an appropriate instrument for the investigation. The instrument selected for the present project is the Professional Identity Five-Factor Scale, or PIFFS (Tan et al., 2016; 2017). Other instruments are usually designed for specific professions, such as exercise science (Clanchy et al., 2021), medicine (Faihs et al., 2023; Toben et al., 2021), or nursing (Worthington et al., (2013).

PIFFS is designed to be sufficiently broad to accommodate a variety of professions and has been adopted, either in part or in full, in several studies on PI formation across diverse disciplines, including Business Management (Mayur & Verma, 2021), nursing (Gusar et al., 2021), and occupational therapy (Gray et al., 2020). Notably, the project reported in Tomlinson and Jackson (2019) spans multiple fields, including Arts and Humanities, Health and Social Care, Social Sciences, and Science Technology Engineering and Maths (STEM). The instrument offers the advantage of being validated and features in Matthews and colleagues' (2019) comparative study of instruments for the measurement of PI, where it was rated as "Good" on a scale containing the four categories of excellent, good, fair, and poor. PIFFS conceptualizes PI through five dimensions, each of which will be examined in detail to demonstrate its relevance to Translation Studies.

2.1.1 Knowledge about professional practices

This dimension corresponds to domain knowledge (Tan et al., 2017, p. 4) and includes knowledge of the discipline, familiarity with the terminology it uses, and awareness and thorough understanding of the professions' values, norms, rules, and regulations that are necessary to promote accountability and responsible professional behaviour. In translation studies, this dimension largely coincides with the system of "knowledge, abilities, and attitudes required to be able to translate" (Hurtado Albir, 2015, p. 259) subsumed under the concept of translation competence (TC) in multiple frameworks (see Hurtado Albir, (2015), Kelly (2005), and Neubert (2000). From a cognitive psychology perspective, the dimension corresponds to the notions of declarative and procedural knowledge.

2.1.2 Having the professional as a role model

This dimension focuses on the individuals' contact and interaction with people from their social context, such as supervisors, teachers, and mentors, and their use as models of the skills and attributes needed to achieve a target goal (Gibson, 2003, p. 592). Usually, these role models are identified in the individual's immediate social context (Gibson, 2003, p. 592), such as family members, relatives, friends who are into the profession and ultimately figures of national and international renown. In the educational context, teachers represent the most immediate role models, but this also extends to peers within a socio-constructivist approach to the translation classroom (Kiraly, 2000). There is growing attention to the question of role models in translator training, with projects exploring different facets, such as interaction with the instructor/advisor or with translated material, the role this interaction plays in students' perception of their possible selves, drawing on the construct originally developed by Markus and Nurius (1986), and the way this development contributes to easing the transition from the educational to the professional contexts (Kiraly, 2000; Singer, 2021; Svahn, 2020).

2.1.3 Experience with the profession

This dimension focuses on the "professional-in-practice" (Tan et al., 2017, p. 4), i.e. what it is and how it feels to be in the profession. It involves direct contact with clients and other actors from the profession in authentic professional contexts. This contact enhances the sense of role within the profession and helps organise theoretical classroom input towards practical implementation. Focus on this aspect in translator training appears in the importance given to authentic experiential learning (Kiraly and Massey, 2019)

which can take multiple forms including peer collaboration and synergistic learning (Cnyrim, 2019), portfolio-based and semi-authentic translation practice (Canfora, 2019), training placements and “practicum” work (Király and Hofmann, 2019), and authentic projects (Way, 2019), among others. The special issue dedicated to situated learning (González-Davies & Raído, 2016) explores how exposure to real-life or highly simulated work environments and tasks enhances the learners’ “capacity to think and act like professionals” (2016, p. 1).

2.1.4 Professional self-efficacy

First introduced by Bandura (1977), self-efficacy is defined as the “individual’s perception of their abilities to perform a particular task” (Haro-Soler, 2018). Transferred to the area of translation, students with high self-efficacy believe in their ability to translate competently, make professional judgements and handle situations (Atkinson, 2012; Atkinson, 2014; Bolaños-Medina, 2014; Haro-Soler, 2017, 2018; Svahn, 2020).

2.1.5 Preference for a particular profession

Studying a major with the aim of getting a job within that field upon graduation is a clear indicator of (pre)professional identity (Lung, 2005). This aspect is usually investigated from the perspective of motivation (Horváth & Kálmán, 2020; Liu & Yu, 2019; Wang et al., 2022). Motivation is considered a predictor of achievement and performance in both academic and professional settings and has been a focus of considerable study where it is argued to reflect on the students’ resilience, performance, and success (see Liu and Yu, 2019 for a review of the literature on the effects of motivation on students).

2.2 Context

The current investigation involved two four-year translation programs from different countries, both explicitly designed for translator training. The decision to include two programs, rather than just one, was intended to facilitate a broader understanding of how PI is formed across diverse educational environments. This approach allows for the examination of both similarities and differences, enabling the detection of patterns. For the selection of the two contexts, convenience sampling was employed. The first program is a BA in English Language and Translation at Sohar University (Oman) (henceforth Setting 1), where two members of the research team, including the first author, are instructors. The second program is the Bachelor in Translation and Interpreting at Management and Science University (Malaysia) (henceforth Setting 2), where another team member is also involved as an instructor. This program was selected based on its characteristics and the readiness of this team member to join the research. (Please see below for ethical considerations.)

The two programs share several similarities. Both span four years and require completion of national pre-university schooling (or equivalent) for entry. While native language proficiency is not explicitly required, students are expected to demonstrate strong command of their native language. Only a basic level of English proficiency is required. The core curriculum in both programs is similar, starting with modules on language skills and general translation, and progressing to specialized translation, translation theory, computer-assisted translation, and terminology. Both programs also include a graduation project.

However, there are notable differences between the two programs. The language combination in Setting 1 focuses on two languages, Arabic and English, while Setting 2 adds a third language, Malay. Moreover, the

participating student cohort in Setting 1 consists solely of nationals, whereas Setting 2 includes international students. As a result, translation activities in Setting 1 are primarily into Arabic, with some activities involving translation into English, and all students participate in both types of tasks. In contrast, the international composition of the cohort in Setting 2 allows for greater flexibility, with priority given to translation into each student's first language. Another distinction is that while both contexts offer training opportunities for students, particularly in the final year of study, this training remains optional in Setting 1, whereas in Setting 2, each student is required to complete at least one training placement.

Regarding the instructors, both contexts employ academics with a background in Translation Studies to deliver the core components of translator training. Their involvement in professional translation activities ranges from highly active, including memberships in translator associations, to moderate, with occasional engagement in translation assignments.

As a broader context, both countries hosting the translator training programs in this study share some similarities regarding the translation profession, particularly a substantial demand for translation services, primarily for business and legal documents (see Jamoussi and Shallal, 2019 for Setting 1). However, this demand is not necessarily supported by robust professional infrastructure. In Setting 1, a professional translator association has yet to be established, and recent reports emphasize the need for greater public recognition of the profession and adequate legislation to prevent rogue practices (Jamoussi et al, 2024). Similarly, Kang and Shunmugam (2014) highlight a need for recognition and legislation in Setting 2. Nevertheless, the presence of three professional organizations, including a translator association, indicates that Setting 2, while not ideal, provides a relatively more developed professional context.

2.3 Sample

The survey was conducted toward the end of the second semester of the 2022-2023 academic year. Aimed at assessing the impact of students' four years of training on their PI, it targeted those nearing the completion of their final semester before graduation. The cohorts in question were among those affected by the shift to online teaching due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In Setting 1, this period spanned the initial three semesters of the students' studies, while in Setting 2, it lasted for two semesters. In both cases, the affected period coincided with the program's focus on language improvement, particularly in English language skills. This detail will be taken up again in the discussion.

Ethical approval for conducting the survey was formally obtained from both institutions following the submission of the survey questionnaire and detailed information about the scope of the project for their consideration. Participants were invited to take part in the online survey via an email sent by a team member from each respective setting. The survey design ensured anonymity by collecting no identifiable information, thereby protecting respondents' identities and encouraging candid responses. Consent for participation was assumed upon starting the survey, which was entirely voluntary and carried no incentives or penalties, since the authors did not know who had or had not completed the survey. In addition to demographic data, the survey employed the PIFFS instrument, comprising 24 statements grouped into the five dimensions discussed earlier, each rated on a five-point Likert scale (see appendix). Descriptive statistics were primarily used to analyze the self-reported data, with calculations performed using the online statistics tool

DataTab. Importantly, the data analysis was conducted by a fourth member of the research team who was not affiliated with either of the investigated contexts.

3. Findings and discussion

The survey collected responses from 57 participants, with 30 from Setting 1 and 27 from Setting 2, representing over 60% of the final-year BA students targeted in each program. The characteristics of the two groups were similar in terms of mean age, gender distribution, and current enrolment level. The reliability measure returned a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.96, indicating very high internal consistency and suggesting that the items in our set are highly reliable.

The primary aim of the study was to assess the PI of final-year translation students from two educational contexts (RQ1). The results revealed that, on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "Not true" (1) to "Definitely true" (5), responses to the various items across all dimensions measured by the PIFFS instrument produced a mean overall score of 3.42 (St. Dev. 1.19), with Setting 1 showing a slightly lower average than Setting 2. This overall score, which falls midway between "Neutral" (3) and "True" (4), suggests a relatively moderate level of PI, reflecting that while students generally recognize aspects of PI in themselves, they are still hesitant in fully identifying with these attributes. This interpretation is further reinforced by evidence that students often overestimate their self-reported levels of development (Nadelson et al., 2017, p. 706). Results also indicate significant variability, with standard deviations exceeding 1 for all dimensions. This variability can be attributed to the heterogeneity of the student population in terms of abilities and levels of achievement.

This overall score suggests that the educational contexts, encompassing values, program components, and teacher interactions, contributed to fostering a sense of PI among the students. However, since PI formation is not a primary objective of the curricula in the investigated settings, the observed results appear to be primarily a by-product of the curriculum, as will be seen in the discussion of the dimension of experience with the profession. These results align with the means reported by Tomlinson and Jackson (2019), who described them as indicative of a professional self that is "yet to be sufficiently formed" (Tomlinson & Jackson, 2019, p. 894). In line with these observations, the findings support Hurtado Albir's (2008) argument that PI development must be purposefully integrated into the curriculum.

The second objective of the study was to profile the emerging PI of respondents, examining their strengths and weaknesses by analysing the results of individual dimensions in the survey. This is further explored in the following sub-sections.

3.1 Knowledge about professional practices

This dimension exhibited an overall mean score of 3.72, placing it among the highest scores within the survey. Notably, variations emerged between the two research settings, with responses from Setting 1 demonstrating results that were somewhat lower compared to Setting 2 (Table 1).

Overall, these findings are consistent with expectations for a dimension centred on familiarity with the discipline, encompassing its terminology, values, and rules (Tan et al., 2017). These aspects constitute fundamental components of a translation program and are integral to translation competence frameworks. Similar outcomes were observed in Johnston and Bilton's study (2020), where

the authors argue that professional knowledge tends to be more amenable to influence compared to other dimensions. In their own words, “[w]hereas equipping students with professional knowledge and workplace experience is core business for universities, influencing the remaining dimensions presents a more complex challenge” (2020, p. 6).

Table 1: Results for “Knowledge about professional practices”

	[Setting 1]		[Setting 2]	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
I know the nature of the work I will do in my future profession as a translator.	3.76	1.25	3.81	1.00
I know about the different types of professionals I will be collaborating with when I become a translator.	3.33	1.02	4.00	1.10
I have a good idea about the roles and responsibilities of my future job as a translator.	3.56	1.10	4.22	1.08
I know what kind of computer applications, tools and equipment I will handle when I become a professional translator.	3.43	1.13	3.88	1.18
I am aware of the impact of the decisions I make as a professional in the translation profession.	3.40	1.30	4.00	1.03
I have a good idea about the rules and regulations in place in the translation profession.	3.36	1.29	4.03	1.12
Dimension average	3.47		3.99	

3.2 *Having the professional as a role model*

This dimension yielded the highest average results in the survey, with a mean score of 3.74. Notably, respondents from Setting 1 reported lower scores (3.47) compared to those from Setting 2 (4.03) (Table 2). These results indicate a relatively strong influence on fostering PI in varied settings, whether through classroom translation practice or critical reasoning.

This dimension follows from the one above on knowledge about professional practices. For Runcieman, the students’ construction of PI is largely determined by the institutional discourse they are exposed to (2022, p. 561). This classroom discourse is typically conveyed through the theories, norms, attitudes, beliefs, etc. that are embedded in the different program modules. It can be hypothesized that a training program offering a balanced introduction to major professional practices has the potential to nurture identification with professionals, though this remains subject to further empirical validation. A very strong positive correlation, with a coefficient of 0.829, was found between these two initial dimensions, thereby supporting the argument presented by Runcieman (2022).

Institutional discourse is conveyed primarily through the teachers who serve as the students’ main point of contacts with the profession (albeit in an abstract and theoretical sense). Of particular interest are the responses to the statement, “Among my teachers, I admire most those who are professional translators,” which received a significantly high mean score in Setting 2 (4.25). This finding may reflect the presence of teachers with professional field

experience, some of whom possess extensive expertise. This aligns with Runcieman’s observations on the significant impact of teachers who are established professionals in the field on students’ PI formation (2022, p. 561). They also resonate with a respondent’s concerns reported in the case study conducted by Liu and Yu (2019), where an instructor was noted as not being a translation practitioner. In Setting 1, the mean score of 3.06 for the same question is more moderate. While this setting also includes teachers with professional experience, the score may be attributed to the limited presence of training activities in this context (see next section). These extracurricular activities, which introduce students to the professional world, may increase their awareness of teachers actively engaged in translation practice.

Table 2: Results for “Having the professional as a role model”

	[Setting 1]		[Setting 2]	
	M	SD	M	SD
When I am translating in class, I imagine myself in the shoes of a professional translator in my future work environment.	3.43	1.30	4.11	1.18
In my studies, I concentrate on what I believe I would need to know and be able to do when I start working as a professional translator.	3.53	1.16	4.07	1.10
I believe I can already think and reason like a professional translator who is working in a company or organization.	3.13	0.93	3.29	1.06
Among my teachers, I admire most those who are professional translators.	3.06	1.46	4.25	1.09
I admire people who are already working as professional translators.	4.20	1.21	4.44	1.08
Dimension average	3.47		4.03	

This need for a role model from the professional arena is also clearly reflected in responses to the statement on professional practitioners, “I admire people who are already working as professional translators”. This item received the highest mean score in both research contexts. The role model the professional represents is already well-documented in the literature and confirms the statement by Sela-Sheffy that “the image of an occupation is actually the image of the people practicing it” (2008, p. 610).

3.3 Experience with the profession

The overall average here is 2.67 with a standard deviation of 1.3 (Table 3). These results correspond to the neutral median category.

The scores of this dimension are the lowest within the survey. The results indicate minimal involvement with the profession both prior to and after joining the translation program. While some statements related to post-program involvement show relatively higher scores, the low overall dimension average suggest limited engagement with professionals in the field among most respondents, highlighting the issue of the profession’s invisibility and that of its practitioners in students’ academic experiences. One reason for this lack of

visibility is the multiplicity of job titles that do not bear the label of translation, contributing to the extratextual invisibility of the translator (Angelone et al., 2020, p. 2; Gambier, 2001, p. 91; Schäffner, 2020, p. 63). These results align with observation reported by Svahn (2020), who argues that “professional translators’ extratextual invisibility may negatively affect translation students” (2020, p. 319). As Svahn further explains, “finding a role model requires attainability, which, in turn, necessitates visibility” (2020, p. 303).

Table 3: Results for “Experience with the profession”

	[Setting 1]		[Setting 2]	
	M	SD	M	SD
I am an active member of a student group or forum (inside or outside of the University) focusing on the translation profession.	1.63	1.06	2.55	1.21
I know personally some people who work in the translation profession.	2.50	1.40	3.88	1.33
I follow developments in the translation profession in different mass media and/or on social media platforms.	3.46	1.27	3.22	1.21
Before I entered the translation program, I already had some prior work experience related to the translation profession.	1.86	1.04	2.22	1.21
I have interacted with professional translators outside of the University or through events organized in the University.	2.73	1.41	2.70	1.29
Dimension average	2.44		2.91	

Another explanation for these results, focusing on the programs themselves, is the limited opportunities they provide for work-integrated learning (WIL) (Runcieman, 2022) or authentic experiential learning (Király, 2000, 2013; Király & Massey, 2019), which are specifically designed to facilitate extended contact with professionals and greater exposure to real working conditions. This limitation is particularly evident in Setting 1, where training opportunities, though available, are optional and not integrated into the program. This explanation is further supported by Ashby and colleagues (2016), who highlight professional socialization as a critical component in fostering the development of PI.

Viewed in light of the dimension on the adoption of role models, these results may appear anomalous. The limited visibility of professional figures in the translation field impacts not only the dimension of experience with the profession but also likely hinders the adoption of role models. However, high scores achieved in the previous dimension suggest that students perceive themselves as successfully identifying and adopting role models. One possible explanation is the role of classroom discourse in enhancing the image of the professional. Another explanation, particularly relevant to Setting 2, is that the lack of professional visibility has elevated teachers as students’ primary points of contact with the profession before graduation, thereby positioning these teachers as their principal role models.

The almost exclusive reliance on classroom discourse and on teachers as the primary source of exposure to the profession highlights the fragility of this setup and the associated risks it entails. It suggests that the respondents’

educational environments do not adequately compensate for the practitioners' invisibility, underscoring the need for universities to address this issue by enhancing students' opportunities to observe and engage with translation role models (see for instance Tomlinson and Jackson, 2019). Suggested measures include facilitating interactions with practicing translators, ensuring meaningful engagement between students and peer tutors, and introducing initiatives such as sharing success stories from alumni who have established themselves in the profession.

Tomlinson and Jackson (2019) report that PI development is more pronounced among students of "occupation-focused degrees" such as Health Sciences and Education (p. 12), arguing that the nature of these degrees inherently fosters higher PI. Although translation degrees fall under the category of occupation-focused degrees, the overall PI results from the present study do not align with Tomlinson and Jackson's (2019) findings. This discrepancy may be interpreted as further evidence of the detrimental effect of the translator's limited extratextual visibility on PI formation among translators.

3.4 Professional self-efficacy

With a general average score of 3.41, professional self-efficacy, emerges as an area where the two investigated contexts exhibit closely aligned results (Table 4). This score is consistent with findings across most other dimensions, indicating a moderate level of agreement with the statements within this dimension and consequently positioning individuals at a moderate level in terms of their PI.

Table 4: Results for "Professional self-efficacy"

	[Setting 1]		[Setting 2]	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
I am sure I will have no problems behaving professionally when I become a translator.	2.60	1.24	3.74	1.16
I feel well prepared for a real translation job.	3.16	1.05	3.14	0.86
I believe that I will easily get along with my future colleagues, get their cooperation, and have informal conversations with them.	3.66	1.21	3.59	1.04
I am confident that I can do an excellent job as a translator.	3.40	1.06	3.40	1.00
I have no doubt that I will master all the skills necessary to succeed as a translator.	3.46	1.13	3.48	0.93
I know about the kind of challenges faced by the professional translator.	3.5	1.22	3.92	1.20
Dimension average	3.3		3.41	

Self-efficacy can be influenced by various factors, including successful performance, student-trainer interaction, practical translation experience, emotional states, and vicarious learning (Haro-Soler, 2018, 2019; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2016). Our results indicate that the two study contexts provide

moderately favourable conditions for the development of self-efficacy, and ultimately PI. However, a notable outlier is observed in the item “I am sure I will have no problems behaving professionally when I become a translator,” where the result from Setting 1 is the lowest within this dimension and ranks among the lower scores in the survey overall. This result may reflect the weaker relationship with teachers identified in the dimension of “having the professional as a role model.” Additionally, it may point to a lack of translation practice in the curriculum as such practice allows students to refine their decision-making skills. Another possible explanation is the impact of the COVID-19-induced shift to online teaching, which may have negatively affected students’ overall language competence and, consequently, their confidence.

Comparable results are reported in Liu and Yu (2019), where a participant in a case study—despite being an MA student—expressed concerns about his language proficiency in Chinese and English, which ultimately impacted his translation performance. Research on self-efficacy highlights the importance of enhancing factors such as work placements (Haro-Soler, 2017, p. 208), reflective exercises (Way, 2009), vicarious learning (Haro-Soler, 2019) and working group sessions (Haro-Soler & Kiraly, 2019).

3.5 Preference for a particular profession

With a general average score of 3.64, this dimension represents an area where the two investigated contexts exhibit similar, moderate results. These results suggest that, despite being about to graduate from a translator training course, respondents were only moderately projecting themselves as future professional translators. This is consistent with Horváth and Kálmán’s (2020) study on the career motivations of graduates in translation and interpreting, which found that these fields ranked lowest among motivating factors. According to the authors, this is because graduates had “not developed a taste for ... [translation or interpreting] at this stage of their lives” (2020, p. 11), a phenomenon that may also explain the moderate scores observed in our study. The findings in the case study reported in Liu and Yu (2019) indicate that while a translation career represented the original motivation, a major demotivating factor was the non-involvement of instructors in professional translation activities and their confinement to theoretical considerations. These results from Liu and Yu’s research establish a strong link with the dimension of role models and further emphasize the crucial role played by program instructors. Preference for a particular profession is also closely related to perceptions of self-efficacy. The correlation coefficient between these two variables was 0.76870186, indicating a strong positive linear relationship between self-efficacy perceptions and projections into a specific profession.

Table 5: Results for “Preferences for a particular profession”

	[Setting 1]		[Setting 2]	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
I already know what kind of work or profession I prefer.	3.70	1.11	3.66	1.24
I am already pretty sure what kind of profession I will enter after completing my university education.	3.66	1.32	3.55	1.31
Dimension average	3.68		3.61	

3.6 Overall results

Overall, results from Setting 1 were consistently slightly lower, indicating a marginally weaker effect of the training program on PI development. However, the trends across both settings exhibit similar fluctuations throughout most of the survey (Figure 1). This suggests that the institutional contexts, program components, and teacher interactions in both settings exert similar influences on student PI, albeit with Setting 2 showing a slightly stronger effect of the training program on PI development in most cases.

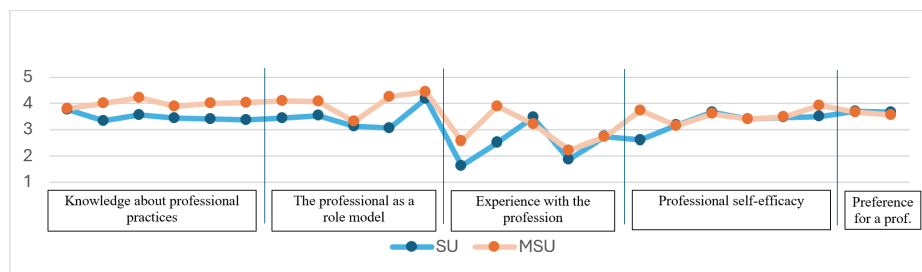


Figure 1: Overall results for Setting 1 (SU) and Setting 2 (MSU)

The weaker effect of the training program on PI development in Setting 1 can potentially be attributed to several factors. One explanation is an external factor: the longer period of online learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While this period in both contexts coincided with the initial focus on language skill enhancement, its extended duration in Setting 1 may have had a deeper impact on students' later development, particularly affecting self-confidence, given the foundational role of language proficiency. Another potential external factor is the status of translation in the country hosting the investigated program in Setting 1. The lack of a translators' association reflects the profession's invisibility in this sector, which could negatively influence the overall PI of student translators. Another explanation—specifically an internal factor related to program components—is the absence of compulsory internships or training modules in Setting 1. The inclusion of a compulsory internship in Setting 2, albeit limited, could partially account for the differences observed in the results.

Given that the various aspects of a translator's PI, like the different components and sub-components of translator competence, should be understood as interdependent and dynamic rather than static or discrete features (Kiraly, 2013), it can be conjectured that the external and program-specific factors discussed above have interacted to shape the overall PI of students. This interplay may account for the consistently lower scores observed in Setting 1 compared to Setting 2.

Over and above differences between the two contexts, evidence highlights two major areas for improvement. First, students typically enter the program without tangible experience in the profession, and the curricula fail to adequately bridge this gap. Second, the lack of extratextual visibility of professionals in the field seems to compel students to rely on classroom discourse and their instructors for the construction of role models. While this reliance can be beneficial, it is not sustainable. These findings have significant implications for translator training programs, confirming the need for a specific curricular focus on PI development as a major program objective. This can be achieved through increased industry engagement within the curriculum via work-integrated learning (Jackson, 2017; Kiraly and Hofmann, 2019; Runcieman, 2022; Tomlinson & Jackson, 2019; Ashby et al., 2016). Such

engagement can take various forms, including apprenticeships, internships, field placements, and practicum experiences. Leaving this engagement optional (Setting 1) or limited (Setting 2) may not be enough to foster increased PI formation.

Despite the insights provided by this study, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the general nature of the PIFFS instrument may not provide sufficient granularity to fully capture the nuances of PI formation in translator training. In the long run, there is a need for the development of an instrument specific to translator training. In addition, the exclusive focus on translation training in this study did not allow for comparisons across disciplines or professions. Such comparisons could provide valuable insights into PI development. For instance, the comparative study by Tomlinson and Jackson (2019) revealed differences in PI formation between professionally and non-professionally oriented curricula. Similarly, compared to translation, professions such as medicine, law, or engineering often have well-defined professional trajectories and greater extratextual visibility. Examining how external recognition and structured pathways shape PI in these fields could offer meaningful contrasts and inform strategies for enhancing PI formation in translation.

Further research on PI formation in translator training could also explore the interactions between the five dimensions outlined in the PIFFS instrument. The positive correlations observed between certain pairs of dimensions suggest that strengthening in one dimension may contribute to improvements in others. Investigating this interplay further could provide a more nuanced understanding of PI development.

4. Conclusions

Starting from the premise that a translator training program is inherently professionally oriented and aims to prepare students for a career in the translation industry, the question of PI development among undergraduate students emerges as a crucial area of inquiry. As discussed in the literature (e.g., Bennett, 2010; Clanchy et al., 2021; Jensen & Jetten, 2016; Worthington et al., 2013), PI, when well-developed, has been shown to significantly boost student engagement in their studies and facilitate professional integration upon entering the profession. Capturing the emerging PI is therefore necessary and has been extensively undertaken in fields such as education, medicine, exercise science, and nursing. However, this important question has not received the attention it deserves in translator training (Salo et al., 2020, pp. 98-99).

Focusing on translation programs, final-year BA students from two academic settings were requested to self-report their PI levels using the validated PIFFS instrument, which covers five dimensions that encapsulate PI attributes. Regarding the first research question on PI strength, the results indicated moderate PI formation levels, with Setting 1 showing slightly lower outcomes than Setting 2. These differences have been tentatively linked to contextual and program-specific factors; however, further investigation is needed to explore these aspects more thoroughly. Regarding the second research question on the characteristics of PI, the results from both contexts revealed comparable patterns of fluctuation across the scale's dimensions, indicating that as scores rise or fall in one dimension, they do so similarly in both contexts. This suggests a typical PI profile arising as an indirect outcome of curricula that do not explicitly target PI development. Of particular interest

was the marked deficiency in the dimension of experience with the profession, highlighting low or non-existent contact with the professional world. In this regard, professional translation associations could have played a beneficial role, particularly if they offered student memberships, as seen in the cases of the Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators (AUSIT) and the New Zealand Society of Translators and Interpreters (NZSTI). However, in Setting 1, such associations are not available, while in Setting 2, they are not active enough to provide the support students need. In contrast, the dimension focusing on role models scored high but was characterized by reliance on classroom discourse and instructors, likely influenced by the documented extratextual invisibility of translators.

Based on these findings and supported by relevant literature, we propose that enhancing PI levels upon graduation requires specific attention to activities that facilitate exposure to the professional world beyond the academic setting. Work-Integrated Learning activities, meetings with alumni, and interactions with industry professionals are essential in this regard. These immersive contexts, as emphasized in previous studies, not only reinforce professional behaviour but also provide invaluable opportunities for students to engage with real professionals and enhance their confidence.

Further investigation, encompassing both qualitative and quantitative approaches, is imperative and can take a range of directions. Triangulating data sources, such as integrating qualitative methods like focus groups or interviews, would deepen the insights gained and extend the evidence base for the findings. This includes exploring the intricate interactions between different dimensions of PI and analysing the evolutionary trajectory of PI formation among students enrolled in both professionally and non-professionally oriented curricula. A particularly insightful approach would be to survey practicing translators about their PI after graduation, inviting their reflections on what aspects of their training best prepared them for the profession and what elements they believe were lacking. Such a mixed-methods approach would offer further insights into PI development.

Declaration of interest statement

The authors declare no financial relationships or personal interests that could have influenced the research and its findings. While some authors were instructors in the programs under study, all necessary measures were taken to mitigate potential conflicts of interest. Ethical approval was obtained from both institutions (UEB 2022-SUStaff-12 for Setting 1 and EA-L1-01-SESS-2023-02-0001 for Setting 2). Participation in the survey was entirely voluntary, and the anonymity of responses was guaranteed. Furthermore, the analysis of the data collected was conducted by a member of the research team who was not affiliated with either of the contexts under investigation.

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Appendix

PIFFS Questionnaire statements

1. I know the nature of the work I will do in my future profession as a translator.
2. I know about the different types of professionals I will be collaborating with when I become a translator.
3. I have a good idea about the roles and responsibilities of my future job as a translator.
4. I know what kind of computer applications, tools and equipment I will handle when I become a professional translator.
5. I am aware of the impact of the decisions I make as a professional in the translation profession.
6. I have a good idea about the rules and regulations in place in the translation profession.
7. When I am translating in class, I imagine myself in the shoes of a professional translator in my future work environment.
8. In my studies, I concentrate on what I believe I would need to know and be able to do when I start working as a professional translator.
9. I believe I can already think and reason like a professional translator who is working in a company or organization.
10. Among my teachers, I admire most those who are professional translators.
11. I admire people who are already working as professional translators.
12. I am an active member of a student group or forum (inside or outside of the University) focusing on the translation profession.
13. I know personally some people who work in the translation profession.
14. I follow developments in the translation profession in different mass media and/or on social media platforms.
15. Before I entered the translation program, I already had some prior work experience related to the translation profession.
16. I have interacted with professional translators outside of the University or through events organized in the University.
17. I am sure I will have no problems behaving professionally when I become a translator.
18. I feel well prepared for a real translation job.
19. I believe that I will easily get along with my future colleagues, get their cooperation, and have informal conversations with them.
20. I am confident that I can do an excellent job as a translator.
21. I have no doubt that I will master all the skills necessary to succeed as a translator.
22. I know about the kind of challenges faced by the professional translator.
23. I already know what kind of work or profession I prefer.
24. I am already pretty sure what kind of profession I will enter after completing my University education.