

# Need-Based Curriculum Design for Developing Translation Competence of Chinese Undergraduate Translation Majors at Municipal Universities

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## Abstract

Bachelor of Translation and Interpretation (BTI) programs are developing prosperously due to rapid growth of language service market in China. A well-organized and scientific curriculum is essential to align with market demands and foster translation competence of undergraduate translation major students. There are 309 municipal universities in China that have established BTI and one of their responsibilities is to cultivate translation talents for local and regional language service market. This research takes Hengshui University as a case study to explore whether the curriculum design can effectively meet the due objectives and satisfy the demands of market as well developing translation competence of undergraduate translation major students. Based on the data from 143 participants, including 46 participants who represent the market and 97 translation major students, the result shows that the curriculum design can satisfy students' learning needs can be satisfied to some extent but there are still significant parts for further improvement. Suggestions for course adjustments and enhancement for professional teacher training are discussed.

**Keywords:** Bachelor of Translation and Interpretation (BTI), Needs Analysis, Translation

Competence, Curriculum Design, Translation Education

## **Introduction**

Language service industry in China grows rapidly thanks to frequent international cultural and economic exchanges. Increasing demands for qualified translation talents calls for professional translation education. To address this need, the Ministry of Education of China has piloted undergraduate translation program, namely, Bachelor of Translation and Interpretation (BTI) in 2006. By 2023, 309 universities offer BTI programs for the purpose of developing the students' translation competence—the core and essential competence for professional translators. ① Municipal universities usually aim to cultivate talents for local and regional development. Despite the expansion of BTI program, there remains a shortage of qualified translators and few BTI students go to language service companies. It indicates that there may be a possible inconsistency between the curriculum and market demands. A scientific and appropriate curriculum can help BTI students improve their translation, The statistics is the newest updated till April, 2023, from the official website for undergraduate program in China, <https://cnbti.gdufs.edu.cn/info/1006/1595.htm>,. competence in a better way and further promote local or regional cultural and economic development.

To assess whether the curriculum align with the market demands and students' needs, the researcher selected the curriculum of BTI in Hengshui University as a case study. Hengshui University is one of the municipal universities which has launched BTI program in 2014 and have produced hundreds of graduates. The investigation uses PACTE translation competence model and needs analysis model to examine the strengths and gaps for the purpose of putting forward some suggestions for curriculum optimization.

## **Literature Review**

PACTE translation competence model and needs analysis model will be reviewed briefly in this section in order to understand the conceptual framework of the research better. The two models are indispensable notions in the whole research and needed to be clarified.

### *PACTE Translation Competence Model*

According to Bell (1991), translation competence refers to the knowledge and skills professional translators require. In his view, translation competence should include the competence of both source language and target language from the text type, the knowledge about the source language, the knowledge about the real world, contrastive knowledge to communicative competence. His definition drew a clear line about the competences translators needs to acquire from source language and target language.

Among the translation competence models proposed by different scholars and research groups, PACTE's translation competence model is widely applied to explore how translation competence is acquired. PACTE, Process in the Acquisition of Translation Competence and Evaluation, is a group of researchers, attempts to investigate the acquisition of translation competence in written translation. Taking the theoretical and methodological background into consideration, the group obtains more details about the trainee translators' learning of translation in order to do the translation work well and improve the quality assessment and unify the teaching or training standard (PACTE, 2003).

The components of the model combine linguistic competence, transfer competence, world or subject knowledge and use of different tools identified in previous studies. Besides these, PACTE also contains another two kinds of translation competence components, problem-solving strategic competence and psycho-physiological competence. Later, in 2000, they redefine transfer competence by modifying the features of linguistic competence and strategic competence. Additionally, knowledge about translation was previously included in the first model, but in the latter model, the group make it an independent competence for assisting data collection.

As a popular translation competence model, PACTE model provides new perspective for Chinese scholars to investigate and explore translation competence development. Empirical research (Tong, 2015; Yi, 2019; Jia, 2017; Liu, 2018) on translation competence development of undergraduate English major and non-English major students in the universities in China were conducted and found that both English majors and non-English majors needed to improve their bilingual sub competence and their strategic sub competence. Zhu (2015) explored the course settings of postgraduate translation and interpretation program based on PACTE model and put forward his suggestions of enhancing the systematicity of sub competence development of students' translation competence. Zhai & Ma (2016) proposed that the current course settings of postgraduate program is inconsistent with the curriculum and the course settings needed to be adjusted according to cultivation of the sub competences of PACTE model.

In summary, most studies concentrated on translation competence development of English major and non-English major students or postgraduate students in China. Therefore, in this research, the researcher will adapt PACTE model to investigate the curriculum of undergraduate translation program from the perspective of translation competence development. It is acclaimed that the model proposed by the PACTE's group is the first empirical and longitudinal study to explore the acquisition of translation competence. Therefore, it is a suitable model for the research on the curriculum for translation competence development of undergraduate translation major students in municipal Chinese universities because of its empirical nature. Besides, it also provides a clear framework for the evaluation of the curriculum to develop the sub competences of BTI students.

#### *Needs Analysis Model*

Needs analysis, also known as needs assessment, is frequently used to collect information to identify certain demands and disadvantages of a certain product or evaluate the skills of the employees. Later, it is also applied to language teaching. By needs analysis model, the researcher can also clarify the gaps between what language learners are able to do at present and what they need to be able to do and find out the problems and lacks learners are experiencing now. In foreign language teaching, unnecessary courses or modules can be avoided when students have various learning purposes with needs analysis model and bring benefits for teachers and students (Santopietro & Peyton, 1991). Therefore, it is of great importance to understand the concept of language needs if people want to explore how these needs will be taken into practice.

According to Hutchinson & Water (1987), explain language needs with the classification of target needs and learning needs in their books. Target needs are understood as what learners

need to do in the target situation while the learning needs are understood as “what learners need to do in order to learn”. Knowing the target needs means knowing necessity (what is needed for), lacks (learners do not know) and wants (what learners feel or need). It includes many variables, for instance, the attitudes, motivation, awareness, personality, want, expectations as well as learning styles (Brindley, 1989). Thus, when people want to design a proper curriculum for a certain education program, they must firstly know about the target needs and learning needs with the guidance of needs analysis model.

In education, the activities of collecting information can be used as the foundation of developing a curriculum that meet the learners’ need (Iwai et al, 1999). The aim of collecting the information is to find out the needs of learners which they need in a particular role and determine whether the present courses can accurately meet the needs of learners, which group of learners are in great need of training for a certain skill. And then, people can identify the gap between what learners are now able to do and what they need to be able to do, and gather the problems learners are experiencing at present and try to provide some solutions.

West (1994), did a thorough review of needs analysis in language teaching, including its history, theoretical basis and approaches. In language teaching, needs analysis is a very effective way to identify specific language needs (Dooey, 2006). It is convincible and can provide reliable data for curriculum designing because the specific information derives from the context., which is in line with the learners’ needs. Thus, conducting needs analysis is of great help when planning the curriculum of any language programs and eliminate doubts of teachers and learners on the efficiency of specific language courses.

Needs analysis was introduced into China and applied to academic research. Chinese scholars also illustrated and developed their interpretation of needs analysis and proposed their models of needs analysis. Yu (2002), introduced and explained the models of target situation analysis and present situation analysis, and how the models of needs analysis applied to foreign language teaching. Wang (2004), divided needs into five aspects: social needs, learners’ needs, teacher’s needs, school’s needs and educational administrative department’s needs. However, most Chinese scholars summarize the needs analysis theories and models and neglect the trends and achievement of domestic application of needs analysis. Chen (2010), introduced four types of needs analysis models and some data collecting tools with consideration of the teachers, teaching contents and the environment. She proposed her needs analysis model for college English courses, which covers college students (non-English Major students). Shu (2004), emphasized the role of needs analysis in foreign language teaching and connected it with foreign language educational policies. According to Shu, the data of needs analysis can be used as references during the process of designing, implementing and evaluating the educational policies. He classified the needs into social needs and individual needs. The requirement for graduates’ language proficiency can be called social needs because language learners apply their language skills into their work when they graduate from institutions. While the gap between the authentic level and the actual level of learners wants to achieve can be called individual needs because it varies from person to person.

Based on the current situation and previous research, the researcher found current research did not match with the actual social needs in the social environment and when making

optimization of BTI curriculum on translation competence development. The curriculum designer should focus on both BTI students and the language service market. Therefore, for this research, the evaluation of curriculum design will be based on Shu's needs analysis model which divides needs into social needs and individual needs. Individual needs can be furtherly classified into learners' learning needs and employment needs. Learning needs includes motivation, challenges and preference while employment needs include students' necessities, wants and lacks of future employment situation, etc. For social needs, in this research, it refers to expectations or requirements of recruiting companies for language service talents through questionnaires and advertisements about their knowledge requirements, ability requirements, quality requirements. It is the suitable evaluation model to assess the BTI curriculum at Hengshui University.

### **Methodology**

In this research, it will address the following questions:

1. How do the market stakeholders perceive the BTI program in Chinese municipal university?
2. What are the needs of the market and students and how does the curriculum meet or fail to meet them?
3. What strategies can be proposed for optimizing the curriculum in order to develop translation competence of BTI students in Chinese municipal universities?

There are hundreds of municipal universities in China, it is hard to conduct the research in every university. Therefore, the researcher selects Hengshui University as case study for the following reasons. Firstly, Hengshui University established BTI program in 2014 and many BTI students have graduated and gained jobs in the market. Secondly, like other municipal universities, Hengshui University designed the curriculum within the requirement of national guide for BTI program, so the general framework of the curriculums is the same. Thirdly, BTI students in Hengshui University are all enrolled through universal national examination with similar academic level compared with other municipal universities. Lastly, the researcher works as a lecturer for BTI program in Hengshui University, so it is more convenient for the researcher to conduct the research and collect the data.

Data were collected in the form of survey questionnaires. The questionnaires were distributed to 46 employers and 97 students (current and graduated) associated with the BTI program of Hengshui University through online questionnaire platform. For one questionnaire, 46 employers or administrators from different companies or institutions in and out of Hengshui City participated in the survey of whether the curriculum have achieved the aim of cultivation. The employers are selected with the help of BTI graduate of Hengshui University. They help to deliver the questionnaires to the leaders in their workplace. 97 BTI students who are now studying in Hengshui University or have already graduated from Hengshui University participated in another questionnaire for the investigation of the curriculum and translation competence development of BTI students and contribute to make adaption of the curriculum. The results will provide insights into both market demands and students' personal needs according to their learning experiences.

## Results and Findings

After designing the questionnaires, the researcher transfers all the questions into wenjuanxing, which is a convenient online survey platform in China and distribute the website link to the participants and obtain the following results and findings.

### *Market Reflections on the Curriculum*

To know the reflection of the market toward the curriculum, the first questionnaire was distributed to the employers. The employers are those who recruited graduated BTI students of Hengshui Universities. Due to the limited number of graduated students, the total number of the participant is 46. The questionnaire applies a five-point Likert Scale, ranging from “disagree very much”, “disagree”, “not sure”, “agree” and “agree very much”. According to the statistics, it shows that large proportion of the graduated BTI students of Hengshui University get positions in foreign trade companies in and out of Hengshui, namely, in Table 1, 2.17% of them are foreign trade companies in Hengshui; 13.04% are foreign trade companies in Hebei Province; 36.96% out of Hebei Province. Additionally, 28.26% are administrators in primary schools or middles schools and another 19.57% are administrators in governmental organizations.

Table 1

### *Working Positions of the Employers*

Name of Position	Percentage
Managers in foreign trade companies in Hengshui	2.17%
Managers in foreign trade companies in Hebei Province	13.04%
Managers in foreign trade companies out of Hebei Province	36.96%
administrators in primary schools or middles schools	28.26%
Administrators in governmental organizations	19.57%

The employers express their reflection toward the cultivation and implementation of the curriculum. Generally, the employers generally rate graduates in Hengshui University highly for their translation competence, as high as 91.3%. Separately, 93.43% of them agree that graduate of BTI in Hengshui University have a certain mastery of bilingual competence (30.43% agree very much, 63.04% agree). 95.66% of them agree that graduates have a certain mastery of intercultural competence, 95.65% for critical thinking, 97.73% for practical ability and 95.65 % for translation skills.

However, it is noted that few of graduates get positions in translation service market. It is quite worthy of highlighting and bridging the gaps between translation competence development and actual workplace demands.

### *Student Reflections on the Curriculum*

After knowing the general reflection of the market, the students' reflections are also worth exploring and emphasizing. In this case, another questionnaire is designed to know the satisfaction and personal reflection on the current curriculum of the students of BTI, including the graduates and students who are now studying in Hengshui University. Among the participants, there are 9 male students and 88 female students. The data shows little difference in gender according to the results. The students expressed mixed views toward the curriculum and the courses on translation competence.

In terms of students' reflection toward the current curriculum of BTI in Hengshui University, a large proportion of the students have a positive attitude toward the curriculum. In Figure 1, it shows that 9.28% of them satisfied with the current curriculum very much. 39.18% think the curriculum can basically meet their needs and expectation. Students who view the current curriculum as a not bad one account for 41.24%. 9.28% of the students dissatisfy with the curriculum and 1.03% of the student believed that the curriculum is not a reasonable curriculum at all.

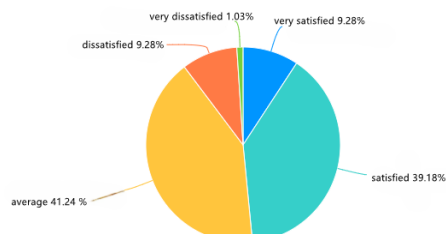


Figure 1 Students' general reflection with the curriculum of BTI

For the course setting, about half of the students think the current curriculum is reasonable and to some extent connect the courses with the market demands while the other half think that some courses need optimization such as establishing translation certificate training, cutting down the learning hours of some courses and limiting the total sum of the courses to lessen the burden of the students.

Specifically, for the percentage of compulsory and elective courses in the curriculum, 16.49% of the students think that the curriculum does not need adjustment, 65.98% of the students think the distribution is basically good, but they have different opinions about the ratio of the compulsory and elective courses; 54.64% of them agree that the compulsory courses should be increased while 11.34% of them thinks that the elective courses should be established more. The other 17.53% do not have a clear idea about the percentage.

For the translation teaching mode and teaching content, 28.87% of the students say that more courses on professional training; 21.65% are not good at applying the translation techniques and methods they are familiar with; if possible, 48.46% of them are willing to go to language service companies to get training in real translation environment or participate in the real translation projects.

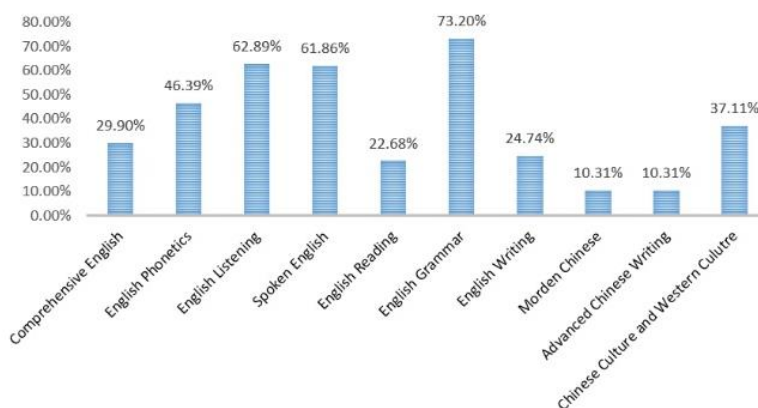


Figure 1 Reflection on the General Courses

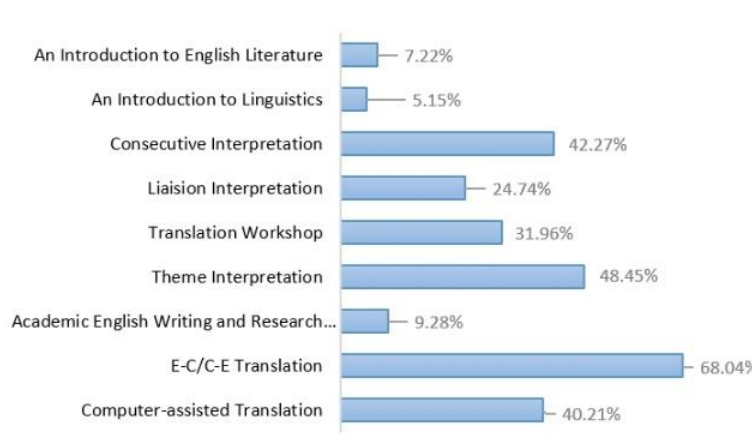


Figure 2 Reflection on the Professional Course

The students have diverse reflections about the specific courses in the curriculum, the charts above demonstrate their view of increasing study hours for general courses and professional courses in Figure 1 and Figure 2. According to the statistics, the students on campus think it important to increase the study hour for learning the general courses such as English grammar, listening and speaking. For the professional courses, the student think it is necessary to spend more time on English-Chinese/Chinese-English translation, and some interpretation courses.

Though many students thought that the courses in the curriculum are generally satisfactory, they also identified many areas for further improvement, such as offering more hand-on training and a better balance between the compulsory and elective courses.

*Students’ Expectations*

When it comes to the question of “how much do you know about the curriculum”, only 2 of them say that they do not know about BTI and the other understand the BTI to different extent. For the curriculum of BTI, 81.41% of them say they know and understand the curriculum to different extent. For the future job expectation and personal needs, different students give various responses, which is shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2

*Job Expectation of the Students*

Name of Position	Number	Percentage
Jobs about international trade	9	9.28%
Business assistant or secretary	1	1.03%
Teachers in primary school or middles school	33	34.02%
Translators	30	30.93%
Clerks in oversea-funded enterprises	4	4.12%
Positions in governmental organization	6	6.19%
Postgraduate study	14	14.43%

Based on the table, it is obvious that, students of BTI in Hengshui University have greater interest in the job areas of foreign trade, translation companies or go to further postgraduate studies. According to their cognition, graduates in municipal universities are difficult to gain



good positions in the market, getting a master degree can help to improve their translation competence and other skills and navigate themselves to a better job.

According to the figures and percentage that have been discussed in 4.2, the students expressed their interests and needs of improving their competences because they desire to increase the study hours for English listening, English grammar and spoken English. They also desire to improve their translation and interpretation skills. Additionally, 98.97% of the students want to get the Certificate of TEM-4 and TEM-8 (TEM stands for Test for English Majors, and the two certificates can only be got through passing the test) and 73.2% of them want to get the CATTI (China Accreditation Test for Translators and Interpreters), which is a professional certificate for future translators and interpreters issued by Ministry of Human Resource and Social Security in China. Thus, in the survey, there is also a question about the necessity of establishing a course on certificate training. Most of the students agree that it is very crucial to establishing the course, 71.13% of them think the length of the course should be half of a semester and 25.77% of them think the course be lasted for a whole semester. The percentage proves that they have strong desires for translation certifications and career-focused training courses.

In addition, the students also have expectation toward their teachers, they hope their teachers have plentiful translation practice experience with a good mastery of translation theory (87.63%) ; the teachers should also have a broader horizon toward both the languages and have multidisciplinary knowledge(52.58%). In the era of information technology and machine translation, the teachers should master how to apply the computer-assist translation tools to the translation practice(41.24%).

#### Expectation of Translation Competence Development

For the translation competence development, various sub competencies involve in the process of translation teaching. Figure 4 shows different students' view on which competence needs to be emphasized. From the figure, it is not difficult to find that students in Hengshui university have greater desire to improve their bilingual competence and translation knowledge and skills because of their lack of self-confidence about their own competencies. In order to solve this problem, most students approve that more practical courses should be established in the future.

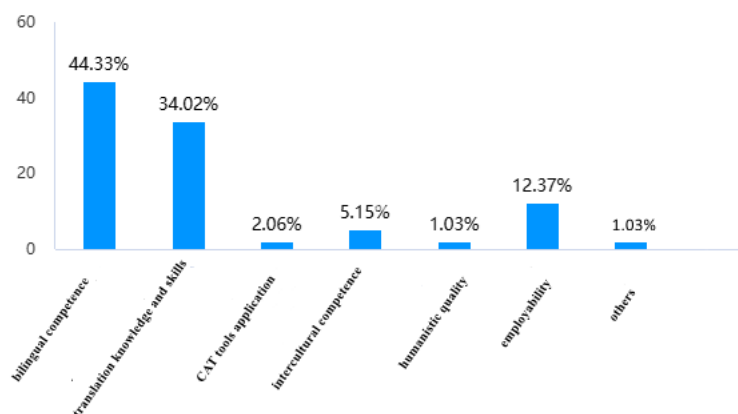


Figure 4 competences needed to be emphasized in translation teaching

For the difficulties and lacks when the graduates meet in their work, 47.42% of students of BTI in Hengshui University need to improve their bilingual competence, 25.77% of them have a view that the knowledge that they learnt in the university is less practical for future job requirements. Disadvantages in practical competence, intercultural communication also matters in dealing with the real work. In order to meet the demands of the market, the students need to improve their professional competence or employability. The first three most important competency (shown in Figure 5) are: good interpersonal communication skills, excellent in searching and sorting out the information and self-learning ability. These professional competences can help the students perform better after they graduate from the university.

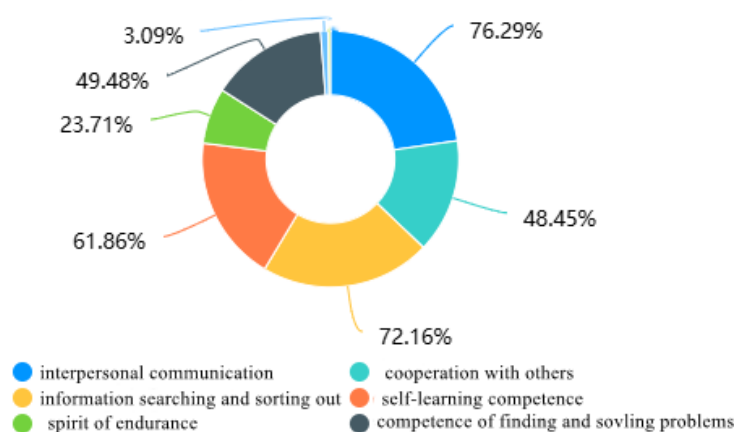


Figure 5 Professional competence that the students need

Through the questionnaire, the researcher gains a better understanding of the current curriculum from the perspective of market and BTI students. The market and BTI students expressed their reflection toward the curriculum and translation competence development and the results provide solid evidence and insights for the following curriculum optimization.

### Discussions and Suggestions

Shown in the results of questionnaires, it is proven that the curriculum is generally satisfied by the market and the students of BTI in Hengshui University. However, students also expressed their dissatisfaction toward the curriculum. To develop translation competence of BTI students, several discussion and suggestions are put forward as follows.

#### *Increasing Competence-Based Courses*

The language service market always emphasizes translation competence of students. Thus, when designing the curriculum, the decision-makers should prioritize practical and competence-based courses that can align with market needs. These courses include both on-campus and off-campus ones. For on-campus courses, project-based translation workshops could be established to develop translation competence of BTI students in the form of group cooperation. The translation projects can select the materials from the real demand of local or national cultural and economic development. For example, the teachers and BTI students can choose to translate the material for publicity of the intangible cultural heritages in Hengshui, which may help the government to express the rich culture in Hengshui City. For off-campus practice, universities should enhance partnership with enterprises or provide

opportunities for BTI students to participate in translation-related activities in the cities where the universities locate such as some international trade fairs, sports events and so on. In this way, students can apply what they have learnt in the classroom and experience the real translation process to fit the professional demands in the market.

#### *Improving Professional Teacher Training*

Teachers who teach BTI students should not only have a good mastery of translation theories but also have rich experience in accomplishing translation tasks and be familiar with the management of translation projects. Teachers should finish a number of translation-related activities regularly, which will further help them explain how to translate and how to train translation competence of their students. In addition, teachers should also master modern teaching techniques and methods. According to the current situation of teacher training in Hengshui University, few of the teachers have rich experience in translating and receive professional training. Therefore, the faculty needs to provide more professional translation training to improve their professional competency. Another way is to send the teachers to translation-related positions in the enterprises to gain translation experience and deepen their understanding toward language service industry and promote reform of classroom teaching. The university can also hire some experts in language service industry to work as part-time teachers and supervisors and share their experience in some practical courses and share their real-world expertise into the classroom.

#### *Creating a Balanced and Featured Curriculum System*

Based on the results, the market calls for a good mastery of translation competence and professional skills and the students think some of the courses that relates to translation techniques, language proficiency as well as interdisciplinary courses need improving. A balanced curriculum can broaden the horizon and the professional area of BTI students. After establishing different modules including core translation thematic courses and interdisciplinary courses, BTI students can choose the courses they are interested in, which is significant for them to raise their interdisciplinary awareness of the job or position they want to study or work in the future more deeply according to personal interests or market needs. For example, BTI students who have interests in business translation, they can choose modules such as international trade practice, international etiquette; if they want to obtain CATTI certificate, they can choose the modules of certificate training, etc.

In addition to a balanced curriculum to develop translation competence of BTI students, being distinctive and forming unique characteristics is also conducive to the cultivation of translation talents to meet the needs of market. Among hundreds of municipal universities with BTI program in China, how BTI students in every University outstands in the job market and differs from others is worth emphasizing. Thus, every municipal university should try to set up some specialized and featured courses such as legal translation, business translation or tourism translation according to the educational background of teachers and the characteristics of regional development. For instance, in China, Hengshui is famous for its long and profound history and culture, therefore, Hengshui University pilots to establish a course entitled Translation of Dong Zhongshu's works about Confucianism (Dong Zhongshu is a very famous Confucian philosopher and politician in West Han Dynasty in ancient China). This course is the only specialized courses that focus on Dong Zhongshu studies nationwide in China. The establishment of the course cannot only improve translation competence of BTI

students in Hengshui University, but also help to spread the profound thoughts in intercultural communication in the era of publicizing Chinese culture to the world.

### **Conclusion**

The results highlight the strengths and weakness of the BTI curriculum at Hengshui University show that the current curriculum can satisfy students' learning needs to a large extent but they also expressed their personal expectation of improving the curriculum in terms of professional training and competence development to align with market demands. In the future, much effort needs be conducted to improve and optimize the curriculum. However, the study was only conducted at Hengshui University, which is a quite small sample size, thus the suggestion might not be applicable for other municipal universities which have BTI programs. Further studies may be done to ensure the recommendation are broadly applicable.

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