



Perceptions, Skills, and Technologies for the Revitalization of Translation Industry in the Post COVID-19 Era: An Empirical Evidence from Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

Translation service has been essential before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic. It is one of the considered frontline services, especially in a multilingual nation like Saudi Arabia. However, just like any other industry, translation had to undergo necessary changes that could have been realized even without the repercussion of a pandemic. This study looked into the change-related issues that struck the translation industry/business, including the adoption of translation tech tools and the reformation of translation course programs and curricula. With the participation of 103 study respondents and the sheer use of descriptive statistical analysis, it was found that the dominantly rookie workforce of the Saudi translation industry is now shifting towards engaging in remote services, adopting new technological tools, and continually engaging in professional development courses and trainings. In the survey, it was further revealed that the translators have a thirst for knowledge in managing business and the skill in using computer-aided translation (CAT) and other media tools. It was deduced that in order for translation to be more productive, lucrative, and most of all, reliable, translators have to learn to adapt to these changes. Moreover, this study offers timely challenges in the breeding of a more resilient translator workforce in the future. When clearly viewed from a more general perspective, this pandemic has brought to light one positive realization despite the devastation it has caused to the population – one should not be content with something just because it works; sometimes, he has to learn new tricks to produce better outcomes.

Keywords: COVID Pandemic, Saudi Arabia, Translation Skills, Translation Tools

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1. Introduction

The industry of translation is an essential medium in human communications. It can potentially bridge the gap among humans hailing from different backgrounds and speaking different languages, and thus, plays a pivotal role in the worldwide communities (Al Mahasees, 2020). Today, the entire world is combating the deadliest pandemic of the 21st century in the shape of COVID-19. There is now an enormous influx of health information being generated by international health organizations, leading health authorities, global leaders, and public health specialists. We continuously witness an unprecedented flow of information, and hence, there is a dire need to help translate this important health-related information into an all-natural language. Research literature suggests that the demand for the translation industry will grow exponentially in 2021 – making it around USD 56 billion (Jack, 2019). The demand for translation has increased so substantially that it will become impossible for humans to fulfill the industry demands at the present time and even more in the future. One of the primary reasons being cited in the literature refers to the cost linked with enormous amounts of information awaiting translation (Almahasees, 2018). For instance, it was estimated in 2016 by Google that its app called "Google Translate" will provide translation for more than 10 billion words daily, and the service will be used by 500 million people (Turovsky, 2016). In this day and age, it is seemingly beyond the capacity of humans to translate the existing demand for information, and thus, it has galvanized the efforts of global tech companies to invest in Machine Translation (MT). With the help of digital translation tools, we can process large amounts of data and get the results at the rate of a split second. However, the end-product still requires a review from a human lens to ensure the quality of translation (Omniscien Technologies, 2016).

Many research scholars view that the advancements being made in the industry of technology are actually need-driven. This is particularly true in the case of the mammoth increase in digital content, which is utilized by the end-users through online platforms (Bowker, 2002; Hutchins, 2005). The continuous demand with respect to localization has resulted in substantial pressure being exerted on the translation industry to generate quick yet first-rate translation materials. This abrupt change in the translation industry has a knock-on effect on the training institutes to help future translators grasp the technical skills and knowledge of digital translation tools. However, the research literature reveals that the users' level of satisfaction and the utilization of these digital systems are relatively scarce (Krüger, 2016; Lagoudaki, 2009; Vargas-Sierra, 2019). This research gap has been manifested in the literature with regard to Arab translators where it has been found that technical tool developers are required to further extensive work on their technical tools; thereby, augmenting the usefulness, effectiveness, and learnability of such tools, and at the same time, improving the experience and satisfaction of the translators (Alotaibi, 2020).



Some of the modern computer-aided translation (CAT) tools can tremendously support the job of a translator. Translation Memory (TM), for instance, plays the role of a database whereby texts (sentences, paragraphs, or other segments) and their appropriate translations are stored in the shape of bilingual segments. This CAT tool can allow a professional translator to reprocess or leverage the earlier translations, particularly with similar, unvarying, and monotonous texts, and thus, eliminates the need for a full-fledged translation (Bowker, 2002; Hutchins, 2005).

Research literature suggests that CAT tools and other digital tools are now increasingly being used in the world; however, some reluctance has been observed by the researchers, especially in the Arab world, in adopting these modern technological tools (Alanazi, 2019; Al-Jarf, 2017; Alotaibi, 2017; Thawabteh, 2009; Quaranta, 2011). This could probably be associated with the negative attitudes of the translators towards adopting the CAT tools (Alotaibi, 2017), and this negative attitude is justifiable, given the fact that machine translation of Arabic text has not been fully automated to produce highly efficient and first-rate results. The Arabic morphology, when combined with other aspects of the language, has caused a great deal of difficulty in automatically translating from Arabic to other languages and vice versa. Notwithstanding considerable gains that have been achieved in the recent past due to technological advancements in the data-driven models of translation such as Statistical Machine Translation (SMT) and Neural Machine Translation (NMT), these language-related elements are still posing a tremendous challenge (Alkhatib & Shaalan, 2018; Habash & Sadat, 2006).

According to a recent survey carried out by Ameer et al. (2020), many linguistic problems pertaining to the Arabic language require deeper examination as they are causing extensive difficulties for the translators in the Arab world to adopt automated systems of Arabic machine translation. Now, the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the working norms, and much of the work is carried out through video conferencing tools while face-to-face meetings have substantially decreased. At a time such as this, a translator will have to rely heavily on digital tools to augment his work performance. This can also be corroborated with earlier studies (Adly & Al Ansary, 2009; Alqudsi et al., 2014) where it has been contended that the sequence of word order Arabic language is complex, which presents an enormous challenge for the accurate machine translation; thereby, asserting that developing accuracy and effectiveness in Arabic machine translation, consistent with the human requirements, is a daunting encumbrance to overcome. It is probably due to this reason that the translation industry wasn't proactively prepared in 2020 to effectively utilize tech tools. This can be attributed to the lack of satisfaction at the user level with respect to retrieval time and the quality of the translated item.

Nowadays, where every country is making efforts to adopt CAT tools to meet modern-day needs, Saudi Arabia has lagged behind in the proactive adoption of these tools. Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which subsequently formed new working norms where interactions between and among humans have tremendously increased through online resources, the physical interactions have consequently decreased. This research undertaking thus aims to explore the following areas: (a) the inclination of Saudi translators to adopt new tech tools for remote interpretation, (b) the perception of Saudi translators towards the professional development courses completed before and after the pandemic, (c) the most helpful tech tools preferred by Saudi translators, and (d) the perception of Saudi translators about the future of machine translation, remote interpretation, employment and income prospects in a COVID-free world in the future.

2. Method

This research study was established using a survey approach, and thus, the results are quantitative in nature. As there are no formally approved or accredited lists of language service providers (LSPs) in Saudi Arabia, the following online sources were utilized to obtain the contact information of functional LSPs:

No	Website / Institution	URL Address
1	TranslationDirectory	https://www.translationdirectory.com/translation_agencies_in_saudi_arabia.php
2	British Embassy, Riyadh	https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/912213/Word_documents_Translators_list_2020__1_.pdf
3	GoodFirms	https://www.goodfirms.co/translation-services-companies/saudi-arabia
4	Global Trade	https://www.globaltrade.net/Saudi-Arabia/Translating/detailed-service-provider.html
5	Translators Café	https://www.translatorscafe.com/tcutils/en-US/search/agencies.aspx?cn=149

Moreover, a snowball technique was employed by inquiring on every prospective and eligible respondent in order to gain more data about potential translators who could be surveyed. The study respondents were reached through telephone calls where they were explained the purpose and benefits of this research study for the translation industry of Saudi Arabia. Verbal informed consent was obtained from every respondent on the telephone. The research questionnaire was prepared in



Google Forms and was emailed to the participants after receiving their informed consent and email address.

The tool was a 38-item researcher-made questionnaire divided into two sections. The first tackled the respondents' socio-demographic profile, while the second on their choices and perception of the subject matter. Multiple-choice questions were intended to know the preferences of the respondents. Rating scale questions were asked to determine the degree of importance of identified factors. Likert scale questions were used in measuring the likelihood of things to happen. These are frequently utilized as research methods for measuring the attitudes, perceptions, knowledge, and/or behavioral changes, according to [Vagias \(2006\)](#). Member checking was utilized by sending the results to the respondents via email to establish validity.

The target population chosen for this research study included students working part-time in translation agencies, freelance translators, and other professional kinds of translators employed in public as well as private sectors. Following the approval of informal consent by the respondents, the research questionnaire link was sent to 220 respondents by email. The response rate was 74.5%, demonstrating that 164 respondents completely filled out the questionnaire. All 164 questionnaires received were reviewed independently. After a review exercise, 61 questionnaires were removed from the final sample population. There were three main reasons for excluding these 61 questionnaires, namely: questions having some missing fields, respondents no longer staying in Saudi Arabia, and those not being actively engaged in the translation industry at the time of this research undertaking. Hence, the final number of respondents was reduced from 164 to 103 (n=103).

3. Results

3.1. Socio-Demographics of Translator-Respondents

Some essential information pertaining to the socio-demographic characteristics of the study respondents has been presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Socio-demographic Information of Survey Respondents (n = 103)

		No.	%
Gender	Male	46	44.66
	Female	57	55.34
Age Group	18-30	49	47.57

	31-45	38	36.89
	46-60	11	10.68
	61-70	5	4.85
Source of Training/Degree in Translation	Saudi Arabia	77	74.76
	Abroad	26	25.63

The range of age chosen for the study respondents was between 18 and 70 years. A significant proportion of the study respondents surveyed were between the age range from 18 to 30 years, followed by the second largest group of respondents with the age range from 31 to 45 years. Unexpectedly, females (n=57) were found to be more engaged in employment in the translation industry by contrast with the male study respondents (n=46). This reveals that female respondents were 24% greater in the chosen study population by comparison with the male respondents. It was also identified whether the study respondents attained their academic qualifications related to translation and interpretation from Saudi Arabia or from any other educational institute in a foreign country. About three-quarters of the study population (75%) obtained their degrees from institutions within Saudi Arabia, whereas the remaining 25% of respondents gained their academic qualifications from a foreign institute. However, only those respondents who were currently practicing in Saudi Arabia (N=103) were chosen for analysis.

The study respondents were also asked about their length of practical experience in the job market. As shown in Figure 1, nearly one-half (48%) of the study population possessed experience between 1 to 5 years in the job market, about one-fifth (19%) respondents had gained experience between 6 to 10 years in the job market, 13% of respondents had attained an experience between 11 to 15 years. The last group, comprising 13% of the total respondents, were the most experienced translators, citing their job experience between 21 years and above. With regard to years of practical experience in the market, the smallest group made 8% of the study population whose experience was reported between 16 to 20 years, as shown in Figure 1.

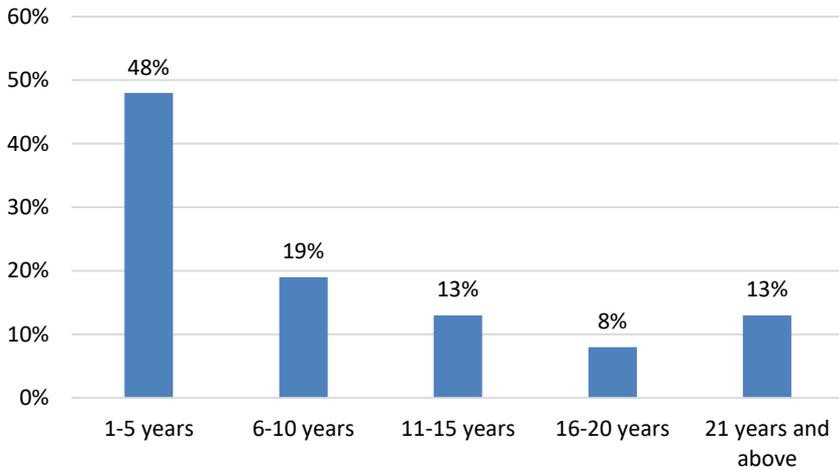


Figure 1. Length of Experience in the Job Market (n=103)

The study respondents were characterized into four categories: freelance translators, students employed part-time at various translation companies, and professional translators who were employed either in the public or private sectors. As shown in Figure 2, 39% of study participants reported being employed as freelance translators or interpreters, 29% were employed in the private sector, while another 26% were working in the public sector. Only 6% of the study participants were identified as students employed in the industry working on a part-time basis.

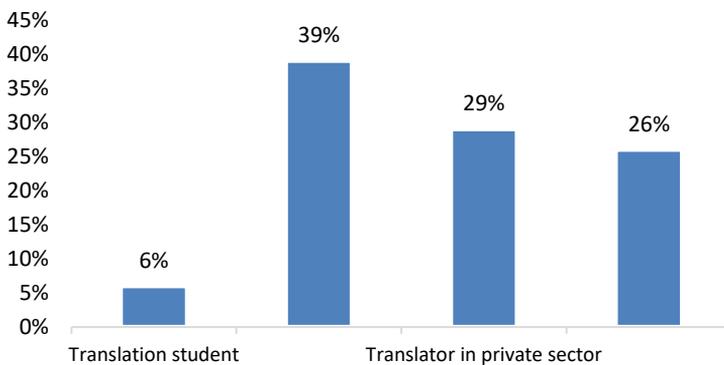


Figure 2. Current Status of the Study Respondents (n=103)

3.2. Importance of Learning New Technological Tools for Remote Interpreting

The study respondents were asked to determine the significance of learning new technological tools for remote interpretation services. Each respondent was asked to choose from the given choices based on the degree of importance: "not applicable," "not important," "important," and "very important." The results to this question have been presented in Figure 3, where a majority of 59% of the respondents view that it is *very important* for them to learn new technological tools for remote interpretation services. Slightly more than one-fifth of the respondents (22%) considered it *important*, whereas another 12% believed it *not important* at all. Only 7% of the respondents stated that this tech service is not applicable to the nature of their work.

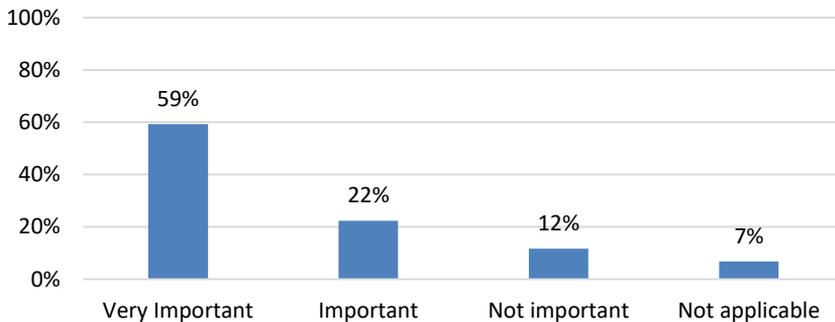


Figure 3. Perceptions of Respondents on Learning New Technology for Remote Interpreting (n=103)

3.3. Biggest Challenge as a Language Professional during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The study respondents were asked to highlight the biggest challenge as a language professional during the COVID-19 pandemic. They were asked to select one option from the four given choices, to wit: "Finding clients," "Running a business," "Keeping up with CAT tools," and "Work/life balance." The results for this question are presented in Figure 4. The majority of the respondents (31%) highlighted managing work-life balance as the biggest challenge for them, whereas another 29% mentioned that they had been finding it difficult to run the business smoothly. One-fifth of the respondents (20%) said keeping up with CAT tools was the biggest challenge, while only 19% had been battling with finding new clients for their business.

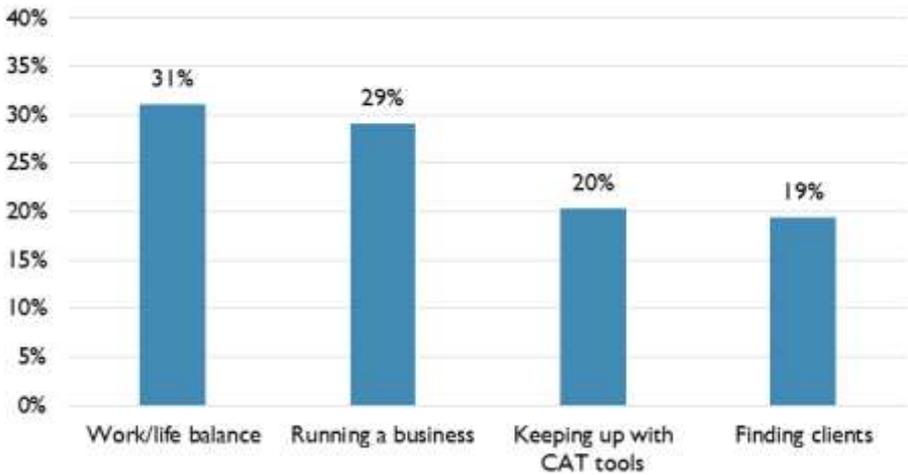


Figure 4. Biggest Challenge for Study Respondents during the COVID-19 pandemic (n=103)

3.4. Professional Development Opportunities Completed in Pre and Post COVID-19 Era

The study respondents were asked to mention the number of professional development opportunities completed, on an average basis per year, in the pre and post COVID-19 era. The examples of professional development opportunities given included training workshops, conferences, and seminars. The results of this query are presented in Figure 5. The study respondents were asked to select one from the four given choices, which included "1-5", "5-10", "more than 10", and "none." The respondents who had completed 1-5 trainings were higher in proportion in the pre-COVID period, i.e., 41%, as compared to 21% in the post-covid period on an annual basis. Similarly, the respondents who had completed 5-10 trainings were higher in proportion in the pre-COVID period, i.e., 41%, as compared to 34% in the post-COVID period on an annual basis. However, the proportion of respondents who had completed more than ten training were lower in the pre- COVID period, i.e., 18%, as compared to 37% in the post-COVID period. In the pre- COVID period, none of the respondents had completed any professional development training in the pre-COVID era, while 8% of them declared that they had not completed any professional development training in the post- COVID period.

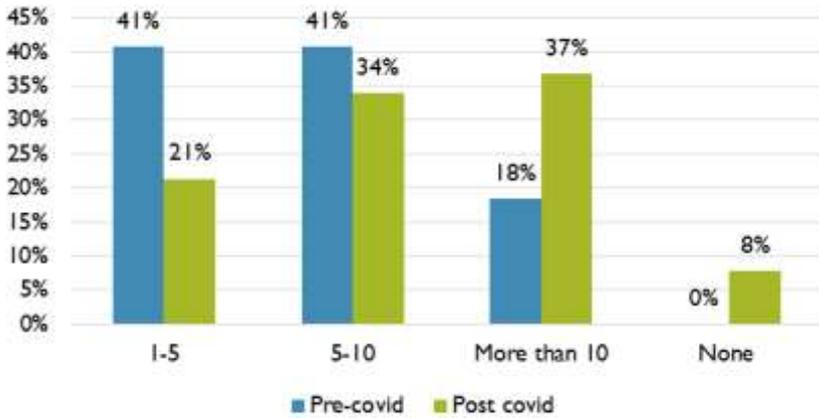


Figure 5. Professional Development Opportunities Completed in Pre and Post COVID-19 Era (n=103)

3.5. Topics Covered in Professional Development Workshops/Trainings Completed in the Post-COVID-19 Era

The study respondents were asked to mention the topics that were covered in the professional development workshops or trainings completed in the post-COVID-19 era. The suggested topics mentioned in the questionnaire included "HR workshops," "interpersonal skills," "job-related skills," "market-related skills," "theoretical translation," "translation technology," and "not applicable." The choice for "not applicable" applied to those respondents who had not attended any professional development course in the post-pandemic era (n=8). It was a multiple response question where the participants were allowed to select more than one option. The results obtained in this question are presented in Figure 6. The most popular topic in the professional training programs was translation technology and market-related skills – completed by 78% and 73% of the respondents, respectively. It was followed by theoretical translation and interpersonal skills – completed by 53% and 38%, respectively. Only 17% of the respondents participated in training programs pertaining to job-related skills, and 2% were involved in attaining training on HR-related topics. This question was not applicable to 8% (n=8) of the respondents who had reported in the previous question that they had not attended any professional development programs in the post- COVID period.

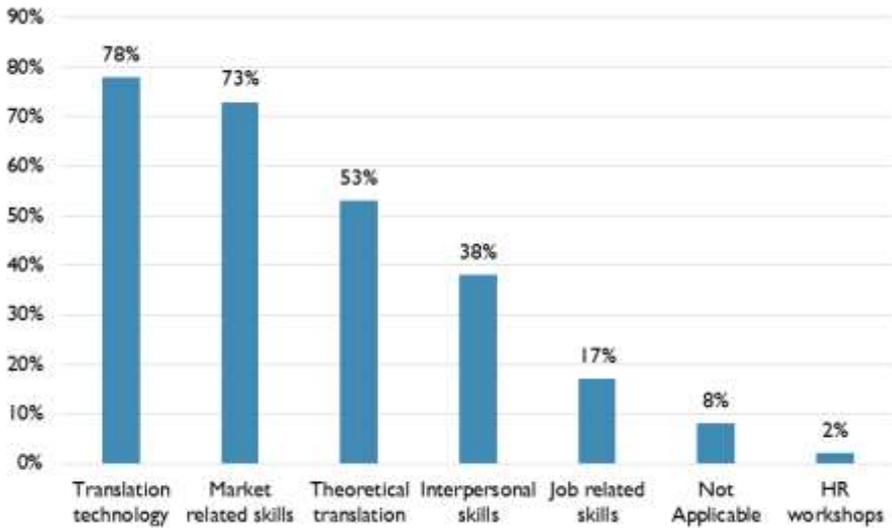


Figure 6. List of Topics Covered in Professional Development Programs Post COVID-19 Era (n=103)

3.6. Familiarization with Topics Taught during the Professional Development Programs

The study respondents were asked to mention whether they had been previously acquainted with the course materials during their academic qualification or it was a new skill or competency for them. This question was applicable to 95 respondents who had attended any kind of professional development workshop or training in the post-pandemic period, eliminating the respondents who answered "not applicable" (n=8). The results to this question are presented in Figure 7, where 71% of the respondents reported that they had been aware of the course materials as they had studied such course materials during their academic studies. Meanwhile, 21% gained an opportunity to learn new skills or competencies for themselves.

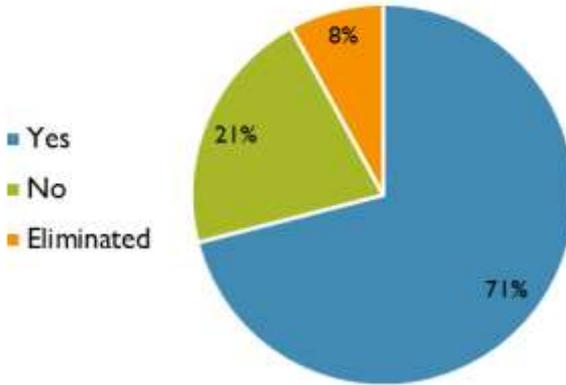


Figure 7. Familiarization with Course Materials before Participating in the Professional Development Course (n=103)

3.7. Preparing Future Translators

The study respondents were asked to share their advice that could serve as a piece of recommendation for the academic institutes to better prepare the workforce of future translators/interpreters. The list of suggested advice included "focus on computer-aided translation (CAT) tools and new media," "focus on transferable skills," "focus on translation skills," "hiring of more professional trainers," and "integrating a business approach to translator training." It was a multiple response question, and the participants were allowed to select more than one option. The results obtained through this question are presented in Figure 8. The highest proportion of respondents (82%) emphasized including a module on how to integrate a business approach in the translation training programs. It was followed by other recommendations such as hiring more professional trainers (69%), focusing on CAT tools and new media (65%), focusing on translation skills (58%), and then on transferable skills (20%).

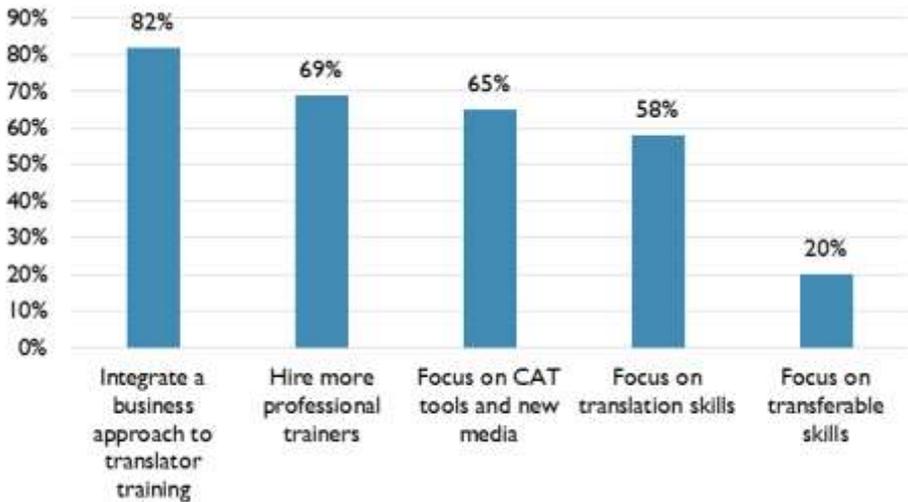


Figure 8. Focus Areas for Academic Institutes to Better Prepare Future Translators (n=103)

Moreover, the respondents were asked to share their knowledge of whether they were taught during their academic qualifications how to launch and run a translation/interpretation business. About two-thirds of the study respondents (67%; n=69) told that they were equipped with essential knowledge and skills on how to launch and run a translation/ interpreting business as opposed to the remaining 33% (n=34) who had not attained any knowledge as such.

3.8. Most Helpful Tech Tools for Translators during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The study respondents were asked about any tech tools that they had used during the post-pandemic crisis and found extremely useful. The list of suggested answers/options included the following tools: "delivery tools", "Microsoft Office", "online dictionaries", "online corpus", "translation online communities", "video/conference calling" and "translation memories". It was a multiple response question, and the participants were allowed to select more than one option. As shown in Figure 9, the highest proportion of respondents (81%) reported that online dictionaries were extremely helpful for them during the COVID-19 pandemic. Three-quarters of the respondents (75%) mentioned video/conference calling as the most helpful tool. These were followed by other tools such as Microsoft Office (68%), translation memories (48%), online corpus (47%), delivery tools (30%), and lastly, one-fifth of the respondents (20%) reported to have found online translation communities extremely useful tool during the pandemic.

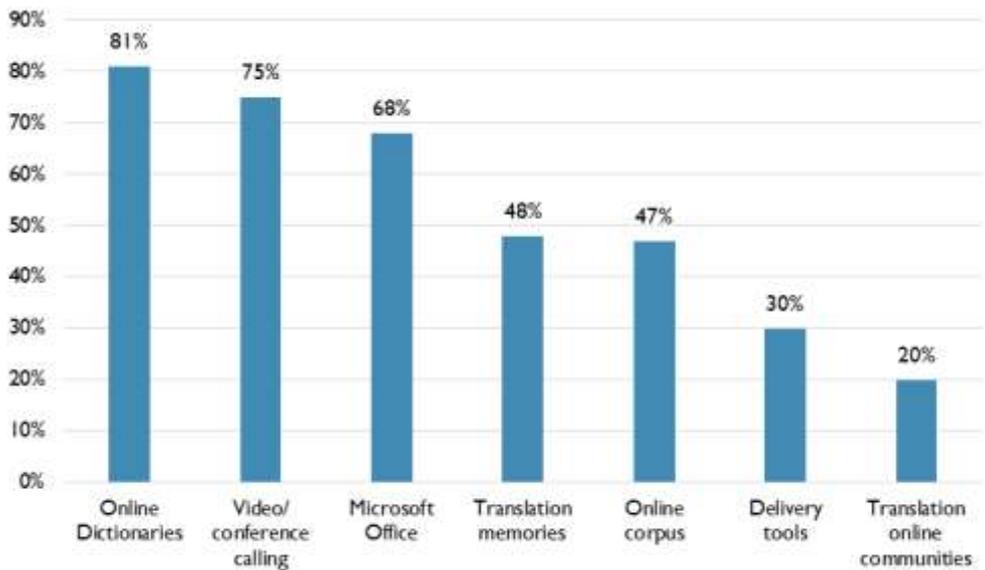


Figure 9. Most Helpful Tech Tools for Translators during the COVID-19 pandemic (n=103)

The respondents were also asked about any tech tools that they had lost access to due to the pandemic crisis. Six of them said that they had not been using any tech tools in the pre-COVID period, while two revealed that they had not lost access to any of the tech tools that they had been previously using during the pre-COVID period. Hence, these eight respondents (n=8) were eliminated, and the analysis was performed only on the remaining 95 respondents (n=95). The list of most commonly used tech tools was provided in the answer, which included "delivery tools," "Microsoft Office," "online dictionaries," "online corpus," "online translation communities," "video/conference calling," and "translation memories." It was a multiple response question, and the participants (n=95) were allowed to select more than one option. The results obtained through this question are presented in Figure 10. Slightly more than half of the respondents (53%) reported having lost access to three important tech tools, namely Microsoft Office, translation memories, online dictionaries, as a result of COVID-19. This was followed by video/conference calling tools (47%), online corpus (42%), delivery tools (22%), and translation online communities (15%).

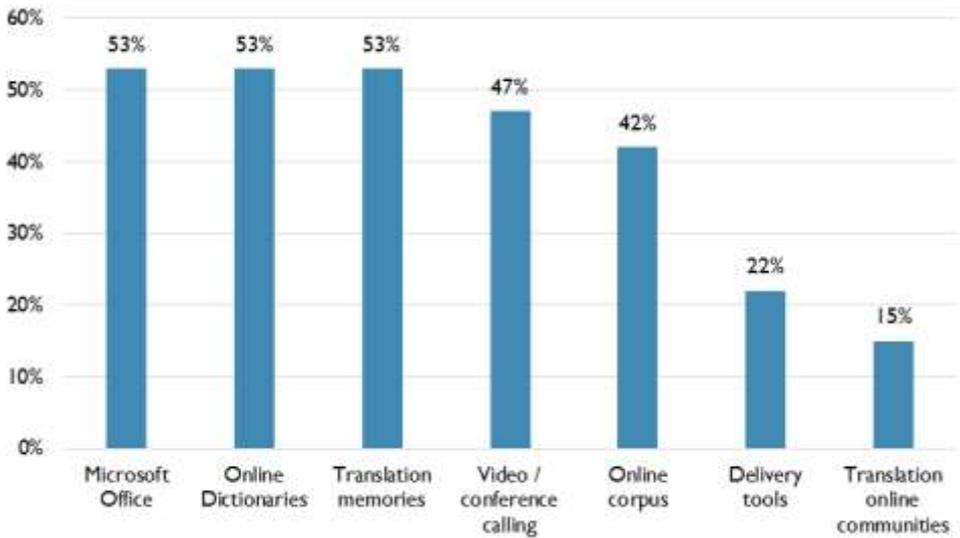


Figure 10. Access to Tech Tools Lost due to the COVID-19 pandemic (n=95)

3.9. Saudi Translators' Perceptions about the Future of Translation in a COVID-Free World in the Future

The study respondents were asked to score the likelihood of them continuing to work as a freelance translator/interpreter after the pandemic ends. As shown in Figure 11, about one-third of the respondents (32%) considered it 'very likely,' and 17% felt it 'likely' to continue working beyond the COVID-free world in the future. Slightly more than one-fifth of the study respondents (21%) were not sure about the likelihood of continuing to work as a freelance translator/interpreter while 14% considered it 'unlikely' whereas the remaining 16% thought it 'very unlikely' to continue their translation work even after the disappearance of the COVID.

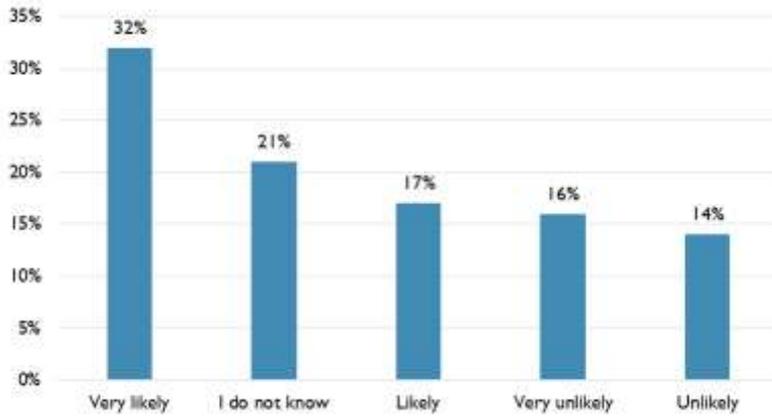


Figure 11. Likelihood of Continuing to Work as a Freelance Translator/Interpreter in COVID-Free World in the Future (n=103)

The study respondents were further asked to score the likelihood of customers valuing the services of professional translators or interpreters in the post-COVID era. Figure 12 reveals that 29% of them considered it 'likely,' and another 23% said it is 'very likely that customers will value the services of professional translators or interpreters in the COVID-free world in the future. 14% were not sure, while 18% claimed it as 'unlikely,' whereas the other 16% considered it 'very unlikely that the customers will value professional translators or interpreters in the COVID-free world in the future.

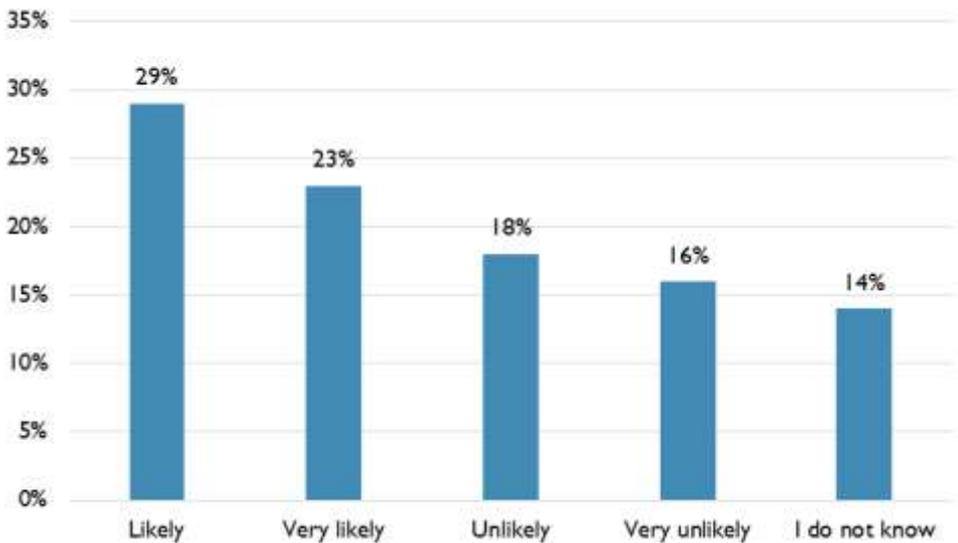


Figure 12. Perceptions of Respondents about Customers Valuing Professional Translators or Interpreters in a COVID-free World in the Future (n=103)



The study respondents were also asked to score the likelihood of customers regarding any probably increased usage of machine translation in a COVID-free world in the future. Figure 13 shows 27% of the respondents considered it 'likely,' and another 24% considered it 'very likely that there would be increased usage of machine translation after the pandemic. Furthermore, 27% were not sure, while 13% saw it as 'unlikely,' whereas the other 9% considered it 'very unlikely that there would be increased usage of machine translation when the pandemic ends.

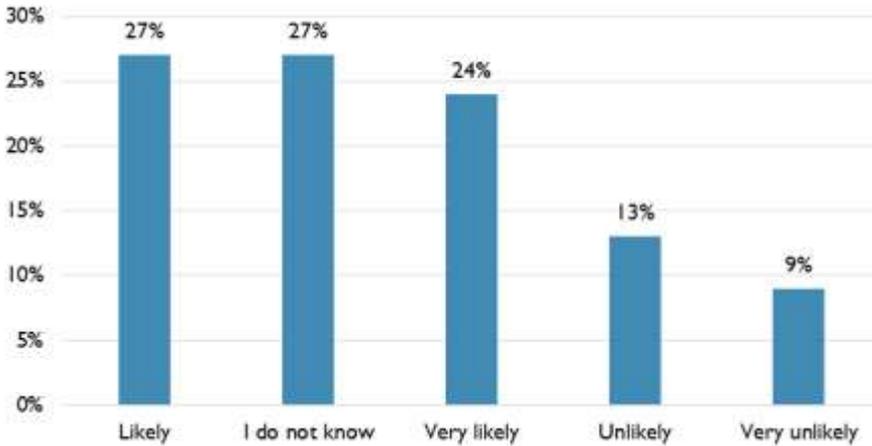


Figure 13. Perceptions of Respondents on Customers regarding the Usage of Machine Translation in a COVID-free World in the Future (n=103)

The study respondents were asked to score the likelihood of customers regarding any probably increased usage of remote interpretation service in the COVID-free world in the future. As shown in Figure 14, 33% of them considered it 'likely,' and another 35% of respondents considered it 'very likely that there would be increased usage of remote interpretation after the pandemic. 18% were not sure, while 13% considered it 'unlikely.' Only 1% of the respondents considered it 'very unlikely that there would be increased usage of remote interpretation when the pandemic ends.

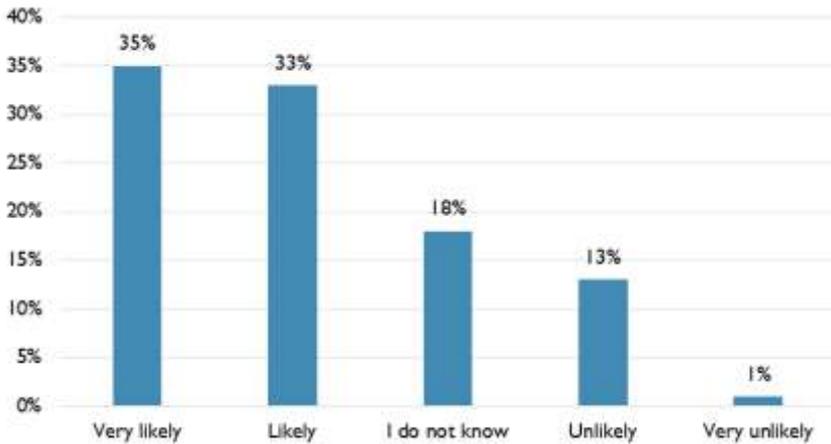


Figure 14. Perceptions of Respondents on Customers regarding Increased Usage of Remote Interpretation Service in a COVID-free World in the Future (n=103)

3.10. The Use of Technological Tools in the Translation Industry in the COVID-Free World

The study respondents were asked to score the likelihood of technological translation tools making the translators even more productive in the COVID-free world as compared to the pre- COVID era. As shown in Figure 15, 28% of the respondents considered it 'likely' while another 41% thought it 'very likely' that technological tools will make the translators or interpreters more productive in a COVID-free world in the future. Furthermore, 13% of them were not sure, while 7% considered it 'unlikely.' The remaining 12% of the respondents considered it 'very unlikely that the technological tools will make the translators or interpreters more productive in the upcoming COVID-free world.

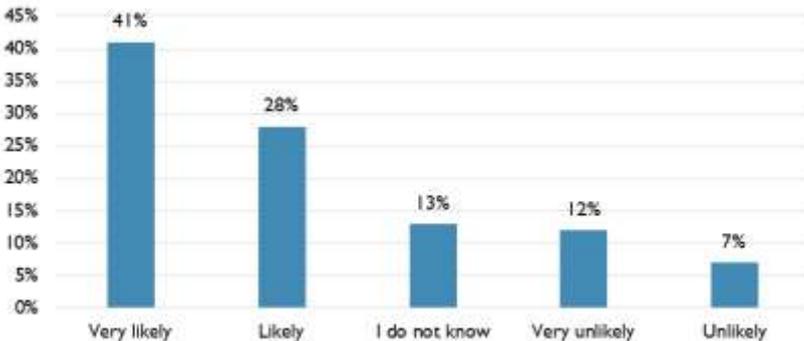


Figure 15. Likelihood of Technological Tools Making Translators/Interpreters More Productive in the COVID-Free World (n=103)



The study respondents were later asked to score the likelihood of the impact of technological tools enabling them to earn more income in the COVID-free world in the future as compared to the pre-COVID period. As shown in Figure 16 below, 31% of the respondents considered it 'likely' while 44% considered it 'very likely' that the technological tools will enable translators/interpreters to earn more income in the COVID-free world in the future. 17% were not sure, and 5% saw it to be 'unlikely.' The other 5% considered it 'very unlikely that the technological tools will enable translators/interpreters to earn more income in a COVID-free world in the future.

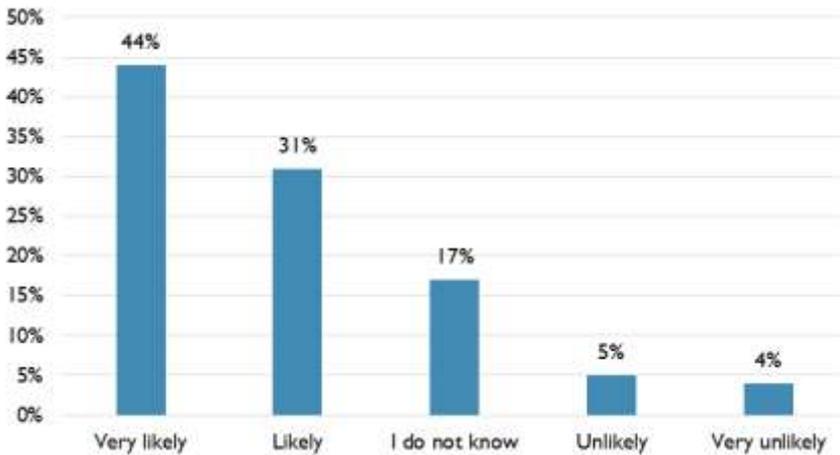


Figure 16. Likelihood of Technological Tools Enabling Translators/Interpreters to Earn More Income in the Post-COVID Era (n=103)

3.11. The Job Status of Translators and Interpreters in a COVID-Free World

The study respondents shared their perceptions about the likelihood of good-paying jobs becoming scarcer after the COVID-19 pandemic. Figure 17 shows that 28% of the respondents considered it to be 'likely' while another 29% saw it as 'very likely.' It further conveys that 20% of them were not sure whether or not good-paying jobs would become scarcer for translators and interpreters in a COVID-free world. On the other hand, 16% responded 'unlikely,' whereas only 7% considered it 'very unlikely.'

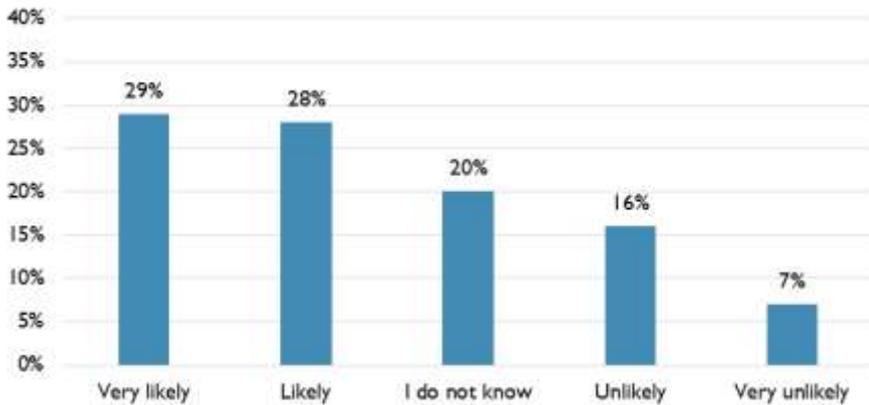


Figure 17. Perceptions of Respondents about Good-paying Translation/Interpretation Jobs to Become Scarcer upon Eradication of COVID-19 (n=103)

3.12. Perceptions on the Likelihood of More Translation Work Shifting towards Monolingual Post-Editing in the Covid-Free World

The study respondents were asked about their perceptions about the likelihood of a major proportion of translation work to shift towards monolingual post-editing after the pandemic. Figure 18 shows that 25% of the respondents considered it 'likely' to happen and another 34% 'very likely.' 20% were not sure, while 13% rendered it 'unlikely.' A few 8% of them found it 'very unlikely that more translation work will shift towards monolingual post-editing in the post-COVID time.

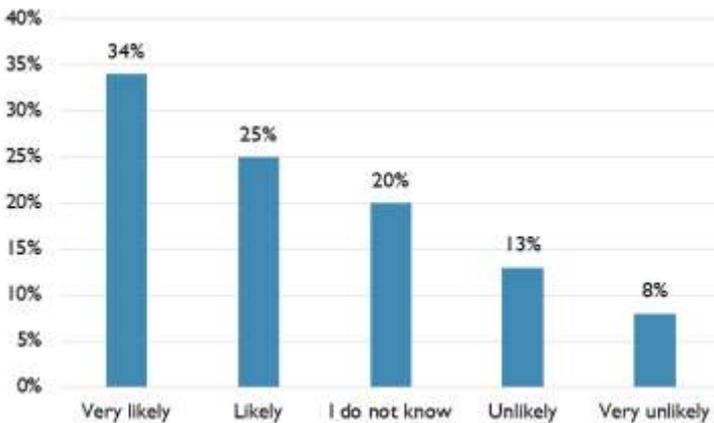


Figure 18. Perceptions on the Likelihood of Major Proportion of Translation Work to Shift towards Monolingual Post-editing in the post-COVID era (n=103)



3.13 Perceptions translation work being available in the COVID-free world

Lastly, the study respondents were asked to score their perceptions about the likelihood of more translation work to be available in the COVID-free world in the future. As shown in Figure 19, 27% of them considered it to be 'likely' while 40% of thinks it would be 'very likely'. 16% were not sure whether or not more translation work would be available after the pandemic, while 11% considered it as 'unlikely.' The remaining 7% found it 'very unlikely' that more translation work will be available in a COVID-free world in the future.

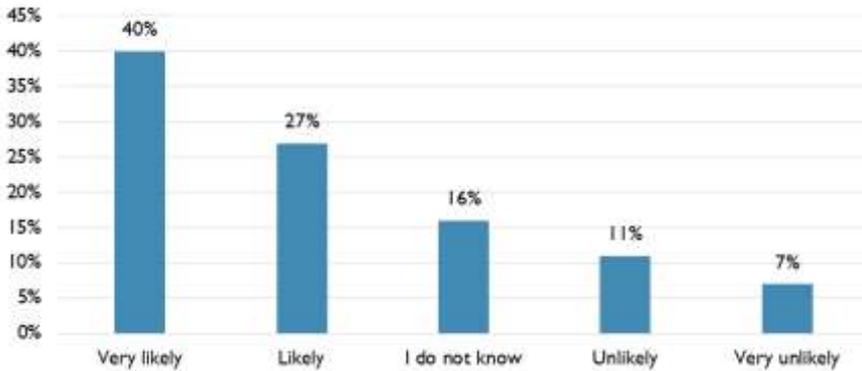


Figure 19. Perceptions on the Likelihood of more Translation Work to be Available in the COVID-free World (n=103)

4. Discussion

The findings of this research study indicate that nearly one-half (48%) of the study population was working at the entry-level of the translation industry with an experience ranging from 1 to 5 years. Nowadays, technological revolutions are continuously transforming and have tremendously facilitated the service of remote interpretation by eliminating linguistic barriers between the marginal language speakers and service providers, while at the same time significantly reducing the costs and enhancing the availability of interpreters (Andres & Falk, 2009; Braun, 2006; Mouzourakis, 2006; Roziner & Shlesinger, 2010). The findings of this study show that translators and interpreters in Saudi Arabia were well-cognizant of the new trends geared towards increasing the demand for remote interpretation, and it is for this reason that about 81% of the respondents showed their willingness to learn remote interpretation services, combining their suggested answer of "most important" and "important."

The findings further suggest that the translators were more actively engaged in undertaking professional development courses/programs in the pre-COVID

period, and perhaps due to economic constraints, were not able to continue after the COVID pandemic. Courses on translation technology also referred to as machine translation software was mainly attended by translators in the post-COVID period to address the pressing needs of the present time. The respondents' viewpoints suggest that academic institutions providing translation courses should include two key components in their curriculum: (1) integrating business approaches and (2) introducing CAT and other media tools. It has been reiterated the need for CAT tools as the translators were not fully prepared or that their preparedness was very weak with regard to adopting new technological tools. Integration of business approach in the training program will help them run their business in a sustainable manner, as indicated by nearly one-half of the study respondents who experienced major challenges of running the business and finding clients in the post-COVID period. The respondents merely identified online dictionaries and video conferencing platforms as the most useful CAT tools in the post-COVID period. This is consistent with the research literature where online dictionaries are extensively used in the translation industry (Fuertes-Olivera & Nielsen, 2011; O'Neill, 2019). The intentions of the respondents to continue working as freelance translators in the COVID-free world in the future are mixed. About one-half of the respondents are willing to continue, whereas almost one-third were not too much optimistic about working in the same industry after the pandemic. As hypothesized, a large proportion of respondents were of the view that there would be increased utilization of machine translation and remote interpreting upon the disappearance of the pandemic. Similarly, the majority of the study respondents, realizing the need for digital tools, stated that their productivity would significantly increase when the pandemic ended. By becoming more productive, three-fourths of them believed that their earnings would increase, while two-thirds foretell that the translation industry would grow substantially after the pandemic. This is consistent with the findings of the research literature, whereby it was estimated that the translation industry would increase from USD 46 billion in 2019 to USD 56 billion in 2021 (Jack, 2019).

5. Conclusion

Looking at the future, it is not yet clear what roles will have to be played by translators, especially keeping in view the progressively tech-dependent world. We find substantial evidence that translation technologies interconnect and oftentimes are subsumed in the translation process completely. As we look towards the future of translators in the Saudi Arabian market, it is evident that they are not strongly being motivated towards tackling future challenges. A well-informed approach must be implored in understanding the latest technological tools and ensuring that these tools are optimally utilized to achieve the desired outcomes with respect to users' satisfaction and the quality of translated texts. Wrapping this article up, one can say with profound certainty that more challenging opportunities await the translators to actively participate in thriving



and flourishing the translation industry. Now the time has arrived that the translators in the Saudi market should start to put aside the traditional working norms and learn to embrace the new tech practices in order to achieve efficiency, effectiveness, economy, and above all, high-quality translation outputs.

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