

The First Academic Translator Training Program in Iran: Iran Girls' College¹

_____ Rezvan Barzegar Hosseini² & Farzaneh Farahzad³

Abstract

Academic translator training started in the 20th century in the world. The investigation reveals that the beginning of academic translator training in Iran was also in the 20th century. The present article is an archival microhistorical research on the first academic translator training program in "Iran Girls' College", which was established in the second Pahlavi era in 1964.

This study tries to a detailed description of "Iran Girls' College" and its development during one decade (1964–1974). The role of Farah Pahlavi as the patron is also considered based on Lefevere's theory (1992). Her influence on the development of the English language translation curriculum is shown. In this regard, Atefmehr and Farahzad's microhistorical model (2021) is employed. First, the document repositories of archives are closely investigated. Then the first-hand information extracted from primary sources, such as college guidebooks, are put together and finally, a narrative was written for the college. The findings indicate that the curriculum's development was primarily aimed at addressing market needs, particularly in creating job opportunities for women in roles like secretarial positions, rather than focusing on publishing.

Keywords: Academic translator training, Iran Girls' College, Microhistory, Patronage, Translator training program

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1. This paper was received on 25.08.2024 and approved on 14.10.2024.
 2. Corresponding Author: Ph.D. Candidate, Department of English Translation Studies, Faculty of Persian Literature and Foreign Languages, Allameh Tabataba'i University, Tehran, Iran; email: rezvanhossini@gmail.com
 3. Professor, Department of English Translation Studies, Faculty of Persian Literature and Foreign Languages, Allameh Tabataba'i University, Tehran, Iran; email: farzaneh.farahzad@gmail.com

1. Introduction

Translator training as we know it today emerged in Switzerland in 1941, with the creation of *École d'interprètes*. It grew on a modest scale in the late 1950s', with the birth of ESIT (*Ecole supérieure de traducteurs et d'interprètes*) and ISIT (now *Institut de management et de communication interculturels*) in Paris, and that of ISTI (now a translation department within the *Université libre de Bruxelles*). It only became a large-scale phenomenon in the 1990s' and even more so after the Bologna process in 2005 (Froeliger, 2019, p. 42).

Like other countries, learning foreign languages and translation in Iran was a serious issue. During the Pahlavi Dynasty (1925–1979), the modernization process accelerated across various sectors, including education. The close relationship between Iran and the United States and the growth of international communications contributed to the spread of the English language in Iran.

In 1964, Iran Girls' College⁴ was established and "English Language Translation and Secretaryship", "French Language Translation and Secretaryship" and "German Language Translation and Secretaryship", as separate fields of study emerged. This was exclusively for women and marked a turning point in the field of "Translation". Consequently, Iran Girls' College became the first college to offer an academic translator training program in Iran. It was a private college for women located in Tehran, founded by Dr. Karim Fatemi (Iran Girls' College, 1345/ 1966, p 11).

In 1974, the name of college was changed to "Farah Pahlavi University" (Ministry of Science and Higher Education, 1355/1976, p. 60). This change prompts the researchers to consider Farah Pahlavi as the patron of the college.

To investigate the educational system of Iran Girls' College, the present study

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applied the theoretical and practical frameworks. The theoretical framework is three components of Lefevere's theory—ideological, economic and status—within the educational system of Iran Girls' College and the role of patronage. The practical framework is based Atefmehr and Farahzad's microhistorical model (2021, p. 61) which are discussed in the further sections.

2. Review of Literature

Teaching translation is considered a significant phenomenon in the realm of Translation Studies. There are numerous studies on teaching translation programs in universities. The aim of most of these studies is to evaluate or critique the English Language Translation curriculum for Bachelor's or Master's degrees.

Mollanazar (2003) conducted descriptive and comparative research on the state of translator training in Iran. He provided data on the number of universities offering Translation as a field of study in 2003.

Other researchers who worked on translator training mostly criticized the curricula of Bachelor's and Master's degrees, suggesting revisions to the current curriculum and proposing new programs tailored to market needs (Khazae Farid, 2001; Razmjou, 2001; Miremadi, 2003; Ziahosseiny, 2003; Heydarian, 2003; Rahmani, 2009; Rahimy, 2010; Khazae Farid and Khoshsaligheh, 2010; Rostamzadeh, 2011; Salari and Khazae Farid, 2015; Kafi et al., 2018).

In 2018, the Iranian Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology introduced a revised Bachelor's Degree program in English Language Translation. Some researchers have investigated this new curriculum based on various models (Farahzad & Ehteshami, 2018; Khoshsaligheh et al., 2019; Emam, 2022; Ranjbar et al., 2022; Ketabi et al., 2020).

While there is a substantial body of work on translator training programs in Iran, there is limited concern regarding the first academic translator training

program in the country. Most studies regarding the English Language Translation program mention “College of Translation” as the first college to offer English Languages Translation as an academic field of study (Kafi et al., 2018, p. 1; Ketabi et al., 2020, p. 1231). “College of Translation” was established in 1969. However, according to the investigation presented in this research, the first college to offer English Language Translation as a distinct field of study was “Iran Girls’ College” which was established in 1964.

3. Methodological Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is based on Lefevere’s theory (1992, p. 16). Lefevere believes that the literary system is controlled by two factors. The first is represented by professionals within literary system and the second factor pertains to patronage outside the literary system. Moreover, he identifies three components of this patronage: a) the ideological, b) the economic and c) the status components (1992, pp. 14–16). His theory can also be applied to the educational system rather than just the literary system. In this context, for the purpose of the present study, the researcher investigates three elements of Lefevere’s theory—ideological, economic and status components— (1992) within the educational system of Iran Girls’ College as a system. The college’s operations were influenced by patronage out of the educational system. Therefore, the present study aims to determine how the patronage played a significant role in development of Iran Girls’ College, its English Language Translation curriculum and fulfilment of the needs of the market.

As the Lefevere’s theory is historical research, we need a microhistorical model to do the research. Therefore, the practical framework of this study is based on Atefmehr and Farahzad’s (2021) model of microhistorical translation/translator research. Based on their model, microhistorical translation/translator research involves three steps: 1) selecting the topic of interest; 2) conducting an archival search; 3) establishing a micro-macro relationship and writing a narrative

(Atefmehr & Farahzad, 2021, p. 61).

The examination of archives is set at the center of the microhistorical approach. Archives are the running record of society and the institutional memory of government (Webb et al., 1966, p. 55). In the present study, after selecting the topic, the archives of The National Library and Archives of Iran, The Library, Museum and Document Center of Iran Parliament, and The Central Library and Documentation Center of the University of Tehran are examined to find primary sources.

The primary sources discovered and utilized in this research included the bulletins and guidebooks of Iran Girls' College, as well as the memoir of the principal. Then pieces of evidence collected from various sources were put together to form a narrative for the concerned college and its program in English translator training.

4. Data Analysis

In the present section the data driven based on Atefmehr and Farahzad's (2021) microhistorical model are analyzed according to Lefevre's theoretical framework. The role of patronage and its impact on developing curriculum is discussed.

4.1. Royal Patronage in Iran Girls' College

As mentioned earlier, one of the factors influencing the educational system from Lefevre's perspective is "patronage outside the system". In the case of Iran Girls' College, Farah Pahlavi emerged as an influential royal patron. In the following, the three components are discussed to illustrate her role as a patron.

Reading the economic component, initially, Dr. Karim Fatemi established Iran Girls' College as the first private college in Iran using his own capital rather than government budget. But in the summer of 1965, about 33165 square meters of land in Vanak were allocated to the college by Endowments and Charity

Organization and Tehran Municipality for constructing necessary buildings. The construction costs were covered by the school's budget (Iran Girls' College, 1345/1966, pp. 11 & 64). On 30th November 1965, Farah Pahlavi contributed 10 million Rials to complete the half-finished dormitory and other buildings at Iran Girls' College. Subsequently, On 30th December 1967, both Farah Pahlavi and chief executives of national oil company provided additional funding—10 million Rials and 3 million Rials, respectively—to build the dormitories for the college. In 1968, Farah Pahlavi facilitated the allocation of 50000 square meters of land from the government for the college. Furthermore, Mohammad Reza Shah dedicated 50000 square meters of land near the Caspian Sea to establish a summer camp for students (Iran Girls' College, 1347/1968, pp. 31, 72 & 73). Thus, Iran Girls College received significant financial support from Farah Pahlavi, as the patron, in various forms of monetary contributions, land donations, and governmental assistance.

With respect to the status component, it pertains to the prestige and recognition afforded to college, professors, and students. Farah Pahlavi's role as a patron was evident in her support for them. According to Fatemi's memoirs, during her visit on 30th November 1965, she "gave her patronage and protection to the professors" (Fatemi, n.d., p. 24). It makes clear the role of Farah Pahlavi as patron in this college. On her visits, Fatemi introduced the board of trustees, professors and educational staff to her, further elevating their status (Iran Girls' College, 1345/1966, p.15 & Fatemi, n.d., p. 29). She gave her protection to them (Iran Girls' College, 1347/1968, p. 6), emphasized on the importance of engaging with students to address their concerns (Fatemi, n.d., pp. 28, 30 & 36) and expressed well wishes for them (Fatemi, n.d., pp. 28, 30, 31 & 35). She also presented gifts to outstanding students during her visits (Fatemi, n.d., pp. 25 & 29). These actions exemplified how Farah Pahlavi conferred prestige and recognition upon the students.

As for the ideological component, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi launched the “White Revolution” on January 26, 1963. This initiative encompassed a series of reforms aimed at modernization. Among these reforms was a social and cultural component that included the development of education through the establishment of the literacy corps and the granting of more rights to women, such as extending the right to vote (Iran Girls’ College, 1345/1966, p. 3). In this context, Farah Pahlavi, the high president of the college, aligned with the system’s ideology by regarding the “Iran Girls’ College” as an institution dedicated to educating women. She visited the college annually, during which she delivered speeches while Fatemi reported on completed and upcoming projects. In her speeches, she emphasized the importance of developing the college and advancing women’s education, addressing issues such as the need to increase student enrollment, hire foreign professors to teach English language and translation, establish connections with foreign universities, and develop the curriculum (Fatemi, n.d., pp. 25, 29 & 33).

The following chart illustrates changes in the number of students in the Foreign Languages Translation and Secretaryship (English, French and German) program during one decade. From 1964 to 1969, the number of students increased. However, from 1969 to 1974, enrollment declined as the college adjusted admissions based on the number of graduating students each year (Fatemi, n.d., pp. 88–89). Thus, in the first five years, the increase in student numbers aligned with the patron’s ideological vision.

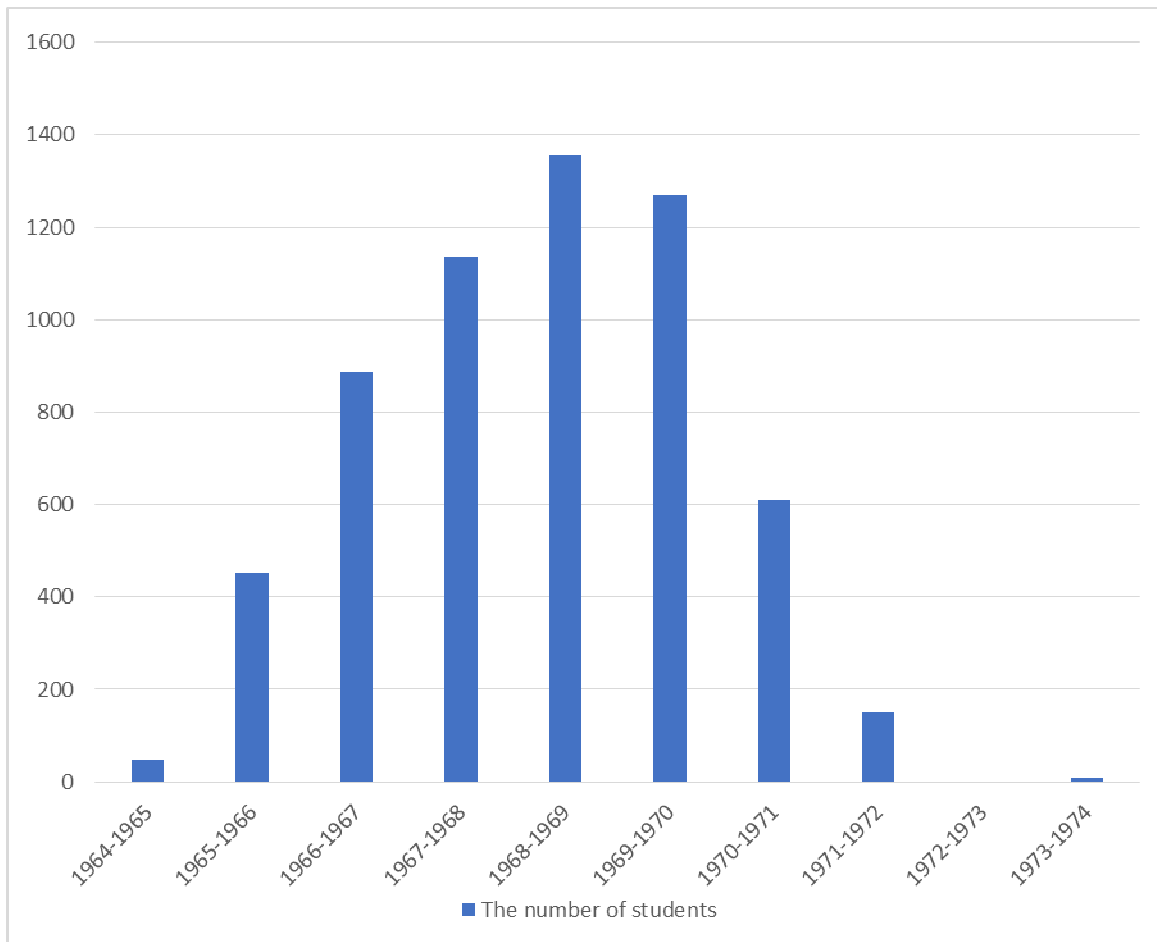


Figure 1: The number of “Foreign Language Translation and Secretaryship” students (English, French and German) from 1964 to 1974

From 1964 to 1974, many professors taught at Iran Girls’ College. Most of them were Iranian; however, in line with Farah Pahlavi’s ideology, some were foreigners who came to Iran to teach at this college. The numbers of Iranian and foreign teachers who taught Translation and English Language courses are provided in the following (Iran Girls’ College, 1345/1966, pp. 152–164, & 175–181; Iran Girls’ College, 1347/1968, pp. 221–222; Iran Girls’ College, 1349/1970, pp. 298–299; Fatemi, n. d., pp. 117–126).

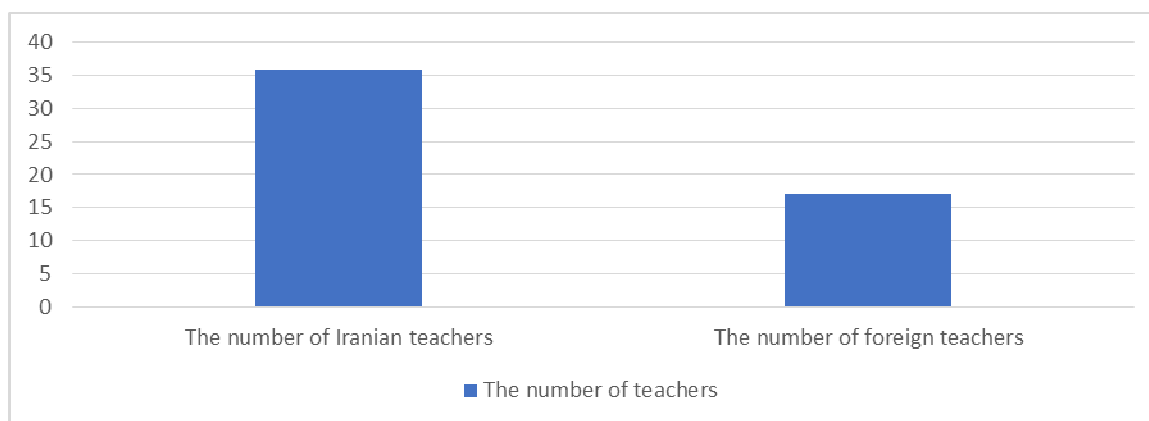


Figure 2: The number of Iranian and foreign teachers of English department of Iran Girls' College from 1964 to 1974

As shown above, the number of Iranian teachers at Iran Girls' College exceeded that of foreign teachers. However, documents indicate that most Iranian teachers had obtained their Bachelor's, Master's, or Doctorate degrees from foreign universities. In contrast to the teaching staff, all heads of the English department were foreigners. From 1964 to 1966, William Milward served as the head of the English department. He earned his Bachelor's and Master's degrees from the University of Toronto and his Doctorate from Princeton University (Iran Girls' College, 1345/1966, p. 157). In 1967, Franklin Burroughs took over as head of the department. He held a Doctorate from the University of California, Berkeley, and remained in this role until 1970 (Iran Girls' College, 1347/1968, p. 221; Iran Girls' College, 1349/1970, p. 298).

Under the ideological framework of Farah Pahlavi and the government, Iranian universities made connection with foreign universities, particularly American ones, to enhance the development of the Iran Girls' College (Fatemi, n.d., p. 110). As a result, Iran Girls' College formed a collaboration with the University of Florida in Gainesville, facilitating the exchange of professors and students. Faculty members from the college were afforded the opportunity to attend training courses at the University of Florida to better prepare for their teaching roles (Farah Pahlavi University, 1356/1977, p. 5; Fatemi, n.d., p. 109). Similarly, another agreement

was established between Iran Girls' College and Texas Woman's University. This contract stipulated that several professors from Texas Woman's University would travel to Iran to teach at the college and conduct research on various aspects, including the curriculum, textbooks, and student progress, in order to provide constructive recommendations (Farah Pahlavi University, 1356/1977, p. 115).

Numerous meetings were held annually among professors and the head of the English Language Translation and Secretaryship Department to discuss curriculum development, textbooks, student progress, and to harmonize teaching methods across similar courses. During these meetings, curricula from other Iranian and foreign universities were meticulously compared with that of Iran Girls' College. Experts in English Language and Translation from other universities were often invited to contribute suggestions regarding curriculum enhancements. (Fatemi, n.d., p. 147). These meetings and discussions were focused on developing the curriculum, particularly in specialized credits, and equipping professors with new teaching methods relevant to this field of study (Farah Pahlavi University, 1356/1977, pp. 47–48).

4.2. The needs of market and development of translator training program over one decade

Syllabus design and curriculum development are critical components of educational planning, particularly regarding their alignment with the real needs of learners. From a pedagogical perspective, a curriculum designed for undergraduate translation students should be realistic and relevant to the skills and competencies required by the target student population. Translator training programs must meet students' needs and professional expectations while also aligning with market demands.

During the Pahlavi period, women predominantly worked as typists or secretaries (Fatemi, n.d., p. 10). By offering English Language Translation and Secretaryship as a field of study, Iran Girls' College addressed market needs by

integrating translation-related courses into the secretaryship curriculum. In 1964, translation skills were essential for secretaries, who were primarily women. Additionally, the growth of commercial and industrial companies during this period increased the demand for secretaries proficient in secretaryship, typewriting, translating, and accounting (Iran Girls' College, 1349/1970, p. 318). Consequently, translator training served the needs of secretaryship rather than publishing, with both skill sets taught together to prepare secretaries capable of translation. This article will focus solely on the translation training aspect of the curriculum. The curriculum for English Language Translation has consistently been influenced by the curricula of both the English Language Teaching Program and the English Language Literature Program. Thus, the English courses were divided into three components: English Translation, English Literature, and English Language. The researcher examines the distribution of credits across these components over the decade. In the following the development of English Language Translation curriculum is discussed during one decade.

4.2.1. The Associate degree

Students were required to complete 36 credits in general courses and 34 credits in optional courses, totaling 70 credits to obtain the Associate degree. Out of these 70 credits, 12 were related to English language. No credits were allocated for translation. Therefore, despite the designation of this field of study as English Language Translation and Secretaryship, the college's focus at the Associate degree level was primarily on training in English language skills rather than translation skills. The following figure details the number of English credits in the curriculum for the Associate degree (Iran Girls' College, 1345/1966, pp. 131–132 & 175–181).

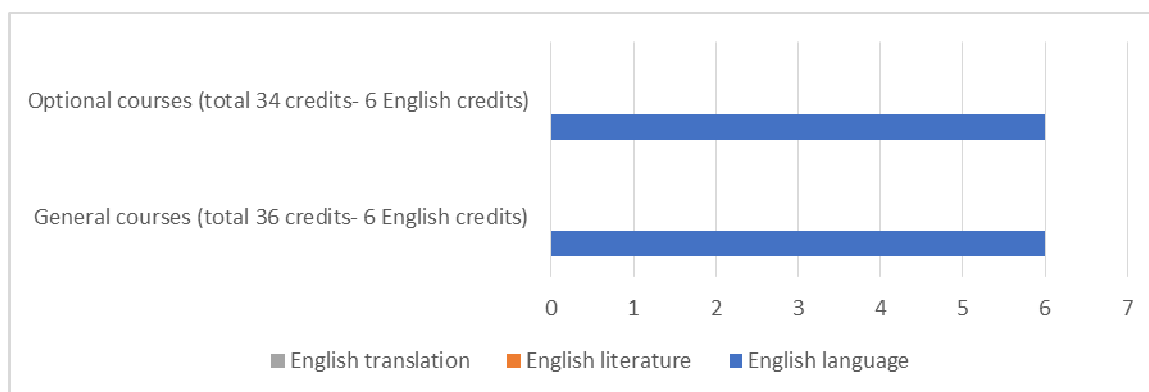


Figure 3: Comparison of the English credits in the Associate degree curriculum in the 1964–1965 academic year

4.2.2. The Bachelor's Degree

According to the Iran Girls' College Bulletin, 1965–1966 academic year, students needed to earn 70 credits to receive their Bachelor's degree. Among them, 22 credits were English-related courses. Specifically, 2, 6, and 14 credits were allocated to English translation, English literature, and English language courses, respectively (Iran Girls' College, 1345/1966, p. 135). Thus, the curriculum for the Bachelor's degree was more specialized than that of the Associate degree.

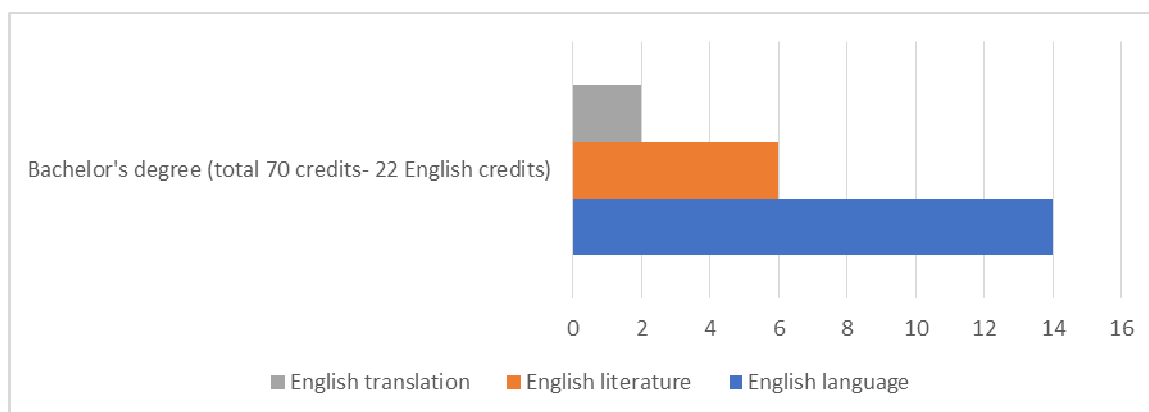


Figure 4: Comparison of the English credits in Bachelor's degree curriculum in the 1965–1966 academic year

In the first three years, the curricula for both the Associate and Bachelor's degrees remained unchanged. However, significant modifications occurred in the Bachelor's program in 1967. On November 8, 1967, a meeting of the College Council was convened to assess how to align the new curriculum for English

Language Translation and Secretaryship with global developments in this field (Iran Girls' College, 1347/1968, p. 37). In this respect, the courses were divided into two categories: 49 compulsory credits and 21 optional credits. The compulsory credits included Persian and foreign language courses, while optional credits were categorized into three specialized fields: English Language Translation, Secretary of Administrative Affairs, and Secretary of Accounting and Financial Affairs (Iran Girls' College, 1347/1968, pp. 183–184). This new structure comprised 16 credits related to the English language, 11 credits for English translation, and 10 credits for English literature.

In the 1965–1966 academic year, English credits totaled 22; by the 1967–1968 academic year, this number had risen to 37. Additionally, translation-related credits saw a dramatic increase from 2 to 11. The courses included “Basic Translation and Vocabulary Building” (2 credits), “Sentence and Paragraph Translation” (2 credits), “Advanced Translation 1” (4 credits), and “Advanced Translation 2” (3 credits) (Iran Girls' College, 1347/1968, pp. 183–184). These changes indicate that the Bachelor's degree curriculum became more specialized in accordance with the patron's ideology, market needs, and the college's objectives to enhance language and translation skills.

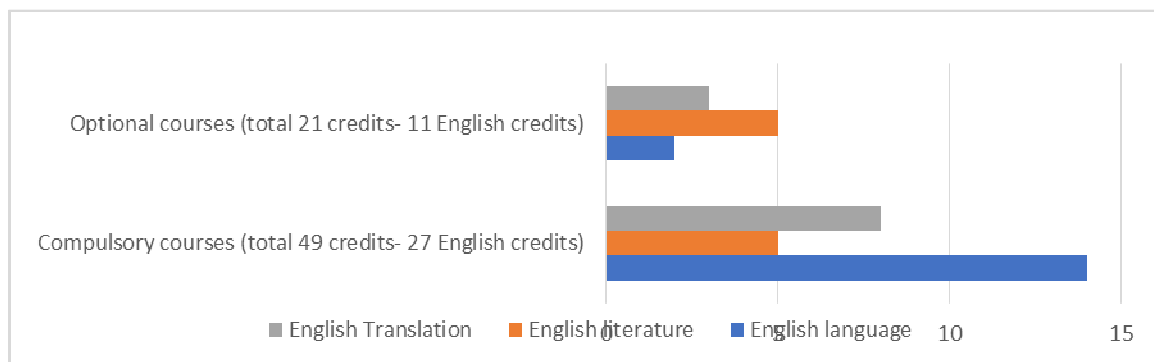


Figure 5: Comparison of the English credits in the Bachelor's degree curriculum in the 1967–1968 academic year

In the following, a brief description of the translation-related courses (11 credits) offered in the 1969–1970 academic year is provided. These courses include

"Basic Translation," (2 credits) "Sentence and Paragraph Translation," (2 credits) "Advanced Translation 1," (4 credits) and "Advanced Translation 2" (3 credits) (Iran Girls' College, 1349/1970, pp. 4–8).

In the first and second translation-related courses (Basic Translation and Sentence and Paragraph Translation) at the college, it is noted that "common English structures are compared with those used in Persian" and that "the translation of graded materials from English to Persian is practiced." Catford referred to this type of translation as rank-bound translation, wherein an effort is made to select TL equivalents at the same rank—word, group, clause, sentence, or text (the short text or a paragraph) (Catford, 1965, p. 24; Lotfi Pour Saeedi, 2000, p. 11). Thus, it can be argued that translation-related courses were grounded in the contemporary translation theories of their time.

In the third course (Advanced Translation 1) selected texts from previous courses were assigned for translation. The primary objective of this course was to maintain meaning (or sense) rather than adhere strictly to a word-for-word translation. Historically, the debate between word-for-word and sense-for-sense translation has been prominent among scholars such as Horace (65–8 B.C.), Cicero (106–43 B.C.), and Saint Jerome (347–419 A.D.). This perspective initiated a longstanding debate between literal and free translation. The current curriculum similarly emphasizes sense-for-sense translation while discouraging word-for-word approaches.

In the fourth translation-related course (Advanced Translation 2), students practiced translating advanced English texts into Persian and then back into English—a process known as "back-translation." Back-translation has been utilized for over six decades. Brislin asserts that translation quality can be predicted, and that a functionally equivalent translation can be demonstrated when responses to the original and target versions are studied (1970, p. 185). In other words, back-

translation serves as a method for evaluating translations (Larson, 1984, p. 534), enabling translators to conduct a meticulous comparison with the source text. Typically, it assists in determining whether a translation accurately conveys the meaning of the source text and is regarded as a test of translation for students in the final translation-related course of the English Language Translation and Secretaryship curriculum.

On July 21, 1971 a revised curriculum featuring more specialized courses and fewer general courses received approval from the Ministry of Education. Additionally, in September 1972, the curriculum underwent another revision in accordance with the general plan of the Ministry of Education (Fatemi, n.d., p. 153). The revised curriculum included general, required, minor, major, and optional courses (Iran Girl's College, 1353/1974, pp. 15–16).

Among these course categories, only major and general courses included English language instruction. Major courses comprised 11 credits related to translation. Compared to the curriculum of the 1969–1970 academic year, while the total number of translation-related credits remained unchanged, the number of translation-related courses increased. Specifically, in the 1969–1970 academic year, there were four translation-related courses; by the 1973–1974 academic year, this number had risen to six, which included “Advanced Translation 1” to “Advanced Translation 5” (each is worth 2 credits) and “Advanced Translation 6” (1 credit). The number of English language credits increased dramatically to 43, indicating that the revised curriculum became more specialized and aligned with the goals of the college, the ideology of its patron and market's needs in comparison to previous versions (Iran Girl's College, 1353/1974, pp. 18–20).

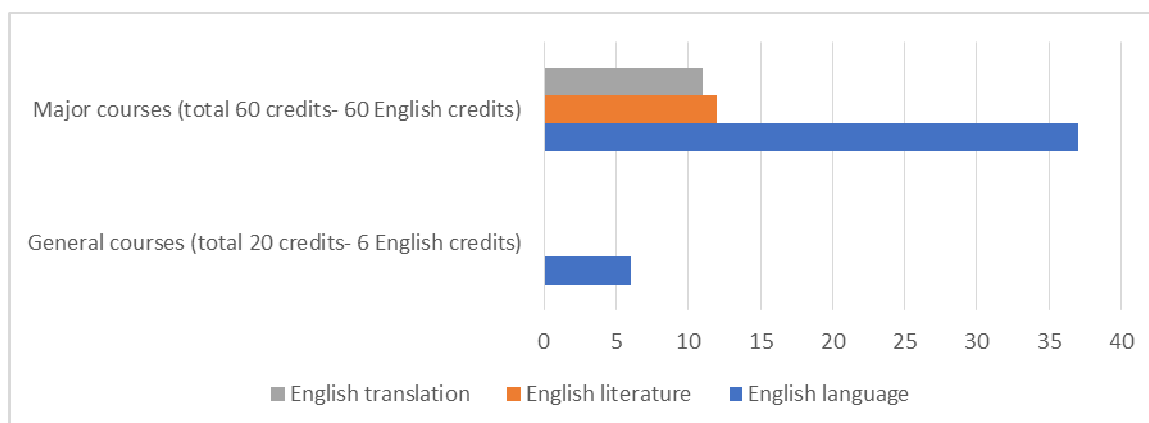


Figure 6: Comparison of the English credits in the Bachelor's degree curriculum in the 1973–1974 academic year

After the Islamic Revolution, the university's name changed to "Alzahra University." Additionally, the Iranian Ministry of Science, Research and Technology introduced the English Language Translation program as a result of the Cultural Revolution. This program was modified and nationally implemented in 1990, with further partial modifications in 1995. It remained in use until 2017, when it was replaced by a more contemporary version: the Revised English Language Translation Program, which is currently used as the foundation for English Language Translation pedagogy across Iranian universities.

5. Conclusion

Institutional translator training emerged in the twentieth century, a trend that also occurred in Iran. Iran Girls' College, a private college exclusively for women, was established in September 1964, during the mid-twentieth century.

The present study considers that Farah Pahlavi, as the high president of the Iran Girls' College, served as the royal patron of the college. Under her ideology, the English Language Translation and Secretaryship curriculum developed over a decade based on contemporary global programs. This development aimed to meet the market needs of the country, particularly in providing job opportunities such as secretaryship for women. As commercial and industrial companies proliferated

during this period, the demand for secretaries proficient in modern translation methods increased. Consequently, learning translation primarily served the purpose of secretaryship rather than publishing.

The increase in specialized English courses from 32 in the 1965–1966 academic year to 66 in the 1973–1974 academic year within the English Language Translation and Secretaryship program reflects a significant enrichment of the curriculum in a purposeful manner. Furthermore, the number of translation-related courses rose from 2 in the 1965–1966 academic year to 11 in the 1973–1974 academic year. This development aligned with the ideological aims of the patronage and fulfilled societal needs.

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