Abstract

The remarkably prolonged controversial issue of which academic component among language, linguistics, literature and translation must be given the priority and take precedence over the other in the English departments in the Arab World during the college years has not only preoccupied a number of specialists and scholars in the field for a considerably long period of time, but has always created a rift between them. However, the resultant conflicting writings, which in turn have persistently treated the subject from the professorial perspective, have lamentably ignored discussing it from the students' viewpoint. This is the main focus of this study in an attempt to add something new to a long-held and open-ended controversy and to find out which of these sub-specializations has more value for the graduating Arab student. This article also seeks to describe the situation of the English Departments in the Arab world, drawing attention to a practical issue faced by all English departments in the non-English-speaking countries where most students cannot and need not digest all the literature content of the English-speaking world. But students want to learn more practical language and translation skills for their future careers. And thus, they are unaware of the objectives, philosophy, and the reason-d'etre of universities, that they are not vocational schools necessarily and must teach humanities and subjects related to the human mind such as literature and cognition to produce future leaders in all different fields of human knowledge as they encourage students to develop the skills they would like to acquire through their studies toward an English degree. The study attempts to have a new look at an old subject through surveying the opinions of 75 English majors in their fourth year in the English Department at the Hashemite University, Jordan, to know the students' preferences in isolation from the opinions of their instructors and the prevailing educational policies, and study-plan requirements. Students were asked to express their likes and dislikes in an essay. There were no specific questionnaire items other than asking them to write a full-length essay on the central issue to figure out which component they prefer: language/linguistics, literature or translation? The respondents' essay-answers show that some prefer language/linguistics; some literature; others translation for reasons that have demonstrated a range of positions which vary from future expectations, to market demands, to personal preferences more or less. The essays also show that there are considerable differences between the past and the present. The traditional competition between literature and linguistics has broadened to include translation, which, in turn, has led to a considerably stimulating tripartite view.