



Developing Translation and Interpretation Services: Insights from Benchmarking Thai University Service Units

Todsaporn It-ngam^{1*} Rapeephan Kunprayoonsawat²

^{1*,2}*Language Institute, Burapha University, Chon Buri, Thailand*

*Corresponding Author. E-mail address: todsaporn@go.buu.ac.th

Received: 15 May 2024; Revised: 21 August 2024; Accepted: 30 August 2024

Published online: 26 December 2024

Abstract

This qualitative study explores the potential of X University, a pseudonym for a Thai public university located in Chon Buri province, to establish a Center of Excellence in Translation and Interpretation for the Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC) and nearby communities. The objective is to develop strategies for the Center to become a pivotal agency in improving translation and interpretation quality within the EEC. Data collection involved semi-structured interviews with directors and staff from four university-based service units and one professional association in Thailand, analyzed through content analysis. Through comprehensive benchmarking of these units, the research identifies key strategic, performance, process, and product dimensions that influence the effectiveness and efficiency of translation and interpretation services. The findings reveal the critical roles of a skilled translator and interpreter network, flexible administrative structures, and the integration of academic and non-degree programs in addressing market demands. The absence of formal interpreter services at the studied centers highlights a unique opportunity for X University to distinguish itself and enhance translation services in the EEC. These insights contribute to a broader understanding of how translation and interpretation impact local and global economies by facilitating international business, enhancing cross-cultural communication, and improving the quality of life through better healthcare, legal, and business interactions.

Keywords: Benchmarking, Eastern economic corridor, Interpretation, Translation, University service units

I. INTRODUCTION

Translation and interpretation are terms that may be used interchangeably in many contexts, yet they differ both theoretically and practically. Several studies (Millán & Bartrina, 2013; Newmark, 1988) state that translation involves converting text from one language to another in written form and includes multiple influencing factors. Interpretation, on the other hand, involves the oral transfer of meaning between languages to facilitate communication among speakers of different languages, which may occur consecutively or simultaneously. Pöchhacker (2016) notes that immediacy is perhaps the most distinct difference between interpretation and translation. Although these two fields differ in some respects, their primary purposes are nearly identical: both serve as mediums and bridges, connecting people from different countries with diverse languages and cultures. They play a crucial role in overcoming language barriers, fostering intercultural understanding, and contributing to economic growth (Kumari, 2019; Millán & Bartrina, 2013; Ojeda & Muñoz, 2019).

In Thailand, translation and interpretation also play the significant role in economic development. This is because translation facilitates effective communication between Thais and foreigners, enhancing efficiency in daily life and business activities. For instance, in public services, healthcare, legal proceedings, and community relations, translation acts as a bridge across language barriers, ensuring accuracy and cultural appropriateness in communication, reducing social issues, enhancing economic opportunities. Additionally, it promotes mutual understanding and equality within Thai society (Auschala Chalayonnavin, 2019; Yamamoto, 2019).

The demand for translation and interpreting services in Thailand has increased across various business sectors (Netima Burapasirawat, 2020; Tongtip Poonlarp, 2016; Tongtip Poonlarp & Nattharath Leenakitti, 2016). For instance, in the manufacturing industry, there is a growing

need for translators to facilitate communication for foreign executives (Ratchanee Piyathamrongchai, 2018). Additionally, the expansion of the MICE (Meetings, Incentive Travel, Conventions, Exhibitions) sector has significantly enhanced the importance of interpreting and translation services (Auntiga Phung-nga, Thanawut Limpanitgul, Pimphun Sujarinphong, & Wanvipha Hongnaphadol, 2016). In the tourism sector, translation plays a crucial role in accommodating international tourists (Korawan Phromyaem, 2022; Puttachart Limsiriruengrai, 2022). The rising demand for translation and interpreting services in Thailand corresponds with the economic expansion in both the industrial and service sectors.

To drive the country's economy, the government has designated the Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC), covering three provinces: Chon Buri, Rayong, and Chachoengsao. The objective is to modernize the country in preparation for the next decade, aiming to link the country's economy with the areas within the EEC region attracting a significant number of international companies, foreign investors, and multinational organizations to the area (Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC), 2019). This leads to cross-cultural interactions and business transactions. Consequently, there is an increasing demand for translation and interpretation to facilitate communication between Thais and foreigners, including businessmen, tourists, and expatriates with specific purposes such as medical treatment, conferences and seminars, and long-term residency in this area. Hence, excellent translation and interpretation services in the EEC area must address both the quality of language translation and the translators' knowledge of industries, tourism, and services, including cultural information.

Although the demand for translation and interpretation is increasing in the EEC area, there are still significant gaps in meeting these needs. To the best of the researchers' knowledge, there is currently a limited number of professional translators and interpreters with knowledge of the Eastern region context. This is evident from the



limited number of translation and interpretation service units within educational institutions in Chon Buri, Rayong, and Chachoengsao provinces, which include both public and private universities, totaling 20 (Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation, 2020). Only one university, X University (a pseudonym for a Thai public university located in Chon Buri), has an official translation center providing academic services to the community. However, according to the information on the center's website, even X University's translation center cannot be considered excellent because it does not offer interpretation services and other components. It is foreseen that challenges may be posed for businesses, organizations, and individuals seeking accurate and culturally sensitive language services due to the lack of translation and interpretation service centers in this area. Furthermore, various activities may be hindered due to the absence of high-quality language services.

Therefore, it is crucial to establish a Center of Excellence in Translation and Interpretation, especially at X University as the main university in the EEC and the Eastern region (MGR Online, 2020). This research adopts the benchmarking method following Stapenhurst's guidelines (2009), comparing and studying the leading university-based translation and interpretation centers in Bangkok and nearby areas.

The objective of this research is to establish strategies to make the Center of Excellence in Translation and Interpretation in the Eastern region a key agency in bridging gaps and enhancing the quality of language translation in the EEC area. However, while this research has a specific focus on the Eastern region, there is currently a lack of studies comparing the operations of leading translation units in Thailand. The findings from this research can be used as guidelines for developing the potential of translators and interpreters, as well as elevating the standards of the translation and interpretation industry at the national level.

II. LITERATURE REVIEWS

A. Benchmarking

Benchmarking refers to a method of assessing and improving an organization's performance by comparing itself with the best organizations (Stapenhurst, 2009). This comparison might involve processes such as process benchmarking, key performance indicator (KPI) benchmarking, and practice benchmarking, where an organization compares its own business processes, performance indicators, and practices with industry leaders or the best companies at the same level. The goal of benchmarking is to identify areas for improvement and develop plans to adopt best practices, leading to enhanced efficiency, competitiveness, productivity, and profitability. This comparison enables organizations to pinpoint areas or aspects that require improvement and implement strategies for future enhancement in productivity and profitability.

1) Types of Benchmarking: In this research, benchmarking is categorized by objectives, including product benchmarking, strategy benchmarking, performance benchmarking, and process benchmarking (Akarapong Untong & Mingsam Kaosard, 2014; Akera Ratchavieng, Suriya Wachirawongpaisarn, Patamanun Hiranirawat, Anan Sillapee, & Phongsak Phakamach, 2022).

Product benchmarking involves comparing one's organizational products with those of industry leaders or top companies. The goal is to identify attributes that maximize customer satisfaction, pinpoint market strengths and weaknesses, and develop strategies to enhance product performance and competitiveness.

Strategy benchmarking entails studying and analyzing one's organizational strategies against those of other similar or related industry entities. This aims to gain insights and understand effective strategies that can improve one's organizational strategies, often used by long-established organizations.

Performance benchmarking assesses and improves one's organizational performance against industry standards and competitors. It focuses on identifying areas for improvement and setting performance goals by comparing with industry leaders and best practices, ultimately providing data to pinpoint potential weaknesses and establish realistic improvement targets.

Process benchmarking evaluates internal organizational processes against those of other organizations to identify the most efficient and effective methods to achieve desired outcomes. This may involve analyzing aspects like cost, time, quality, resource utilization, and customer satisfaction, helping organizations identify problems, inefficiencies, or areas needing enhancement, leading to improved performance and innovation.

2) Benchmarking Process Steps: The benchmarking process can vary in complexity. For instance, Robere (2000) suggests a 10-step process, which includes: (1) selecting the process to be improved, (2) forming a team, (3) identifying the companies or units to benchmark against, (4) collecting and analyzing data from these entities, (5) identifying performance gaps and strengths, (6) studying the company's systems, (7) communicating findings at all levels, (8) setting performance goals, (9) developing and implementing an action plan, monitoring progress, and (10) re-evaluating and repeating the benchmarking process as necessary.

However, these steps can be simplified into a three-step process according to (Stapenhurst, 2009):

3) Objective Setting and Criteria Establishment: Determine the benchmarking objectives and standards, such as cost reduction, increased productivity, or improved customer satisfaction in the industry sector.

4) Data Collection and Analysis: Recruit benchmarking partners, collect relevant data, and conduct a detailed analysis.

5) Implementation of Insights: Use the analysis results to guide process improvements or to make decisions about selecting the best processes to implement.

B. Service User's Needs

To develop strategies for advancing translation and interpretation centers in the EEC area, in addition to benchmarking with the leading centers, it is crucial to understand the needs of the service users. Translation and interpretation services can be categorized into two types based on the employment nature: (1) the needs for services through intermediaries, such as university translation and interpretation centers and interpretation agencies, and (2) the needs for in-house translators and interpreters, such as factory interpreters.

1) Needs for Services via Intermediaries: In the current job market, most translators and interpreters operate as freelancers (Risku, Pein-Weber, & Milosevic, 2016). Although freelancers may work directly with clients, they often work through intermediaries, such as document translation companies and interpreter providers. These agencies secure translation or interpretation jobs from clients and then subcontract freelancers to complete the tasks, charging clients an additional fee over the freelancers' compensation. Direct client engagement typically costs less as it involves only the freelancers' fees.

Despite limited studies on client expectations from translation and interpretation agencies, a study in Austria by Risku et al. (2016) found that clients expect agencies to provide accurate and timely translations. Clients expect translators to have expertise in specific fields, native proficiency in the target language, and the ability to adhere to specified formats and terminologies. Additionally, clients value ongoing communication with translators to address questions and clarify doubts during the translation process. These expectations are likely applicable to interpretation services as well.



2) Needs for In-house Translators and Interpreters:

Employing full-time translators and interpreters might involve dedicated positions or roles combined with other tasks. The latter is often found in industrial factories, (Tongtip Poonlarp, 2016; Tongtip Poonlarp & Nattharath Leenakitti, 2016) where employers generally prioritize language skills over specialized knowledge or other skills.

However, these employees typically perform more interpreting than document translation (Netima Burapasirawat, 2020; Wannida Yuenyong, 2019). Sansoen Sattavorn (2020) found that in-house language translators play primary roles such as interpreting in various company scenarios, including meetings and escorting clients, as well as translating documents. Their secondary roles include additional tasks assigned by supervisors that are unrelated to their interpreter positions, such as design and sales tasks. Therefore, in addition to strong language skills, employers may also value additional qualifications including proficiency in English and other additional languages, computer skills, and soft skills like teamwork, creativity, and problem-solving abilities.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a benchmarking process targeting four leading university translation and interpretation centers. Qualitative content analysis (Krippendorff, 2018) was used as a methodology to collect information from the centers' websites, which included general data such as history, mission, services, and pricing. These data were then compared with each other and used to prepare for asking more detailed questions in the semi-structured interviews with the directors and staff of the centers. The guideline questions for the semi-structured interview are listed in table 1. Additionally, a focus group discussion was conducted with executives from a professional translation and interpretation association in Thailand,

referred to as "Association T" (a pseudonym). The term 'focus group discussion' was used to differentiate this data collection process from the semi-structured interviews, highlighting its flexibility (Krueger & Casey, 2009). According to Krueger and Casey, focus group discussions are more flexible, allowing participants to feel more comfortable, respected, and free to express their opinions without being judged. The main purpose of the discussion with Association T was to complement the semi-structured interviews with the university-based service centers, which do not provide interpretation services. The discussion focused on identifying the best ways for the new center to provide interpretation services in the EEC region.

The centers, pseudonymously named Center A, B, C, and D, were selected based on their public service provision, longstanding experience, and willingness to provide information (as presented in table 2). Centers A, B, and C are recognized leaders associated with undergraduate and graduate programs in translation and interpretation. Center D, while also offering translation and interpretation services, is more akin to a language school and is not affiliated with any academic translation or interpretation programs. Despite their designation, all four centers primarily provide translation services, with insufficient data available on interpretation services.

Three executives from Association T, all experts in translation and interpretation, were invited to participate due to their experience and willingness to provide in-depth information about interpretation. This involvement was crucial as initial data collection revealed that the information from the four centers was inadequate for interpretation-related insights. The focus group discussion aimed to collaboratively define appropriate types of interpretation services, service process models, pricing, and compensation rates, along with other considerations.

Table 1: Guideline questions

Categories	Questions
A. Strategies	1. What is the vision of the center? 2. What is the mission of the center? 3. What is the history of the center? 4. How does the center achieve continuous fame and success?
B. Performance	1. What are the short-term and long-term plans of the center? 2. What are the performance indicators of the center? 3. What are the center's performance outcomes?
C. Process	1. What is the organizational structure of the center? 2. How are the workflows of each service at the center structured? 3. What specific technologies or equipment does the center use?
D. Product	1. What are the products and services of the center? 2. Who are the center's customers? 3. How does the center evaluate and maintain customer satisfaction? 4. How does the center improve the quality of its products and services?

Table 2: Details of the subjects

Subjects*	Details
Center A	This center, part of the Faculty of Arts, has provided translation services for over 35 years, covering Thai, English, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and more. Faculty members perform translations. The center also offers master's programs and training in translation and interpreting.
Center B	This center, part of the Faculty of Liberal Arts, offers document translation services in Thai and various foreign languages, including English, French, Danish, and German. Established for over 20 years, it conducts translator and interpreter training and administers professional certification exams. Faculty members perform translations.
Center C	This center, part of the Academic Service Center at a university's Language Research Institute, offers document translation in Thai and 30 languages, including Southeast Asian languages. Faculty and external experts perform translations. The center also offers a master's program, training, and publishes textbooks in translation.
Center D	This center is a unit under the Faculty of Humanities at a university, established for over 30 years. It provides foreign language training and document translation services in languages such as English, Chinese, Korean, Japanese, and others. Translations are carried out by faculty members from the Faculty of Humanities.
Association T	This association is a legally registered professional organization established 30 years ago. Its members include translators, interpreters, publishers, and related organizations. The association's activities include training in translation and interpreting, as well as translation competitions. However, the association does not provide document translation or interpreting services.

*Pseudonyms

The data collection and analysis procedures, adapted from Krippendorff (2018), are outlined as follows:

1) *Define Research Questions*: Evaluate and compare translation and interpretation services at four university centers, focusing on strategy development for the Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC).

2) *Select Data Sources*: Data gathered from websites of university centers (Centers A, B, C, and D) and semi-structured interviews and focus groups with center staff and executives from Association T.

3) *Sampling*: Selected Centers A, B, C, and D based on their program integration and willingness to provide



information, alongside three executives from Association T for their industry expertise.

4) *Define Units of Analysis*: Analyzed textual data from websites and transcripts from interviews and focus groups, focusing on history, mission, services, and pricing.

5) *Develop Categories and Coding Schemes*: Created categories and a coding scheme based on guideline questions to systematically analyze responses.

6) *Pilot Testing*: Conducted a pilot test with two researcher coders to refine coding categories and ensure consistency.

7) *Coding*: Applied detailed manual coding to website content and interview transcripts.

8) *Analyze Data*: Used a benchmarking matrix to compare data across centers and analyzed focus group discussions to gauge consensus on service needs in the EEC.

9) *Ensure Reliability and Validity*: Reliability maintained by consistent coding; validity checked by two researchers reviewing coding and analysis.

10) *Reporting*: Documented methodology and findings in a final report, offering recommendations for enhancing services and outlining strategic implications.

11) *Conclusion of Findings*: Synthesized benchmarking insights and focus group discussions into actionable strategies, concluding analysis in July and August 2023.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. University-Based Translation and Interpretation Centers

The benchmarking of four university-based translation and interpretation centers was conducted by gathering data from their websites and through interviews with executives and staff at each center. Grounded in benchmarking theory, which emphasizes systematic comparisons to foster continuous improvement, this study utilized a Benchmark Matrix to analyze the findings. The framework provided by Robere's (2000) benchmarking strategies guided the assessment across

four key dimensions: strategy benchmarking, performance benchmarking, process benchmarking, and product benchmarking. These dimensions helped explore strategic goals, monitor performance, adjust processes, and evaluate service offerings to enhance operational outcomes. The detailed analysis led to the following conclusions.

1) *Strategy Benchmarking*: The strategy emphasized by all four centers revolves around reputation, stemming from the quality of translation work and the expertise of the translators. Most translators at these centers are foreign language professors teaching at universities, with only a few being freelancers. Centers A, B, and C have a well-defined quality review system, including a secondary language reviewer to verify translation accuracy before delivering to clients. This is illustrated in the following dialogue with the director of Center A.

Researcher: "How have you continuously built the reputation and success of this translation and interpretation center?"

Director: "The main factor is our translators. Other factors are secondary. (...) We don't do much beyond finding skilled translators and ensuring quality. For example, we don't send the work directly to clients immediately after receiving it from translators. We also have secondary language reviewers. If it's a translation of a foreign language, we use native speaker reviewers. (...) Another point is that we often take on challenging tasks, such as translating Thai culture, temples, coins, and woven fabrics. We have translators capable of handling such work, which is why government agencies frequently come to us, knowing we have translators who can do the job."

The fact that these centers can have secondary language reviewers and handle difficult translation tasks shows that they have a substantial network of translators. Center D, however, relies on the expertise of its translators, and due to a smaller number of available translators for certain languages, it cannot always implement a

secondary review process. Thus, having an ample network of skilled translators familiar with the languages and subjects relevant to the center's focus areas is crucial.

Moreover, the strategy of enhancing reputation is also achieved through demonstrating academic expertise in translation and interpretation. The leading centers are linked with undergraduate and graduate courses, integrating these into their services through academic activities such as workshops, seminars, collaborations, and research initiatives. The following excerpts illustrate how Centers A, B, and C actively engage in these activities.

Director A: "Since the start of the master's program in Translation in 1999, it has been offered every year. (...) Currently, there have been more than 20 batches for English-Thai translation. (...) The master's program in Interpreting is offered every other year, with about 10 batches so far. Additionally, there are regular academic service projects, such as legal translation, short-term interpreting, and interpreter training, including simultaneous interpreting courses, which are offered once per semester. (...) Some of these courses are very popular, and registration fills up within just 2-3 days."

Director B: "The center's strategy has five aspects. The first is to achieve academic excellence by organizing seminars and training sessions on translation and interpreting. We hold training sessions twice a year and provide translation and interpreting services. (...) The second aspect is to promote education, which includes conducting research, developing the translation profession, and producing translated works by the center's committee. The current project we are working on is translating the royal speeches of King Rama IX."

Director C: "Our institute offers a master's degree program, originally named XXX, which includes a translation track. It is one of the first universities in the country to offer a master's degree in translation, probably since the late 1990s. As you can see, there are many theses on translation in this room. The current

program includes both English language teaching and translation tracks. The professor who founded the translation track was renowned in the translation field and had strong connections with professional translation associations, which led to the establishment of our translation center."

On the other hand, despite being established for over 30 years, Center D's primary mission is revenue generation rather than research and academic programs. Its affiliation with an academic department might overshadow its academic reputation goals. Unlike Centers A, B, and C, which are specifically established for translation and interpretation with missions separate from academic service revenue generation, Center D operates under the academic services department of a faculty, which might lead to less focus on academic reputation. The summary of the strategy benchmarking is presented in table 3.

Table 3: Strategy benchmarking summary

Center	Strategy Benchmarking Summary
Center A	Focuses on reputation through quality translation and academic integration. Offers regular academic projects and master's programs. Uses university professors with secondary language reviewers for complex tasks.
Center B	Prioritizes academic excellence and educational advancement through frequent training sessions and research. Employs university professors and incorporates secondary reviewers in quality assurance.
Center C	Combines academic integration with strong professional connections. Established translation tracks in master's programs, linked with professional translation associations. Uses secondary reviewers for advanced tasks.
Center D	Aims for revenue generation, operating under the academic services department with limited academic activities. Employs university professors but faces challenges in secondary reviews due to limited translator availability.

The strategy focusing on reputation due to quality and expertise (Tongtip Poonlarp & Nattharath Leenakitti, 2016) underscores the necessity of maintaining a high standard in translation services, reflecting Newmark's (1988) emphasis on accuracy in translation. Centers A, B, and C implement a robust quality review system, which not only aligns with international standards (Millán & Bartrina, 2013) but also mirrors the best practices recommended in academic settings, reinforcing the pivotal role of academic integration in translation services (Ojeda & Muñoz, 2019). This strategic integration supports the notion that centers connected with academic institutions tend to enhance their reputational capital through scholarly activities, which can significantly impact their service delivery and client satisfaction (Kumari, 2019).

2) *Performance Benchmarking*: Centers A, B, and C each have specific annual plans or objectives for their translation services. In contrast, Center D does not have specific plans and objectives for translation services because translation is part of a broader service offering that focuses more on foreign language training, as shown in the following excerpt from the interview with the director of Center D.

Director D: "Actually, our language center is not a translation center per se. Therefore, we count all projects in the annual planning. We don't separate them into training projects or translation projects because sometimes we might not have any translation projects at all for the whole year, or there might just be one, or there could be several projects throughout the year. (...) It's just another service of the language center, which has many other projects. (...) Our KPI is the total revenue of the center, not separated by project types."

However, having such plans can contribute to greater job challenges for staff, potentially leading to better performance outcomes.

Additionally, it is observed that Center A likely performs the best in terms of the volume of translation work and

revenue, despite not engaging in aggressive marketing. This superior performance could be attributed to its reputation, quality, and the diversity of expertise among its translators, which allows it to accept challenging translation tasks that other centers might refuse. Consequently, even though these tasks command higher fees, clients are willing to pay for the services offered by Center A due to its ability to handle complex translations.

The specific annual plans or objectives for translation services adopted by Centers A, B, and C illustrate a strategic approach that aligns with Robere's (2000) benchmarking strategies for continuous improvement. Center A's superior performance, attributed to its reputation and the diversity of expertise among its translators, echoes findings from Stapenhurst (2009), who notes that clear strategic objectives contribute to higher operational performance. This center's ability to handle complex translations which other centers refuse showcases the practical application of high standards in translation as discussed by Pöschhacker (2011). The summary of the performance benchmarking is presented in table 4.

Table 4: Performance benchmarking summary

Center	Performance Benchmarking Summary
Center A	Has specific annual plans focused on translation services. Known for excellent performance in volume and revenue without aggressive marketing, excels in handling complex translations that command higher fees.
Center B	Implements specific annual plans, focusing exclusively on translation services. Engages in strategic planning for continuous improvement, though specific performance metrics are not detailed.
Center C	Like Centers A and B with specific annual plans for translation services. Details on performance metrics are not specified but likely align with strategic continuous improvement goals.

Table 4: Performance benchmarking summary (Cont.)

Center	Performance Benchmarking Summary
Center D	Lacks specific plans for translation, offering a mix of language services. Performance measured by total center revenue, with translation just one part of a broader service offering.

3) *Process Benchmarking*: In terms of processes, Centers A, B, C, and D show a similar direction. It was found that each of the four centers has 1-2 staff members specifically tasked with coordinating translation services. All four centers also implement a certification stamp for verified translations. Centers A, B, and D have a process where completed translations are sent to the client for review, and only after ensuring that there are no errors do they apply the certification stamp.

There are, however, differences in operational procedures among the centers. For example, in the payment process, there are three payment models: full payment before the translation begins, partial payment (deposit) before the translation starts, and payment on the day the translation is received. In terms of ethical or ethical risk document screening, Centers B and C explicitly state that they do not accept translations of research abstracts, theses intended for graduation submission, academic position applications, or any documents that are inappropriate, defamatory, or illegal.

Director B: “(..) We will not accept translation jobs for dissertations because we believe it is the responsibility of the students to do it themselves, including research works that professors will use for academic promotion. It's also a matter of research ethics (and ours). We have consulted with the head of the Research Ethics Committee, who told us that we could translate questionnaires or experimental reports, but for dissertations or research papers, he didn't specify clearly. He left it to us to decide, and we chose not to accept translations for those.”

The uniform process across Centers A, B, C, and D, involving specific coordination roles and certification stamps for translations, highlights a standard industry practice that ensures quality and accountability (Risku et al., 2016). The variations in payment processes among the centers reflect their individual operational strategies and client handling techniques, which can influence their market competitiveness and financial sustainability (Akarapong Untong & Mingsarn Kaosa-ard, 2014). The ethical considerations in document screening at Centers B and C align with broader professional standards that emphasize ethical responsibility in translation practices (Valdeón, 2021). The summary of the process benchmarking is presented in table 5.

Table 5: Process benchmarking summary

Center	Process Benchmarking Summary
Center A	Employs 1-2 staff members for translation coordination. Uses a certification stamp for verified translations. Translations are reviewed by clients before the final stamp is applied. Uses standard payment models without specific ethical restrictions.
Center B	Like A in staffing and certification processes. Ethical document screening prohibits translations of theses, research abstracts, and similar documents for academic integrity. Offers multiple payment options including full and partial payments.
Center C	Staffing and certification like A and B. Also adheres to strict ethical screening standards, rejecting documents that could compromise academic or professional integrity. Payment models include options for full and partial pre-payments.
Center D	Coordinates translation services with 1-2 dedicated staff. Implements a certification stamp like the other centers. Reviews translations before certification but does not specify ethical restrictions or detailed payment models.

4) *Product Benchmarking*: In benchmarking products and services, it was found that all four centers, A, B, C, and D, offer similar types of services, primarily translation and training or seminars. However, there are distinct offerings among them: one center offers a Master's program in translation and another in interpretation, one center conducts standardization tests for translators, another publishes translation-related books, and another offers foreign language training. Regarding quality development in translation work, all centers agreed on the importance of translators being experts in the specific subjects they translate. Additionally, a process may be needed for a third party to verify the accuracy of translations.

Regarding translation clients, the four centers have similar types of clients, including government agencies, private sector companies, shops, and individuals. However, the proportion of clients in each group can vary based on the center's context and expertise. For instance, some centers, located in research-focused universities with extensive medical and health science faculties, have a higher number of clients needing scientific and medical document translation.

However, none of the four centers offer interpreter services. Interviews with executives revealed that providing interpretation services is not suitable for university translation centers due to cost considerations. The overhead fees required by the university can make the service fees uncompetitive, as shown in the excerpt from the interview with the director of Center A.

Director A: "We let our clients contact the interpreters directly because if we offered interpreting services like translation services, the fees would be very expensive. We would need to ask the interpreters how much they would charge, then we would have to add a 10% profit for the center and another 10% for the faculty. The price would end up being much higher. Therefore, we do not intend to specialize in this area."

Moreover, as illustrated in the following excerpt from the interview with the director of Center D, interpretation often requires specific equipment and can be limited by the university faculty's schedule constraints, as interpreting work sometimes involves travel to different provinces or extends over several days or even months, which regular faculty members with teaching responsibilities cannot accommodate.

Director C: "Actually, our center focuses more on translation even though we often have clients contacting us for interpreters. Currently, there are faculty members who work as interpreters, but they are hired privately because if hired through the center, the process would be more complicated. For instance, we would need to prepare equipment and plan for solving potential problems in advance."

The diverse offerings among the centers, such as specialized master's programs and translation standardization tests, indicate a tailored approach to meeting specific client needs and expanding their service portfolio (Sununta Siengthai, 2015). The emphasis on translator expertise in specific subjects they translate is crucial for maintaining service quality and is in line with industry standards that demand specialized knowledge and skills (Sansoen Sattavorn, 2020). The absence of interpreter services across the centers, as revealed through executive interviews, points to a strategic decision influenced by cost considerations and operational challenges, which align with the broader market dynamics observed in public service interpretation sectors (Yamamoto, 2019). The summary of the product benchmarking is presented in table 6.

The discussions and findings from the benchmarked translation and interpretation centers highlight their operational dynamics and strategic orientations, resonating with several theoretical frameworks that enhance the understanding of their practices. Applying benchmarking theory, as described by Robere (2000), demonstrates

how these centers continually improve through clear strategic goals and quality management, supported by Newmark's (1988) emphasis on maintaining high translation standards to enhance reputation. The significance of Academic and Professional Integration is evident in the role of educational activities in professional practice, aligning with the views of Ojeda and Muñoz (2019). Insights from Human Resource Management theories explain the centers' staffing strategies and development practices, which are crucial for adapting to the dynamic demands of translation services. Lastly, strategic decisions around not offering interpreter services, analyzed through Yamamoto (2019), reflect cost considerations and market dynamics, pointing to a nuanced understanding of service provision within the competitive landscape of translation and interpretation services.

Table 6: Product benchmarking summary

Center	Product Benchmarking Summary
Center A	Offers translation and training seminars, plus a Master's program in translation. Does not offer interpreter services due to cost considerations, allowing clients to directly contact interpreters. Focuses on expert translators in specific subjects.
Center B	Provides translation services, training, and publishes translation-related books. Does not offer interpreter services, focusing instead on expanding its translation offerings with educational materials.
Center C	Offers translation and training, conducts standardization tests for translators, and has a Master's program in interpretation. Similar to others, does not provide interpreter services, focusing on translation specialization.
Center D	Offers translation and foreign language training. Lacks interpreter services due to logistical challenges and faculty constraints. Focuses more on translation while accommodating clients needing interpreters privately.

B. Focus Group Discussion

From a focus group with three representatives from Association T, key insights emerged about the interpreting services provided by the university translation and interpretation centers. These insights can be analyzed using several frameworks: Interpreting Services Strategy (Yamamoto, 2019) for understanding strategic decisions on Community and Conference Interpreting; Human Resource Management (Tongtip Poonlarp & Nattharath Leenakitti, 2016; Sununta Siengthai, 2015) for staffing and compensation strategies; Ethical and Professional Standards (Valdeón, 2021) for precautionary measures like cancellation policies; and Service Provision and Client Relationship Management (Risku et al., 2016) for balancing client expectations with operational challenges.

1) Types of Interpreting Services: The interpreting services are categorized into Community Interpreting and Conference Interpreting:

Community Interpreting caters to nearby community activities such as at police stations, hospitals, and tourist sites, and can be offered on-site or remotely (online or by telephone). This immediacy in service provision necessitates on-call availability of interpreters due to the urgent nature of requests. This mode of interpreting supports the findings of Netima Burapasirawat (2020) who emphasizes the dynamic requirements of interpreters in the labor market, particularly in terms of responsiveness and availability. Community interpreting can be further subdivided into free and paid services:

Free services, ideal for public welfare activities, also serve as a training ground for students or novice interpreters, highlighting an educational component like internship opportunities discussed by Sununta Siengthai (2015), which enhance practical skills through real-world experience.

Paid services are more commercial or require specialized expertise for longer durations. The integration of freelance interpreters in paid services reflects the



flexibility needed in professional interpreting as discussed in Millán and Bartrina (2013), emphasizing the diverse professional paths within translation and interpreting.

Conference Interpreting necessitates experienced and professional interpreters, capable of operating both onsite and remotely. This requirement underscores the high level of expertise needed, aligning with Pöchhacker (2016) discussion on the professional standards and rigorous training required for conference interpreters. The necessity for pre-event coordination and the inability to provide immediate service align with the organizational challenges noted by Ojeda and Muñoz (2019), who highlight the logistical complexities in scheduling and planning interpreting services. Conference interpreting is divided into two sub-types: Consecutive Interpreting (CI) and Simultaneous Interpreting (SI).

Consecutive Interpreting (CI) involves the interpreter translating after the speaker has spoken. This can be done both at the actual event location or online (e.g., via Zoom). CI does not require special equipment, just an appropriate setting from the event organizers. The time for interpretation should match the speaking time, without summary or abbreviation.

Simultaneous Interpreting (SI) involves translating at the same time as the speaker is speaking. This type requires special equipment. The center should manage equipment rental to ensure quality, avoiding any inconvenience that might arise from poor-quality equipment provided by the client. For events longer than an hour, two interpreters are typically needed to work together, with both being compensated.

2) Precautions in the Interpreting Process: Travel and Accommodation for Interpreters: Incorporating travel time into the hired duration addresses the logistical aspects of service provision, aligning with Valdeón (2021) who emphasizes the practical considerations in providing interpretation services.

Job Cancellation: The cancellation policy reflects a common practice in service industries where terms are designed to minimize financial loss while accommodating client needs, a balance discussed in Risku et al. (2016) as crucial for maintaining client-provider relationships.

Compensation Differences Between CI and SI: This segment illustrates the nuanced understanding of the skills required for different types of interpreting, which (Sununta Siengthai, 2015) suggests should be recognized in human resource practices within the interpreting sector.

Half-Day and Full-Day Rates: Establishing specific rates for different durations of service provision not only standardizes billing practices but also aligns with industry norms where service duration directly influences compensation, as noted by Tongtip Poonlarp and Nattharath Leenakitti (2016).

The discussions from the focus group reveal a complex landscape of interpreting services that require nuanced management of human resources, strategic planning, and a deep understanding of the professional and ethical standards in the interpreting industry. These findings highlight the critical role of universities in preparing interpreters to meet the diverse and dynamic demands of the market.

In conclusion, the benchmarking of four university-based translation and interpretation centers revealed key insights across strategic, performance, process, and product dimensions. Centers A, B, and C focus on maintaining high standards in translation quality and academic integration, which enhances their reputation and operational outcomes, aligning with benchmarking theory and reputation management frameworks. Center D, in contrast, prioritizes revenue generation with less emphasis on academic reputation. The study also highlighted how human resource strategies and ethical considerations, particularly in handling complex translations, contribute to service quality. Additionally, all centers face challenges in offering interpretation

services due to cost and logistical constraints, reflecting broader market dynamics. These findings underscore the importance of clear strategic goals, quality management, and academic integration in shaping the effectiveness of translation and interpretation centers.

V. CONCLUSION

This study explores the crucial role of reputation and quality management in university-based translation centers and offers actionable strategies for enhancing service offerings to meet global market demands. By applying benchmarking theory and reputation management frameworks, the research presents a robust model for universities seeking to strengthen their translation and interpretation services. Key findings suggest that strategic adjustments, such as the introduction of interpretation services and the adoption of flexible administrative structures, can significantly enhance an institution's ability to meet client needs while fostering cross-cultural communication. These insights contribute to the existing literature by highlighting the pivotal role academic institutions can play in the translation industry, with broader implications for both community engagement and global economic integration. The following section delves into a detailed discussion of these findings, offering a deeper analysis of their significance and potential applications.

The findings of this research indicate that X University is well positioned to establish a "Center of Excellence in Translation and Interpretation" to serve the Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC) and its surrounding communities. Transforming the existing document translation unit into a center of excellence would necessitate a strategic restructuring of both management and services to better meet client expectations. This evolution would not only enhance the university's service offerings but also promote the development of skilled translators

and interpreters who can support the growing demands within the EEC region.

Key strategies that X University's Translation and Interpreting Center could adopt are closely aligned with the theoretical frameworks of Reputation and Quality Management, as well as Human Resource Management. First, maintaining a network of skilled translators and interpreters, including both university faculty and professional freelance translators, would not only uphold but enhance the center's reputation for delivering high-quality services. This approach supports the findings of Millán and Bartrina (2013) and Newmark (1988), emphasizing that reputation in the translation industry is deeply tied to the consistency and accuracy of services provided.

Second, adopting a flexible administrative structure that facilitates rapid service delivery, including sufficient operational staff, aligns with the recommendations of (Sununta Siengthai, 2015) in managing human resources effectively. This flexibility is crucial for balancing academic duties with professional service offerings, allowing the center to respond efficiently to client needs without compromising quality. Third, the center should play a pivotal role in producing highly qualified translators and interpreters through both degree and non-degree programs. This integration of academic and professional activities is supported by Ojeda and Muñoz (2019), who stress the importance of academic institutions in shaping the next generation of professionals.

A key finding of this research is that no existing university-based centers formally offer interpretation services, which represents a gap in the market. If X University's center were to introduce interpretation services, it would differentiate itself significantly in the competitive landscape. According to Yamamoto (2019), offering such services requires careful consideration of cost constraints, but the potential benefits in terms of



reputation and service diversification could outweigh these challenges.

Moreover, interpreting services at X University need not operate on a fully commercial basis due to resource limitations. Instead, the center could focus on community interpretation, which is ideal for university faculty and students seeking practice. This approach would require less preparation time, contribute to a positive community image, and provide valuable hands-on experience. For conference interpretation, a more specialized service, the center could collaborate with professional partners, thereby balancing the resource demands while still offering high-quality services.

The findings of this research extend beyond X University, offering valuable insights for a variety of organizations that aspire to promote the quality of translation and interpretation services. The strategic approaches identified in this research can significantly enhance the capacity of both university-based and other institutions to respond effectively to the needs of the local and global economy. By fostering proficient translation and interpretation services, these centers can facilitate international business, enhance cross-cultural communication, and contribute to global connectivity. By improving communication barriers, these centers facilitate better business practices, healthcare delivery, and legal processes, thereby enhancing economic efficiency and social integration. They not only support economic growth by enabling smoother transactions and interactions on a global scale but also play a crucial role in enhancing community engagement and participation. Therefore, the structured and strategic models derived from this study provide a robust framework for institutions to elevate their translation and interpreting services, thereby making a substantive impact on both local communities and the global marketplace.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This work was financially supported by (i) Burapha University (BUU), (ii) Thailand Science Research and Innovation (TSRI), and (iii) National Science Research and Innovation Fund (NSRF) (Fundamental Fund: Grant no. HU033/2566).

REFERENCES

- Akera Ratchavieng, Suriya Wachirawongpaisarn, Patamanun Hiranitawat, Anan Sillapee, & Phongsak Phakamach. (2021). 360° Benchmarking: High-performance innovative organization tools (in Thai). *Rattanakosin Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 3(3), 47–65.
- Akarapong Untong, & Mingsarn Kaosa-ard. (2014). Spas performances benchmarking and operation efficiency (in Thai). *Applied Economics Journal*, 21(1), 1–19.
- Auschala Chalayonnavin. (2019). The working process for human trafficking resolution in order to reduce the risk of human trafficking incidents over the cross border region (in Thai). *NKRAFA Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 7, 43–54.
- Auntiga Phung-nga, Thanawut Limpanitgul, Pimphun Sujarinphong, & Wanvipha Hongnaphadol. (2016). *The study of convention capability of Thailand: The study of Thailand MICE capability* (in Thai). Retrieved from Thailand Science Research and Innovation (TSRI) website: https://elibrary.tsri.or.th/fullP/RDG5850048/RDG5850048V04/RDG5850048V04_full.pdf
- Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC). (2019). *About EEC: Who we are*. Retrieved from <https://www.eeco.or.th/en/vision-mission>
- Korawan Phromyaem. (2022). The study of linguistic landscape of Chinese language and the translation methods of business names in tourism areas of Chiang Mai (in Thai). *Journal of Human Sciences*, 23(1), 257–278.
- Krippendorff, K. (2018). *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology* (4th ed.). Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Krueger, R. A., & Casey, M. A. (2009). *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Kumari, A. (2019). Translation and globalisation. *Contemporary Literary Review India*, 6(2), 11–24.
- MGR Online. (2020, September 18). 3 Major agencies jointly launch 'EEC Automation Park' project at Burapha University (in Thai). *MGR Online*. Retrieved from <https://mgronline.com/local/detail/9630000095659>

- Millán, C., & Bartrina, F. (2013). *The Routledge Handbook of Translation Studies*. Oxfordshire, England: Routledge.
- Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation. (2020). *Number of higher education institutions, academic year 2020, classified by province* (in Thai). Retrieved from https://data.mhesi.go.th/dataset/univ_uni_11_05
- Netima Burapasiriwat. (2020). Needs assessment for labor market of Korean interpreter in Thailand: A case study in online job advertisement (in Thai). *Korean Language and Cultural Studies Journal*, 2(1), 153–173.
- Newmark, P. (1988). *A Textbook of Translation*. Hertfordshire, England: Prentice-Hall International.
- Ojeda, B. M., & Muñoz, M. L. R. (Eds.). (2019). *Translation in and for Society: Sociological and Cultural Approaches in Translation*. Córdoba, Spain: UCOPress.
- Pöchhacker, F. (2011). Conference interpreting. In K. Malmkjær & K. Windle (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Translation Studies* (pp. 307–324). doi:10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199239306.013.0022
- Pöchhacker, F. (2016). *Introducing Interpreting Studies* (2nd ed.). Oxfordshire, England: Routledge.
- Puttachart Limsiruenrai. (2022). Research to obtain guidelines for Thai-English translation for developing linguistic landscape in tourist attractions in Thailand. *Manutsayasat Wichakan*, 29(2), 200–222.
- Ratchanee Piyathamrongchai. (2018). Thai interpreters' roles and problems in cultural differences in the context of japanization: A case study of Japanese enterprises in the industrial estate of Thailand (in Thai). *Journal of Language, Religion and Culture*, 7(2), 51–90.
- Risku, H., Pein-Weber, C., & Milosevic, J. (2016). "The task of the translator": Comparing the views of the client and the translator. *International Journal of Communication*, 10, 989–1008.
- Robere, P. J. (2000). *Benchmarking: A Systems Approach for Continual Improvement* (in Thai). Bangkok, Thailand: Durakitbundit University Press.
- Sansoen Sattavorn. (2020). Predictors of Japanese interpreters' organizational commitment (in Thai). *NIDA Business Journal*, 26, 153–171.
- Stapenhurst, T. (2009). *The Benchmarking Book: A How-to-Guide to Best Practice for Managers and Practitioners*. Oxford, England: Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Sununta Siengthai. (2015). Japanese-style human resource management in Thailand (in Thai). *Japanese Studies Journal*, 32(2), 1–17.
- Tongtip Poonlarp. (2016). Investigating the needs for interpreters in the Thai labor market through online job advertisements (in Thai). *Journal of Letters*, 45(2), 263–303.
- Tongtip Poonlarp, & Nattharath Leenakitti. (2016). "What do employers want?" A study of online job advertisements for translators in Thailand (in Thai). *Journal of Language and Culture*, 35(2), 7–33.
- Valdeón, R. A. (2021). Perspectives on interpreting. *Perspectives*, 29(4), 441–453.
- Wannida Yuenyong. (2019). *Problems regarding Japanese interpretation conducted by Thai interpreters in industrial factories of Thailand: A case study of differences between novice and professional interpreters* (in Thai) (Master's thesis). Retrieved from https://ethesisarchive.library.tu.ac.th/thesis/2019/TU_2019_6006032046_11420_11592.pdf
- Yamamoto, K. (2019). Toward deployment of public service interpreting and translation in Thailand: The Japanese case from a comparative perspective. *Kasetsart Journal of Social Sciences*, 40(2), 303–310.