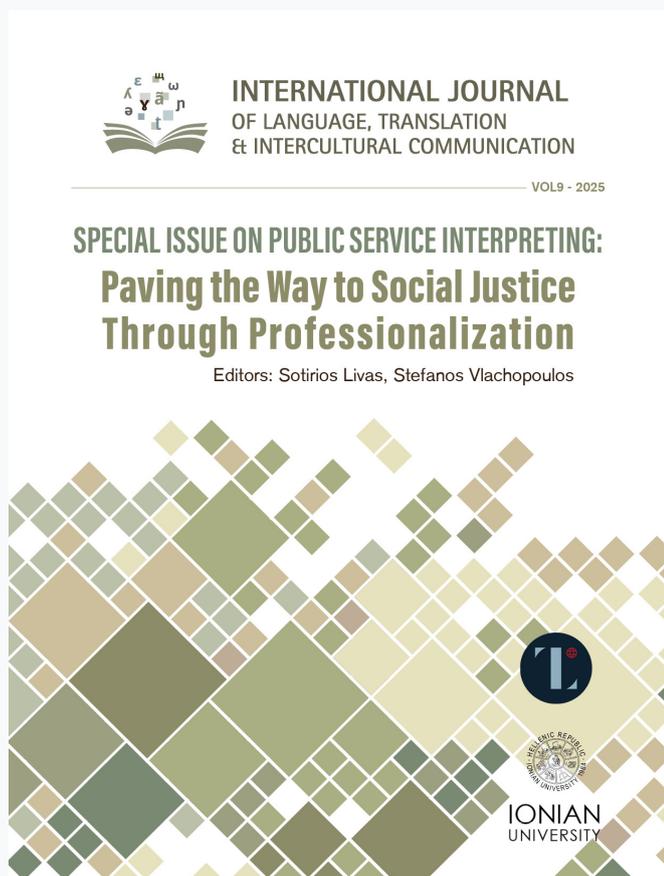INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL
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Public Service Interpreter Training

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Public Service Interpreter Training: Evaluating the Experiential Learning Approach of the Lives in Translation Internship

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Abstract

Lives in Translation (LiT) is a community-based interpreting and translation program at Rutgers University-Newark, educating and training undergraduate students through a combination of structured coursework and experiential internships. LiT's pedagogical model combines theoretically informed coursework with experiential learning through structured, community-based internship placements. The present study provides the first empirical evaluation of the LiT program, reporting findings from a survey completed by 18 undergraduate students who participated in semester-long internships involving Spanish interpreting assignments with community partners, specifically focused on public service interpreting. The survey assessed students' overall satisfaction with the academic program and internship, and their development of professional and performance skills through self-assessments. Results of the quantitative analysis show high student satisfaction with the overall academic program and, more specifically, internship experiences. Students reported significant perceived growth in competencies essential to effective public service interpreting, particularly in consecutive interpreting and management of professional boundaries. These findings underscore the value of integrating strategically designed coursework with experiential learning in public service interpreting, offering an adaptable model for institutions aiming to effectively prepare qualified public service interpreters and address growing multilingual demands in their communities.

Keywords: *community engagement, interpreter training, language access, public service interpreting, teaching methods*

1 Introduction

According to the United States Census Bureau (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022), the population of people who speak a language other than English at home has nearly tripled in the last four decades rising from 23.1 million in 1980 to 67.8 million people in 2019. The languages with the largest numeric increase in speakers are Spanish ranking first and followed by Chinese. US Census Bureau broke down the country's ever-evolving language demographics and it is evident that speakers of languages other than English significantly outpace the English-speaking population's rise.

The U.S. Department of Justice defines individuals who do not speak English as their first language, and who have limited proficiency in reading, speaking, writing, or understanding of English are identified as limited-English proficient (LEP)[1]. Although LEP may not fully capture the complexities and nuances inherent in linguistic and intercultural communication, the growing presence of LEP populations accessing public services underscores the critical need for highly

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[1] Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice Commonly Asked Questions and Answers Regarding Limited English Proficient (LEP) Individuals. [(accessed on 1 April 2025)]; Available online: https://www.lep.gov/faq/faqs-rights-lep-individuals/commonly-asked-questions-and-answers-regarding-limited-english

skilled and culturally responsive public service interpreters. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the job roles for translators and interpreters are expected to grow 24% through 2029, more than three times the average job growth rate. As language diversity continues to expand, the practice of communicating across languages, whether professionally or privately, is a daily reality (Vieira et al., 2020). Persons identified as LEP are impacted by various barriers to legal aid access and government-agency resources, including specifically language barriers, which create significant inequities and challenges in understanding their rights and accessing legal resources.

Drawing from the framework of community-academic partnerships, this paper describes the development and implementation of an academic program that provides students not only with the fundamental background in theoretical translation studies but also includes a practical approach to support students in gaining professional experience in public service interpreting. In this paper, we focus specifically on the Lives in Translation (LiT) program, a community-based translation and interpreting initiative designed to train public service interpreters through experiential internships. While LiT provides training for both students enrolled in the academic undergraduate program, focused on Translation and Interpreting Studies, and student volunteers, this study concentrates explicitly on the experiences and skill development of undergraduate students who completed structured internships with community-based partners. Building a solid training system that includes professional experience and situated learning is key to enhancing learners' capacity to think and act like professionals and preparing students to become qualified interpreters. (Gonzalez-Davies and Enriquez Raido, 2018).

The article is structured as follows: Section 2 presents an overview of the multilingualism of Rutgers University, Newark, the Lives in Translation program, and describes the layout of the PSI coursework and internship, including evaluation criteria. Section 4 provides an overview of the study, detailing research methods, research questions, and participant demographics. Section 5 presents the data analysis and quantitative results. Section 6 offers a discussion of these results, interpreting their implications. Section 7 outlines program outcomes, specifically highlighting nationally recognized certification opportunities funded for students. Finally, Section 8 provides concluding remarks, limitations of this study, and prospects for future research are discussed.

2 Representation of Multilingualism

Rutgers University-Newark, U.S. (RU-N) is an increasingly diverse public university in a globalized city, in which faculty interact and collaborate with students from over 100 countries in teaching and research. In 2019-2020, Rutgers University conducted a language survey in which 11,024 participants, including students (67%), faculty (26%), and staff members (10%) across all three Rutgers campuses took part (Language Engagement Project Research Advisory Council, 2020). The survey results revealed that 59% reported understanding and/or speaking a Language Other Than English (LOTE), 84% indicated that they have studied a LOTE, and 63% considered themselves heritage speakers of a LOTE. Collectively, the students, faculty, and staff members spoke 125 languages, including minority and endangered languages.

Drawing on these findings, the Language Engagement Project Research Advisory Council proposed several action items designed to highlight and leverage multilingualism present across the university's campuses. Two primary recommendations include: (1) providing course credit for students who apply their non-English language skills in professional and clinical setting, and (2)

presenting initiatives that support the development of students' non-English language as a university-wide priority.

In line with these objectives, Lives in Translation (LiT), the Translation and Interpreting program within the Spanish and Portuguese Studies Department at Rutgers University-Newark, offers a notable example of language-focused academic and experiential learning opportunities. Established in 2015, LiT initially connected student interns and volunteers with law clinics, non-profits organizations, and community partners in Newark and the surrounding area that required translation and interpreting services. The program has since expanded to offer an academic program for students to specialize in translation and interpreting, service-learning internships, speaker series and workshops led by experts in the field, and opportunities for students to receive nationally recognized certifications. Since 2020, LiT has provided nationally recognized certificates to 15 students, internship opportunities to 61 students, and currently has 31 students enrolled in the academic program. Furthermore, LiT has partnered with more than 25 organizations—ranging from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice (NJISC) to Rutgers Law's Immigration Rights Clinic and Child Advocacy Law Clinic—to provide language services that bridge communication gaps for speakers with limited English proficiency. By developing this program and implementing the survey-suggested action items, LiT not only celebrates the multilingualism at RU-N, but through rigorous coursework and experiential learning, equips the next generation of language professionals with the expertise needed.

LiT is situated within a higher education anchor institution (HEIs), a place-bound institution with strong regional connections that shape socioeconomic development (Corazza et al., 2023). These institutions are designed to foster collaborative initiatives with local stakeholders, encourage shared values and become the "social glue" of a community (Morrison, 2022). Theoretically speaking, a stakeholder is defined as "any group or individual who is affected by or can affect the achievement of an organization's objectives" (Friedman et al., 2013). Through these collaborations, HEIs and community stakeholders leverage their respective expertise and resources to address pressing social issues and inequalities. By evolving in tandem with their communities, HEIs can promote social and economic growth, strengthen community ties, or help bridge the gap in access to public services and resources (Corazza et al., 2023). Fully recognizing its role as a HEI, RU-N offers courses and programs that not only teach students the concepts and skills related to translation and linguistics which may prove useful in their professional lives but also provide them with a toolkit to further their knowledge of their own linguistic and cultural identities.

3 Public Service Interpreting

Community Interpreting (CI), or public service interpreting (PSI) as it is commonly referenced, is a service and a profession deeply rooted in the communities and societies that face language barriers (Valero Garcés and Martin, 2008; Remael and Carroll, 2015). Its implementation is essential to ensure that individuals who do not speak, write, or understand the dominant societal language have access to public services and resources on par with those who do. PSI plays a crucial role in facilitating and supporting multilingualism in a myriad of situations in the world today. PSI is grounded in the principle of providing access to information regarding basic services for individuals who do not speak the societal language (Mikkelson and Jourdenais, 2015). Given this foundation, PSI intertwines concepts of language and culture with concepts of social justice,

equity, and basic human rights by providing language access to those seeking public services and resources. Although there are numerous definitions that describe the role of a community interpreter, the underlining theme across all formalizations is that this interpreting specialization supports access to community services.

The principles that guide action in PSI may be shaped by several factors, such as the society involved, interaction with other cultures, the participants' education background, ethical beliefs, and personal values (Valero-Garcés, 2021). A successful interpreter-mediated conversation relies on collaborative efforts by all persons involved in the communicative chain as described by Corsellis (2008; 2002). The interpreter's communicative solutions are not enough to bridge the linguistic gap between parties, other professionals that act as providers (social workers, NGO workers, public service workers, etc.) are also expected to collaborate to ensure an effective dialogue. However, their communicative interactions are at times hindered due to cultural barriers, communicative effectiveness, and public trust (Valero-Garcés, 2021). Recent studies (Aguilar-Solano 2015; Angelelli 2020; Gil-Bardají 2020; Monzó-Nebot and Wallace, 2020; Burdeus-Domingo et al. 2021) have revealed shared challenges and obstacles faced by professional and non-professional interpreters and translators in public spaces. Interpreters have emphasized the importance of improving the communicative effectiveness of public service institutions and organizations, which will, in turn, increase public trust within the LEP community. Unsatisfactory interpreter-mediated conversations in public services may lead to a loss of public trust, which highlights the importance of PSI services (Gavioli & Wadensjö, 2023). Training programs that bring to the fore the risks and benefits of interpreters' work, while also focusing on developing essential skills and qualifications for interpreters, can raise awareness of the interpreters' value, improve their working conditions in the public sector, and ensure they are well-prepared to meet the challenges of their profession providing high-quality services to the public.

2.2 PSI Coursework

Through the program's academic offerings, an introductory course in translation and interpreting serves as a prerequisite, providing students theoretically anchored knowledge, interpreting strategies for consecutive and simultaneous interpreting, practice with sight translation, and the essential skills required in professional interpreting settings. Moreover, students practice interpreting notetaking, morphosyntactic transformation and transcoding, and short-term memory exercises. An additional requirement is an introductory course in Linguistics, which provides students with foundational knowledge of the scientific study of language, examining the similarities and differences across languages in their phonetic, grammatical, and semantic structures. Students enrolled in this course explore theories of language acquisition and cognitive processes underlying language development.

Subsequently or concurrently, students complete advanced coursework specifically designed to prepare them for interpreting within medical and legal contexts. These specialized courses critically examine bilingual communication dynamics across varying languages, cultures, ideologies, socioeconomic conditions, and educational backgrounds. The curriculum explicitly addresses the growing demand for effective language services in linguistically diverse societies, highlighting the complex challenges public institutions face in accommodating this need. Integral to this advanced coursework is the study and application of the Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct for Interpreters, which guides ethical decision-making in professional practice.

Furthermore, the curriculum incorporates current international standards, such as ISO 13611:2024 (Interpreting – Guidelines for Community Interpreting). This framework outlines specific requirements and recommended practices for providing effective interpreting in public services, establishing foundational principles aimed at ensuring quality communication for all language communities, and supporting the needs of interpreters, end users, and institutional stakeholders alike.

2.3 PSI Internship

A 15-week internship program was developed to provide students with a weekly, community-based placement of 8–10 hours of interpreting practice, accompanied by a one-hour workshop attended by all classmates in the internship cohort. Students are placed with a community partner in a specialized area of CI (education, legal, medical, media studies, and social services). This internship program is offered in the fall, spring, and during one session in the summer. Since the summer of 2020, this program has been offered to 61 students. To ensure adequate background knowledge, successful completion of an introductory translation studies course is a prerequisite. All students have successfully completed an introductory course of translation studies in which students learn (a) a variety of translation theory to facilitate the comprehension of multidisciplinary translation, (b) the aspects of bilingualism and development of translation competencies, (c) the cognitive effort and process of interpreting, and (d) the role of an interpreter in terms of cultural brokering, ethics, sociology, and visibility.

The first week of the internship students complete an onboarding process, which consists of a university-based orientation through LiT's workshop, and a community-partner based orientation. At the LiT orientation, students review professional code of conduct for interpreter and interpreter code for ethics, students complete a self-assessment to evaluate current competencies, students complete an internship objective form and review digital tools and the shared platform for covering Internship requirements are listed in **Table 1**.

Activity	Description
Orientation	• Introduce the program's objectives and expectations. • Review and implement ethical codes and standards of conduct. • Discuss and review confidentiality forms and organization policies.
Weekly workshops	• Learn and discuss a variety of translation theory to facilitate comprehension of multidisciplinary translation.
Shadowing	• Observe experienced professionals in the field on how tasks are performed, decisions are made, and troubleshooting is completed.
Supervisor evaluation	• Evaluations conducted by the internship placement supervisor at the mid-semester and end-of-semester. • Provide interns with formal and constructive feedback.

Self-evaluation	• Process of reflecting on own performance, skill development, and professional growth. • Interns complete a formal self-evaluation at the mid-semester and end-of-semester. • Interns are required to complete a self-assessment for their personal records after each interpreting session.
Final paper	• Interns submit a formal analysis of their experiences, connecting their techniques to theoretical frameworks and data-driven insights.

Table 1. Internship program requirements.

Moreover, the LiT orientation provides students with role responsibilities, a list of ethics codes and standards of practice guidelines, as well as a contract agreement detailing role responsibilities, confidentiality regulations, and organization policies. During orientation, interns are provided with a *How-to* Guide offering practical advice on the meaning-based model of interpreting contextual knowledge and cultural awareness, and consecutive interpreting notetaking. To facilitate easy reference, the guide includes a convenient list of do's and don'ts, summarizing key points and potential pitfalls to avoid. Dos and don'ts are listed in **Table 2**.

Do's	Don'ts
Do use formal tone.	Don't use familiar form of address.
Do introduce yourself.	Don't assume the client knows each provider and the role of each member.
Do speak in the first person.	Don't speak in the third person.
Do note-take while actively listening	Don't try to rely on your memory alone.
Do stand/sit to the side and slightly behind the client.	Don't sit or stand in the middle or between the speakers.
Do become familiar with the possible cultural meanings of gestures.	Don't make assumptions of cultural backgrounds and language variations.

Table 2. Dos and Don'ts list.

To prepare for a meeting or interpreting session, PS interpreters are ideally briefed about the case and terminology, and the format of the conversation or meeting. Moreover, to ease the flow of conversation, interns are given the opportunity to meet with their supervisor to discuss any questions or concerns before the interpreting session and instructed to introduce themselves formally as interpreters. Interns are provided with a *How to Introduce Yourself as the Interpreter* Guide. The guide is illustrated in **Figure 1** below.

> Good morning/afternoon,
>
> I am (first and last name),

> Professional (agency/company) (language-pair) Interpreter.
>
> I will interpret everything said and keep it confidential. I will take notes throughout the interpreting session that are to help in providing an accurate interpretation.
>
> Please speak to each other in short sentences, I may interrupt for clarification.
>
> Please let me know if there's anything you do not understand or need clarification.
>
> Can I be your interpreter today?

Figure 1. How to Introduce Yourself as the Interpreter Guide

This internship provides students with the opportunity to apply their language skills in a particular language, gain experience in the language services industry, and network with professionals in the field. The structured learning outcomes, shared with students at the beginning of the semester, outline specific skills and professional insights essential for effective practice and growth in PSI. These learning outcomes include:

Learning outcomes:

The internship program for PS interpreters had the following learning outcomes:

- To gain knowledge and insight about the national code for translators and the standard of practice for interpreters.

- To apply the various modes of interpreting, consecutive, simultaneous, and sight translation in the specialized domain.

- To improve written and verbal proficiency and lexical competence of target language through attaining an expansion of domain-specific terminology (i.e. legal, medical, etc.).

- To gain knowledge and insight about the profession of interpreting and translating. This internship examines how to begin a career in interpreting/translating through real-world experience.

- To improve written and verbal proficiency of target language through attaining an expansion of legal, court, judicial processes terminology.

- To obtain knowledge in the current judicial system, ethics and professional values, and the importance of linguistic awareness to avoid legal implications.

- To understand and deliver that the interpreter does more than provide a tunnel, they work to make communication so complete that no language barrier remains, the goal

being that the consumer speaking a non-dominant language receives the same resources and treatment as one who speaks the dominant language.

- To understand the effects of linguistic barriers on limited-English proficient individuals and develop awareness of linguistic variation and cultural diversity for intercultural communication.

The weekly workshop provides ongoing training and support for the students through discussions on thematic topics pertaining to the project workload. Students improve their oral and written proficiency not only through the place-based workload (Dahnberg et al., 2023), but also in the workshop, which requires students to complete assignments on textual analysis, peer-review of translated documents, comparative analysis of parallel texts, oral production tasks using consecutive interpreting and simultaneous interpreting, and sight translation of client- and patient-based forms particularly in legal and medical settings. To prepare students for challenges inherent to interpreting in sensitive contexts, such as domestic violence cases or medical prognosis consultation, the curriculum explicitly addresses occupational stress, compassion fatigue, and vicarious trauma (Villalobos et al., 2021). In partnership with the Department of Social Work at RU-N, LiT hosts workshops to provide students with a toolkit to navigate workplace stressors, identify early signs of burnout, and cultivate a sustainable work-life balance. By examining these potential challenges, interns develop the ability to recognize early indicators and implement preventive strategies.

To complete the internship program, students must submit a mid-semester and end-of-semester self-evaluation and internship review, a final paper on the theoretical approaches applied in a service-learning setting, and a portfolio of translated materials including source and target texts.

2.4 Evaluation Criteria

All students complete a mid-semester and end-of-semester self-assessment in which students track and analyze their personal progress in alignment with their previously written internship objectives, which is completed during the onboarding process of the internship. Separately, after each interpreting task, students are asked to complete a post-task self-evaluation.

Internship supervisors complete a mid-semester and end-of-semester student evaluation in which they gather and discuss internship progress from various activities, assignments, and sources to gain a deeper understanding of the students' development throughout the semester. The supervisor evaluation rubric is presented in **Table 3**. This evaluation is completed by a rubric analysis and direct observation, which provides a guide as to students' strengths and developed skills throughout the program, while addressing any challenges or concerns that may arise. Discussions regarding students' progress are held by the director of the internship program, who analyzes the performance review, shares constructive recommendations, and guides employment of feedback to improve skills. According to Tontus (2020), assessment is the process of planning, implementing, clarifying, designing, collecting, analyzing, and re-designing to increase students' learning and development. Internship supervisors are also committed to providing ongoing feedback and support. They schedule regular meetings with students to share their observations, address any concerns, and offer guidance on professional development.

Evaluation Dimensions	Needs Improvement 1-2	Meets Expectations 3-4	Excellent 5-6	Score
Quality of Work	Work was done in a careless manner and was of erratic quality; work assignments were usually late and required review; numerous errors made.	With a few minor exceptions, adequately performed most work requirements; most work assignments submitted in a timely manner; made occasional errors.	Thoroughly and accurately performed all work requirements; submitted all work assignments on time; made few if any errors.	
Initiative and Creativity	Had little observable drive and required close supervision; showed little if any interest in meeting standards; did not seek out additional work and frequently procrastinated in completing assignments; suggested no new ideas or options.	Worked without extensive supervision; in some cases, found problems to solve and sometimes asked for additional work assignments; normally set his/her own goals and, in a few cases, tried to exceed requirements; offered some creative ideas.	Was a self-starter; consistently sought new challenges and asked for additional work assignments; regularly approached and solved problems independently; frequently proposed innovative and creative ideas, solutions, and/or options.	
Attendance and Punctuality	Was absent excessively and/or was almost always late for internship	Was never absent and almost always on time; or usually reported to internship as scheduled, but was always on time; or usually reported to internship as scheduled and was almost always on-time	Always reported to internship as scheduled with no absences and was always on-time	

Organizational Fit	Was unwilling or unable to understand and support the organization's mission, vision, and goals; exhibited difficulty in adapting to organizational norms, expectations, and culture; frequently seemed to disregard appropriate authority and decision-making channels	Adequately understood and supported the organization's mission, vision, and goals; satisfactorily adapted to organizational norms, expectations, and culture; generally functioned within appropriate authority and decision-making channels	Completely understood and fully supported the organization's mission, vision, and goals; readily and successfully adapted to organizational norms, expectations, and culture; consistently functioned within appropriate authority and decision-making channels	
Consistent and Responsible	Was generally unreliable in completing work assignments; did not follow instructions and procedures promptly or accurately; was careless, and work needed constant follow-up; required close supervision	Was generally reliable in completing tasks; normally followed instructions and procedures; was usually attentive to detail, but work had to be reviewed occasionally; functioned with only moderate supervision	Was consistently reliable in completing work assignments; always followed instructions and procedures well; was careful and extremely attentive to detail; required little or minimum supervision	
Response to Feedback	Rarely sought supervision when necessary; was unwilling to accept constructive criticism and advice; seldom if ever implemented supervisor suggestions; was usually unwilling to explore personal strengths and areas for improvement	On occasion, sought supervision when necessary; was generally receptive to constructive criticism and advice; implemented supervisor suggestions in most cases; was usually willing to explore personal strengths	Actively sought supervision when necessary; was always receptive to constructive criticism and advice; was always willing to explore personal strengths and areas for improvement	

		and areas for improvement		

Table 3. Supervisor evaluation rubric – grading rubric performance ratings

Throughout the semester and as part of the accompanying workshop, students are instructed to identify areas for improvement aligned with the core competencies required in PSI while critically reflecting on their performance. This reflective process centers on the students' internship experiences, providing a structured opportunity to assess their current interpreting skills and related academic achievements. Thus, students utilize a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis, as proposed by Tipton and Furmanek (2016) for interpreter profile evaluation in professional development. The SWOT framework guides students in making a distinction between internal competencies and external factors that influence their performance and professional development as PSI interns. Adapted from Tipton and Furmanek (2016), a set of prompts guides students in evaluating their PSI competencies, addressing key questions including:

- Do my current qualifications allow me to access relevant interpreting opportunities in my local market?

- Am I making the most of program offerings such as workshops, speaker series, networking events, and professional memberships?

- Do I have access to the resources I need to prepare appropriately for assignments?

- Have I encountered situations in my internship that highlight areas where I need further education or training?

- Is the reality of interning as an interpreter meeting my expectations?

- How does my internship experience and academic performance set me apart in the field?

- Am I working in contexts beyond the scope of my interpreter training and education?

Upon completing this exercise, students are invited to share their reflections within their intern cohort, encouraging peer exchange and collaborative learning. Moreover, this collaborative approach in reflecting on their experiential learning promotes sustained engagement with the broader interpreting community, thereby enabling students to remain informed about evolving industry standards, emerging best practices, and developments in the field of PSI.

Furthermore, as there has been no previously published research examining the methods and experiences associated with this internship program, this article presents the first publicly available data and analysis on its outcomes.

3 The present study

This section of the paper describes the survey study on the student program experience and internship participation experience in public service interpreting. The wider overall objectives of the survey were to identify (1) student satisfaction both on their academic coursework and their internship experience, (2) determine whether and how effectively the internship component facilitates the transfer of classroom-based skills and theories to practical, community-based interpreting contexts, and (3) measure student skill development by assessing specific competencies. This paper includes the quantitative data related to objectives 1, 2 and 3 mentioned above. The survey also collected qualitative data, and these findings will be included in subsequent work, given the need for further analysis. Furthermore, because the internship is offered every semester, data collection remains ongoing, and future cohorts will expand our understanding of the program's impact.

3.1 Research method

The survey was designed using the online survey tool Qualtrics, and it was reviewed to ensure participant usability ease and comprehensibility by faculty in the program. Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board at Rutgers University. Participants were contacted online by means of emails shared with the program's academic department. The requirements for participation in the survey is to have completed a semester-long internship with the LiT program by being paired with a community-based partner to conduct interpreting assignments and practice in the field of PSI. The online self-administered survey collected data from the following categories: (1) academic background (4 questions), (2) language background (3 questions), (3) demographic questions (4 questions), (4) internship and program assessment and evaluation (15 questions).

At the beginning of the survey, participants were presented with a concise overview of the study, including information on survey duration (approximately 8-10 minutes), data usage and storage protocols, privacy safeguards, and the voluntary nature of participation. Following this introduction, participants were required to provide consent before proceeding with the questionnaire.

All quantitative data was obtained using a linear scale ranging from 0 to 100% for more precise measurements.

3.2 Research questions

The present study utilized a qualitative descriptive method and analyzed the responses from student participants in both the academic program and the internship to examine perspectives on program and internship effectiveness and satisfaction, internship experiences, and the professional and performance skill development for students in PSI training.

With these goals in mind, this study investigates the following four research questions:

RQ1: How do students rate their overall experience in the academic program?

RQ2: How do students rate their overall experience in the internship program?

RQ3: To what extent did the internship enable students to effectively apply classroom-based skills and theoretical knowledge to real-world contexts?

RQ4: To what extent did student experience in the program contribute to knowledge, skills, and personal development in the following areas: cultural competence, effective speaking, ethical reasoning, language development, notetaking when interpreting, professional boundaries, and consecutive and simultaneous interpreting?

3.3 Participants

Eighteen full-time undergraduate students (14 female, 4 male) completed the survey. All were Spanish speakers, categorized as follows: 8 first-language speakers, 3 heritage speakers, 1 second-language learner, and 6 simultaneous bilinguals. Students represented a range of majors, including Marketing (n = 1), Psychiatric Rehabilitation and Psychology (n = 2), psychology (n = 4), Political Science (n = 3), Spanish (n = 3), Social Work (n = 3), and Unspecified (n = 2). Students indicated that they work in the following fields: Community, Public, or Social Service, Education, Healthcare, Law and Government, Translation and Interpreting, and Retail.

3.4 Statistical analyses

To evaluate the results, the quantitative data from the survey were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods, performed in RStudio for Statistical Computing (R Team, 2024). Mean ratings and standard deviations were calculated to assess student perceptions across two main skill areas evaluated in the survey: Professional Skill Development and Performance Skill Development. The data were analyzed following a descriptive analysis performed using the "tidyverse" (Wickham et al., 2019) and "dlyr" packages (Wickham and Bryan, 2023).

       The Professional Skill Development analysis examined students' self-assessed growth in *cultural competence*, *ethical reasoning*, and *professional boundaries*. Performance Skill Development analysis included *effective speaking*, *language development*, *consecutive interpreting*, and *simultaneous interpreting*. These analyses provided clear insights into the relative strengths and areas for further development as perceived by student participants, offering a structured reflection of the internship program's effectiveness.

4 Results

This section reports on the results of the quantitative portion of the survey. Professional and Performance Skill Development are analyzed first, based on student self-assessments. This is followed by an evaluation of students' overall internship experience and satisfaction with the offerings of the academic program.

4.1 Professional skill development

In the section of the survey pertaining to program and internship evaluation, the following question was asked Q21. "*To what extent did your experience in the program contribute to your knowledge, skills, and personal development in the following areas: cultural competence, effective speaking, ethical reasoning, language development, notetaking when interpreting, professional boundaries,*

and consecutive and simultaneous interpreting?". The analysis of this question in two-fold: (1) Professional Skill Development, which consists of *cultural competence, ethical reasoning,* and *professional boundaries,* and (2) Performance Skill Development, which consists of *effective speaking, language development, notetaking when interpreting, and consecutive and simultaneous interpreting.* **Figure 2** illustrates the Professional Skill Development indicating that students experienced the most skill development in *professional boundaries* (mean = 98.6, *sd* = 4.13), followed by *cultural competence* (mean = 96.7, *sd* = 4.82)*,* and lastly *ethical reasoning* (mean = 95.1, *sd* = 7.69).
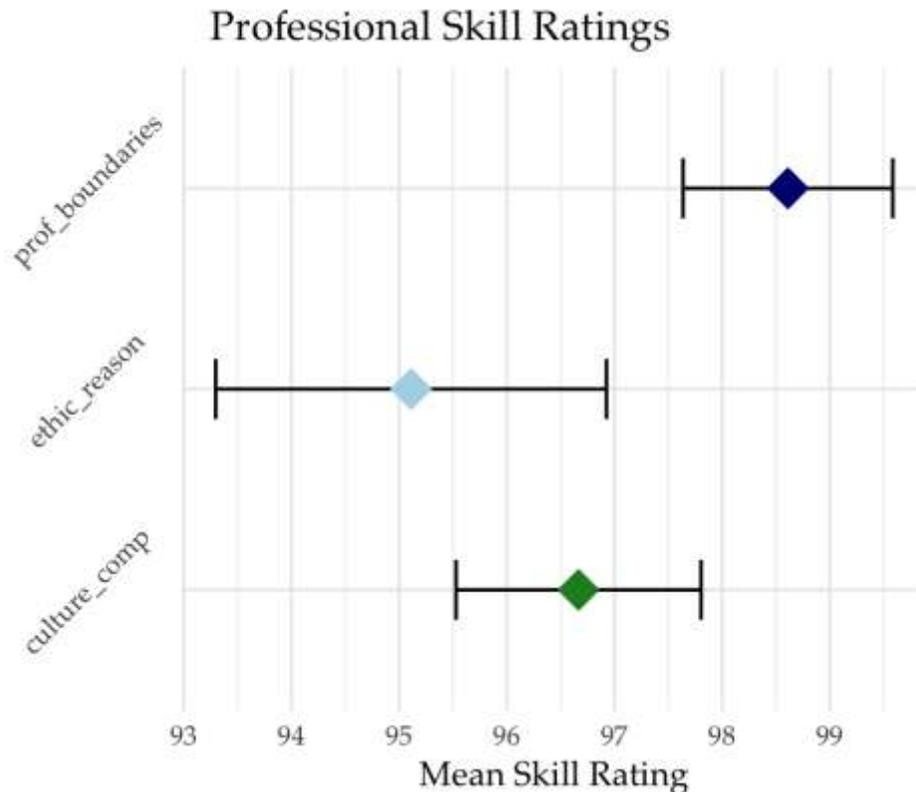

Figure 2. Professional Skill Development Ratings by Students

4.2 Performance skill development

Following this section, Performance Skill Development is analyzed. Performance Skill Development, which consists of *effective speaking, language development, notetaking when interpreting, and consecutive and simultaneous interpreting*

      Figure 3 illustrates the Professional Skill Development indicating that students experienced the most skill development in *consecutive interpreting* (mean = 98.6, *sd* = 3.38), followed by *effective speaking* (mean = 96.7, *sd* = 4.56)*, language development* (mean = 96.5, *sd* = 5.75), and lastly *simultaneous interpreting* (mean = 95.1, *sd* = 5.79).
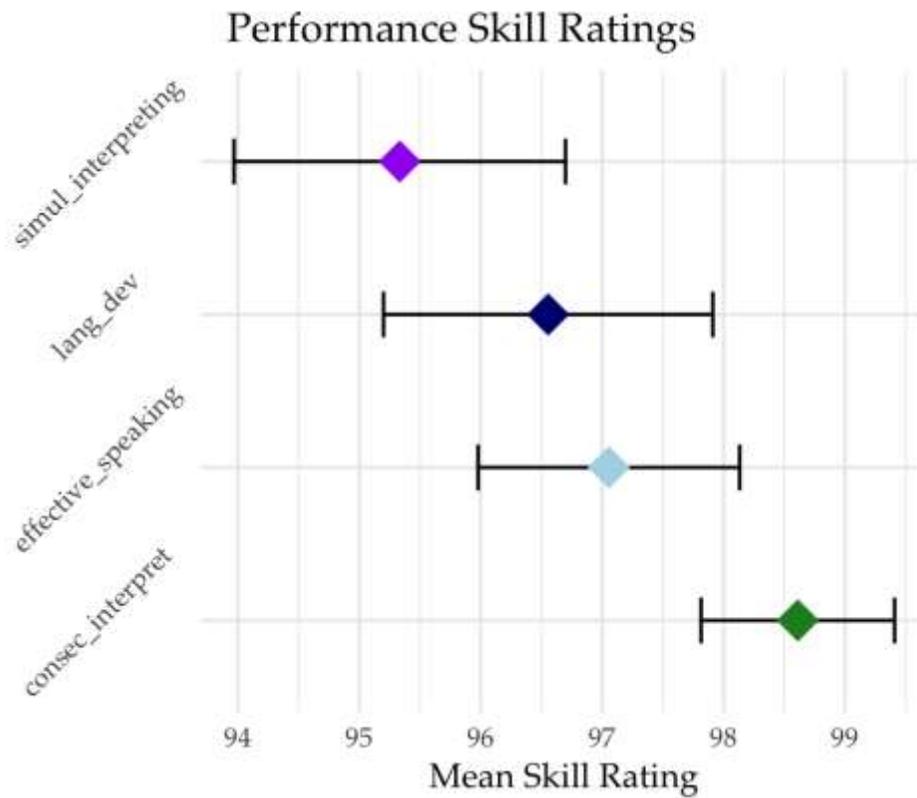
Figure 3. Performance Skill Development Ratings by Students

4.3 Overall satisfaction rating

To assess their overall experience with the program and with the internship, students were asked to rate their overall satisfaction with both the internship and the academic offerings through the program. Results, summarized in **Figure 4**, indicated high levels of satisfaction, with students rating their overall internship experience (mean = 96.9, *sd* = 4.36) and their overall experience in the academic program (mean = 97.6, *sd* = 6.05).
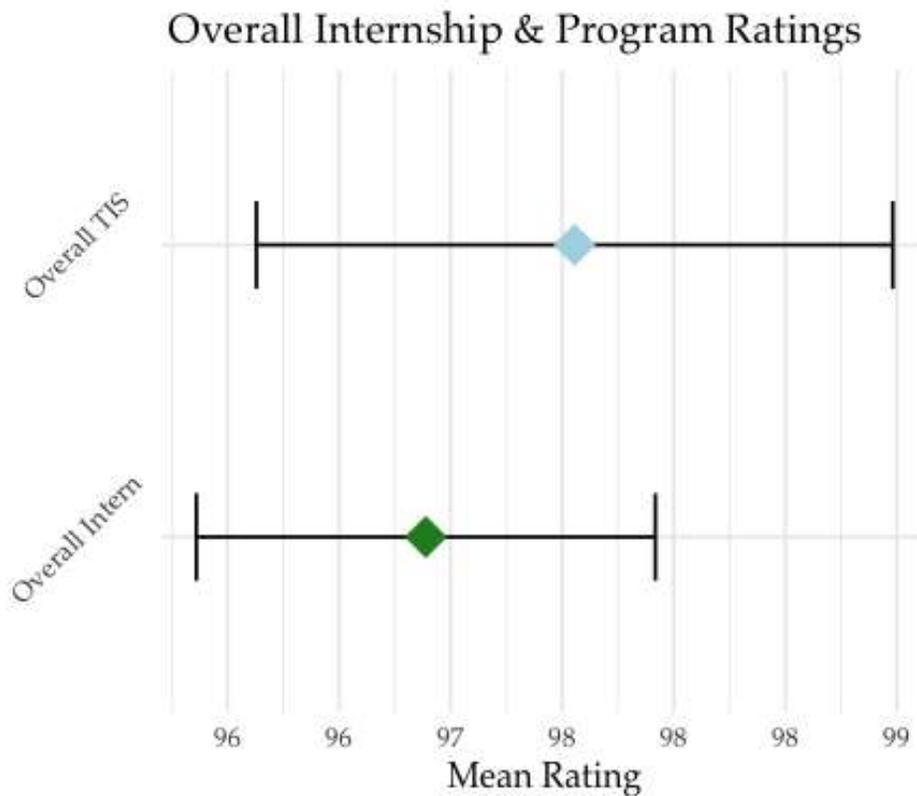
Figure 4. Performance Skill Development Ratings by Students

These findings suggest that students perceive both the program and the internship experience positively, indicating effective alignment between academic preparation and experiential learning through internship placement with community-based partners.

5 Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the PSI training program successfully develops both professional and performance skills through a structured integration of rigorous coursework and experiential learning through community-based internships. Based on student self-assessments, participants reported substantial development in critical competencies central to effective interpreting practice.

In the category of Professional Skill Development, students reported the highest perceived growth in managing *professional boundaries*, indicating that experiential learning opportunities prepare students for the complexities and ethical conduct in real-world interpreting situations. Similarly, high ratings in *cultural competence* underscore the program's effectiveness in

promoting intercultural awareness and sensitivity, key elements for interpreters when navigating diverse social contexts in PSI. While still notably high, *ethical reasoning* showed slightly lower scores, suggesting potential room for curricular development to further strengthen student assessment of and confidence in ethical decision-making.

The results related to Performance Skill Development also suggest effective skill acquisition, particularly emphasizing *consecutive interpreting*, *effective speaking*, and *language development*. Data highlighting students' highest skill development in *consecutive interpreting* reflect frequent use of this mode in PSI and due to practical, hands-on training. Conversely, comparatively lower ratings for *simultaneous interpreting*, although still high, suggest this as an area where additional curricular emphasis or specialized practice sessions could further strengthen students' skill development in this more of interpreting. This finding aligns with the recognized complexity and cognitive demands inherent in simultaneous interpreting, suggesting the potential benefit of additional classroom-based practice and simulated training scenarios.

Lastly, results indicated that students expressed strong satisfaction with their overall experiences in the internship and the academic program. The high satisfaction ratings reinforce the importance of implementing experiential learning, along with workshops, speaker series, and networking events, providing students with effective education and training to confidently apply classroom-based skills in authentic community contexts.

5.1 Program Outcomes

Upon completing the required coursework, internship, and workshops, students select a certification exam from a pre-approved list of recognized credentialing bodies. The exam fee is covered by the program, easing the financial burden, and allowing students to focus on thorough preparation. In addition, dedicated sessions and advising throughout the semester guide students in understanding prerequisites, testing formats, and performance expectations. By integrating situated learning through community-based internships with academic theory and practice, the curriculum ensures that graduates gain hands-on experience and the professional competencies necessary to succeed in acquiring interpreter certifications. As a result, students emerge well-prepared to pursue nationally and globally recognized credentials, enhancing their employability and reinforcing the quality of their interpreting skills.

5.2 Conclusions

The present study investigated student self-assessment of skill development across two key domains, professional and performance skills, through experiential learning provided by an internship placement, as well as students' overall satisfaction with both the internship and the academic program. Specifically, this research explored the relationship between structured coursework and the effective application of acquired interpreting knowledge and skills in authentic, community-based PSI settings.

This study aimed: (1) to present a replicable model for an academic interpreting program integrating rigorous coursework with structured community-based internships designed explicitly to prepare students as competent and professionally equipped PSI practitioners; and (2) to analyze quantitative data reflecting student perceptions of their skill development and overall program

satisfaction. Findings demonstrate that this program's format, blending specialized coursework, including training in professional ethics, cultural competence, interpreting techniques (consecutive and simultaneous interpreting, note-taking), linguistic skills, and domain-specific terminology, with experiential internships through community partners effectively enhances students' interpreting competencies. Furthermore, the structured workshops embedded within the curriculum served as critical touchpoints, providing opportunities for students to engage in reflective practice, self-assessment, and peer-to-peer collaboration,

Given the relatively small sample size of this initial study (n=18), future research could benefit from a larger participant group and longitudinal assessments to measure sustained skill development and professional outcomes over time. Moreover, complementary qualitative analyses would provide deeper insights into student experiences, offering a deeper understanding of the benefits and challenges related to PSI training.

In summary, these results affirm the effectiveness of combining structured coursework with experiential learning internships, highlighting the value of community-based interpreting experiences as an integral component of interpreter education and training within the public service sector. This study presents an adaptable model for other institutions seeking to develop or refine PSI training programs aimed at equipping students with robust professional competencies and the practical skills necessary for successful careers in public service interpreting.

5.3 Limitations

There are, however, limitations to this study. Study findings are only based on the perception of interns and do not include any findings deriving from the volunteer program, which would provide data from a larger population representing more languages. Moreover, the current analysis only presents data stemming from two student interns. Further, to gain a better understanding of student intern objectives and expectations, a pre-internship survey will be conducted. Future research should attempt to address such limitations, present the collected qualitative and qualitative data, and evaluate the internship program's impact on community partners' interpreter-mediated sessions.

Ethics Statement

This study was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, New Brunswick. The participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

Disclosure Statement
The author reports there are no competing interests to declare.

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