Introducing SIL iDELTA

(SIL Institute for the Development of Languages and Translation in Africa)

a bachelor-level training program

About SIL

Founded over eight decades ago, SIL International is an organization that studies, documents, and assists in developing the world's languages. SIL's staff share a commitment to service, academic excellence, and professional engagement through linguistics, literacy, translation, and other academic disciplines. SIL makes its services available to all without regard to religious belief, political ideology, gender, race, or ethnic background.

SIL works with host governments, non-governmental agencies or organizations, and academic institutions worldwide as well as with churches and local communities. UNESCO has granted formal consultative status to SIL, an affiliation that puts SIL in global links that enable it to contribute to policy dialogue and information exchange. In Africa, SIL currently works in Senegal, Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Ghana, Togo, Benin, Niger, Cameroon, Republic of Congo, DR Congo, Central African Republic, Chad, Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Botswana and Mozambique.

SIL also works directly with ethnolinguistic communities building their capacity for sustainable language development. SIL's expertise in language development includes training and consulting for activities such as linguistic research, writing system development, mother tongue literature development, and mother-tongue based literacy and multilingual education.

Finally, SIL is an acknowledged leader in formal academic programs for the components of cross-cultural language development work. SIL works in partnership with more than 20 academic institutions around the world to offer classroom and online training in applied linguistics, translation and language development domains. Close to 1000 SIL staff hold advanced degrees, and regularly publish their research and present papers. Through its extensive language survey efforts, SIL is a leader in the identification and documentation of the world's known languages.

About iDELTA

After four decades of working in Africa relying on expat staff, in 2006, the leadership of SIL Africa Area (SIL AFA) saw it crucial to develop core local capacity for the work in Africa to be more effective and sustainable. Thus, an SIL AFA training department was set up and mandated to develop an Africa-wide core curriculum for post-secondary through to doctoral degree level training in Bible translation and language development.[1] Such a curriculum would target the competencies needed for all relevant language development roles, and provide crucial linkages between the skills development typical of workshops and analytical thinking provided by formal education programs. Options for accreditation were sought to cover the core curriculum in ways that would keep it flexible enough to ensure the meeting of any and all language program needs. The Institute for the Development of Languages and Translation in Africa (iDELTA), an accredited bachelor-level study program, is the result of this initiative. Complementary bachelors, masters and doctoral degree programs, for the Anglophone Africa, continue to be offered at the African International University (formerly Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology), in Nairobi, Kenya and South African Theological Seminary (SATS), an elearning degree program based in Johannesburg, South Africa.[2] Because of these accrediting bodies, most universities accept iDELTA credits.

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[1] Where suitable training already existed at an African institution, SIL determined to cooperate with such institution(s) in as broad a fashion as possible, in some cases SIL choosing to offer the training directly or strengthen the local institutions' capacity by embedding the training there.

[2] iDELTA evolved from the Africa Training Program (ATP), held in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, for Francophone Africa, and the Translation Degree Program (TDP), held at Pan-African Christian College (PACC) (now Pan-African Christian College University) in Nairobi, Kenya, for the Anglophone Africa

SIL iDELTA's aim is to develop skilled workers for language development and translation work in local language situations in Africa as a whole. Courses are taught in both English and French. The French program is based in Yaoundé, Cameroon, while the English program is, as of 2019, is based in Entebbe, Uganda (up to 2018, in Kenya).

iDELTA specializations, modules and timelines

Students taking the iDELTA program choose from five specializations (referred to as tracks): Bible translation, Scripture engagement (SE), mother-tongue based literacy and multilingual education (herein referred to simply as literacy), linguistics, and language assessment depending on their interest of career and professional growth or previous professional field experience. This engaging, highly interactive and practical training helps them deepen their knowledge in the specializations mentioned above, all of which directly apply to language or language-based development. Students need to choose one track before they embark on the program and are expected to stay on that track. Changing tracks is generally not possible.[3]

Under each track are three intensive academic sessions. We refer to these as academic courses (ACs) i.e. AC1, AC2 and AC3. Each AC is 8 weeks long. Each student is expected to complete all three ACs. To complete all three takes a period of three successive years. As can be seen in the table (below), each AC has 3 modules or course units (and 9 in the track). In addition, there is one course offered by distance that is generally requested by universities. This course is Bible Translation and the Church and is offered through the SIL e-learning system.

The table below show what the tracks, the ACs and modules look like:

Track	AC1 (8 weeks)			AC3 (8 weeks)			AC3 (8 weeks)		
Translation	Sociolinguistics	Biblical Cultures	Bible Translation Basics 1	Intro to Grammar	Exegesis	Bible Translation Basics 2	Language Dev & Language Program Planning	Discourse Analysis	Translation Project
Scripture Engagement[4]	Sociolinguistics	Bible Translation Basics 1	Biblical Cultures

Bible Translation and the Church | SE-1: Translating the Bible into Action | SE-2a: Trauma Healing[5]

SE-2b: Community Development | SE-3: Chronological Storying | Language Dev & Language Program Planning | SE-4: Community Research | SE-5: Modern Media |
Literacy	Sociolinguistics	Phonetics & Phonology 1	Literacy 1	Intro to Grammar	Phonetics & Phonology 2	Literacy 2	Language Dev & Language Program Planning	Multilingual Education	Orthography
Linguistics	Sociolinguistics	Phonetics & Phonology 1	Field Methods and Data Collection	Introduction to Grammar	Phonology	Lexicography and Field Methods	Language Dev & Language Program Planning	Discourse Analysis	Advanced Phonology and Tone Analysis
Language Assessment	Sociolinguistics	Phonetics & Phonology 1	Survey methods 1	Introduction to Grammar	Phonology	Survey Methods 2	Language Dev & Language Program Planning	Survey Methods 3	Advanced Phonology and Tone Analysis

Teaching

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[3] One exception is that students on the SE track can shift to the translation track during or after AC1, and vice versa, translation track students can change over to the SE track. This is only possible because the modules for these two tracks are the same in the first year.

[4] SE-1 covers 4 weeks, SE-2a and SE-2b take one week each, SE-3 goes over two weeks

[5] Some of these courses are subject to change.

The teachers at iDELTA are all well qualified (only those with a minimum of a Master's degree in the relevant discipline) and have significant teaching or consulting experience in the respective domains. They are devoted to the holistic development and success of their students. In most cases, iDELTA sources teaching staff from an already existing pool of highly qualified (PhD-level), experienced SIL international members and staff).

Formal Credits

In each iDELTA module there are 40 hours of lecture (in class teaching). Students are expected to complete another 40 hours of direct study through one-on-one between teacher and student, plus a further 40 hours of homework assignments and self-study. This altogether makes 120 notional or contact hours.[6]

Each module is worth 3 credits, according to the American university system, (or 10 credits in the British and 12 in the South African systems).

Evaluation

There are both formative and summative assignments given during each course. The iDELTA program teachers emphasize continuous assessment in order to facilitate long-term learning.

Accreditation

The normal expectation is that as many students will enter the iDELTA program with the goal of not only completing the AC1-3, but also the degree, in order to obtain a B.A. or B.Th. We offer this opportunity in partnership with partner academic institutions. What iDELTA teaches is the approximate equivalent of one year's study; the rest of the required coursework needs to be covered by residential or distance/e-learning at another university or college, especially but not limited to those we partner with.

For students of iDELTA who wish to complete courses for a degree award, currently, the iDELTA modules are accredited mainly by two universities in Africa: South African Theological Seminary (SATS) and African International University (AIU). Courses taught on the translation and SE tracks are accredited by SATS; courses taught on the literacy track are accredited by AIU.[7] In both cases, credit for the completed track may be applied either toward a B.A. degree at AIU or a B.Th. degree at SATS. At SATS, the total number of credits obtained during the three iDELTA courses plus the one distance course offered by SIL e-learning are recognized as being equivalent to one year of a B.Th. program. A four-year degree is offered by AIU in either Education or Development Studies, each with a concentration in language development. They also offer Bible translation. Each of these degrees accept the iDELTA courses plus the distance course as equivalent to one year of the degree.

Other certification

For students who successfully complete AC-AC3 minus being affiliated to a partner university and with no aim of continuing to an award of a bachelor's degree, they receive an iDELTA certificate of completion. Similarly, where a student affiliated to a partner university aiming to attain a degree, but through our progressive assessment, seems to be academically incapable of successfully completing the full academic program, we allow them to continue through the AC1-3 only on the advice of the department responsible at the partner institution. Where permitted to continue with iDELTA, such students may only receive a certificate of attendance for this.

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[6] 120 notional hours x 3 course units = 360 study hours ÷ 8 weeks = 45 hours of work per week.

[7] The Anglophone iDELTA leadership is exploring possibilities of accreditation for the linguistics track at a recognized university in Uganda.

Admission

As is the norm for any bachelor-level program, applicants for iDELTA must have completed their secondary education or demonstrate equivalent qualifications to successfully follow university-level courses. As part of the process, applicants must provide two written recommendations.[8]

Auditing iDELTA

The iDELTA program now provides an option for those who wish to pursue the program but not for academic credit. This arrangement is called 'auditing' the course i.e. attending classes informally. In this case, the student is free to attend and complete as many academic courses (modules) as they will find of interest. They will receive a certificate of attendance for this.

Training outcomes

Students who complete the iDELTA program, with or without the bachelor's degree will, according to SIL International core competence standards, have attained the competencies needed to work as a specialist in their respective disciplines:

- Bible translator – able to work independently on his/her own language or take up the role of translation advisor/exegete for their own or other language.
- Scripture Engagement worker -- able to work with church and community leaders in the best ways to make full use of newly translated scriptures.
- Literacy specialists – able to produce various, age or level-graded literacy materials, train mother-tongue based (MTB) literacy/MLE teachers in how to use literacy materials, plan an MTB education program and/or evaluate the success of such programs.
- Linguists/linguistic specialists – able to do the basic analysis of a language for the purpose of developing an adequate orthography or dictionary, write a basic description of the sound system and grammar of the language to inform literacy specialists and translators working in the language.
- Language assessment specialists -- able to conduct language vitality assessment or language use surveys and write up the results of those sociolinguistic surveys.

Financing of iDELTA

SIL AFA depends entirely on student fees for each year to cover the costs for the iDELTA training program, coupled with the benevolence of the mainly SIL-affiliated teaching staffs (i-DELTA does not pay salaries to the teaching staff; they receive their regular salaries through their other work with SIL). The available funds mainly cover costs such as travel and medical insurance, room and board, hire of classrooms, purchase of scholastic materials, stationary, equipment, etc.

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[8] Where the applicant is affiliated with an SIL or sister organization, or a partner institution, then one of those recommendations should be from the respective domain coordinator in their organization or institution.