Introducing SIL iDELTA

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

a bachelor-level training program

About SIL

SIL International is an organization that studies, documents, and assists in developing the world's languages. Founded over 8 decades ago, SIL shares a commitment to service, academic excellence, and professional engagement through linguistics, literacy, translation, and other related 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. In Africa, SIL works in Senegal, Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Ghana, Togo, Benin, Niger, Cameroon, Republic of Congo, DRC, CAR, 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.

Besides, SIL is a recognized contributor to formal academic training 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 leads in the identification and documentation of the world's known languages.

About iDELTA

After four decades of working in Africa mainly relying on expat staff, in 2006, the Africa Area bureau of SIL (SIL AFA) found it crucial to develop core local capacity to make the work more effective and sustainable. Thus, a SIL AFA training department was set up and charged with developing an Africa-wide core training curriculum for post-secondary to doctoral degree levels in translation and language development.[i] The curriculum would target competencies needed for all the relevant language development roles and provide crucial linkages between the development of skills typical of workshops and the analytical thinking provided by formal education programs. Options for accreditation were sought to cover the developed core curriculum in ways that would keep it flexible enough to ensure the meeting of all language development program needs.

As a result, the Institute for the SIL Development of Languages and Translation in Africa (iDELTA), an accredited bachelor-level study program, started.[ii] Its aim being to develop skilled workers for language development and Bible translation work in local language situations in Africa as a whole, courses are taught in both English and French, with the latter being based in Cameroon while the former is, as from 2019, based in Uganda (was hosted in Kenya until 2018).

Specializations, modules and schedule

Students of the iDELTA program have four specializations (also known as tracks) to choose from: Bible Translation, Scripture Engagement (SE), mother-tongue based Literacy and Multilingual Education, as well as either the Linguistics or Language survey option depending on their interest, professional growth path or field of involvement. The highly engaging, interactive and practical training helps students deepen their knowledge in the specializations. Students have to choose a track before embarking on the program and are expected to stay on it. Changing tracks is generally not possible.[iii]

Under each track are three intensive academic sessions, also known as academic courses (ACs) i.e. AC1, AC2 and AC3. There is one AC per year, each 8 weeks long. Students are expected to complete all ACs. Each AC has 3 course units (and 9 in the track), as show in the table below.

Track	AC1 (8 weeks)			AC3 (8 weeks)			AC3 (8 weeks)		
Translation	Sociolinguistics	Bible Translation Basics 1	Biblical Cultures, or Bible Translation & the Church	Intro to Grammar	Bible Translation Basics 2	Exegesis	LDLP [iv1]	Discourse	Translation Practicum
Scripture Engagement[v]	Sociolinguistics	Bible Translation Basics 1	Biblical Cultures, or Bible Translation & the Church	SE-1: Translating the Bible into Action	SE-2a: Trauma Healing / SE-2b: Community Dev	SE-3: Chronological Storying	LDLP	SE-4: Community Research	SE-5: Modern Media
Literacy	Sociolinguistics	Phonetics & Intro to Phonology	Literacy 1	Intro to Grammar	Phonology 2	Literacy 2	LDLP	MTB-MLE[2]	Orthography
Linguistics / Survey	Sociolinguistics	Phonetics & Intro to Phonology	Filed Methods: Data Collect or Survey 1	Intro to Grammar	Phonology 2	Field Methods Data Analysis + Lexicography or Survey 2	LDLP	Discourse	Advanced Phonology: Tone Studies or Survey 3

Formal Credits

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).

In each iDELTA module there are 40 hours of lecture (in class teaching). Students are expected to complete another 40 hours of directed 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.[vi]

Course 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.

Course 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 other academic institutions. What iDELTA teaches is the approximate equivalent of one year's Bachelor degree level study; the rest of the required coursework needs to be covered at a partner university or college, either by residential or distance (e-learning).

Currently, iDELTA modules are accredited by two universities: South African Theological Seminary (SATS) for courses taught on the Translation and SE tracks; and African International University (AIU) for courses taught on the Literacy track.[vii] That is, credit for the completed track may be applied either toward a B.A. degree at AIU or a B.Th. degree at SATS. SATS recognizes the total number of credits obtained during the three iDELTA ACs as equivalent to one year of a BA program. SIL iDELTA is exploring similar partnerships with chartered institutions in Uganda to enhance accessibility for locally based students.

Course certification

Students who successfully complete AC-AC3 not aiming to continue to an award of a bachelor's degree receive an iDELTA certificate of completion. Students, whether affiliated to a partner university and aiming to attain a degree or not, who through progressive assessment are found to be academically incapable of successfully completing the academic program, but are permitted to continue with iDELTA, only receive a certificate of attendance. The same applies to students who are auditing the course.

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[1] Language Development and Language Program Planning
[2] Mother-tongue Based Multilingual Education

Admission

General entry requirements

As is the norm for any bachelor degree-level training program, applicants for iDELTA must have completed their secondary education or demonstrate equivalent qualifications to successfully follow university-level courses. Applicants must all provide two written recommendations.[viii]

General Training Assessment

After enrolment and ahead of AC1, students are required to take a 3-week, non-accredited course called General Training and Assessment (GTA). The purpose of this course is to establish the precise level of academic skills the student has i.e. the reading and writing skills required for academic study at a bachelor-level, also their ability to think critically, abstractly and creatively. It is also to assess the student's command of English or French and their computer skills. At the same time, during the GTA students learn cultural awareness, in preparation for the cross-cultural training the iDELTA program is.

GTA happens a few months before AC1. Registration into AC1 depends on GTA staff recommendations.

Exemption from GTA: Situations may arise where a student seeking admission to the AC1 and subsequent modules may be exempted from attending the GTA. They include where the student already attained a diploma or degree in another field of study the language of instruction having been English or French and did very well. Also, where the student wants to audit the iDELTA program.

Auditing iDELTA

The iDELTA program now provides an option for those who wish to pursue the full program or only components of it 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 or course units as they will find to be of interest. They will receive a certificate of attendance for this.

Training outcomes

A student who completes 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 discipline, specifically, as a:

- Bible translator – able to work independently on one's own or other language, or take up a role as a 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 the full use of newly translated Scriptures in the local language.
- Mother-tongue Literacy specialist – able to produce various, age or level-graded literacy materials, train mother-tongue based [MTB] literacy teachers in mono-, bi- or multilingual contexts in how to teach MTB literacy, develop and/or use MTB literacy materials, plan an MTB education program and evaluate the success of such a program.
- Linguist – able to do the basic analyses of a language for the purpose of developing an orthography and dictionary, write a basic description of the sound system and grammar of the language to aid literacy and translation work in the language.
- Language assessment specialist -- able to conduct language vitality and use surveys and to write up the results of such assessment in order to language policy and planning, as well as language development program design.

Teaching staff

The teachers at iDELTA are all well qualified (all have 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 faculty from an already existing pool of experienced SIL international staff.

Financing of iDELTA

SIL AFA depends on student fees each year to cover the costs for the iDELTA training program. This is coupled with the benevolence of the mostly SIL-affiliated teaching staff (i-DELTA does not pay salaries to the teaching staff; they receive 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 as well as scholastic materials, stationary, equipment.

[i] 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.

[ii] iDELTA emerged out of the Francophone Africa-targeted Training Program (ATP) and the Francophone Africa Translation Degree Program (TDP)

[iii] 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.

[iv] Language Development and Language Program Planning

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

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

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

[viii] 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.