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## **Practicum: A Missing Link in the Translator Training at the Postgraduate Level in Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

This paper examined the critical role of internship in the translator training and profession. The work is premised on the fact that most translation graduates from Nigerian tertiary institutions shy away from practising translation or from picking up translation jobs due to lack of confidence and experience. For this work, data were collected from the brochures of some Nigerian universities that offer translation from M.A. to the Ph.D. levels. Data were also collected through WhatsApp and phone calls made to translation colleagues in the various Nigerian universities offering translation at the higher level. Data collected revealed that apart from Abia State University, translation programmes in Nigerian universities fall short of internship, justifying this lack of confidence and experience. The paper also highlighted the likely challenges of internship in Nigeria and proposed that the Industrial Training Fund (ITF) which, in collaboration with National Universities Commission (NUC), manages the Students Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES), could be exploited to enable Translation students avail themselves of the internship opportunities offered by these parastatals.

**Key words:** internship, translator training, work experience, internship supervisor

### **Introduction**

Translation is such a complex linguistic activity that leaves many wondering if translators are born and not made or made and not born. Even though one may find a few bilinguals who trained themselves on the job as translators and are translating well, the importance of training

cannot just be waved without a second thought. In Nigeria, Translation is taught first as a component of the First-degree programme in French in the universities. No Bachelor of Arts degree in Translation studies, according to the findings of this work, is awarded by any Nigerian university. Professional translators are trained at the postgraduate level in the various Nigerian universities. This training is marked by many challenges. Researchers such as Simpson (2007), Timothy Asobele (1999), Iloh (1997, 2005, 2018), Soyoyo & Mayanja (2012), Tar (2012), Mebitaghan (2013), Afolabi (2014, 2018), Mufutau Tijani (2015), Mary Nyong & Akintoye (2015), Akakuru & Chima (2006), etc. have already dealt with the challenges. What has escaped their analyses is the issue of internship, which is the crux of this work.

In this paper, efforts were made to examine the state of the Nigerian translation graduates in the job market, the situation of translation internship in Nigerian universities, the role of internship in the translator training programme, where internship should be carried out, duties of an internship supervisor, factors hindering translation internship in Nigeria and the way forward.

### **The State of the Nigerian Translation Graduates**

It is observed that very few, and at times no student-translator graduate from the universities in Nigeria at the postgraduate level every year do not apply for jobs each time there is a job advertisement on Translation. They do not even wait to be termed unemployable. By their action or inaction, it is obvious that they are unemployable. This may be as a result of lack of confidence in themselves as to what they studied at the university. The Director General of the National Office for Technology Acquisition and Promotion (NOTAP), an arm of the Science and Technology Ministry, Nigeria, Umar Bindir (2014), said that a major reason for the high unemployment rate is the lack of synergy between theoretical knowledge acquired in school and industrial experience needed in the market place. Some time ago, some of our graduate students were informed of job vacancies in a university and the African Development Bank, but shied away from the jobs for reasons that have to do with the students themselves and with the content of their training programme.

A critical look at the training programmes reveals that there is a missing link between theoretical knowledge acquired from the class room and the practical knowledge from actual work carried out in the field. Internship constitutes this missing link. It is one of the components of the Translator Training Programme that instil confidence, motivate and get students set for work after school. One may want to know the situation of internship in the Translator Training programmes in Nigerian universities.

### **Situation of Translation Internship in the Translator Training Programmes in Nigerian Universities**

An Internship is a period of work experience offered by an employer to give students and graduates exposure to the work environment, often within a specific industry, which relates to their field of studies. Internship can be as short as one month and as long as 12 months. Internship can be paid or unpaid. Abrudan et al (2012) defined internship as “a form of practical education through work and represents the possibility to acquire experience on a certain position in a company, without being their employees.”

Unfortunately, internship as a component of the Translator Training Programme is either dangling, that is, neither here nor there, or even absent completely from the Translator Training Programme in many universities in Nigeria. Out of the 30 Federal Universities that have

approval from National Universities Commission to offer postgraduate programmes for 2018/2019 academic session, only eleven offer Translator Training Programme. None of these eleven universities has internship as part of their Translator Training Programme. Then, out of the 28 State Universities that have approval from National Universities Commission to offer postgraduate programme, only six of them offer Translation at the postgraduate level and the only state university that has internship as part of its Translator Training Programme is Abia State University. Given the importance of putting theoretical knowledge into practice, attention will now be focussed on the role of internship in the Translator Training Programme.

### **The Role of Internship in the Translator Training Programme**

The résumé of a fresh graduate can be a real challenge for an employer. Lack of experience is one of the sensible points that every young person faces. Besides the school good results, employers want to see it mentioned in the resume, where this wonderful knowledge was translated into practical works, either as a part-time translator in an organization, a volunteer translator in a company or as an intern in an international organization.

Abrudan, Mihaela and Anca-Ioana (2012, pp. 986-991), all from the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, West University of Timisoara, in a study on the role of internship in training and professional development of students, gave some benefits of internship to students. The benefits are:

#### **1. Valuable Work Experience**

An internship provides translator trainees the opportunity to gain hands on work experience that the students cannot get in the department.

#### **2. An Edge in the Job Market**

Employers are usually more concerned with the students work experience than their qualifications and internships are often the only way to get the work experience they need to secure a job. Student translators, who through internship, got some work experience always have an edge over those who did not have the experience. This explains why graduates from translation schools that have practicum as a component of their programme are always favoured in employment, locally or internationally.

#### **3. Transition into a Job**

Employers see interns as prospective employees and many who finished their internships continued working with the company full time. Internships are the number one way for employers to find new staff in many countries, including Nigeria.

#### **4. Career Decision**

Internship or Practicum provides an avenue for a student to try out the profession he/she intends to embrace in future. At the end of the internship, the intern examines his or herself and decides whether or not he/she has to continue with that particular profession. Many people who are into translation today would have decided otherwise if they had the opportunities to try out either during an internship or otherwise, the profession into which they are today. They had no opportunity to learn about the career field from the inside and decide if it was the right career field for them. They had no opportunity to work alongside a professional in their chosen career area.

### **5. Networking Opportunities**

Internships are a great way to meet people in different fields. An internship allows translation students to meet translation professionals they will work and interact with in future and who might help them have a job later on in life. It further establishes mentors and references, who will be there to give the interns useful advice on their career path.

### **6. Apply Faculty Knowledge**

An internship can be seen as an avenue for the students to apply the translation theories and skills to practical exercises in the field. It is a chance to prove the worth of their qualifications and to show what they can perform.

### **7. Gain Confidence**

An internship enables student translators to gain some confidence in themselves. It further enables them to discover the responsibilities and the tasks the job of a translator entails. It puts the student translator face to face with the challenges of the job he/she is training to embrace as a career. Internship participants can learn from inside how a company or organization works, what position they have experienced useful in the future.

The benefits of internship as seen above make it an indispensable factor in the training of translators. It bridges the gap between theory and practice. One may now ask if practicum, as important as it is, can be done just anywhere. Answers to this question are provided in the following paragraphs:

#### **Where Internship Should be Carried Out**

For translation training, an internship can only be done where translation activities are very much in practice. This may be in a company, a government ministry, an NGO or in an international organization where there is at least an in-house translator to supervise the translation interns. In a situation where the translation training school or department has internship as part of its programme, it should be the school or department that finds an internship venue for the students. When the negotiation between the school and the institution to take the students on internship is concluded, the school or department gives the internship supervisor the evaluation guideline. At the end of the internship, the supervisor sends his/her evaluation scores to the school or department where the interns came from, while an attestation of internship is given to the intern.

In a situation where internship is not part of the translator training programme as it is the case in most Nigerian universities, all hopes are not lost. The intern wanting to enrich his/her resume, can shop for internship positions in companies, ministry, international organizations, translation agencies or any institution that has a resident translator and then apply for the internship. At the end of an internship, an internship certificate or attestation is given to the intern as proof of his/her experience to present to any future employer. May it be underscored here that a translation internship carried out where there is no resident translator to supervise the intern is not valid and any attestation or certificate awarded by such an institution may not be recognized by any translator employer in the labour market.

#### **Duties of an Internship Supervisor in the Host Institution**

The in-house translator working with the intern, overseeing all his professional practices and ethics is referred to as the Internship Supervisor. He/she has some duties spelt out as follows:

1. As an internship supervisor his task is to introduce, accompany and coach the translation trainees in their work area.
2. He collects, corrects the intern's translations and supports the trainee's learning process and take enough time for guidance and assessment of the trainees
3. He provides the trainees with practical information, such as company profiles, time schedules, computer access codes, etc.
4. He introduces the work setting, the staff and the clients to the trainees
5. He explains house rules and safety regulations to the trainees
6. He should seek to know the trainees' professional and personal goals and advise them accordingly.
7. He ensures that before the end of the translation internship, the trainees have attended a conference or two with him, to show where the translators and interpreters work during international conferences.
8. He should be competent in understanding & speaking a common (foreign) language with the trainees and help them to understand the culture and lifestyle of speakers of the foreign languages that constitute their working languages.
9. He ensures that the trainees see other professional translators in the field, how they dress and also dresses according to the dressing code of the profession, if any.
10. He should ensure that clear reasons are given to justify the translation choices and strategies adopted for the translation of a particular text.
11. He should also ensure that he is culturally and professionally a **role model to the trainees**.
12. He should ensure that he treats the trainee as a colleague and not as a boy or slave, making him/her understand that he/she is one of the team members.
13. He should also acknowledge that the trainee is a novice, and give due respect and recognition to his/her efforts.

From the duties of the Internship Supervisor, it is clearly seen that a translation internship done in a company, an NGO, or in an international organization where there is no in-house translator to supervise the trainee is a waste of time and efforts.

Attention will now be focussed on the efforts made by the Nigerian government to ensure that young Nigerians training to participate in the economic, cultural and political development of Nigeria acquire practical knowledge in the field, in addition to the one acquired from the universities, polytechnics and colleges of education.

#### **Government Efforts to Bridge the Gap between Theory and Practice**

The Government of Nigeria, mindful of the need for the skilled labour for the development of the country established in 1971, the Industrial Training Fund (ITF) with the mission to set and regulate standards and offer direct training intervention in industrial and commercial skills training and development, using a corps of highly competent professional staff, modern techniques and technology. Since then, ITF has operated consistently and painstakingly within the context of its enabling laws, Decree 47 of 1971 as amended in the 2011 ITF Act.

In 1973, ITF initiated the Students Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES) with the following objects:

- To provide an avenue for students in institutions of higher learning to acquire industrial skills and experiences in their course of study
- To provide students with an opportunity to apply their knowledge in real work and actual practice.
- To make the transition from school to the world of work easier and to enhance students contacts for later job placement.

It is obvious that the reasons that led to the inception of the programme some decades ago are today even more relevant due to rapid technological development, especially as it concerns translation studies.

Translator training institutions have been left out of the SIWES programme. Student translators, too, need practical knowledge of their field of study. Translator training institutions should seek to be part of SIWES to enable their translation trainees avail themselves of internship placement. SIWES strives to bridge the gap between theories taught at the universities and the related practice in the field. Recently, SIWES has been marked with challenges that threatened the purpose of its creation. Some of these challenges as highlighted by Atenaga (2018) are as follows:

- The Industrial Training Fund (ITF) that manages the Students Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES) is not made to see Translation as a practical subject that should attract their attention to ensure that students reading translation at the Master's level in the various Nigerian universities carry out an internship.
- Students are the ones who look for where they will do the industrial Training and quite often, they are not taken. It is alleged that some students bribe their way to companies where they want to do their internship.
- Some students do the Industrial training in places that have nothing to do with their field of study. For instance, an engineering student doing his IT at the bank.
- Another problem that has affected the SIWES programme is the unwillingness of the various organizations and companies to accept students for training. This has affected negatively the number of students that can be placed on internship at any given time.

Inefficient supervision is also a problem. Ogbonnaya (n.d.) stated that the operational guidelines of SIWES spell out that three separate officials should supervise students on industrial attachment: an industry-based supervisor, supervisor from the school and another one from ITF. It has been reported that these supervisors especial the one from the students' school hardly visits the student when they are on industrial placement.

The unfriendly attitude of workers towards the trainees is another problem. These workers feel threatened by the presence of the industrial trainees.

The above stated problems have actually hindered the actualization of the goals of SIWES. Even as this paper suggests that translation training institution should queue into the scheme, if the government does not provide solutions to these problems, the aim of queuing into the programme may still be defeated.

## **Recommendations**

To make internship have its place in the training of translators in Nigeria, three key players have to be involved: The Government, the training institution and the student.

### **The Government**

The government of Nigeria should create translation units in some key ministries such as the Ministry of External Affairs, the Ministry of Trade and Industry, the Ministry of Finance and the Economic Development, etc., and recruit translators to oversee those ministries. The House of Representatives and the Senate should also have translation units headed by competent translators. These units will then serve as venues to accept translation trainees placed on internship.

Besides, the government should revisit the decree establishing the Industrial Training Fund and the SIWES Operational Guidelines and ensure that they are well-implemented to make ITF and SIWES achieve their objectives.

Furthermore, National University Commission (NUC) may also intervene in the translator training programmes of the various universities in Nigeria to ensure that they produce workforce actually needed in the Nigerian labour market.

### **Training Institutions**

The very first thing to be done by the translator training institutions is to make practicum part of their translator training programme and ensure that it is a course whose score will count in the trainees' transcript. The internship in the programme should have a coordinator who from time to time will go out there, visit the interns and bring back reports on how they are faring.

As said earlier in this paper, the various universities should queue into SIWES to enable their trainees avail themselves of the internship opportunities the scheme offers.

The training institutions should establish Memoranda of Understanding with NGOs, international organisations represented in Nigeria, some private translation companies, etc., where they will be sending their translation trainees on internship. The training institution should assume its responsibility of posting the students to the various places of internship.

### **The Students**

The fact that a translator training programme does not have internship as one of its components should not mean that the students themselves and their sponsors cannot do something to close the gap. There are avenues available locally and internationally where students can apply to do internship. After their studies they can exploit such avenues. Within Nigeria for instance, in addition to international organisation and NGOs, students can apply for internship positions in the following translation companies:

- 1. Bilingual Solution Genius Company**

Block 2C, Ogun State Housing Estate, Ota, Ogun, Nigeria

Email: [info@bilingualsolutiongenius.com](mailto:info@bilingualsolutiongenius.com)

A Bilingual Solution Genius Company that specialises in providing excellent proofreading, document translation and multilingual translation services in Nigeria.

**2. DY+ Language Solution**

21/25 Isheri-Agege Road, Ojodu Berger, Lagos Nigeria

Email: [info@ftranslators.com.ng](mailto:info@ftranslators.com.ng)

DY+ Language Solutions is a language translation services provider offering document translation, conference translators and interpreters specially on ECOWAS official languages in Nigeria.

**3. Fastrack Translators Limited**

Email: [info@ftranslators.com.ng](mailto:info@ftranslators.com.ng)

Fastrack Translators Limited, a firm of professional translators and interpreters that provides services in multilingual translation, translation technology, simultaneous interpretation, digital equipment rental and more.

**4. Fsnlink Communications**

Plot 8, Cow lane street, Off Igboere Street, Lagos Island, Lagos Nigeria

Email: [info@fsnlink.com](mailto:info@fsnlink.com)

Fsnlink Communications offers professional translation and interpretation services in French, Portuguese, German & Spanish. It also provides executive language tutoring.

**5. Novatia Translations NG**

No 7 Second Isiuwa Lane Off MM Way, Benin City, Edo Nigeria

Email: [hello@novatiatranslations.com.ng](mailto:hello@novatiatranslations.com.ng)

Novatia Translations are translation experts in Nigeria and West African Sub-region. They provide innovative translation solutions for hundreds of organisations in Nigeria, and Africa as a whole.

**6. Sans Frontieres Limited**

Bola Event Centre, 2 Abimbola Awoniyi Estate, Near Abattoir, New Oko-Oba Agege, Lagos

Email: [oriloye2k10@gmail.com](mailto:oriloye2k10@gmail.com)

Sans Frontieres Limited provides unparalleled language by bringing the benefits of innovative digital technology to discussion and conference systems. They cater for small, medium and world-class multilingual conferences.

**7. ShanTranslation Limited**

1, Lane 5, Ilupeju Avenue, Odo Ado Ado Ekiti, Ekiti State Nigeria

Email: [language@shantranslation.com](mailto:language@shantranslation.com)

ShanTranslation Limited is an international translation services company with a branch in Nigeria offering translation and transcription, proofreading, content writing, subtitling and typing services.

**8. Splendid Translations Nigeria**

565, Ikorodu Road, Kosofe, Lagos Nigeria

Email: [splendidtranslationsng@gmail.com](mailto:splendidtranslationsng@gmail.com)



Splendid Translations Nigeria is one of the leading language translators in Nigeria.

**9. After Babel Communications Limited**

19, Adebiyi Street, Off Hughes Avenue, Behind Sweet Sensation, Alagomeji Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria

Email: [info@afterbabel.com.ng](mailto:info@afterbabel.com.ng)

After Babel Communications Limited strives to be one of the largest translation companies in the world with services in multilingual translation of documents, proof-reading, simultaneous and consecutive interpretation, conference services and management.

**10. All Naija Translations**

1 Hebron Villa 1 Ropheka Close, Camp Village, Abeokuta South, Ogun State, Nigeria

Tel: [+234 803 692 4310](tel:+2348036924310), [+234 805 192 6658](tel:+2348051926658)

All Naija Translations offers translation solution to locals and foreigners.

**11. Directline Translators**

1, Yakubu Olufunmi, Sangotedo Ajah, Lagos

Email: [directline.translations@gmail.com](mailto:directline.translations@gmail.com)

A network of certified translators in Lagos, Nigeria under the corporate entity of Directline. They provide trusted translation services in Lagos, Nigeria as the international base of translation services.

**12. Transcript Box**

AO20 Desire Innovations, Lagos Street by Nasarrawa road, kaduna, Kaduna

Email: [info@transcriptbox.com](mailto:info@transcriptbox.com)

Transcript Box is an initiative to provide audio-to-text services to Nigerians. There main aim is to provide transcription service.

**13. Wolef Language Center**

305 Upper Ekenwan Road, Benin, Edo State, Nigeria

Email: [woleflanguages@yahoo.com](mailto:woleflanguages@yahoo.com)

Wolef Language Center is a foreign language translation service provider.

**Conclusion**

This paper has highlighted the indispensable role of internship in a translator training programme. In an investigation carried out to know if the various translator training programmes in the Nigerian universities have Internship as part of their training programme, it was discovered that only Abia State University has Internship as part of its translator training programme. Furthermore, it has been suggested in this study that the government, translator training institutions and the students themselves have a role to play to ensure that the current gap between theories learnt at the universities is complemented by actual practice in the field to make Nigerian translation graduates employable in the labour market or create employment for themselves. This study identified Internship as one of the problems of translator training in Nigeria. There are other problems which include the fact that many translator training

programmes in some Nigerian universities do not have courses such as Revision, Sight Translation, Machine Translation, Précis Writing, etc. These ones will certainly constitute topics for future studies.

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