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Skills and Competencies Needed to fill the existing gaps in Translation Training at the University of Maiduguri, Nigeria

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Abstract

Translation is increasingly recognised as a professional competence, yet it remains largely a pedagogical exercise within language programmes in many Nigerian universities. This study assesses the skills and competencies required by students and lecturers to address gaps in translation training in the Department of Languages and Linguistics at the University of Maiduguri. A mixed-methods design was adopted, involving a structured questionnaire administered to all eight eligible Level 300 and Level 400 French students and an open-ended instrument completed by six lecturers. Students responses were analysed using descriptive statistics, while lecturer responses were analysed thematically. The findings highlight five interconnected areas for strengthening translation training: bilingual and transfer competence, technological competence, specialised and professional competence, practice-oriented competence, and industry-linked training. Students expressed the lowest confidence in translating general texts, with 62.5% reporting agreement with the relevant questionnaire item. All eight students indicated a desire for more hands-on projects and a dedicated translation programme. Lecturers further emphasized the need for training in computer assisted translation (CAT) tools, artificial intelligence (AI), post-editing, humanitarian specialisation, revision, professional ethics and certification. Neither students nor lecturers explicitly identified translation briefs or the communicative purpose of translation as training priorities. Given the small study population, the findings are exploratory and descriptive rather than generalisable. The study therefore proposes a five-component training framework for strengthening training and recommends establishing a dedicated Translation Studies programme, developing translator trainers' competencies, providing a translation laboratory, and fostering partnerships with professional translation organisations.

Keywords:

translation competence, translator training, curriculum development, French programmes.

1. Introduction

In a country as linguistically diverse as Nigeria, language education carries a particular responsibility. For French students at the University of Maiduguri, French is more than an academic requirement. It is a tool for communication across a region that borders Francophone Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Benin. In north-eastern Nigeria, humanitarian operations, security

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cooperation, and cross-border trade create a steady demand for people who can mediate between French and English (UNHCR, 2026). Despite this demand, language programmes often teach students to speak and understand a language without training them to use it professionally through translation. Translation is commonly used as a way of testing grammar rather than as a specialized field with its own competencies (Kelly, 2005). Translation is commonly used as a way of testing grammar. The result is a competence gap: graduates may be proficient in French, yet unprepared for the demands of the translation profession (PACTE,2003). This article reports on the need for translation training at the University of Maiduguri. It focuses on one question: which skills and competencies do students, lecturers, and professionals need to address gaps in current training? The answer to this question provides evidence for curriculum planners who are considering a dedicated translation programme

2. Problem Statement

The French programme at the University of Maiduguri includes translation, but there is a gap between what students are taught and the skills required in the translation market. In Nigeria, French programmes have traditionally focused on literature, grammar and linguistics, while translation training has received less attention (Afolabi, 2019; Gyuse et al., 2019). When translation is included, it is often taught as one subject among several rather than as a complete area of professional training.Previous studies show that Nigerian translation courses tend to focus more on literary texts, such as novels and poems, than on non-literary texts, such as legal documents, medical texts and business documents (Ezeafulukwe, 2020). Other studies have found that some programmes lack sufficient course content and qualified trainers (Ngongeh, 2018). However, no study has investigated the specific skills and knowledge that students and lecturers at the University of Maiduguri consider necessary to address these gaps. Without this information, changes to the curriculum may rely on training models from other institutions that do not meet the university's needs or reflect local conditions. The objective of this study is therefore to assess the translation skills and competencies that students, lecturers and professionals need to address the challenges and gaps in the current training.

3. Literature Review

This section reviews existing research on translator training to establish the foundation for this study in Nigeria. It covers key teaching theories like functionalism, social constructivism, and reflective practice, alongside major global frameworks for testing translation skills (such as the PACTE and EMT models). It also explores the gap between classroom teaching and professional practice, including the growing role of machine translation technology. Finally, the chapter examines current translation programs in Nigeria and Africa, focusing on their school courses, market demands, and challenges to highlight the research gap this study aims to fill.

3.1 Translation competence

Translation competence involves more than knowing two languages. A good translator also needs other skills and knowledge to produce accurate and appropriate translations. The PACTE group (2003) identifies several key areas of competence, including knowledge of two languages, knowledge of the subject being translated, the ability to use translation tools, the ability to solve translation problems and an understanding of translation itself. Further research

by Hurtado Albir et al. (2020) shows that subject knowledge and general knowledge beyond language often take longer to develop than other translation skills. Therefore, students need specific training to improve their understanding of different subjects. Kelly (2005) also explains that translators need professional and interpersonal skills, a positive attitude towards their work and the ability to organise their tasks effectively. Similarly, the European Master's in Translation (EMT) framework (EMT Expert Group, 2022) highlights the importance of technology and professional service provision, alongside language and translation skills. This reflects the changing demands of the translation profession, where translators must use modern tools and provide services that meet clients' needs.In simple terms, translation training should prepare students not only to understand and use languages, but also to research subjects, use translation tools, solve problems, manage their work and meet professional requirements.

3.2 Translation training and the purpose of translation

Floros (2020) distinguishes between two types of translation. Pedagogical translation is used to teach or test language skills, while professional translation is done for real readers and specific purposes. When translation training focuses only on classroom exercises, students have fewer opportunities to learn what is expected of them in professional work. Functionalist approaches also explain that the purpose of a translation should guide the translator's decisions. Vermeer (1989) and Nord (1997) argue that translation should meet the needs of the client and the intended audience. This means that students should learn to work with a translation brief, which provides information about the purpose of the translation, its target audience and the client's requirements. Kiraly (2000) argues that students develop their translation skills more effectively through teamwork and practical projects based on real-life situations than through lessons in which teachers mainly correct short passages. Translation training should go beyond classroom exercises. Students should practise translating real documents, working with clients' instructions, understanding their target audience, and completing projects with other translators. This helps prepare them for the demands of professional translation work.

3.3 Technology and trainers

Machine translation and computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools are now widely used in the translation profession. Mellinger (2017) explains that students are likely to encounter machine translation, even if their university does not teach them how to use it. Therefore, translation technology should be included in practical translation tasks rather than taught only as a separate subject.

The ability of trainers to teach these skills is also important. Kelly (2005) argues that translation lecturers need more than knowledge of languages and translation theory. They should also understand professional translation practice and know how to use modern translation tools. students need to learn how to use modern translation tools, and their teachers must have the necessary skills and experience to teach them. Universities should therefore provide practical technology training for students and ensure that their translation trainers are well prepared.

3.4 Empirical Review

Studies of translator training in Nigeria and elsewhere point to recurring gaps. Gyuse et al. (2019) found that translation is an established part of Bachelor's French curricula in Nigerian

universities, suggesting that its presence in the curriculum is not the issue. Ezeafulukwe (2020) analysed the curricula of three federal universities and found a lean towards literary translation, despite greater market demand for administrative, legal, commercial, and technical translation. Ngongeh (2018) identified gaps in Nigerian programmes in content, resources, and trainers, and recommended adapting structured international models.

Afolabi (2019) argues that translator training in Nigeria should be based on an analysis of market needs. Afolabi and Oyetoyan (2021), reviewing experience across selected African countries during the COVID-19 period, report weak technological infrastructure and a shortage of appropriately skilled trainers, and recommend continuing professional development in technology and pedagogy. Outside Nigeria, Hazaea and Qassem (2024) found in Saudi translation programmes that specialised content is treated as secondary to general language teaching and that technology is covered by only one or two courses. Akpaca (2022) proposes a West African programme centred on specialised knowledge in law and economics and built on a constructivist approach.

These studies share two limits. They rarely bring students and lecturers together within one institution, and none addresses the main problem faced by the University of Maiduguri. They also say little about how students' and lecturers' accounts of the same training may differ. The present study addresses this gap.

4. Methodology

This section outlines the mixed-methods research design used to study translator training needs by combining quantitative survey data with qualitative insights. It details how the study used purposive sampling to select relevant participants and how data was gathered during a 2026 field survey. Numerical data was evaluated using descriptive statistics (percentages, means, and standard deviations), while text responses were analyzed through Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic method. The subsequent sections cover the study's design, participants, tools, analysis methods, and ethical choices

4.1 Design and participants

A convergent mixed-methods design was adopted: quantitative and qualitative data were collected in the same phase, analysed separately and compared at the interpretation stage (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The study was delimited to the Department of Languages and Linguistics, University of Maiduguri. Because the population of Level 300 and Level 400 French students who had taken translation-related courses was small, the study used a census. All eight students took part (five in Level 400 and three in Level 300; four male and four female). Lecturers who teach French or translation-related courses were selected purposively (Etikan et al., 2016), and six took part. All eight students confirmed that they had taken a course with a translation component. Lecturers are identified as L1 to L6.

4.2 Instruments and analysis

Students completed an online questionnaire of 27 five-point Likert statements, grouped under the three research questions. They covered course content, teaching methods and assessment, perceived competence and preparedness, training needs and career awareness. Lecturers

completed a written, open-ended instrument asking about the main gaps in training, the skills and competencies to add, ways to improve training, and their views on a dedicated Translation Studies programme. Items were derived from established models of translation competence (PACTE, 2003; EMT Expert Group, 2022). Data were collected between 16 and 27 September 2026.

Quantitative data were analysed using frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations, using the decision rule that a mean of 3.50 or above indicates agreement, 2.50 to 3.49 indicates undecided and below 2.50 indicates disagreement. Lecturers' responses were analysed thematically using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases, with inductive coding and the resulting themes mapped onto the research questions. Because one student's answer shifts a percentage by 12.5 points, we did not run inferential tests.

5. Presentation of Findings

This section presents the findings from the 2026 field survey, focusing on the curriculum, students' skills and preparedness, and their training expectations.

5.1 Students' perceived competence and preparedness

Table 1: Students' perceived competence and preparedness (N = 8)

Statement	Agree (%)	Mean	SD
Training adequately prepares me for professional translation work	87.5	3.88	0.83
I am confident translating general texts (French–English)	62.5	3.50	1.41
I am confident translating specialised texts	75.0	4.00	0.76
Training has given me the cultural knowledge to translate effectively	87.5	4.25	0.71

Source: Field survey, 2026. Sub-scale mean = 3.91.

This sub-scale recorded the lowest mean in the questionnaire (3.91). Confidence in translating general texts was the weakest item and had the highest dispersion (SD = 1.41). Confidence in specialised texts (mean = 4.00) was higher, even though coverage of non-literary and specialised texts was the only item in the curriculum sub-scale to fall below the criterion mean (Q7; mean = 3.38, undecided). Students rated training technology (Q10) and use of translation aids (Q9) at a mean of 3.62 each.

5.2 Students' training needs

Table 2: Students' training needs and expectations (N = 8)

Statement	**Agree (%)**	**Mean**	**SD**
There is a need for a dedicated translation-training programme	100.0	4.62	0.52
I would value more practical, hands-on translation projects	100.0	4.25	0.46
I would benefit from interacting with professional translators	87.5	4.38	0.74

Source: Field survey, 2026. Sub-scale mean = 4.42, the highest in the questionnaire.

The survey findings reveal a strong student demand for improved translation training, with 100% of respondents supporting a dedicated Translation Studies degree program and more practical, hands-on projects over traditional lectures. Additionally, 87.5% of students value networking opportunities with professional translators. Ultimately, these results highlight that while students currently feel only moderately prepared for the workforce, they strongly desire practice-oriented training that better equips them for professional translation careers.

5.3 Lecturers' themes

Table 3: Themes on the competencies needed and how to develop them (lecturers)

Theme	Sub-themes	Lecturers
Bilingual and transfer competence	Vocabulary, grammar and syntax; pragmatic competence; transfer of meaning without literal translation	L2, L4, L5, L6
Technological competence	CAT tools; AI and machine translation post-editing; audio-visual translation and localisation	L2, L3, L6
Specialised and professional competence	Domain specialization; revision and quality assurance; ethics; certification; soft skills	L2, L6
Practice-oriented, industry-linked training	Translation laboratory; internships; partnerships; student translation bureau; trainer development	L1 to L6

Source: Field survey, 2026.

Bilingual and transfer competence

The lecturers emphasised that students need a good command of both working languages. L5 recommended improving students' vocabulary, grammar and syntax, as well as their ability to use language appropriately according to the context and level of formality. L6 explained that knowing two languages is not enough. Students must also learn how to transfer meaning from one language to another without translating word for word. This requires techniques such as reformulation, transposition and modulation.

Technological competence

L6 described technology as "the most urgent gap" in the current training. The lecturer proposed that every student should obtain a certificate in computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools before graduating. Students should also learn to use artificial intelligence (AI) to produce a first draft and then improve it through post-editing. L2 highlighted the need for training in CAT tools, AI, terminology management and post-editing. Similarly, L3 recommended providing software to modernise translation practices.

Specialised and professional competence

L2 recommended training students to translate legal, medical, technical, business and humanitarian texts. L6 proposed that each student should graduate with a specialisation in at least one area. The lecturer particularly emphasised humanitarian translation because of its

importance in Borno State, where United Nations agencies and non-governmental organisations need French-English translators.

The lecturers also identified other essential professional skills, including revision, proofreading, quality assurance, professional ethics, meeting deadlines and teamwork. They further recommended preparing students for the examinations of the Nigerian Institute of Translators and Interpreters (NITI).

Practice-oriented and industry-linked training

All six lecturers recommended practical measures to improve translation training. These included converting the existing language laboratory into a translation laboratory and changing the balance of the curriculum from approximately 80% theory to 60% practical work. They also proposed supervised translation exercises with individual feedback, a compulsory six-week internship and partnerships with translation organisations through memoranda of understanding.

5.4 Related findings

Students reported high career awareness (sub-scale mean = 4.35), but willingness to pursue translation after graduation was the weakest item (mean = 3.88; SD = 1.36), with Level 400 students (mean = 4.20) more inclined than Level 300 students (mean = 3.33). L6 reported that students receive no orientation towards certification or self-employment. All eight students and all six lecturers supported a dedicated Translation Studies programme. L5 noted that translation is currently taught "as only one course among several others" and that a new programme would need a carefully designed curriculum, adequate staffing and sustained investment.

5.5 Data Analysis and Interpretation

When the findings from students and lecturers are examined together, four main patterns emerge.

First, both groups agree that students need more practical experience. Students and lecturers identified the need for practical translation activities and greater contact with the translation profession. All the students wanted more hands-on projects, while 87.5% wanted opportunities to interact with professional translators. All six lecturers also suggested practical ways to improve translation training. This agreement provides the strongest evidence that students need more opportunities to practise translation in real-life situations.

Second, students still need to strengthen their language skills. Only 62.5% of students expressed confidence in their general translation skills. Lecturers also reported differences in students' levels of French and English proficiency. This suggests that the problem at the University of Maiduguri is not limited to a lack of professional experience. Students also need to improve their language skills. Therefore, the assumption that graduates already have strong language skills but lack professional training may not be entirely correct.

Third, students and lecturers have different views on technology and specialised translation. Students gave positive ratings to their technology training, with 75% agreeing that they had received adequate training in this area. They also rated their confidence in specialised

translation at 4.00. However, lecturers reported that students had not received formal training in computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools or artificial intelligence (AI) tools. They also explained that teaching mainly focused on general translation.

One possible explanation is that students consider their use of free online translation tools to be formal technology training. Another possibility is that they judge their ability to translate specialised texts based on what they have learnt in class rather than on the requirements of professional translation. However, these are only possible explanations; the data collected cannot confirm them.

Fourth, the purpose and intended audience of a translation receive little attention. Neither students nor lecturers mentioned translation briefs, intended readers or the purpose of a text. A translation brief provides instructions about why a text is being translated, who will read it and what the translation should achieve. The absence of these elements in participants' responses suggests that translation in the department may be understood mainly as transferring meaning from one language to another, rather than as a professional activity guided by a specific purpose and audience.

Overall, the findings suggest that translation training at the University of Maiduguri needs to place greater emphasis on practical experience, language development, translation technology, specialised translation and the purpose of the target text. These areas could help bridge the gap between university training and the demands of professional translation.

6. Discussion

The findings support much of the literature on translator training in Nigeria and Africa. The weak coverage of specialised texts agrees with Ezeafulukwe's (2020) finding of a literary bias, and suggests that the same imbalance appears at undergraduate level. Lecturers' reports of absent technology and a shortage of professionally trained trainers match Afolabi and Oyetoyan (2021), Hazaea and Qassem (2024), and Ngongeh (2018). At Maiduguri, however, the problem lies partly in under-use of existing facilities, since a language laboratory exists but is not used for translation.

The finding that bilingual competence is Itself a gap supports PACTE's (2003) view that bilingual competence is the foundation of translation competence, and shows why a translation programme cannot be built on19pecialized19onn and technology alone. The lecturer'' demand for transfer without literal rendering reflects Floro''s (2020) critique of pedagogical translation. The student'' higher confidence in19pecializedd than in general translation fits Hurtado Albir et al''s (2020) observation that extra-linguistic knowledge is slow to develop and easy to overestimate.

On technology, lecturers' calls for CAT tools, AI and post-editing agree with the EMT framework (EMT Expert Group, 2022). One lecturer proposed a stand-alone course, but Mellinger (2017) cautions that technology should also be integrated across authentic tasks, so a single course will not be enough. The emphasis on humanitarian translation extends Akpac''s (2022)19pecializedd-knowledge approach by identifying a domain suited to the Lake Chad Basin. The lecturers' emphasis on revision, ethics, and certification aligns with the professional and interpersonal dimensions in Kell''s (2005) model. The demand for hands-on projects

supports Kiral''s (2000) constructivist argument, and the absence of any reference to briefs supports the case for teaching translation as purposeful action (Vermeer, 1989; Nord, 1997).

Finally, the gap between students' high career awareness and weaker career intention suggests the challenge is no longer awareness but preparation for entering the profession.

7. Recommendations

The evidence supports a five-component framework (Table 4), together with enabling conditions.

Table 4: Proposed translation-training framework

No	Component	Content	Evidence
1	Bilingual and transfer foundation	French and English proficiency; register and pragmatics; transfer techniques	Q17 (62.5%); lecturer themes
2	Specialised translation	Humanitarian, legal, medical, technical and business translation	Q7 (undecided); L2, L6
3	Technology and responsible AI use	CAT tools, terminology management, post-editing	Q10; L2, L3, L6
4	Authentic, purpose-oriented practice	Translation briefs, portfolio, translation laboratory, student bureau	Q21 (100%); all lecturers
5	Professional and career development	Revision, ethics, certification, internships, career guidance	Q22, Q25; L2, L6
6	Enabling conditions	Trainer recruitment and certification; partnerships; infrastructure	L3, L4, L5; L5's conditions

Source: Researcher's synthesis, 2026.

The framework is cumulative: the bilingual foundation comes first, specialisation and technology are introduced progressively, and authentic practice and professional development run through every level. The following recommendations are proposed.

1. Establish a dedicated Translation Studies programme, building on the initiative reported to be under way in the Faculty of Arts. In the interim, expand translation from one course to a sequence across levels 200 to 400.
2. Balancing the curriculum towards supervised practice, with regular exercises, individual feedback and a student portfolio.
3. Strengthen bilingual and transfer competence through targeted French and English instruction accompanying translation courses.
4. Introduce specialised translation, with humanitarian translation as a priority and at least one specialisation per student.

5. Integrate technology across the curriculum, reactivating the language laboratory as a translation laboratory and teaching CAT tools, post-editing and responsible AI use both as a course and within practical tasks.
6. Teach translation as purposeful action by using realistic briefs that specify purpose, audience, and client.
7. Develop trainer capacity by recruiting specialist translators and sponsoring lecturers for certification and training in CAT tools and AI.
8. Build links with the profession through internships, memoranda of understanding with NITI, humanitarian agencies and universities in neighbouring Francophone countries, guest lectures and a supervised student translation bureau.
9. Convert career awareness into preparation through early guidance on certification, freelance practice and annual NITI examination workshops.
10. At policy level, the National Universities Commission should consider including specialised translation, translation technology and professional practice in minimum academic standards for language programmes (National Universities Commission, 2023).

8. Conclusion

This article assessed the skills and competencies needed to address the gaps in translation training at the University of Maiduguri. Translation training exists and is valued, but it falls short in 21 pecialized 21 on, technology, supervised practice and trainer capacity. Four competence areas emerged from students and lecturers: bilingual and transfer competence, technological competence, 21pecialized and professional competence, and practice-oriented, industry-linked training. Two findings extend existing work: the competence gap is both linguistic and professional, and the purpose-oriented view of translation is absent from how the training is conceived. Students and lecturers were unanimous that a dedicated Translation Studies programme is needed. Future research should use larger, multi-institution samples, analyse course outlines and examinations, observe classroom practice, and include professional translators and employers so that perceived demand can be tested against labour-market evidence.

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