

FINANCIAL MATTERS AFFECTING MOZAMBICAN PROFESSIONAL TRANSLATORS AND INTERPRETERS: A SURVEY

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ABSTRACT: This study investigates the financial challenges affecting translators and interpreters in Mozambique. Specifically, the study seeks to describe the Mozambican translators' and interpreters' business context. By means of a survey questionnaire, qualitative and quantitative data was collected from 42 participants. Data analysis led to the conclusion that Mozambican translators and interpreters are relatively young adults, who mostly offer freelance services on a part-time basis while holding a full-time job elsewhere, and that few of them have a pension scheme. It also identifies two distinct levels of income amongst these professionals. These findings highlight the need to equip translation and interpreting students with skills beyond their field of expertise to enhance graduate employability.

KEYWORDS: Translators and Interpreters, Translation and Interpreting, Translation and Interpreting Service Provision, Financial Security, Translator and Interpreter Training

1. Introduction

Many people are scared by the thought of financial insecurity and this no doubt influences their choice of career. If someone believes that the career they want to pursue will allow them to support themselves and their dependants, they will have motivation to get the needed training, no matter how hard it is. Conversely, someone that is initially inclined to choose a fulfilling job may reconsider if they sense that it is not likely to help them pay bills, perhaps even opting for a job they do not necessarily like.

Those who choose to enter the translation and interpreting profession usually have, first and foremost, a love of and knack for languages. Long before they seek any specialized training, they will probably have developed a good mastery of at least one foreign language and feel that training that builds on their linguistic proficiency will put them on a path to a career that is both fulfilling and financially secure. However, in a world full of uncertainties, few academic courses can, in themselves, guarantee a financially secure job. For a demand-driven industry such as translation and interpreting, multiple factors are at play that affect success. These include the translator's language pair, the country in which he/she operates, his/her networking skills, and of course economic shocks operating at the national or global levels etc. Thus, in a country such as Mozambique, it is not uncommon to find successful full-time translators and interpreters working alongside others who provide freelance translation and interpreting services while holding down jobs in other domains (as language teachers, for example). Indeed, it is quite frequent to meet translators and interpreters who are struggling to make a living, to the point of getting frustrated with their career choice. This is unfortunate, considering that in some countries, translators' salaries are comparable to those of other highly trained professionals (Arnold et al, 1994, p. 4).

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Against this backdrop, this study aims to find out more about the financial challenges affecting professional translators and interpreters in Mozambique. Specifically, it seeks to provide some insights into Mozambican translators' and interpreters' business context by answering such questions as: How do Mozambican translators and interpreters practice their profession? Do they have access to the government's pension scheme? How does taxation affect their financial situation? What rates do they charge for their services and do these make their job financially secure?

It is hoped that this data might ultimately contribute to the curriculum development for translator and interpreter training and enhance graduate employability.

2. Context of the study

The context of this study is Mozambique, a country situated in Southern Africa, bordered by Tanzania to the north, Zambia and Malawi to the northwest, Zimbabwe to the west and South Africa and Eswatini to the southwest. The geographic location is significant because, apart from Mozambique and Angola, whose official language is Portuguese, the remaining countries of Southern Africa mainly speak English as their official language. This provides an opportunity for Mozambican professionals to tap into the region's translation and interpreting market. Nearby South Africa and Botswana, for example, host international bodies (the Pan-African Parliament and the Southern African Development Community, respectively), both of which use Portuguese as one of their working languages.

The history of translator and interpreter training in Mozambique dates back to the late seventies, when the Language Institute of Maputo offered intensive training for translators, interpreters and tour guides. In 2001, Eduardo Mondlane University (UEM) launched a BA Honours degree (*Licenciatura*) in Translation and Interpreting, which it revised in 2009 in the context of the Bologna Process. One negative aspect of the Bologna Process was the decision, on the part of UEM, to phase out the Interpreting component from the BA Honours degree.¹ However, training in interpreting is still available in Mozambique, having been offered at MA level at the Pedagogical University (UP) since 2010. More recently, the Pedagogical University also introduced MA courses in translation as well. These are, however, the only training courses for translators or interpreters in Mozambique, and the professional shortfall is made up by people with university degrees in modern language teaching, who have effectively taught themselves translation in order to be able to operate effectively in the marketplace.

In Mozambique, there is a professional association of translators and interpreters known as the *Associação de Tradutores e Intérpretes de Moçambique (ATIM)*, founded in 2016. During a phone interview conducted on 19 May 2022, Sandra Tamele, a founding member of this association, stated that ATIM now has 63 members, but is quite "dormant" because the majority of Mozambican translators and interpreters hesitate to join the association and help it become a truly active organization. She added that the association

¹ See Magaia (2018) for more detail about these historical processes and about the study itself.

recently lowered the annual membership fee from MZN 5,000 (nearly \$78) to MZN 750 (nearly \$12), but despite this incentive, many are still reluctant to join.

3. Materials and Methods

Bearing in mind that “in any research methodology, the relationship that a researcher establishes with the object of study will determine the kind of research to undergo” (Cravo and Neves, 2007, p. 94), this study uses a survey questionnaire consisting of two parts, namely: 1) Respondent’s profile and 2) Professional practice and financial matters. The first part collected data regarding respondent’s gender, age, city, language pair(s), academic training and work experience. The second part consisted of both closed-ended and open-ended questions. The questions centred on the following:

- a) how the translator/interpreter is practising his/her profession (i.e., whether he/she is working freelance only or he/she has another job while working freelance, or he/she is running his/her own translation and interpreting business);
- b) whether the translator/interpreter has a pension plan (if working freelance only or running own translation/interpreting business);
- c) whether the translator/interpreter will access government pensions after retirement (if he/she is not on a pension plan);
- d) how the translator/interpreter is preparing for life after retirement (if he/she will not access government pensions);
- e) whether the respondent thinks working full time as a translator/interpreter is financially secure;
- f) the usual translation rates per page (220-250 words);
- g) the usual interpreting rates a day (up to 8 hours);
- h) the translator/interpreter’s annual revenue, on average, in a successful business year;
- i) factors the translator/interpreter takes into consideration when determining rates; and
- j) whether the tax regime applicable to respondent’s business affects his/her income.

The questionnaire was distributed via social networks and email among 68 practising translators and interpreters, of whom 42 responded through the same channel within a period of three weeks from 5th to 27th May 2022. The data was anonymized to comply with ethical and confidentiality considerations. For the purpose of citation, respondents were

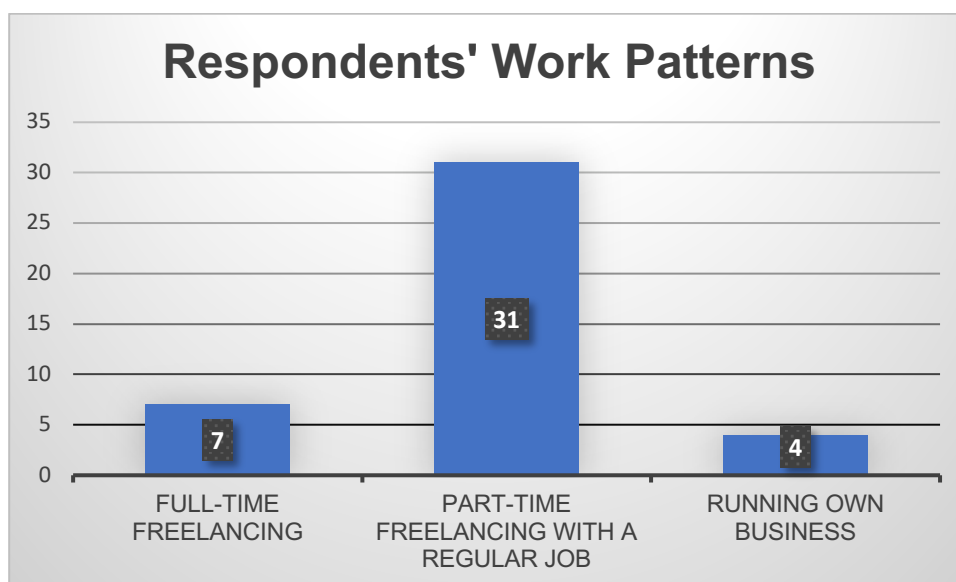
assigned a code (for example, P1 means participant number 1, P2 participant number 2, and so on). The findings of this survey are presented and discussed in the section below.

4. Results

4.1 Respondents' profiles

A total of 42 respondents took part in the study, 36 (85%) of whom were male and 6 (15%) female. Of these, the majority (24 or 60%) were aged between 31 and 40, followed by a group of 11 participants (26%) aged between 23 and 30. A further 6 people (12%) were aged between 41 and 50, and 1 (2%) between 51 and 60. Most (72%) of the participants lived in the capital city, Maputo, while the rest lived in the nearby town of Matola (19%) or in the cities of Beira (5%), Tete (2%) and Pemba (2%). All participants have at least a BA Honours degree in translation and interpreting or in modern languages.

With regard to language pairs, 39 (93%) of the participants translate and/or interpret from English into Portuguese and vice versa. The other three participants (7%) have other language combinations in addition to English and Portuguese: i) English-Portuguese-French-Spanish-Italian; ii) English-Portuguese-French; and iii) English-Portuguese-Ronga-Shangaan. The respondents had more than 7 years of work experience on average. As can be seen in graph 1, the majority of Mozambican translators and interpreters (74%) offer freelance services on a part-time basis while holding down a permanent job in different sectors. Those working exclusively as freelancers or running their own translation and interpreting business total 11, making up just 26%.



Graph 1. Respondents' work patterns.

The main issue emerging from these results is that the overwhelming majority of the study participants are young adults still in their prime. Hence, it is crucial that at this age they begin to feel some degree of financial stability within the career of their choice. Furthermore, with more than 7 years of work experience, on average, it is to be expected

that by this age translators and interpreters will have identified and conquered their market niche. However, as shown in graph 1, only 11 (26%) professionals were self-employed, against 31 (74%) who relied on a permanent job elsewhere while offering freelance translation and interpreting services on a part-time basis. This finding suggests that Mozambicans do not feel much security in the translation and interpreting career.

4.2 Financial matters

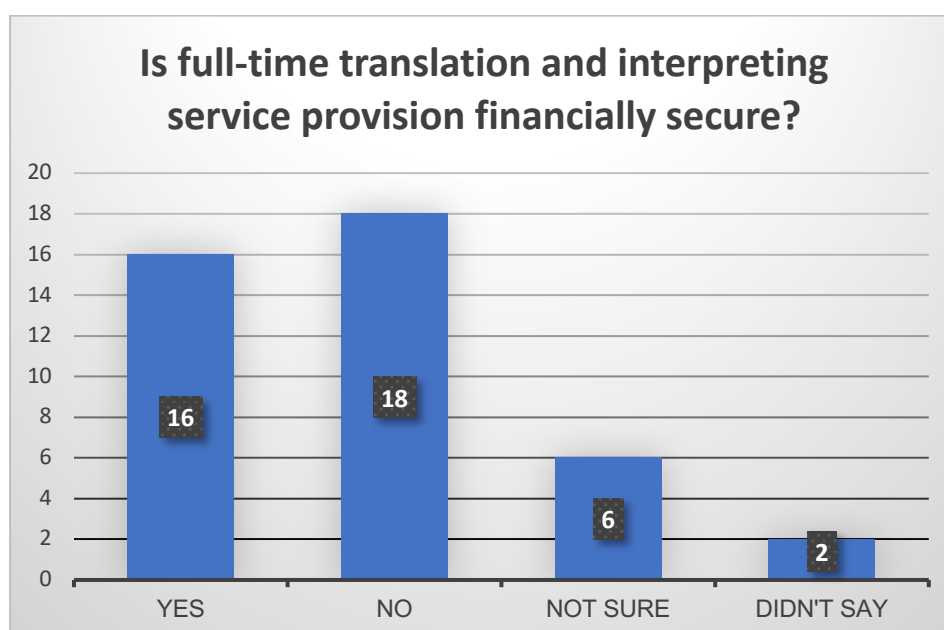
4.2.1. Social security in translation and interpreting

Focusing on the 11 translators and interpreters who are either offering full-time freelance services or running their own company, the data reveals that only 4 participants (36%) have a pension scheme. This is because only those that run a business are registered with the tax office and National Social Security Institute (INSS) and pay the monthly contribution that will entitle them to a state pension upon retirement. The other 7 (64%) are operating in the informal economy. Of those, 3 are investing money into other businesses in preparation for retirement and 2 are saving money; the other 2 are doing nothing.

This suggests that it is advisable for freelance translators and interpreters to move out of the informal economy and formalize their services in order to benefit from the government's social security system and minimize their social insecurity.

4.2.2. Findings on financial security in translation and interpreting

The data reveals mixed views among Mozambican translators and interpreters regarding financial security. As shown in graph 2, a significant number (40%) think that working fulltime as a translator/interpreter is financially secure, but a larger number (45%) disagree; 10% are not sure, and 5% have no opinion.



Graph 2. Perceptions about financial security of providing translation and interpreting services full time.

For those considering the work to be financially secure, participants admit that this depends on various factors. For example, one participant mentions the need to keep “good health, good habits and discipline at all levels of life” (P13), while another says that the translator/interpreter needs to be “someone who has already established his spot in the market, [be] well known and [have] good links with companies and projects” (P23). Yet another participant (P30) put it this way:

It is secure if you have a salary-based job. However, if one is starting a business, it might take a while to reach a financially secure level, because the span of time to reach such a level or simply make a living out of this work is dependent on many factors such as: connection (knowing many people or the right people to help boost the company); the market (the price charged for the good and the consumers’ purchasing power); the taxes and so forth.

On the other hand, those who do not find full-time translation and interpreting service provision financially secure refer to the challenges inherent in freelancing. Respondent P38 said: “There are many translators in the market and there is no business”, while P11 affirmed:

There is a lot of competition and sub-contracting; people only rely on official translators for official documents and purposes. Due to the availability of information technology and content, people now have access to all kinds of information and content which leads to lower demand for translation services.

Another participant (P12) put it this way:

Working as a fulltime translator can be financially secure if you are working for a company or an organization. Freelancing is not. Mainly because translation projects are seasonal; they come and go. And there have been delays in getting paid for translations done.

In view of the above evidence, one can conclude that, in Mozambique, full-time translation and interpreting service provision is mostly viewed as financially insecure. That is why most of those graduating from a translation and interpreting course resort to seeking a reliable job elsewhere even if it is not much related to their field of expertise, only offering translation and interpreting services on a part-time basis.

In such a scenario, one can see the link between this feeling of financial insecurity and the weak adherence to the Mozambican translators’ and interpreters’ association (ATIM) mentioned in section 2. If the majority of translators and interpreters felt that their career was a viable and important one, they would probably want to support an organization that advances their common interests.

4.2.3. Findings on prices and determining factors

Closely related to financial insecurity in translation and interpreting service provision are the varying patterns of rates charged in Mozambique. The rates charged are per page of source text, containing, on average, between 220 and 250 words. Thus, while the majority (46%) of translators charge \$15-20 per page, a smaller number (25%) charge \$20-25, a yet smaller number (12%) \$25-30, and 17% charge below \$15. Based on these figures, it can be concluded that the standard price per 220–250-word page is \$20 in Mozambique.

These varied patterns are also seen in the prices charged for interpreting services, where 29% charge \$200-250 per an 8-hour working day, while 26% charge \$250-300, 16% \$300-350, another 16% below \$200, and 13% above \$350. Here it can be concluded that the standard price per an interpretation day of 8 working hours is \$275, on average.

With regard to annual incomes, according to the study data, 30% of the respondents earn below \$3,000 a year from translation and interpreting services combined, in contrast to 27% who report an average annual revenue above \$6,000. Also, 24% have an average annual revenue of \$3,000-4,000, while 16% earn \$4,000-5,000 per year against only 3% who earn \$5,000-6,000 annually.

Consequently, after analysing the aggregate data, one can conclude that there are two income groups: the bottom group (made up of the majority, 73%) and the top group (made up of the minority, 27%). A bottom group translator/interpreter earns an estimated \$300 a month and a top group translator/interpreter earns about \$500 a month. This suggests that, based on the assumed standard price of \$20 per 220–250-word page and \$275 per interpretation day of 8 working hours, the least successful professional in Mozambique either translates a total of 180 pages a year (i.e., 15 pages per month) or sells nearly 13 days of interpreting services a year. Likewise, using the same criteria, the most successful professional sells 300 pages a year (i.e., 25 pages a month) or a maximum of 22 days of interpreting services a year. On the basis of the data collection tool used in this study, it is not possible to determine what type of service is the primary source of translators and interpreters' income. Nonetheless, a trend that can be noticed is that the demand for Mozambican translators' and interpreters' services is low.

With regard to the factors determining these rates, Mozambican translators and interpreters take into account local and international rates as well as the content and type of document or meeting. Other factors include: type of client (whether private or public, individual or corporate, national or international, etc.), client fidelity, client sensitivity, fees to be paid to institutions that authenticate documents, document format, turnaround time, number of pages, number of words, purpose (e.g. young scholarship applicants may pay less), and the like.

An important finding emerging from the varied patterns of rates charged for translation and interpreting services in Mozambique is that this also contributes to the financial insecurity of translators and interpreters. This situation is compounded by the fact that most of them offer cheap labour in terms of translation rates per page (less than \$20), although a substantial number claim to charge a relatively fair price for interpreting

services a day (\$250-350). Hence, one could once again argue that an active professional association of translators and interpreters would play an important role in regulating the prices applied in the market to counter unfair competition (Picken, 1996, p. 59; Baker, 2011, p. 274).

4.2.4. Findings on the effects of taxation

In terms of the effects of taxes² on translators' and interpreters' financial situation, the data shows that taxes have no effect on the majority of respondents (52%). For example, as regards VAT, one respondent (P40), said:

When running the translation/interpretation through my business, the VAT is added to the invoice (additional to the actual sub-amount). When working for another firm or business, we agree on a fee free from taxation (the other business or firm will cater for taxation).

While another (P24) said: "It doesn't affect my financial situation because I factor it in the final price the customer pays for the services." A third (P20) elaborated further: "I do not consider 3% to be a lot. However, the payment system is very bureaucratic and time-consuming, we have to stay in long queues and make bank deposits."

However, over one third (36%) did report a negative effect of taxation, presumably those whose general financial security was weak. For example, one respondent (P3) said: "The amount given to the government at the end of the year would make a huge difference in my life, chiefly if one is not financially stable", while P33 seemed to agree:

It adversely affects my business financial health because not all customers are willing to pay accordingly so as to face tax obligations adequately. Taxes, as they are now, are not conducive for new start-ups.

In view of this evidence, it can be concluded that Mozambican translators and interpreters know the relevant tax legislation and that most of them do not find it burdensome, for different reasons. However, it is not clear to what extent these views reflect the real majority of Mozambican professionals in this field, since many have another job in addition to translation and interpreting, and may pay most of their taxes from that, while others, operating in the grey economy, pay no taxes at all.

5. Discussion

Translation and interpreting training is useful not only because of its vocational potential, but also because, during training, students develop skills and competences that can be used in other jobs as well. Some university translation courses offer workshops and seminars in areas such as law, banking, finance and technology (Owens, 1996, p. 41), which

² Taxes here refer either to the 17% VAT or to the 3% tax paid by small taxpayers known as ISPC (Imposto Simplificado para Pequenos Contribuintes).

allows graduates the chance of obtaining employment in those fields as a specialist linguist. As Picken (1996, p. 57) observes:

It is gratifying to find independent evidence of the fact that a language degree is not regarded as a 'soft' subject, and that because language graduates must by definition possess linguistic skills, coupled, one hopes, with the ability to communicate, their merits are at last being appreciated.

It seems that an effective translator and interpreter training model should, among other things, equip students to be self-employed, since freelancing is a very common professional option for translators and interpreters. Sharing an African perspective, Nintai (1994, p. 45) points to "the danger of training too many literary translators for a market often marked by very low demand". Nevertheless, he argues in favour of the introduction of relevant courses in African universities because "most of those trained will, in all likelihood, come to work with publishing houses, or on a free-lance basis alongside other main jobs" (Nintai, 1994, p. 45). Training translation students for freelancing has also been identified as a goal of "vocational degree programmes in Europe" (Rico, 2010, p. 97). In fact, at least in Mozambique, based on my findings about the number of graduates working freelance, it appears that despite the greater security in having a full-time job, preparing students for self-employment is a strategy that might bring added value to the translation course.

However, as we have seen, working freelance has both advantages and disadvantages. For example, translators and interpreters often take full-time jobs in some adjacent field to provide financial security while working freelance in their free time. Moreover, although those who work solely as freelancers might at times feel insecure, they do enjoy the comfort of working from home, aided by modern technology, as described by Picken (1996). According to this author, the downside of working freelance is that it is risky at the outset and not very lucrative either (Picken, 1996, p. 58). Indeed:

Unless freelance translators are lucky enough to have close links of co-operation with colleagues who work in the same fields or languages, and who are willing to provide mutual assistance, as a freelance one is very much on one's own (Picken 1996, p. 58).

This hints at the need for networking in order to counter the negative effects of freelancing, as discussed below.

5.1 Importance of translators' and interpreters' associations

Schröder (1996, p. 89) argues that "translation organisations bring translators together" and that "translators need to be brought together". He goes on:

Translation can be a lonely business – even in-house – and those not naturally equipped with social skills may find they need a little help. Hence virtually all translation organisations arrange social events for members.

Although this may not be a compelling reason for translators to join a professional association, he also mentions (1996, p. 90) a “much more valid side of association” – namely networking – which means “translators getting together to discuss issues of relevance to the work they do.”

Regarding the benefits of having a functional professional association of translators and interpreters, one scholar writes:

Most countries have at least one association which brings together professional translators with the aim of jointly defending their interests, promoting the profession and ensuring standards. The vast majority of these organize professional development programmes for members, normally in the form of short courses designed to deal with very specific aspects of translators’ work: new technologies, marketing, tax, copyright, terminology management, revision, and so on. (Kelly, 2005, p. 9)

Another potential benefit of having an effective professional association is the provision of “longer-term programmes such as the American Translator’s Association (ATA) mentoring scheme, whereby senior experienced professionals offer guidance to novices over a period of time, facilitating their entry into the profession” (Kelly, 2005, pp. 9-10). Then there is also the matter of professional ethics. For Mona Baker (2011, p. 274), one of the main benefits of translator associations is to ensure the accountability of their members to other parties involved in the interaction, particularly clients who pay their wages.

Since financial matters are at the centre of this study, the next section reviews some of the factors affecting pricing in the translation and interpreting market.

5.2 Factors affecting pricing in translation and interpreting

There is no single way of knowing what price to charge for translation or interpreting services, as multiple factors are at play. Picken (1996, pp. 59-60) has shown that the rates charged for these services may vary according to a person’s age, location, whether one is working abroad or within his or her country, and whether one is working as a staff translator or as a freelancer. Weschke (1996, p. 161) makes a similar point: “rates of pay do vary widely, and are often affected by the subject area, the translator’s profile, internal client regulations, translator location, etc.” The International Federation of Translators, in its Translator’s Charter, stipulates the need for “reasonable fees (not undercutting the profession!)” and advocates that “the general conditions of the translation task ... must not be ‘humiliating’ either to the translator himself or to the profession as a whole” (Chesterman, 200, pp. 187-188). In this regard, it can be argued that if there is a functional association of translators and interpreters, these professionals will find it easier to stipulate prices for the services they render. Indeed, in many countries, the national translators’ associations publish tariffs of recommended rates, graded according to type

of language (basically Western European versus others), degree of difficulty and in some cases, the purpose for which the translation is required (Picken, 1996, p. 59).

In order for the translator or interpreter to know how to act in the market, including how to negotiate fair prices with clients, he or she needs to be what Nord (2005, pp. 210-211) calls a “functional translator”, who, among others, “knows what her/his translations are worth”. If a translator or an interpreter is confident about the quality of their services, they will certainly require fair pay. In other words, translators and/or interpreters who have developed full translation competence and/or interpreting competence will have what Kelly (2005, pp. 32-33) calls “professional and instrumental competence” and “interpersonal competence”. The former will equip them with “basic notions for managing professional activity: contracts, tenders, billing, tax; ethics; professional associations”, and the latter will endow them with the ability to work with clients, in addition to developing their negotiation skills (Kelly, 2005, p. 33).

Armed with good professional and instrumental competence, coupled with interpersonal competence, the translator or interpreter will also be able to educate the client (Weschke, 1996, pp. 149-172). For example, many clients need to be told that “there is a difference between translation and interpreting” (Weschke, 1996, p. 153). Likewise, “the client should be clear that they pay for words rather than time in most cases” (Weschke, 1996, p. 153). Therefore, even though there is no agreed rate for any translation commission or an interpreting assignment, providers need to dignify themselves and the profession they practice by negotiating fair rates of pay and by being assertive, though always flexible, according to the specific circumstances of the potential assignment.

7. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to learn about financial challenges affecting professional translators and interpreters in Mozambique. It was hoped that the study would provide an understanding of Mozambican translators’ and interpreters’ business context (e.g. pensions, taxation, prices, etc.), and that this might ultimately be useful for the development of training courses at university level.

In view of the findings of this study, it seems that, apart from translation and interpreting competence in itself, translator and interpreter education should also include financial matters. During the training, students should benefit from the study of applicable commercial laws and regulations, which could encourage them to aim at acting as formal service providers, instead of following the trend of many current translators and interpreters today who operate in the grey economy, mostly to avoid the burden of taxes. Equally important in translator and interpreter training are contents related to personal marketing (to broaden one’s market share), negotiation skills (to secure fair pay) and networking (to encourage cooperation, for example, through an association, to counter unfair competition).

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