THE IMPORTANCE OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN EDUCATION: VOICES FROM THE CONTINENTS

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Abstract

Learning a second and/or a foreign language is no longer a luxury. Opportunities in higher education, in international military, diplomacy and economics increasingly require multilingual skills. Countries engaged in the global market need employees with knowledge of foreign languages and cultures to market products to customers around the globe and to work effectively with colleagues from partner countries with different languages and cultures. In the same way, international organisations have underscored the importance of competence in foreign languages for: international finance, trade, diplomacy and security. Research has further shown that knowledge of a foreign language broadens a person's opportunities in higher education, and helps in the overall cognitive development. Foreign languages are essential in peace keeping missions and in international courts. In discussing the importance of foreign languages, this paper surveys literature to uncover key policy decisions, practices and directions adopted by various nations in the world. Examples are drawn from regions representing the five continents.

Key Words: Foreign languages, education, voices from continents.

Introduction

Many institutions of higher learning have departments or centres dedicated to the teaching of foreign languages. This is in spite of the fact that there is no common agreement on what constitutes 'a foreign' language. In multilingual nations, people could easily claim to be users of a foreign language when they have proficiency in the language of a neighbouring community. In Kenya, for example, the majority of citizens use at least three languages: the individual's community language as a mother tongue, and the two official languages Kiswahili and English. Kiswahili and English for most Kenyans are formally learned in school, but no one considers them 'foreign languages' despite the fact that they are not the 'native' languages of the users. This calls to mind a situation some 30 or so years ago when one of public universities in Kenya, Kenyatta University, (then known as Kenyatta University College) was working towards full university status and was re-looking at the way the departments were to be organised. There used to be a 'Languages, Linguistics and Literature department, and a decision was taken to break it into three departments. Literature was set up as a separate department (disregarding the fact that the teaching of French and Kiswahili also included a lot of literary studies). The big question was how to organise Linguistics and the three language programs into two departments? One suggestion was to have Kiswahili and African languages as a department and then 'English and other foreign languages' as another department. This proposal was heatedly opposed. Some people felt that designating English

as ‘foreign language’ was some kind of ‘demotion, while others saw English, the language of the former colonial powers, as clearly a ‘foreign language’. This serves to show how context dependent the term ‘foreign language’ is. Yet, in many other contexts, English is seen as the preferred ‘foreign language’. For example, a survey conducted by Cha and Ham in 2008 (cited in Lo Bianco and Slaughter, 2009: p.11), covering the period between 1850 and 2005, indicated how English dethroned German and French after the world wars to become the foreign language of choice by 2005; taking 82% of the people learning a foreign language.

Table 1: First foreign language, world survey

Period	% German	% French	% English
1850–1874	50.0	33.3	8.3
1875–1899	44.4	38.9	5.6
1890–1919	24.3	45.9	27.0
1920–1944	14.8	35.2	33.3
1945–1969	00.0	28.1	59.4
1970–1989	00.0	17.0	67.4
1990–2005	00.7	13.6	82.1

Source: Cha and Ham (2008) cited in Lo Bianco and Slaughter (2009, p.11)

Defining Foreign Language

Is there such a thing as a foreign language? Does it have distinctive features? Language policy is often based on the idea of teaching monolingual learners languages spoken in ‘foreign places’, but because of immigrants, what is termed as a foreign language in countries like Australia and the United States of America, will also be a ‘community language’ of some citizens in that same country. Thus, a meaningful definition of a foreign language can only make reference to an ideal situation. In this sense a foreign language is defined, geographically, as a language that is indigenous to another region outside the boundaries of the speakers or learners in focus. If the geographical boundaries are set at state/country level, then a foreign language will be defined as a language that is the native tongue of other states (in an ideal situation). On the other hand, if the geographical boundaries are set at ethnic/speech community level, then a foreign language will be the native tongue of other speech communities even when they are in the same state; it is the language of the ‘foreigner’; however foreigner is defined in the setting. This definition does not distinguish between a foreign language and a second language in setting where the second language has foreign origins as is the case in many developing countries. It therefore leads us to a second definition.

In language learning contexts foreign language is associated with identifiable patterns of acquisition and use. To begin with, the learners of a foreign language already have a first language variously referred to as mother tongue or home language. This does not particularly distinguish a foreign language from a second language but the social context in which a foreign language is learned is the deciding factor in determining whether it is identified as a foreign or second language. A foreign language is learned in a context where the linguistic environment is not saturated with authentic language input. The students learning a foreign language in a typical setting have only their teacher to rely on for authentic language input. As result, the students are not expected to develop proficiency in one or two years of instruction. Does this make English a foreign language in Kenyan rural areas, or in Tanzania?

Thirdly, a foreign language can be defined, from the functions the learners want to put the new language

into. While for second language acquisition the learner is motivated by the desire to access goods and services within own country, but which are packaged in the second language, the learning of a foreign language is motivated by desire to learn more about, or to communicate with, speakers of that language. The focus is to reach for goods and services outside one's own community.

This paper is a general overview of the importance of foreign languages, and approaches the subject by surveying literature to uncover key policy decisions, practices and directions adopted by various nations in the world to ensure meaningful access to foreign languages by their citizens. Examples are drawn from regions representing the five continents.

Early and Enduring Engagements with Foreign Languages

What has motivated people over the years to learn a 'foreign language'? In the Western world back in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, foreign language learning was associated with the learning of Latin and Greek, both supposed to promote learners' intellectuality. In fact the mastery of the classical languages was seen as evidence of high intellectual power.

With the exploration of the 'new' world, the movement of missionaries, traders, imperialists and adventurers outside the boundaries of their languages increased. This gave rise to the need to learn foreign language with dual purpose: learn their language so that I can give them what I have (evangelism), or so that I can access what I need from them (entrepreneurship). As a result, foreign language schools, many of which were initially managed by missionaries, came up. Some of these language schools are still strong today: The ACK language school in Kenya; the Baptist Language School in Brakenhurst to quote local examples; and the famous language school by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, where missionaries are said to learn foreign languages in nine months.

The other institutions that have facilitated the learning of foreign languages all over the world are cultural centres established to foster the cultures, education, trade and political cooperation among people of different regions. Though culture, education, trade and political cooperation may be seen as the objective behind the establishment and sustenance of such institutions, the mission statements of many of these organisations indicate that they exist to further the interests of the home countries and the primary way of doing this is through the promotion of their language.

For example British Council is represented in 110 countries and 220 towns and cities worldwide, with the following as its mission outcomes:

- a. More widespread and better quality teaching and learning of English;
- b. New ways of connecting with and seeing each other through the arts;
- c. Enhanced UK leadership of and shared learning from international education; and
- d. Stronger global citizenship among people in the UK and worldwide (British Council, n.d.).

The spread of Confucius Institutes is a more recent phenomenon, but it is currently the most entrenched institute in universities and other institutions of higher learning around the world. It is funded by China's National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language, and has a mission of promoting Chinese language and culture and supporting Chinese language instruction.

These are examples of nations 'reaching out' to take their languages to others. They see great benefits to their nation when others can speak their language and understand their culture. They attach great importance to supporting others to learn their language. Are they simply spreading their language and culture or has foreign language become a commodity for sale? Are they making connection with the world or are they simply making money by selling their language and culture abroad, or is spreading the languages abroad a means to an economic end?

On the other hand individual nations have made efforts to institutionalize the teaching of foreign languages in their educational institutions, but in the general, this has not been systematic. Except where

the language of the former colonial masters was adopted as the language of instructions and therefore a second language, in many countries foreign languages have remained optional subject in the school curriculum; subjects designated for the linguistically gifted or for those with aspirations of continuing education in foreign countries, or of working with international bodies.

Outside the restricted school curriculum, learners interested in a foreign language have had to make individual plans to learn from the relevant language/cultural centres: British Council for English, French Cultural Centre (Alliance Française) for French, German Cultural Centre (Goethe Institute) for German, Confucius Institutes for Chinese and other foreign language centres coming up. There are, however, cases where nations or regions have taken the stance to regulate the presence of foreign languages in their education systems by policy. We will examine some cases of explicit policy and consistent practice in foreign language teaching, and the role foreign languages are perceived to have in education.

The Importance of Foreign Language in Education: Voices from the Continents

The Voice from the United States of America

For quite some time now, educationists, politicians and economists in the United States of America have expressed the view that English is not sufficient enough to get by in this century where globalization and internationalism are the hallmarks of diplomatic, military, economic and social policy. They have therefore called upon their government to do what other nations are doing and mobilize the nation to promote competence in foreign languages as a matter of national security and survival.

The prevalent practice in the United States of America is to offer and sometimes require one or two years of foreign language study for high school or college graduation. In other words students who have not studied a foreign language at high school will be required to take at least one year of foreign language at college. But policy analysis have observed that the content of foreign language curricular in the required program is not comprehensive enough, and it starts too late in the educational system when the learners' ability to learn the language is not at the strongest.

Thus there have been constant complaints that the policy is weak, the funding is inadequate, and the engagement in learning of foreign languages is dragging behind other nations. There are constant calls for the teaching of foreign languages to start early when the learners' abilities to learn another language is at the best, and for the reinstatement of the funding that was withdrawn during the times of financial difficulties. In short, the voices from America are saying that the stakeholders are dissatisfied with the educational outcomes of the foreign language programs in their educational system as they are currently. They want more focus in foreign languages. For example, according to the former Director of CIA and also former Defence Secretary Leon Panetta (n.d):

“the nation simply must commit itself to two fundamental goals: 1) That by 2010, 100 per cent of all schools, colleges and universities should require all of their students to study a foreign language; and 2) This requirement should be a condition for the receipt of federal funds for education ... this nation cannot cross the threshold into the era of globalization unless we can fully communicate with that world ... If we are going to advance stability in some of the countries we are fighting in today, we have to be able to understand what motivates those countries, what motivates their people, and to understand their culture, beliefs, faiths, ideologies, hatreds and loves. So it is crucial to our national security to be able to have strong language ability (Panetta, n.d., p. 11).

In Summary American Voices are saying:

- i) English is not adequate for engagement in the international arena and the current state of

foreign languages in their schools is below expectations.

- ii) They want more of foreign languages in their education system in order to:
 - a. Improve US presence in the global/international arena “Because globalization and internationalism are the hallmarks of diplomatic, military, economic and social policy”.
 - b. Maintain the peace keeping initiatives and ensure national security.

The Voice from Europe

Heightened awareness of the importance of foreign languages in Europe was one of the after effects of the two World Wars. Europe realised that peaceful coexistence in the continent depended on closer cooperation between its countries, and on the recognition that they were equal partners. They observed that only citizens with relevant linguistic ability and skills in cross-cultural communication could establish the channels of communication required for successful cooperation. This led to the promotion of the teaching of foreign languages and greater knowledge of the corresponding cultures. As early as 1995, the European Commission made it a requirement that school and college graduates in member countries be proficient in two foreign languages. This requirement has been refined with time. The European Union heads of state and government meeting at the Barcelona Summit in March 2002, added emphasis to this goal by stating that children were to start learning these two foreign languages at an early age; they were not to wait until high school as was formerly the case. Their goal is to create a Europe where everyone is taught at least two languages in addition to their own mother tongue (commonly known as ‘mother-tongue +2’ objective) from a very early age.

In 2005 the EC embarked on developing systems for measuring competence in foreign languages. To encourage progress towards this goal, the Commission’s new ‘Rethinking Skills’ strategy, was adopted in November 2012 and proposed the following benchmarks on language learning: “By 2020, we would like to ensure that: at least 75% of pupils in lower secondary education study at least two foreign languages (compared to the present 61 %) and at least 50% of 15 year-olds attain the level of independent user of a first foreign language compared to the present 42% (European Commission , 2013, p. 4).

The EC efforts have led to an increase in the number of pupils learning two languages for at least one year during compulsory education. On average, in 2009/10, 60.8% of lower secondary education students were learning two or more foreign languages - an increase of 14.1% compared to 2004/05 (European Commission, 2012). The progress of foreign language teaching in Europe is closely monitored and reported in the *Key Data on Teaching Languages at School in Europe* every two to three years.

Thus, EU has constitutionalized the teaching/ learning of foreign languages in an effort to create a multilingual Europe in order to:

- i) Promote intercultural dialogue and a more inclusive society;
- ii) Help the public to develop a sense of EU citizenship;
- iii) Open up opportunities for young people to study and work abroad and
- iv) Open up new markets for EU businesses competing at the global level.

This promotion of language learning is one of the main objectives of the Commission’s Education and Training (ET 2020) strategy, and is crucial for encouraging the cross-border mobility of EU citizens, which is one of the aims of the Europe 2020 strategy for jobs and growth.

However, studies in individual countries within the EU have underscored the importance of foreign languages and lamented the achievements within their nations. For example, according to Board and Tinsley, in UK reports by major employer organisations, such as the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) 26 and the British Chambers of Commerce (BCCI) 27 have highlighted the importance of language

competence for individuals and for the economy, and have called for improvements to language education in schools in order to support UK aspirations for growth and improved export performance. The key finding in these reports “was that the UK is suffering from a growing deficit in foreign language skills at a time when global demand for language skills is expanding” (Board and Tinsley, 2014, p. 14).

In Summary the voices from the European Union are saying they must have foreign languages in their education system for the following reasons:

- i) For peaceful coexistence in the continent, closer cooperation between its countries, and recognition that they are equal partners;
- ii) Promote intercultural dialogue and a more inclusive society;
- iii) Help the public to develop a sense of EU citizenship;
- iv) for encouraging the cross-border mobility of EU citizens;
- v) Open up opportunities for young people to study and work abroad and
- vi) Open up new markets for EU businesses competing at the global level.

Voices from Australia

Australia is said to have “an impressive record of policy development and program innovation in second language education, but a relatively poor record for consistency of application and maintenance of effort” (Lo Bianco and Slaughter, 2009 p. 6). Lo Bianco and Slaughter then sum up the development of foreign language ideologies in Australia beautifully by the sub-headings in one of the chapters as: “initially *Comfortably British*, then *Assertively Australian*, *Ambitiously multicultural*, *Energetically Asian*, and *Fundamentally economic*” (Lo Bianco and Slaughter, 2009, p. vii). The four main voices in Australia’s languages debate have been: language professionals, immigrant community organisations, indigenous community organisations, and those working in diplomacy, trade and security. Like in the case of US above, these voices complain that the education system is not doing enough in the area of foreign language education.

Although every Australian student is required to study a second language for at least 300 hours before year 7, the outcry has been that by the time these children reach year 12, over 87% of them will have stopped studying the language altogether and will have forgotten much of what they learned. Many stakeholders have expressed concern that Australian students are spending less time studying languages than students in all other Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, and therefore this might lead to economic disadvantages on the country (Liddicoat, Scarino, Curnow, Kohler, Scrimgeour and Morgan, 2007). Economists further, observe that the balance of power is beginning to shift away from traditionally dominant English-speaking countries, and predict that China will soon outpace America’s GDP. Arguing for focus on Asia-Pacific languages one young Australian sees foreign languages as important for the strategic economic positioning of Australia in the future:

In 2030, the paired economies of China and India will have overtaken the United States, Euro area and Japan combined... For Australia to reap the benefits of this growth, it must continue strengthening links with its Asia-Pacific neighbours, not only on an economic, but cultural level. This kind of meaningful interaction can only come from a common language base - in fact, studies have found that sharing a language increases bilateral trade by between 75% and 170%, and that language barriers cost between 15% and 22% in tariff equivalents. Neither can Australia rely on the bilingualism of its Asian counterparts, as providing an English education to almost 200 million Chinese students is significantly less achievable than teaching Mandarin to the 3.4 million students of Australia (Radievska, n. d.).

This debate is concluded with the words: “Australia must make language learning a priority, and develop a policy that is both bipartisan and long-lasting; only then can Australian students truly reap the benefits of bilingualism and be able to engage with the world on a level par excellence” (Radievska, n. d.).

In recent developments the national curriculum for languages in Australia approved the development of 11 curriculums to be taught across Australian schools. The first language curriculums to be implemented were Chinese and Italian - chosen because they cater for the greatest range of students. According to a July 2014 report, curriculums for Chinese, French, Indonesian and Italian have also been published on the Australian Curriculum website as available for use (The Australian Curr. Ass. and Reporting Authority, 2014).

In Summary the Australians are saying that foreign languages are important in their efforts to:

- i) Position themselves strategically in an era when they can see economic power shifting to Asia
- ii) Keep up with the other countries in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.
- iii) Keep ties with Europe (observing keenly the EU language policy reflected in the Italian and French choice), but engage with the geographical positioning: (Mandarin and Indonesian)
- iv) Take affirmative action- response to the multilingual/multicultural nature of the country: Because of the varied immigrant population, all the ‘foreign’ languages chosen for the curriculum have community speakers within Australia. Taking these languages to the school strengthens positive feelings of the community speakers, and accords them engagement in the education system.

Voices from Asia

In many of the Asian countries stable political and socio-economic growth developed within a monolingual communication system. As such, their reaching out for a foreign language is driven more by the need to find market for their goods and services than to look for the goods and services. In many of these countries, particularly in China and Japan, English has become very valuable. This is because English connects them not only with European and American markets, but also with the African and other markets in the developing countries which were once British colonies. In recognition of the way “China’s economy was boosted due to open foreign policies and the use of English, the policy makers of the Ministry of Education (MOE) decided to include English as the first compulsory subject in the secondary school curriculum and tertiary level of study” (Qi, 2016, p. 2). Policy decisions kept strengthening the position of English in the school curriculum progressively until when in 2003 the Ministry of Education announced a new ‘student-centred’ English language curriculum for all primary and secondary schools in 2003 (Qi, 2016, p. 2). The graph below shows parents in China are spending fortunes to get their children learn English (cited in Wen, 2012).

MARKET VALUE OF ENGLISH EDUCATION IN CHINA

Unit: billion yuan

Source: CCID

LI YI / CHINA DAILY

Although in China many children start learning English in the primary grades, many parents feel that this isn't enough, and send their children to expensive centres for learning English after school. There has also been tremendous growth in the number of Chinese students sent to study in the United States. According to Wen (2012), 65 middle school aged children were sent to study in the U.S. in 2005, but the number increased to 6,725 in 2010. Parents feel their children will need to be able to compete internationally when they grow up and therefore need a global outlook.

In the new environment of economic depression and globalised business, Japanese see proficiency in English as vital. This is reflected in the English language teaching boom in Japan. The Ministry of Education in the country has also started taking interest in improving the level of English in Japan. There is also raised interest in the learning of other Asian languages, but there has been decline the status of other modern European languages in Japanese education system.

Many people in South Korea regard English as valuable if not necessary for their financial/economic survival. However, they also worry about the negative impacts this is having on their national identity.

In Summary in China, Japan and Korea the voices are saying that foreign languages serve to:

- i) Give the learners a global outlook;
- ii) Prepare them to compete internationally and
- iii) Ensure continued financial/economic growth and positioning

Voices from Africa

The African Union handles language matters through the African Academy of Languages (ACALAN) (formed in 2001). The initial focus of ACALAN was the establishment of the Vehicular Cross-border Language Commissions (Working Structures of ACALAN) for the identified cross-border languages which include: Standard Modern Arabic and Berber for North Africa; Hausa, Mandenkan and Fulfulde for West Africa; Kiswahili, Somali and Malagasy for East Africa; Cinyanja/Chichewa and Setswana for Southern Africa and Lingala and Beti-fang for Central Africa. While this may not be seen as a 'foreign language policy', it does endeavour to establish language ties/connections across political borders, which is an objective of many foreign language programs.

For a long time Africa has engaged with the struggles to harness the internal multilingualism, and ensure the development of African languages, and has not had to respond to a regional foreign language policy. Decisions on foreign language teaching/learning are left to individual member states, and in many of these states it is left to individual schools or institutions.

As opposed to the situations in America, Europe, Australia and Asia, where a second/foreign language is contrasted with a mother tongue, in most African nations, the contrast is threefold: Mother Tongue, Second Language (which in nearly all the cases is a foreign language) and a foreign language. Because of colonial heritage, going to school alone is enough to give a learner an international language from among: Arabic, English, French or Portuguese. These languages though, are not considered 'foreign languages' in the African countries where they are official languages. They are referred to as second languages, but they do provide connection with the outside world in the same way a foreign language does. At the same time they serve educational, and other official functions that are served by mother tongues in nations where mother tongues are official and language of education.

In addition to these 'second' languages, African nations offer other international languages in their school system as 'foreign' languages. In many of these countries the foreign language is optional in primary and secondary schools. Perhaps this is because the language curriculum is already crowded with the mother tongue, second language, and in some cases a national language. For example in post-apartheid South

Africa 11 languages were declared official languages and the policy of incremental introduction of African languages (IIAL) in the school system requires that in addition to the mother tongue, learners be offered two official languages, one of which must be the language of learning and teaching. Depending on where the school is located, this could be two African languages, and Afrikaans or English. According to Joshua (2014, p. 41) the languages are organized in the following pattern:

- **Home language level:** the language first acquired by children at home.
- **First additional language level:** a language learned in addition to home language.
- **Second additional language level:** a language learned primarily for interpersonal and social purposes.

If we take the definition of 'foreign' language as the language of 'others', then in Africa we could distinguish two kinds of 'foreign' languages: local foreign languages, and external foreign languages, and all of them have a role to play in education. The role of the local 'foreign' language is summarized by the aims of the Incremental Introduction of African Languages (IIAL) in South African public schools, to:

- a. Strengthen the use of African languages ...
- b. Improve proficiency in and utilisation ... marginalised languages.
- c. Increase access to languages by all learners, beyond English.
- d. Promote social cohesion.
- e. Expand opportunities for the development of African languages to help preserve heritage and cultures (Joshua, 2014, p. 41).

Incremental Introduction of African Languages (IIAL) policy in South Africa seems to mirror the European Commission's 'mother tongue + 2 policy' within European Union. Concerted voices calling for increased attention to foreign languages, or language policies requiring increased attention to foreign languages in primary and secondary school curriculums like in Europe, America, Australia and Asia seem to be absent in the Africa as yet. The purposes of global connection are served by the external language used in the school as a foreign language, and for those who choose to want/need more than one external 'foreign' language; they have to learn it as an optional subject in secondary school or as extra after school course in the cultural centres. The French, the Portuguese and English in Europe are being told that they need two more languages in addition to their mother tongues, which the Africans are standing with for international connection. Is the African education still aiming at producing a global citizen?

In summary voices in Africa are still harnessing the internal multilingualism, and finding a footing to stand on to reflect on the addition of another foreign language in a school curriculum that already has a compulsory foreign/second language. It is still unclear, given the direction South Africa has taken, how the African countries will integrate the linguistic demands of global citizenship into their educational systems. There will be need for change of attitude. As Negash (2012, p. 19) observes, it is unhelpful for Africa to continue viewing English or any other international language as the language of colonisation or imperialism. Africans need to go beyond this and see the usefulness of these languages as giving her a voice in the global economic, social and political matters.

Summing up: The Importance of Foreign Languages in Education

The goal of education is to prepare the next generation by disseminating the currently available knowledge and values; preparing the future knowledge searchers (Research and innovation); and preparing and equipping workers (manpower development). With the borders dissolved in the global and regional social-political and economic arena, foreign languages are indispensable in achieving this goal.

This paper demonstrates that, globally, there is a growing interest in foreign language learning. For

example, a survey, by Berlitz Corporation (2011), shows that most parents think foreign languages will be a crucial element in their children's future success. The survey, polled over 9,000 parents in nine countries -Japan, Germany, USA, Mexico, China, Brazil, France, Poland and Italy. The aim of the research was to find out how parents of children between the ages of 4 and 17 perceive the importance of foreign language learning. The results, presented in the figure below show that parents in Mexico and Brazil have the greatest interest in their children learning foreign languages; Japan, France and Germany have the least interest. Overall 55% of the parents polled very 'interested'. Thus, it is not just governments that are recognizing the importance of foreign languages in the preparation of the next generation.

Globally, there is strong interest in foreign language learning

Source: Berlitz Corporation (2011).

The importance of foreign languages as extracted from the voices from the continents can be summarised as:

- a. **Preparing global world citizens:** People who understand and appreciate other cultures. What more effective way is there to demonstrate this than speaking the language of those cultures!
- b. **Economic Benefits - Career opportunities and International Business:** To get jobs and do business internationally. An American who took his foreign language seriously has this to say: "Looking back over my 20 year professional career in public policy and international business, my foreign language training prepared and inspired me to think globally about my future, helped me make great friends around the world, and opened doors for me in my career. In short, learning foreign languages did not just give me ways to communicate with people in other countries, but it deepened my understanding and appreciation for the rich and complex world we live in. Having that competitive edge on your CV these days can be invaluable and Mandarin is without a doubt an eye-catcher. Companies are on the lookout for these kinds of experiences more and more," (Abraham, 2013).
- c. **International Peace Arbitration and National Security:** The quotation from Leon Penetta articulates this precisely: "If we are going to advance stability in some of the countries we are fighting in today, we have to be able to understand what motivates those countries, what motivates their people, and to understand their culture, beliefs, faiths, ideologies, hatreds and loves. So it is

crucial to our national security to be able to have strong language ability” (cited in Miles, 2011, par, 5).

- d. **Cognitive Benefits:** Recent studies suggest that bilingual people are more efficient at higher-level brain functions. Speaking multiple languages is like exercise for your brain. Studies say it may improve the brain’s ability to multitask, and could even mean a four- to five- year delay in the onset of Alzheimer’s symptoms. Students learning a foreign language have been found to out-score their non-foreign language learning peers in the verbal and, surprisingly to some, the math sections of standardized tests (Olsen and Brown, 1992; Cooper, 1987; Cooper et al., 2008).

Conclusion

Globally, interest in foreign language learning is growing. This paper has shown that in many parts of the world, the place of foreign languages in education is no longer left to individual nations, schools or families to drive. In Europe it is driven by the European Commission; in America and Australia by the federal governments who are making decisions on the requirements of the school curriculums, in Asia there is tremendous growth in the numbers learning foreign languages. It is, however, of concern that in Africa there does not seem to be concerted action towards institutionalizing the requirement of learning a foreign language. The question is: What can Africa and other multilingual developing countries do to entrench foreign languages in their education systems?

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