THE CASE FOR LOCALIZATION IN THE GROWING STUDY OF MANDARIN CHINESE AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE (CFL) IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

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Abstract
The purpose of this paper is to analyse current trends in the teaching and learning of Mandarin Chinese as a foreign language (CFL) in Sub-Saharan Africa, with a special focus on Botswana, and to map objectives, achievements and challenges. The paper finds that planners and decision-makers in government and the education sector as well as individual learners have embraced the study of Mandarin because of its perceived potential to deliver development opportunities. However, the paper also identifies inconsistences and gaps between stated national and individual objectives of Mandarin Chinese teaching and learning and the actual offering. In particular, the paper highlights concerns related to curriculum design, curriculum delivery and local human capacity development. The paper posits that the fast roll-out of Mandarin Chinese instruction in many African countries with assistance from China should stimulate the development of localized curricula and local expertise in the teaching of Mandarin Chinese and not detract from such efforts. Botswana is in an excellent position to spearhead such localization efforts since the country has developed a strong foundation in Mandarin Chinese instruction at the tertiary level.

Keywords: teaching Mandarin Chinese as a foreign language (CFL), localization, Confucius Institutes, Africa-China relations

Introduction

Relations between Africa and China go back centuries but the study of Mandarin Chinese as a foreign language (CFL) on the African continent is quite a recent phenomenon. In Botswana, as elsewhere on the African continent, interest in learning Mandarin Chinese is primarily informed by China's emergence as a major trading partner, lender and investor, which started with the People's Republic of China's "going out" (*zou chu qu*) policy of the late 1990s. As Anita Wheeler (2014: 49) states, "Mandarin is an emerging language in Africa, one that Africans are learning in order to participate in the global market economy." Examples of areas where Mandarin Chinese language skills are instrumental in the context of growing Africa-China relations include increased demand for interpreting and translating services, the use of Mandarin Chinese as a medium for knowledge and skills transfer and the use of Mandarin Chinese to facilitate and promote trade and investment between Africa and China (ibidem: 53). Interest in Mandarin Chinese in Botswana and elsewhere in Sub-Saharan Africa is thus primarily informed by pragmatic rather than linguistic or cultural considerations.

The study of Mandarin Chinese as a foreign language experienced a breakthrough in Botswana in 2009, when the newly established Confucius Institute at the University of Botswana (UB) started offering evening lessons in the language. By now (2019), Mandarin Chinese has become

the second most important international language after French to be taught and learnt as a foreign language. [1] This is remarkable since Mandarin Chinese can still be considered an emerging foreign language in Botswana which is only offered on a limited basis. It has therefore probably not yet reached its full potential. Batswana took up the study of Mandarin Chinese with great excitement in 2009, to the extent that the Confucius Institute was unable to meet the demand and had to open a waiting list (Thalefang 2013). The purpose of this paper is to take a critical look at the teaching and learning of Mandarin Chinese in Botswana today and ask whether they are able to deliver on the high hopes that decision-makers in government and education and individual learners alike held and continue to hold for the language in terms of unlocking economic opportunities. To feed into the discussion the paper also considers the experiences of a few other African countries, in particular some that have already gone further than Botswana and have introduced the study of Mandarin Chinese in the national curriculum. The paper identifies curriculum development and human capacity development as critical factors in ensuring that the teaching of Mandarin Chinese instruction can deliver on its objectives. More specifically, the paper asserts that the fast roll-out of Mandarin Chinese instruction in many African countries with assistance from China should stimulate the development of localized curricula and local expertise in the teaching of Mandarin Chinese and not detract from such efforts.

The study of Mandarin Chinese in Botswana: Current situation

Mandarin Chinese is currently offered through a number of platforms and channels in Botswana. The University of Botswana (UB) has been at the forefront of developing the instruction of Mandarin Chinese. Firstly, the University is home to Botswana's only Confucius Institute, which has been offering courses in Mandarin Chinese language and Chinese culture since 2009. The Confucius Institute at the University of Botswana (CIUB) came into existence through a partnership between UB and Shanghai Normal University (SHNU). As in many African countries (Hartig 2015) the Institute acts as the major catalyst and channel for much of the training in Mandarin Chinese in Botswana. Apart from offering evening courses to the general public from the main campus of UB in the capital city of Gaborone, the CIUB has also set up teaching points across the country, including in Palapye at the Botswana International University of Science and Technology (BIUST) and in the north of Botswana in the towns of Francistown and Maun. Furthermore, the Confucius Institute has also assisted a number of private primary and secondary schools to establish Mandarin Chinese language and culture classrooms.

Secondly, UB also offers the academic study of Mandarin Chinese and China through the Chinese Studies Programme, which is a full-fledged undergraduate degree programme under the Faculty of Humanities. The Programme is entirely funded by the University itself. As Youngman (2014: 24) explains, "[a] deliberate decision was taken that this initiative should be separate from the Confucius Institute and its special funding arrangements so that the academic autonomy of the Department would be transparent." Chinese Studies is a so-called "area study", which covering various aspects of China including Mandarin Chinese but also Chinese history, politics, culture etc. It is a novel field of study in Africa, unlike in Europe (including Russia), Australia

[1] English is Botswana's official language and is thus not considered a foreign language for the purposes of this paper in spite of its status as an international and even global language.

and North America which have a long history of either Sinology or Chinese Studies. Students in the Chinese Studies Programme at UB spend about half of the four (4) years that comprise the degree programme learning Mandarin. The targeted outcome in terms of Mandarin Chinese proficiency is the ability to pass the international *Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi* (HSK) Chinese Proficiency Examination at Level 4, which corresponds to fluency for practical purposes (Youngman 2014: 24). The Mandarin Chinese language courses and other courses on China offered by the Chinese Studies are taken by students from other Departments and Faculties in the University as electives. Exposing students from across the University to the study of Mandarin Chinese or other aspects of China fits into the Policy on Internationalization that UB adopted in 2006, which had as one of its key objectives the internationalization of all curricula (Youngman 2014). As Kamwendo (2011) explained, UB students can gain a range of transferable skills from studying an international language such as Mandarin Chinese including communication skills, cross-cultural fluency and entrepreneurship skills.

Unlike at other African universities such as University of Nairobi in Kenya, the University of Yaounde II in Cameroon or the University of Zimbabwe (UNESCO 2011: 8), the Confucius Institute at UB is not offering any degree programmes or credit courses that count towards a university degree. These are all offered through the Chinese Studies Programme, which does occasionally recruit teachers from Confucius Institute to assist with teaching on a part-time basis. Concerns have been raised, particularly in the West, about allowing Confucius Institutes to teach in regular university curricula considering that they are funded by the Chinese Ministry of Education through the Beijing-based Office of the Chinese Language Council International (commonly called "Hanban"), which hosts the Headquarters of the Confucius Institutes (Gil 2019, Hartig 2015a: 132, 183-184). In Africa, however, concerns about possible Chinese influence in the curriculum have so far not featured very prominently. As Whyte and Whyte (2016) explain, institutions and individuals in African academia are confronted with the dilemma of "how to achieve excellent research and teaching while managing on scarce resources" (ibidem: 41). According to Whyte and Whyte (2016), it is therefore often context-specific practical challenges rather than timeless principles that are "fundamental for understanding the generation and use of ideas" (ibidem: 41). From the perspective of this "philosophy of pragmatism" (ibidem: 41) relying on Confucius Institutes resources for teaching can be seen as a pragmatic, cost-saving arrangement that enables African institutions to venture into the newly emerging academic fields of Chinese language teaching and Chinese Studies in a context of limited resources.

It should be noted that apart from the above mentioned channels that are all connected to UB, there are a few schools that have made their own arrangement for teaching Mandarin Chinese in Botswana, for instance by privately hiring a Mandarin Chinese language teacher. Finally. there are also private initiatives offering training in Mandarin Chinese. These are offered by individuals or small-scale businesses which typically have not obtained accreditation with the Botswana Qualifications Authority (BQA).

The introduction of Mandarin Chinese in the national curriculum

It is becoming a trend among African countries to introduce Mandarin Chinese in the national curriculum at primary and/or secondary level. In this regard Africa has belatedly joined other parts of the world. In the UK, for instance, the number of pupils taking Mandarin in GCSE was

up 38% between 2002 and 2010 and reached 3500 in 2018 (Carruthers 2019, Smale 2010 as cited in Zhu and Li 2014). On the African continent South Africa was the first to announce a policy decision to introduce Mandarin Chinese as an optional second additional language in the curriculum for primary and secondary school in 2015.[2] The 2015Action Plan of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), the high-level official platform for China-Africa cooperation, warmly endorsed this development, stating that "4.3.5 The Chinese side welcomes the inclusion by African countries of Chinese language teaching as part of their national education systems" (FOCAC 2015). This commitment was reiterated in the FOCAC 2018 Beijing Action Plan 2018 stating that "4.3.4 China … welcomes the inclusion of Chinese language into African countries' national curriculum."

By 2019, three (3) other African countries have followed suit in introducing or planning to introduce Mandarin Chinese to the national curriculum namely Kenya, Uganda and Zambia. Upon closer inspection, all of these pioneering initiatives are quite reliant on support from China for the development of curricula and the provision of teachers and textbooks. This support considerably lowers the costs of introducing Mandarin for the government concerned (Brown 2019) but raises a number of practical as well as ideological concerns. For instance, without critical involvement of local experts, specific challenges related to the local learning context may not be sufficiently taken into consideration. The study of Mandarin Chinese in Africa might even be approached in the same way as the study of the language as a second or foreign language in the West, Asia or China itself. However, the latter learning environments boost a much longer history in terms of teaching and learning of Mandarin, greater affinity with Mandarin and the culture of China and/or a greater endowment of resources. There are also concerns about different objectives or even a hidden ideological agenda behind China's support for the teaching of Mandarin Chinese in Africa. These ideological concerns are grounded in Africa's historical experience with outside powers and cannot be easily dismissed. We shall return to these points later in this paper.

Table 1: African countries announcing incorporation of Mandarin Chinese in the national curriculum

Country	**Place in the curriculum**	**Year of commencement**
Kenya[a]	Primary school from Grade 4	2020
South Africa[b]	Second additional language option from Grade 4 to Grade 12	2015
Uganda[c]	Mandarin compulsory in Year 1 and 2 in some secondary schools	2019
Zambia[d]	Grade 8 to 12	2020

a Xinhua 2019, b Chutel 2019, c Adeoye and Mukhtar 2019, d Mutale 2019

[2] Additional options that were approved are German, Serbian, Italian, Latin, Portuguese, Spanish, Tamil, Telegu and Urdu (Nkosi 2015b).

The arguments advanced by African policy-makers for the introduction of Mandarin Chinese instruction make reference to concrete practical benefits in terms of personal and national development. South Africa's Basic Education Minister Angie Motshekga, for instance, stated that, "[a]s South Africa's biggest trading partner it is important for our children to become proficient in the Confucius language and develop a good understanding of Chinese culture" (ENCA 2014). In another example, the CEO of the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD was quoted by the Chinese news agency Xinhua as saying: "The place of China in the world economy has … grown to be so strong that Kenya stands to benefit if its citizens can understand Mandarin." (Xinhua 2019) In other words, specific instrumental goals rather than integrative (interpersonal) goals or a general interest in foreign languages and cultures appear to primarily motivate decision to introduce the study of Mandarin (Dornyei 1998). Wheeler (2014) points out that this instrumental view on the study of Mandarin Chinese is underpinned by the paradigm of the knowledge-based or skills-based economy. Under this paradigm, Chinese language learning, knowledge building and development opportunities are perceived to be closely linked. As one private secondary school principal in Botswana succinctly explained his school's decision to enter into a pilot project for the instruction of Mandarin Chinese: "We are of the view that China will be the superpower of the world, and as we move into a knowledge-based society and Botswana wants to compete with the rest of the world, it makes sense to prepare our students to engage meaningfully in that future global village" (Moeti 2013). Botswana has not yet moved in the direction of adding Mandarin Chinese to the national curriculum. Nonetheless the current Administration under President Masisi has shown itself supportive of relations with China and the study of the Chinese language. In words echoing those of leaders elsewhere on the continent, President Masisi advised Batswana to learn Mandarin Chinese "in order to court Chinese investors as well as to make sound business deals in without [SIC] the communication barrier" (BOPA 2018).

Expectations versus reality

It is clear that the study of Mandarin Chinese in Botswana and many other African countries can so far be considered a success story in terms of its growth and the enthusiasm and high expectations it has generated. To ensure that the teaching of the language is in the best possible position to deliver on these high expectations it is useful to take a closer look at the current teaching situation and map out achievements, challenges and areas of improvement. This is important for two major reasons, one is the novelty of the study of Mandarin in Africa, and the other is the unique nature and relative difficulty of Mandarin. In terms of the former, there is limited local experience with and expertise on the study of Mandarin Chinese language, which leads to a situation whereby much of what is currently happening in terms of teaching, can be considered experimental. The experience with developing the curriculum for the introduction of Mandarin Chinese in South African schools offers a telling example. The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) for English as a Generic Second Additional Language was used as the basis for the development of the Mandarin curriculum (Department of Basic Education 2012:3 as cited in De Man 2017: 3-4). A language expert from China was seconded to the Department of Basic Education at the end of 2015 to assist in the implementation of Mandarin in South African schools from 2016 (Department of Basic Education 2016: 51). Finally, textbooks were donated by the Chinese government so as to get the teaching started while a South African textbook was still under development. In another example, the Chinese

Studies Programme at UB was developed in 2010 by scholars from the History Department who were not experts on China and did not know Mandarin Chinese. Through interaction with stakeholders and extensive benchmarking the historians crafted an undergraduate degree programme in Chinese Studies, which remains quite unique in the Southern African region for the comprehensive study of China that it offers. Improvising, copying and borrowing are ways for novel initiatives to make progress under pioneering conditions. However, it is important to systematically monitor and evaluate processes and outcomes and to regularly revise the curriculum accordingly.

In terms of the difficulty of Mandarin Chinese, the language has many distinctive aspects to which the concept of transfer cannot easily be applied in teaching and learning (De Man 2017). This concept holds that major thought processes acquired through the study of the first language need not be learned anew when learning an additional language because they are transferable between the two languages. One example of an aspect of Mandarin Chinese that learners typically need to master from zero is the writing system. Chinese characters are logographic as opposed to the phonographic alphabet which many learners in Sub Saharan Africa are accustomed to. Another unique aspect of the language is the four tones of Mandarin Chinese, meaning the four different possible variations in pitch within a syllable. This may in fact not be entirely new to African learners. Many of the Niger-Congo languages, for instance, are tonal. However, little research on the transferability of tonality between African languages and Mandarin Chinese has been done so far for curriculum development to leverage on. Thirdly, although Mandarin Chinese grammar is generally considered relatively easy, many of the grammar patterns are fundamentally different from other languages and thus also need to be acquired (Hu 2010: 109). Finally, there are significant cultural differences between China and Africa, meaning that for users to become truly competent in the language there is need for them to acquire cultural skills as well as language skills. The above entails that it is difficult to simply transpose the curriculum for other foreign languages to Mandarin Chinese. However, it is not always clear to what extent policy planners and decision makers excited to roll out Mandarin Chinese instruction for their constituencies have taken full consideration of these complexities. What the situation calls for is careful attention to the development of a curriculum that meets the expectations and requirements of the local environment, and of the necessary human capacity at a local level for the development and delivery of this curriculum. The following sections discuss these two key issues in greater detail.

Localization in curriculum development

Needs and objectives

Brown (1995: 19) defines language curriculum development as a series of activities which contribute to the development of a consensus among learners, teachers, planners and administrative staff about a framework for learning. This framework consists of a combination of teaching activities to help students learn as efficiently and effectively as possible in a given situation. Brown's definition does not see curriculum development as an event but rather as a process. It emphasizes the context-specific nature of this process and its outcomes; and the importance of allowing all critical stakeholders to provide input. In this regard, a key question in language curriculum development is what objectives planners and learners intend to achieve through the teaching and learning. Nation and Macalister (2010) underscore the importance of

carrying out a needs analysis before embarking on language curriculum design. A needs analysis is aimed at identifying what the curriculum should cover in terms of gaps in learners' present knowledge (lacks); required knowledge for the situation in which learners will be using the language (necessities), and learners' own views about what they think is useful for them (needs). From the above it has emerged that in Africa, Mandarin Chinese is usually not considered just another foreign language to be studied for the benefit of interpersonal communication or exposure to a new language and culture. Rather, concrete pragmatic aspirations in terms of personal development, national development and the development of relations with China at the commercial, economic and political level are projected onto the study of the language. As stated above because of resources constraints as well as lack of local expertise, curriculum development in Mandarin Chinese language teaching is currently heavily reliant on help from outside, in particular from China which is highly keen on promoting its language. However, it is important to be aware of potential discrepancies between local objectives and China's objectives in the promotion of Mandarin Chinese language learning. China's approach to the study of Mandarin Chinese as a soft power tool to bolster its image and win foreign hearts and minds is well documented (Ding and Sanders 2006, Yang 2010, Zhao and Huang 2010, Zhu and Li 2014). From the Chinese perspective, any amount of time and resources devoted to the study of Mandarin Chinese that result in greater affinity with the People's Republic of China and its culture constitute a beneficial step towards achievement of its goals. However, such learning may fall short of the goals that African policy makers and individual learners have in mind, which are centred on the acquisition of concrete in-demand skills for the knowledge-based economy.

In her assessment of the objectives of Kenyan policymakers and the University of Nairobi surrounding the Confucius Institute at the University of Nairobi and China's objectives, Wheeler (2014: 60) concludes pessimistically that "Kenya's language planning policy in higher education is linked to China's assertive policy of cultural diplomacy and there is little evidence that the University of Nairobi and student participants in the Confucius Institute are developing marketable language skills that they can use to secure employment". She cites the lack of clarity about the curriculum followed at the Confucius Institute, the lack of specific training to prepare Chinese instructors for the teaching environment in Kenya and the view expressed by learners of the Confucius Institute during fieldwork that they had not acquired sufficient language skills to secure employment (ibidem: 58). To Wheeler (2014), the key in ensuring that Confucius Institutes deliver on local objectives lies in local oversight, without which "external forces can influence curriculum and the allocation of resources to their own ends" (ibidem: 60). Indeed, curriculum development is not a mere technical exercise of selecting, organizing and sequencing content but has important ideological underpinnings. Ideas about the reasons and purposes for learning a particular language are an important factor in defining what is taught and how. To ensure that teaching meet the needs of both learners and the nation, it is important to recognize the influence of the broader cultural, economic, geopolitical and political context within which curriculum development takes place, and to understand the ideological foundations of what is being taught and learnt. The development of the curriculum can thus not be viewed in isolation from the context within which it exists. However, it is important to point out that the ideological objectives formulated Beijing are not necessarily what informs practice on the ground. Policy-practice gaps exist. In fact, much depends on those actually planning and delivering the

curriculum on the ground. As Zhu and Li (2014) point out for Confucius Institutes, its managers and teachers are important intervening variables between Chinese government objectives and ideology, and actual delivery on the ground.

In South Africa in particular the introduction of Mandarin Chinese raised eyebrows with regard to China's ideological agenda and the domestic implications of China's assertive moves to promote its language. Kashula et al. (2015) expressed concerns about "a new potential coloniser on South Africa's linguistic block". DeMan (2017: 146) notes that the top-down manner in which Mandarin Chinese was introduced in South-Africa may have contributed to the negativity and opposition. A major issue for many was that the introduction of Mandarin to the national curriculum "will see African languages bumped even further down the educational pecking order" (ibidem). For instance the General Secretary of South Africa's largest teachers' union rhetorically asked, "So why is it that we would invest more resources, more time of our teachers and more time for our children to learn another foreign language and not an African language?" (Nkosi 2015a). In essence, these discussions about the introduction of Mandarin Chinese revealed a clash of two paradigms. One paradigm was ideological in nature. It emphasized the intrinsic value of indigenous languages in nation-building and the uplifting of disadvantaged communities. The view was also informed by historical experiences of language as a tool of colonial control and subjugation and by perceptions that injustices and inequalities similar to those of the past continue to shape South Africa's language policies. The other paradigm, apparent in the discourse of policy-makers, was utilitarian in nature, viewing Mandarin Chinese as a pragmatic tool to empower the nation in negotiating its relationship with a major rising power. This paradigm framed the study of Mandarin Chinese as a product of African agency rather than foreign control. The key point to emphasize here is that ideological concerns surrounding the introduction of Mandarin Chinese as a foreign language exist and can and should not be easily dismissed. Those who believe that the practical benefits of learning Mandarin Chinese outweigh any ideological concerns should expect to be held accountable for whether these practical benefits are actually being delivered. Careful attention should thus be paid to needs analysis as well as curriculum design.

Awareness of the needs and objectives of teaching plays in key role in the process of delimiting the curriculum (Brown 2012). Defining the limits of the curriculum is a key component in any language curriculum development process but particularly so with Mandarin Chinese given the complexity of the language. A simple example of this can be seen in the debate on whether or not learners should learn how to write Chinese characters. From a cultural and linguistic perspective, Chinese characters, the millennia-old Chinese writing system are a defining and highly significant feature of the Chinese language. However, learning how to write Chinese characters by hand is a highly time-consuming activity, which some scholars have argued is quite an inefficient use of precious learning time (Allen 2008). Moreover, a strong focus on learning to write Chinese characters may negatively affect performance on other crucial aspects of language proficiency such as fluency, word choice, grammar, pronunciation and comprehension (Poole and Sung 2015: 67). These are crucial to developing communicative skills in Mandarin Chinese, which, as mentioned previously, are highly valued by those planning or engaging in the study of Mandarin Chinese in the African context. Alternatives to character writing are available, for instance letting learners rely on the use of pinyin, the official

Romanization system for Mandarin Chinese used in Mainland China, or training learners in more passive character recognition rather than active character writing. The latter two strategies combined would allow a learner to write characters with the help of information technology (IT) even if they cannot actively write them by hand. It is not the aim of this paper to take a position in the debate on the necessity or utility of learning to write Chinese characters. The above is rather intended to highlight how different objectives can inform a different delimitation of the curriculum for Mandarin Chinese instruction.3

Evidently, there can be no one-size-fits-all needs analysis and, by extension, curriculum for the teaching of Mandarin Chinese (see also Li 2008: 52-53). Even among the Confucius Institutes there is no standardized curriculum. While there is a degree of standardization through the teaching materials used (Wheeler 2014: 59), Hanban also encourages Confucius Institutes to develop their own teaching materials if local circumstances necessitate so (Hartig 2015: 154). The study by Wheeler (2014: 57-58) found little evidence that a full-fledged curriculum was developed and used in the Confucius Institute at University of Nairobi Confucius Institute. In fact, when probed, instructors and administrators did not appear to perceive an immediate need for it. In Botswana, evening courses for the general public or Mandarin Chinese lessons at private schools either as a curricular or extracurricular activity remain the main modes of delivery at the moment. In such a setup, the subjective needs of learners usually carry much weight. However, when Mandarin Chinese is taught as part of the national curriculum or in tertiary education, gaps and necessities should be carefully mapped and inform the development of the curriculum to ensure optimal use of public resources and learning time. In identifying gaps and necessities, a broad base of stakeholders should be consulted, including key representatives of the public and private sector in Botswana as well as the Chinese community. The area studies approach taken at the Chinese Studies Programme at UB can be helpful in this regards as the Programme offers a diverse range of expertise to draw from in the analysis of lacks and necessities, including expertise on Botswana-China relations at political, economic and people-to-people level.

Learning context

Developing a solid curriculum for foreign language learning does not only require insight into the needs and objective of the course but also of the teaching context. An environment or situation analysis maps "the factors that will have a strong effect on decisions about the goals of the course, what to include in the course, and how to teach and assess it. These factors can arise from the learners, the teachers, and the teaching and learning situation" (Nation and Macalister 2010: 14). Issues to consider with regard to learners include their ages, cultural backgrounds and preferred learning styles. When it comes to teachers, curriculum designers should analyse the availability and overall qualification levels of trained teachers. When fewer highly qualified teachers are available, there is need for a more detailed curriculum in terms of format and

[3] Interestingly, in her research on the South African curriculum for Mandarin Chinese, Maria DeMan (2017: 157) found that the policy on the use of *pinyin* or Chinese characters was left inexplicit when it came to the skill of reading, perhaps because the curriculum was modelled after that for English, which only has a phonemic writing system and does not have to deal with the challenges of a logographic writing system.

presentation so as to guide teachers (Nation and Macalister 2010: 14). Finally, regarding the learning situation, the learning context and availability of critical resources are important considerations. For instance, 21st century technology and media hold tremendous potential for classroom-based learning and individual learning. However, in Africa, resources constraints often hamper access to technology at the institutional and individual level. Complicating factors in this regard are structural inequalities between regions and schools. DeMan (2017: 123-124) points at such inequalities between South African schools as a major factor contributing to a gap between policy and practice in the South African educational landscape and state that it also affects the implementation of the South African curriculum for Mandarin Chinese. She fears that "top-down changes, such as curriculum changes, will not make a lasting difference … if schools are not empowered with the necessary resources and motivated to make change happen" (DeMan 2017: 23).

Another example of an issue to consider with regard to the learning situation is the availability, or lack thereof, of opportunities for learning outside of class. In Africa, much of Mandarin Chinese learning remains classroom based because of lack of such opportunities. Lemmers and Wang (2015), for instance, describe how the "isolated language environment with limited communicative opportunities" creates a lonely learning experience for South African learners of Mandarin Chinese. Although the number of learners is on the increase, it still consists of a small minority among the general population. Moreover, reaching out to the Chinese community is not always easy. In her study of Chinese merchants in Botswana, for instance, Zi Yanyin (2017) describes how these merchants often practise self-isolation and experience feelings of vulnerability, causing them to interact less with the local community outside of the "contact zones" of their shops. She explains how feelings of vulnerability sometimes even cause Chinese merchants to interact little with other Chinese in Botswana for fear of being cheated (Zi 2017: 90). Zi also points out that other Chinese in Botswana such as those employed by Chinese construction companies are in the country on a short-term basis and therefore also tend to interact very little with the local society (Zi 2017: 28-29). In an environment where learners have limited opportunity to practise or acquire knowledge and skills outside of the school setting, there is need to plan the curriculum very carefully as it is the sole pathway for learning, and to provide plenty of opportunity for practise and review.

Localization in human capacity development

The shortage of suitably qualified teachers is one of the major issues affecting the teaching of Mandarin Chinese as a foreign language all over the world (Carruthers 2019, Wang 2007, Wang, Moloney and Li 2013: 116, Zhao and Huang 2010). In Africa this constraint is particularly pressing. The continent currently sorely lacks local capacity for Mandarin Chinese language teaching, let alone curriculum development or teacher training. There is therefore heavy reliance on support from China in this matter. This is certainly the case in Botswana, where all of the instructors at the Confucius Institute at the time of writing of this paper have been deployed from China. Attempts to add local instructors to the staff complement have been made in the recent past but these efforts have so far encountered financial and administrative hurdles. The Botswana situation is not unique. For instance, when South Africa introduced the teaching of Mandarin Chinese, the Minister of Basic Education revealed that no South African teachers were being trained as yet to teach Mandarin in South African schools (National Assembly 2015). Instead, the

country would rely on volunteer teachers from China, while it started to send local teachers to China for training. The number of those going for such training was set at 100 per year over the course of five (5) years (National Assembly 2016). The country was starting from a very low baseline with the number of South African teachers qualified to teach Mandarin Chinese stated as "one (1)" in 2016 (ibidem). As Qi and Lemmer (2013) point out, while a number of universities in South Africa offer undergraduate training in Mandarin Chinese, there is no articulation of the qualification at postgraduate level, which poses a serious constraint on the development of local teaching capacity. The same is true in Botswana, where the undergraduate degree in Chinese Studies is currently the highest locally obtainable qualification in Mandarin Chinese.

Some African countries are doing better in terms of localizing the teaching effort. At the Confucius Institute at University of Zimbabwe, for instance, half of the teachers are local (Van den Heever 2018).[4] The governments of Zambia and Uganda announced their plans to introduce Mandarin Chinese in the national curriculum together with ambitious plans to start training teachers at tertiary level. Makerere University in Uganda was set to roll out a three-year bachelor degree program in Chinese and Asian studies with a master's degree program in Chinese language teaching also reported to be in the pipeline (Makerere University 2018, Xinhua 2018). The targeted exit-level outcome in terms of language proficiency for graduates of the undergraduate programme was set at HSK 6, while the targeted proficiency level for local teachers is HSK 4 (Makerere University 2018, Xinhua 2018). In Zambia, the University of Zambia announced plans to develop a fast-track teacher training programme at postgraduate level in partnership with Hunan Normal University (University of Zambia 2018). These are encouraging steps, but it remains to be seen whether such initiatives will be able to produce a sufficient number of sufficiently qualified teachers to supply the market.

To roll out Mandarin Chinese language teaching to schools at secondary and even primary level as many African countries are currently planning on doing or have already started implementing will require substantial numbers of qualified teachers. Such capacity is currently unavailable in Africa and will probably mean continued heavy reliance on native speaker instructors from China for the foreseeable future. It should be stressed, however, that this is not a uniquely African challenge. For instance, according to Moloney and Xu (2012) 90% of Chinese teachers in Australia are native speakers. The issue of local teacher training is now a priority area of Africa-China relations. It entered the agenda of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in 2012, did not feature in 2015 but was brought up again in 2018. The 2018 FOCAC Beijing Action Plan stated: "4.3.4 China will continue to support the development of existing Confucius Institutes and Classrooms in Africa and support qualified African educational institutes to apply for the hosting of new Confucius Institutes and Classrooms, and welcomes the inclusion of Chinese language into African countries' national curriculum. China will continue to support Chinese language teaching in African countries by sending more Chinese teachers and volunteers, donating textbooks and teaching materials in Chinese, providing Confucius Institutes scholarships and *training more local Chinese language teachers*." (Emphasis added)

[4] Author's own observations, Harare, August 2018.

Research has highlighted some concerns and challenges associated with relying on Chinese instructors. One issue concerns their qualifications and experience. CFL teaching has grown exponentially all over the world and so has the demand for Chinese instructors. Experienced teachers now enjoy more opportunities and options in their careers. Already a decade ago it was noted that "[i]t is becoming increasingly difficult to persuade experienced teachers of Chinese to leave their families for one or two years to go abroad on a low salary. This leaves the younger, less experienced teachers as the prime candidates" (Starr 2009: 78). Finding staff who are willing to relocate to Africa has been a particular challenge for Hanban, with many Chinese teachers preferring deployment to countries closer to home or in the West (Hartig 2015a: 176). To alleviate the constraints Hanban has resorted to recruiting volunteer teachers. These are professional teachers as well as postgraduate students and graduates from a variety of backgrounds, not necessarily directly related to Mandarin Chinese (Hartig 2015a: 177). They are native speakers of Mandarin Chinese but that does not necessarily make them qualified teachers of the language. As Wang (2009) asserts,

> Assuming that most of these native or highly functional heritage language speakers do not need to take courses to learn the language, they do, however, often need to strengthen their knowledge of and pedagogical training in teaching the structure of their native tongue. The lack of linguistic knowledge, metalinguistic awareness, and of awareness of sociolinguistic norms associated with complex rules of usage among native speakers may not only lead to confusion or misinformation being provided to students but may also foster an ethnocentric attitude on the part of the prospective teachers. This subtle yet important aspect of training has yet to be addressed.

A second concern with Chinese instructors is that they need to be trained and assisted to adapt to the foreign context since they "are not teaching Chinese kids in Chinese context" (Moloney and Xu 2012). Wheeler's research on the Confucius Institute at University of Nairobi in Kenya suggested that teachers had received training before being dispatched abroad but at least one teacher indicated that the training did not include information about Africa (Wheeler 2014: 58). A third concern is that the Chinese instructors are perceived to be taking up employment opportunities that would otherwise be available to local graduates. In a continent with a young population and high youth unemployment, the question of whether the teaching of Mandarin Chinese can provide opportunities for gainful employment for young people is a major concern.[5] A particular risk associated with reliance on volunteers or teachers whose salaries are paid by China is that what starts off as a practical measure because of unavailability of local teachers and resources constraints may become an entrenched practice for financial reasons. This would be quite paradoxical because as explained previously, support for learning Mandarin Chinese is

[5] In South Africa, which as stated before has few qualified local teachers of Mandarin, the policy of "importing Chinese teachers" drew similar criticisms though the focus there was slightly different. The concern was mainly that the country had high numbers of unemployed teachers in other fields, who could find increased opportunities if, instead of introducing Mandarin Chinese, the country increased its efforts to teach indigenous languages (Nair 2015).

strongly associated with the notion that it will bring economic benefits to the nation and individual learners. If however, those who have acquired a degree of proficiency in Mandarin Chinese find themselves excluded from such opportunities because the services they offer can be accessed freely or at least more cheaply through an instructor supported or sponsored by the Chinese government, this would raise questions about some of the stated objectives of teaching Mandarin Chinese. It remains to be seen whether countries that are making arrangements to train larger numbers of local teachers are ready to absorb them onto the government's payroll.

Conclusion and recommendations

Trade, investment and lending between China and Africa have increased exponentially over the past two decades. In tandem with this development, proficiency in Mandarin Chinese has been embraced in Sub-Saharan Africa as a critical skill to empower Africans to get the most out of the emerging partnership. To some extent. the high expectations vis-à-vis the teaching and learning of Mandarin Chinese need to be carefully managed: experience shows that among those who study Mandarin Chinese very few people go on to develop a proficiency level that is good enough to do business with China (Midgley 2019[6], Phiri 2019). Nonetheless, the growing importance of China to Africa is undeniable and thousands of Africans who have lived in China or interacted with Chinese people have already proven that a high level of proficiency is not out of Africans' reach. Best practice shows that for foreign language instruction to be meaningful and effective, it should ideally be localized. As Sandra Lee-McKay (2002: 122) has pointed out with regard to the teaching of English as an International Language, "[i]f the teaching … is to take place in a socially responsible and appropriate manner, the control of the curriculum and the method must be given to local teachers." Africa is currently heavily reliant on China in the rollout of Mandarin Chinese teaching because of lack of expertise as well as resources constraints. Realistically speaking, this situation is likely to prevail for quite some time to come. Even in much more established "markets" for the teaching of Mandarin Chinese there is heavy reliance on teachers and teaching materials from China. However, a conscious effort should be made to continuously increase the local element in the content and delivery of the curriculum. The case for localization can be made on ideological as well as practical grounds. Given Africa's historical experience with dominant outside powers, it is important that a situation of dependency or domination is avoided and African ownership of the teaching of Mandarin Chinese is ensured. As Ngugi wa Thiongo (1986) stated, language is never just a means of communication; it is also a carrier of culture. We should be aware of the relation between power and language, and therefore critically interrogate the power relations between those championing a language and those learning it. However, we should not throw out the baby with the bathwater. Increased localization is likely to strengthen African agency and ownership. As Wheeler (2014: 59) concluded in her case study of the Kenyan Confucius Institute, increased local capacity for oversight would likely strengthen the systematization and quality of curricula and teaching at the Institute and thus the Institute's ability to deliver on the objectives of leaners and planners.

[6] Midgley (2019) does point out the additional benefits of learning Mandarin Chinese in terms of cognitive flexibility, decision-making, and intercultural competency. However these are not the benefits that supporters of the study of Mandarin Chinese in Africa appear to have in mind primarily. Moreover, critics such as those opposed to the teaching of Mandarin Chinese in the national curriculum in South Africa, would argue that learners could get these same and other benefits from learning any language, including indigenous African languages.

Finally, it is advisable for planners and decision-makers to take a consultative approach in foreign language policy making involving a broad range of stakeholders and to leave room for an individual opt-out rather than to impose the study of a language in a wholesale and top-down manner (DeMan 2017: 146).

The increased attention to local teacher training at the policy level in some African countries is a positive development that should be encouraged considering the great shortage of local teachers. Moreover, better trained teachers are empowered teachers. This allows for the curriculum to be less rigid and detailed and thus more easily adaptable to different settings. It is important that African teachers of Mandarin Chinese (and trainers of teachers for that matter) get wide exposure in their training so that they can access a range of perspectives and practices. In practice this means that they should also be able to consider other places than China to go for training, including other African countries, other developing countries as well as countries with a long tradition of teaching Mandarin Chinese as a foreign language. Currently a lot of what is happening in terms of training is China-centred. This is useful but so is complementing it with experiences from elsewhere. Local universities should strive to become repositories of knowledge, skills and best practices not only for teaching Mandarin Chinese but also for teacher training and curriculum and textbook development.

In Botswana, the University of Botswana has been at the centre of local capacity building, but it has so far only developed expertise in teaching Mandarin Chinese as a foreign language through the undergraduate degree programme in Chinese Studies and the evening lessons at the Confucius Institute. There is limited experience with and expertise in the areas of teacher training and the development of local curricula and teaching materials. Although Mandarin Chinese has not yet been introduced in the national curriculum in Botswana, it is important that these other areas are not overlooked but are further developed through postgraduate training and research. Mandarin Chinese teaching in Botswana is growing but the involvement of Batswana in the design and delivery of the curricula remains limited, in part because of lack of expertise and training. There is great room for development since many Batswana who have studied in the Chinese Studies Programme, at the Confucius Institute or in China have already developed a foundation in terms of language skills. Further training will enable them to refine these skills into highly practical marketable skills. There is need to study best practices in teaching of Mandarin Chinese, curriculum development and teacher training in Africa and to exchange these best practices. This calls for networks between African centres for teaching Mandarin Chinese and teachers. Currently the relations between African institutions and individuals engaged in teaching Mandarin Chinese as a foreign language in Africa tend to follow more of a "hub-and-spokes model" with China being the central hub that African players along the spokes look to for resources and ideas and where meetings and exchanges take place. There is room for much more dialogue and exchanges between African institutions and professionals so as to learn directly from each other's experiences and make optimal use of limited resources.

As pointed out above, training of local teachers should be followed up by a commitment on the part of African governments and employers in the private sector to actually employ these local teachers and to diminish reliance on cheaper instructors from China. Ensuring that local people see real benefits from the language they have spent much effort and resources studying is an

important way to make the study of Mandarin Chinese sustainable in the long run. This question becomes even more important if Mandarin Chinese is introduced in the national curriculum at secondary or even primary level as this casts the net wider to catch talented learners with potential to become professional users of Mandarin Chinese and allows them to access training from an earlier age. Finally, there is also need for government departments and the private sector to be aware of the availability of local Mandarin Chinese language skills and to contribute to a nurturing environment beyond the education sector for such skills to be developed and utilized. As one observer in Zambia noted:

> Even as we get excited about learning the language, there is also need for us to push for better utilization of Zambians who speak Chinese mandarin [sic] by both the government and the Chinese companies that are coming to Zambia. We would like Chinese companies to start giving priority to Zambians who already speak Chinese for local jobs other than bringing all their management and technical staff from China. Government departments should also come up with a deliberate policy to utilise Chinese speaking Zambians in their structures instead of them always struggling when dealing with the Chinese nationals because of language barriers. Chinese companies should also endeavour to offer meaningful working conditions to Chinese speaking Zambians and all other local workers just as much as they do to the Chinese employees they bring in the country. We need to see an end to the high turnover of Chinese speaking Zambians who join Chinese companies due to unbearable working conditions such as lower salaries and lack of professional growth (Phiri 2019).

The development of learning materials suitable for the local environment is another key issue to be considered. Even if efforts to develop a localized curriculum start to bear fruit, on the ground, much of delivery is done through and therefore also shaped by the instrument of the textbook since individual teachers are usually not able to develop their own materials from scratch. Few of the internationally used textbooks are very suitable for use in Africa. Many of the textbooks have been written for the benefit of those learning Mandarin Chinese as a foreign language in China, in Asia or in the West. They often contain content which African learners have limited affinity with such as major landmarks in China or aspects of everyday life in China. As explained in this paper, the objectives and the learning environment for learning Mandarin Chinese in Africa are often quite different from those informing the content of those textbooks. The Chinese Studies Programme at the University of Botswana has embarked on a project to develop a textbook that is relevant to the local learning needs and environment. It for instance includes vocabulary that is useful for the local context, such as terms related to tourism, construction, manufacturing and retail, sectors of the economy where Batswana are likely to interact with Chinese and vocabulary that can help learners explain key features of their country such as the climate and the geography and local culture to a Chinese audience. The textbook project has been making very slow progress because of inexperience with textbook development and understaffing of the Chinese Studies Programme. Considering the complexity and unique nature of Mandarin Chinese, developing a comprehensive Mandarin Chinese textbook that covers all the key skills of

speaking, listening, reading and writing is a very big undertaking. Nonetheless, it is a highly useful and significant project.

For the study of Mandarin Chinese to become a true success story in Africa, increasing localization and network-building is needed. As long as there is heavy support from China, planners and decision-makers in government and training institutions may be under less pressure to demonstrate that the teaching of Mandarin Chinese as a foreign language is delivering on its ambitious objectives since the teaching programmes are relatively cheap to run. However, such a narrow focus on financial costs overlooks the opportunity costs associated with studying a highly difficult and different language like Mandarin Chinese. Policy planners would therefore be wise to invest in developing local capacity to build and deliver a curriculum that can effectively contribute to the stated objectives of empowering Africans and is sustainable in the long term.

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