

Special Issue: Foreign Languages Learning and Teaching in Botswana

Most educational institutions around the world offer programmes that enable students to learn foreign languages. The requirements for foreign language programmes vary from country to country, and from one institution to another within the same country. Some countries or institutions propose at least a minimal foreign language requirement, which can translate into enrolling for one foreign language course in order to validate a study programme, as it is the case at the University of Botswana for a number of study programmes. However, in some countries or institutions, foreign language learning is part of the core requirements. Students need to earn credits in a foreign language programme in its entirety to graduate. The perceived need for foreign language proficiency arises from the fact that the world's economy has increasingly become international and as such some set of skills are becoming increasingly invaluable for graduates to possess in order to be successful. One of such skills is the proficiency in the so-called international languages such as Chinese and French. Employers want a blend of academic achievement with well-balanced cross-cultural skills and proficiency in at least one international foreign language can bring about this culturally sensitiveness to any academic programme. Consequently, graduates who are proficient in foreign languages find themselves with increasing work opportunities and often increased salaries.

Nevertheless, the impact that foreign languages have on the host society cannot be evaluated and measured if there is no research on the institutionalisation of these languages, as is the case of Chinese and French (in alphabetical order). In order for us to appreciate the impact of foreign language on the society, we should be able to compare and contrast the host country's sociocultural, political, economic and educational ideologies before the introduction of the foreign languages with the ideologies after their introduction. Indeed, history provides useful lessons and a sense of perspective. However, the history of institutionalisation of the learning and teaching of Chinese and French in Botswana has been neglected. Little or no research has been carried out to retrace when, how and why these languages were introduced into Botswana's education system. Lack of research in this domain can be explained in part by the relative weak position of foreign languages in the core school curriculum given that foreign languages are only offered as optional courses. In fact, French is the only foreign language taught to pupils in public schools. Furthermore, the country has relatively few foreign language pedagogy experts and no foreign language education historians, sociologists, economists and the like. This special issue would like to fill that gap.

This special issue is the first of its kind to provide an overview of learning and teaching foreign languages in Botswana and marks several important milestones in this domain. Indeed, the learning and teaching of foreign languages in the country, specifically Chinese and French, have reached a certain level of maturity. As such, it was only a matter of time before they could be considered a new domain of research. This special issue, by leading scholars in the field from the University of Botswana, reflects on the learning and teaching of Chinese and French as foreign languages from different perspectives and aims at discussing and sharing research, theory, and best practices, initiating and sustaining meaningful professional dialogues on foreign languages learning and teaching in Botswana.

The objective of this special issue is therefore twofold. The first objective is to cast a foundation for a research network that will provide an overview of the institutionalisation of

Chinese and French in Botswana and establish the learning and teaching of foreign languages in Botswana as a new domain of research. The issue will therefore serve as a point of departure for researchers from other domains such as economy, sociology, linguistics, education, pedagogy, etc., who want to understand the impact that the foreign languages have had on the society and uncover other critical areas that they were not able to explore before. The second objective is to provide some historical awareness of the learning and teaching of Chinese and French including achievements and challenges faced by learners and teachers in order to inform foreign language teacher training institutions, foreign language policy makers and capacity developers. The special issue is composed of eight papers including this editorial message.

The first paper by Kewagamang and Kaome examines the progress made and challenges faced by the teaching and learning of French as a foreign language in Botswana's Junior Secondary schools since its inception in 2001 through the use of classroom action video observations and interviews of eight in-service teachers and four student teachers. Their study reveals that, despite the progress achieved in the area of teacher training and professional development, the main objective of teaching French, which is the development of learner's communicative competence, and its implementation do not correlate. The authors conclude that there is need to discard the generalist approach to teaching, learning and teacher training and adopt a contextualized approach, in order to reinforce the relevance of French language teaching to developing globally competitive citizens in Botswana. Some recommendations are made.

The next paper by Sello, Malunga-Payet, Kewagamang and Michel attempts to answer the question on whether the assessment tools play a role in the poor performance of learners who sit the Junior Certificate Examination. Indeed, examination is rarely taken into consideration when seeking to identify obstacles impeding good performance of learners even though learners' academic performance is always defined in terms of examination performance or examination results. To respond to this question, the authors investigated French JCE assessment tools in form of the JC French Syllabus, JC French Assessment Syllabus and past JC Examination Papers in order to identify variables of these tools that could potentially affect performance. The research results presented suggests that the JCE in its current form bears a share of responsibility in the poor performance of learners who sit this examination. Certain recommendations were proposed for implementation.

The following paper by Sello and Michel is more practical in nature as it attempts to prove that dictation activities still have an important role to play in the foreign language class despite being labelled as old-fashioned and that the activities can effectively help improve learners' proficiency in all the language activities: reception, production, interaction and mediation in oral and written form. The authors explore some practical ways of integrating dictation activities within the action-oriented approach of learning and teaching foreign languages and provide some examples.

How possible it is to convey the foreign culture in a classroom context dominated by other cultures? How possible it is to strike a balance between the culture inherent to the foreign language taught and the cultures of the learners? These are the questions asked by Nthapelelang and Ratshosa. To answer them, the authors observed the learning space in order to establish the link between culture and language space. In their observations, the authors noticed that, in a classroom setting, culture is lived through practices and customs and rarely is learned in the most explicit ways. The authors conclude that a manual method which would

allow a learner to make a back and forth movement between their language and culture and the foreign language and culture in a way that enriches the two would be most appropriate to promote an education which participates in the strengthening of the identity of the learner.

In her article, Malunga-Payet makes a comparative study of semantic and conceptual representations as well as the performance of the speech act of blaming in Setswana and French. The author notes that, as part of teaching and learning a foreign language, like in the case of Botswana, it would be beneficial to take into account certain sociocultural aspects such as cultural entrenchment of an act, its lexical and conceptual structure in both source and the target cultures in order to build sociocultural, semantic and pragmatic competence. Malunga-Payet concludes that pragmatic competence can be integrated in an L2 through a systematic comparison of the performance of speech act in both cultures in real life.

Masule and Raletsatsi looks at the teaching and learning of Chinese language in Botswana and in particular at the University of Botswana. The research focus on the teaching of Mandarin Chinese and Chinese language instructors. The research highlighted several challenges that are encountered in teaching and learning Mandarin Chinese such as the learners' lack of motivation, writing characters, English as a medium of instruction, truancy, and shortage of qualified instructors amongst others. Masule and Raletsatsi conclude that it is essential to address these challenges at the earliest opportunity in order to pave way for the successful teaching of Mandarin Chinese at the University of Botswana and the country at large.

In the final paper, Van Hoeymissen analyses 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. In her study, the author identifies inconsistencies and gaps between stated national and individual objectives of Mandarin Chinese teaching and learning and the actual offering, particularly in relation to curriculum design, curriculum delivery and local human capacity development. The author demonstrates the need for African countries to adopt their Chinese as a foreign language curricula to local contexts. In her conclusion, Van Hoeymissen reiterates that for the study of Mandarin Chinese to become a true success story in Africa, there is need to increase localization and network-building. Policy planners should 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.

In closing, the editors would like to acknowledge the efforts of all the peer reviewers who made critical contributions to this special issue. We hope that the papers presented here will be appealing to all the stakeholders involved and that the research efforts presented here will trigger even further research on the learning and teaching of foreign languages in Botswana.

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