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# UNITED NATIONS OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ADOPTION IN UNIVERSITIES

Review  
Article

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## Abstract

*The paper provided draws attention upon the new kind of demand that globalization places on the today's people, especially those who wish to operate internationally in various spheres. The culture of the people is well entrenched in their languages. A good way to understand the culture of others is to get involved in intercultural studies where everything concerning others can be revealed. Intercultural studies also present opportunity for understanding other nationalities especially by accessing their cultures through their languages. As is evident in most national study programs and curriculum, studying in national languages is the precedence thereby limiting the exposure students in higher institutions have after graduation. The research methodology is to do a holistic assessment of the incisive issues on the topic and draws the conclusion of the necessity of adoption of UN working languages for all students in higher Institutions across the globe.*

## INTRODUCTION

The globalizing impact of contemporary world habitation has placed enormous demand on everyone in the world to be able to speak more than just the native language. Although some native languages are popular and spoken by several people across the world, the increasing need to relate more across national boundaries in various capacities makes it important and almost inevitable for people to know and speak one of the United Nations (UN official languages). The UN official languages are supposedly spoken by more number of people on earth and widespread in reach of geographic location of usage. Even at the work places, international companies with global fronts and outreaches are increasingly demanding employees with multilingual capability. Multilingualism, without doubt could ease and enhance operational processes anywhere in the world. This is at the crux of this research which focuses on measures that could ensure that most graduates who are even in greater position to operate internationally at various capacities private and public to have the opportunity to understand and communicate in at least one of the UN official languages besides their native languages. This idea is believed to be feasible under the university system which would make it possible for undergraduate students to undertake the language courses of one of the UN languages while studying for their programs' duration. At graduation, most students would have been really prepared for a global level of operation in any field, a feat made possible by the compulsory adoption of the language courses by the universities.

### CURRENT UNIVERSITY STUDY CURRICULUM STRUCTURES

The curriculum of most if not all Universities across the globe basically has individual country's official language as the main language of teaching in all universities. By this measure, all students irrespective of tribal origin or ethnic roots have to study in the officially declared language in the University. Some of the official languages for teaching in the higher institutions may not even be any of the UN Working language or even any other major language spoken all over the world. The official languages used in most or even all of the universities across the globe are usually the national languages of the countries where the University is sited. With just a few UN official languages, it invariably means that most national languages used in many countries' universities are not the UN official languages and may also not be majorly spoken languages across the world.

## CULTURAL STUDIES

The critical assessment of cultural studies indicates that it is a good basis for teaching especially in native language. Further assessment of cultural studies shows that the local or native languages contain the reflections of the people's culture, norms, aspirations, way of life and traditions. By implication, the people's culture can be found and explained coherently in the local dialect or language of the people. In this order as well, while teaching, the better examples can be cited using the local languages, customs and norms. Using local languages citing local customs and norms helps natives or even foreigners who have become accustomed to the people's way of life to comprehend faster and easily. Clearly cultural heritages, customs and norms are hidden and contained in people's various languages. One of the main reasons for this is that all things that every people have find expression in the various people's local languages. All cultural heritages, customs and norms have names and possible historical backgrounds contained in the local languages of the people.

### BENEFITS OF STUDYING IN NATIVE LANGUAGES

Drawing inference from the foregoing explanations, several benefits can be deduced from studying in local native languages. Some of the benefits include:

- a. Better comprehension and understanding
- b. Reference to better examples are made in the local native languages
- c. Reinforcement of the local dialect for the students
- d. The student's ability to relate and connect better with the lessons thought
- e. Can increase motivation and involvement of students in the lessons

### LIMITATIONS OF STUDYING IN SINGLE NATIVE LANGUAGE

Just as there are benefits of studying in local languages, there are also limitations that come with doing so, especially if the said local language is not one of the UN official languages. Some of the demerits or limitations of studying in local native languages include:

- a. Confinement of the student to local language
- b. Confinement of the student to local examples
- c. Reduced student's exposure to contemporary global perspectives

- d. Inability of the students to link and connect with other cultures around the world
- e. Students miss out from knowing other cultures and languages

### INTERCULTURAL STUDIES

“Intercultural studies examine the cultural differences and similarities of people around the world, and workers in this field focus on bridging gaps among communities and providing necessary services” (Learn.org 2017). Intercultural studies could also be defined as the study of the similarities, differences, linkages, and dissents of the fundamental elements of the culture (complete way of life) of the people (Itumo, 2015). Intercultural studies appear to be a good avenue to learn the cultures of other nationalities and by extension their languages as well. But as is very evident, cultural studies and intercultural studies are not study options for all students in higher institutions. They are not also done on compulsory bases for students and therefore do not present opportunities for others to either get acquainted with cultural heritages of others or their languages. Intercultural studies do present numerous benefits for students undertaking it such as highlighted by (Itumo, 2015) to include:

- a. “Provides enhanced knowledge and understanding of the pupils
- b. Provides guide on better relationship with various students
- c. Can help for use of relevant examples by the tutors
- d. Can aid the proper handling of the students’ perceptions
- e. Provides adequate knowledge of the various cultures of the students
- f. Provides understanding of the culture of various people
- g. Can promote mutual respects in the study environment”

Despite the above benefits of studying or undertaking intercultural studies, it does not suffice appropriately as avenue for students of higher institutions to gain knowledge of one of the UN official languages or to be a truly global citizen. The intercultural studies bases done with focus on knowing aspects of other tribal or nationality cultures may not be with emphasis on the language. Though intercultural studies could help to grasp the language of other cultures understudied, some of the other languages may not reasonably expose students to high level of comprehension.

### WHICH ARE THE UN OFFICIAL LANGUAGES?

The UN official languages are Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish (United Nations, 2017). One of the outstanding reasons for the adoption of these UN languages was the high number of population using them and the extension of its use across the globe. The six (6) UN official languages were adopted at various times over the years to be used as official medium of communication as follows alphabetically.

#### “Arabic:

official and working language of the General Assembly (18 Dec. 1973)  
official and working language of the subsidiary organs of the General Assembly (17 Dec. 1980)  
official language of the Economic and Social Council (15 April 1982)  
official and working language of the Security Council (21 Dec. 1982)

#### Chinese:

official language of the United Nations (except the International Court of Justice, ICJ) (1 Feb. 1946)  
official language of the Security Council (24 June 1946)  
working language of the General Assembly (18 Dec. 1973)  
working language of the Security Council (17 Jan. 1974)

#### English:

official and working language of the United Nations (except the ICJ) (1 Feb. 1946)  
official and working language of the Security Council (24 June 1946)

#### French:

official and working language of the United Nations (except the ICJ) (1 Feb. 1946)  
official and working language of the Security Council (24 June 1946)

#### Russian:

official language of the United Nations (except the ICJ) (1 Feb. 1946)  
official language of the Security Council (24 June 1946)  
working language of the General Assembly (21 Dec. 1968)  
working language of the Security Council (22 Jan. 1969)

#### Spanish:

official language of the United Nations (except the ICJ) (1 Feb. 1946)  
official language of the Security Council (24 June 1946)

working language of the General Assembly (7 Dec. 1948)

working language of the Security Council (22 Jan. 1969)” (Hammarkjold , 2017).

### **Arabic Speaking countries**

According to Worldatlas (2017) the Arabic language is spoken in 26 countries. The countries listed afterwards are some of those that speak Arabic in order of their prevalence and population of usage. Tunisia, Western Sahara, Egypt, Syria, Mauritania, Morocco, Libya, Lebanon, Sudan, Jordan, Iraq, Kuwait, Algeria, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Yemen, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, Palestine - West Bank - Gaza, Somalia, Israel, Chad, Djibouti, Eritrea, Comoros.

### **French Speaking Countries**

In similar vein, French is widely spoken across the world by as many as 53 countries leaving it as the most widely spoken language with those having it as first or second language at 220 to 300million people (Thompson and Phillips, 2015). Worldatlas (2017) identifies that French is spoken as official language in the 29 countries as follows: “Belgium, Benin, Burkina, Burundi, Cameroon, Canada, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Congo, Congo Democratic Republic , Cote d'Ivoire, Djibouti, France, Gabon, Guinea, Haiti, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Mali, Monaco, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, Seychelles, Switzerland, Togo, Vanuatu, Vietnam”.

### **English Speaking Countries**

The English speaking countries have been identified to include, “American Samoa, Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Australia, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bermuda, Botswana, British Virgin Islands, Cameroon, Canada, Cayman Islands, Christmas Islands, Cook Islands, Dominica, Falkland Islands (Isles Malvinas), Fiji, The Gambia, Ghana, Gibraltar, Grenada, Guam, Guernsey, Guyana, Hong Kong, Ireland, Jamaica, Jersey, Kenya, Kiribati, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Malta, Marshall Islands, Mauritius, Micronesia, Montserrat, Namibia, New Zealand, Nigeria, Norfolk Island, Northern Mariana Islands, Palau, Philippines, Pitcairn Islands, Rwanda, Saint Helena, Saint Kits and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Saint Maarten, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Solomon Islands, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, Turks and Caicos Islands, Uganda, United Kingdom, Vanuatu, Virgin Island, Zambia, Zimbabwe”(Valencia college, 2017). The United States of America is known to be an English speaking country. There are many other people who communicate in English language, even though it is not their official language or major language. There are also many other people who

for the need to reach out and communicate beyond their climes have learnt English at least at elementary levels.

### **Chinese Speaking Countries**

Mandarin is the official language of China which is equally spoken by some other countries. The Chinese speaking countries include China, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia (BBC, 2017). Another source however has this other list of Chinese speaking countries to include China, Hong Kong, Macau, Singapore(Ranker (2017). There is yet another source that adds Taiwan as a Chinese speaking country (Su, 2016).

### **Russian Speaking Countries**

The Russian language is categorized as the sixth most spoken language in the world and most widespread language of the Eurasia. The countries that speak Russian language include Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Ukraine, and Moldova (Tanya, 2009).

### **Spanish speaking Countries**

Beus (2012) documents that the 21 Spanish speaking countries includes Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba – Havana, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico, Spain, Uruguay, Venezuela (Beus, 2012). Spanish is also spoken and used regularly in United States of America, Belize, Andorra, Gibraltar, and Brazil (Sponaugle, 2014).

## **WHY WAS THE UN OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ADOPTED AS OFFICIAL LANGUAGES OF THE INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION?**

I want to believe that the prevailing reason for the adoption of the UN official languages of Arabic, English, Chinese, French, Russian and Spanish are the fact there are more number of people using them as well as the widespread usage of them. The foregoing listing of countries that speak these languages and the number of people represented by the various countries would readily affirm the truism of the necessity of their adoption. There are many other languages that may be widespread in usage and with high number of people speaking them, but they probably are not be up to the level of the widespread usage or number of people speaking the UN official languages.

## WHY ADOPT UN OFFICIAL LANGUAGES IN HIGHER INSTITUTIONS

The question of providing reasons for the adoption of United Nations official languages at the higher institutions abounds. There are several languages all over the world, however in the wisdom of the UN system, six had been adopted as the international language bases for operation at the United Nations which is a body that has membership of virtually all countries of the world.

a. **Versatility:** a level of versatility is required by the today's man in operating in the global community. One of such needed versatility is being able to speak a language considered global enough that it put the person in a position of advantage in various spheres.

b. **New working demands:** whether in business or in public administration services, there is usually need to officially contact other businesses or public administrations at various levels, and it is the knowledge of at least one of the UN official languages that could help in smoothing this process. In this respect therefore, it would be highly beneficial for graduates to speak one of the UN official languages as it could help to enhance the working and networking demands of the modern society at different fronts.

c. **Being a global citizen:** being a truly global citizen requires that a person is able to speak one of the widespread languages of the world. By doing so, a person is able to move, interact and integrate faster in event of travelling or staying in another part of the world, other than his native locality.

d. **Employment advantage:** there is renewed demand for graduates with the capability of speaking any of the major world languages or widespread spoken languages. This is based on the fact that businesses are beginning to more and more have global outlook, customer base across international borders, operations and partnerships internationally. In essence, international companies require workers with multilingual ability in major languages so as to secure their reach and operations anywhere in the world.

e. **Assisting younger generation to learn more:** having knowledge of the UN official languages believed to be widespread and spoken by billions of people around the world would rightly position young people and indeed everyone to learn easily at any time. The bases for this is that given the widespread usage of the UN official languages in written and spoken forms, it would be easier for anyone who understands them to comprehend and learn faster as the case may be.

f. **Better graduate are produced:** knowing one of the UN official languages, other than just the national native language could help graduates of Universities to be better graduates as it would

rightly position them for operating in a world where the widespread languages includes one of the ones he already knows.

## MECHANISM FOR ADOPTION AND PRACTICE OF THE STUDY OF UN OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

The process for adoption of the adoption of the UN official languages in higher institutions would be an easy one. If most universities across the globe accept the necessity and efficiency of this idea, they would simply make the UN official languages compulsory at their Universities with students having the option of doing only one of the languages as a borrowed course which forms part of the curriculum for every student irrespective for the course of study. Given the fact that learning a new language would not be so easy, students could be given the opportunity to continue to undertake the language course all through their study years as a subsidiary course. The assessment of the students on the language course would be annually to access their level of performance, but at the end of their studies, their cumulative grade for the language course would be merged together and graded as a single unit and then presented with relevant certification in any of the UN official languages undertaken. The universities would then employ lecturers in these language study areas as a means of meeting up with the obligation of exposing their students reasonably to UN official languages as a means of making them better graduates at the end of their studies. Besides making better graduates with global prospects by the universities, many more students would be interested in enrolling into such universities that could expose them to the possibility of added benefit and advantage of knowing a major UN official language at the end of their studies.

## CONCLUSION

The foregoing discussions exposed the necessity of adoption of the UN official languages in the higher institutions across the globe as a means of making students better graduates at the end of their studies. The idea has numerous benefits which had also been discussed in the research article. The relevant contributions and benefits of cultural and intercultural studies were highlighted. As was obviously underscored, graduates who only speak their native language also used in teaching at the Universities would have communication impediments after university education especially if they want to move across national boundaries where one of the major languages which could be one of the UN official languages is spoken.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendation from the foregoing as is already clearly articulated under the mechanism for adoption and practice of the study of UN official languages. The recommendations are as follows:

a. Universities all over the world should adopt the teaching of the UN official languages into their study curriculum for all students

b. The UN official languages adopted should be made optional for students to select which one they would want to do, but all students must study one within the duration of their undergraduate academic program.

c. Universities should focus mainly on students' proficiency in using the languages rather than just passing the language exams which may not potential show retentive knowledge or ability of usage of the language beyond the university.

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