

Introduction to Special Issue

Overcoming linguistic barriers, advancing global citizenship, and embracing humanism through foreign language education

Abstract

Several researchers have underscored the role of foreign language education in overcoming linguistic barriers, fostering global citizenship, and promoting shared values. These studies emphasise the societal benefits of language learning, such as cultivating empathy, mutual respect, and cross-cultural understanding. They also highlight the interconnection between migration and language evolution, thus, reinforcing the relevance of sociolinguistic studies on cultural exchange. For example, research on the impact of language immersion programmes demonstrates their influence in bridging cultural gaps and broadening global perspectives. Others refute the long-standing negative societal reaction towards code-switching, thus challenging linguistic imperialism while celebrating diversity, and offering innovative insights for language teaching. This introduction to the special issue on overcoming linguistic barriers, advancing global citizenship, and embracing humanism through foreign language education presents a theoretical backdrop to these areas of foreign language education, with a focus on its sociolinguistic dimensions. The authors highlight, among other things, the role of language in fostering national unity and cultural diplomacy, providing lessons for multilingual societies. They also show how, collectively, the contributions affirm the value of language education as a tool for forging social ties. They conclude that the papers in the issue advocate for educational practices that embrace linguistic diversity, which will equip people to better navigate today's globalised world

Keywords: global citizenship, linguistic barriers, language education, cultural understanding, sociolinguistics

The role of language learning in fostering global citizenship

Sholihah and Annas (2024) posit that globalisation is the process where people, businesses, and governments from different countries connect through trade, investment, and technology. These economic and social interactions are possible through the power of language, where language is not just a mere tool for communication but an effective medium for cultural exchange. More significantly, foreign language education is vital in overcoming linguistic barriers and advancing global citizenship. In this context, global citizenship is not just about awareness and engagement with global trends but also about the ability to communicate and collaborate with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. By developing this intercultural competence in individuals, language educators contribute to shaping learners to become global citizens.

As globalisation continues to make the world smaller by the second, the ability to navigate linguistic and cultural differences has become a crucial 21st-century skill. As argued by Xiang (2024), fluency in a foreign language is a fundamental skill that enhances career prospects and cultural understanding and empowers individuals to adapt to diverse settings. As such, foreign language education is a bridge that connects societies, enabling learners to access new opportunities and actively participate in various aspects of life. This language learning process fosters a sense of global citizenship, where individuals are aware of other cultures and actively engage with and appreciate them, as seen in the case of language immersion programmes. As Klimova (2021) suggested, knowing foreign languages enriches individuals' experiences and broadens their understanding of the world. Through a language, learners gain the tools to understand different viewpoints, which promotes respect and collaboration.

Language education also promotes global citizenship by helping break down barriers, reducing misunderstandings, and building trust and cooperation. As Nelson Mandela once said,

“Because when you speak a language, English, well many people understand you, including Afrikaners, but when you speak Afrikaans, you know you go straight to their hearts” (Mandela, 1990, as cited in Stengel, 2009). Hence, communication is the foundation for meaningful relationships, and when people are equipped with the linguistic skills to connect across cultures, they can overcome misunderstandings. Alamdari and Ghani (2021) further articulate the unifying nature of language learning by highlighting that it helps reduce prejudice towards cultural differences.

Lastly, embracing humanism through foreign language education is essential for fostering empathy and respect for diversity. Language is not just for communication, but it offers insight into others’ experiences. It promotes equity, compassion, as well as mutual respect, which are globally vital values. Indeed, the benefits of foreign language education for embracing humanism have been underscored by several scholars. Stein-Smith (2018) notes that foreign language skills help learners understand diverse, tackle global challenges, enhance communication, creativity, problem-solving and promote tolerance. Further evidence is provided by Salih (2024), who argues that overcoming language barriers through language education improves global cooperation, especially in sectors like healthcare, business, and education.

Language learning and bridging cultures: Theoretical approaches

This special issue draws upon diverse theoretical frameworks. Examples are the tenets of Plurilingual and Pluricultural Competence (PPC) and Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) which are applied to explore the role of language in overcoming linguistic barriers and promoting cultural understanding. PPC, as proposed by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), emphasises the integration of diverse linguistic and cultural

resources by learners in their interactions with others. ICC on the other hand, articulated by Byram (1997) and expanded by Deardorff (2006), highlights the development of skills and attitudes necessary for effective intercultural communication. These frameworks underpin the contributions in this issue, which explore the potential of language to break barriers and promote mutual respect across diverse linguistic contexts.

Dunlop Ochieng's paper aligns strongly with the Plurilingual and Pluricultural Competence (PPC) framework. According to the CEFR, "Plurilingualism and pluriculturalism aim to capture the holistic nature of individual language users/learners linguistic and cultural repertoires. Learners/users are seen as social agents who draw upon all sorts of resources in their linguistic and cultural repertoires and further develop these resources in their trajectories" (CEFR, 2023, paragraph 4). By analysing Brian Chikwava's hybrid use of English, the paper exemplifies PPC's emphasis on leveraging multiple linguistic systems of individuals to enhance communication and cultural understanding. Also, the incorporation of multiple linguistic identities in *Harare North* highlights Coste et al.'s (2009) assertion that developing plurilingual and pluricultural competencies enhances linguistic awareness and interaction skills.

The importance of study abroad programmes in enhancing language proficiency and intercultural competence connects with Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) as theorised by Michael Byram (1997). In Duncan, Kabio-Danlebo and Annoh-Achampong's paper, the immersion experiences in Spain and Cuba helped improve learners' attitudes, knowledge, and skills necessary for engaging across cultures. The findings from this research support those of other studies which posit that immersion programmes foster empathy, mutual respect, and deeper cultural understanding. They also reinforce Deardorff's (2006) assertion that intercultural competence is essential in today's globalised world. Likewise, Marjie and Sackey-

Amakye's study shows that students learn Kiswahili and French to improve communication skills, advance career prospects, and achieve personal growth. The students' focus on improved communication skills in order to interact with native speakers reflects a desire to connect with diverse cultures as a result of globalisation. However, beyond ICC, Husein's exploration of Arabic also reflects Plurilingual and Pluricultural Competence (PPC). The historical analysis of Arabic in Ghana, shaped by trade and religious networks, underscores how language contact enriches social, cultural and linguistic identities. As a result, Husein's study supports linguistic plurality and advocates for it through language education.

Okine's contribution is also grounded in Plurilingual and Pluricultural Competence (PPC), showcasing how linguistic systems interact and adapt through migration and cultural exchange. The paper highlights lexical borrowing and the coexistence of diverse linguistic structures, reflecting PPC's principles of embracing multilingual practices to foster mutual understanding and inclusivity. The integration of lexical borrowings into Pichi and the Spanish of Equatorial Guinea reflects the CEFR's (2023) perspective of learners as agents utilising diverse linguistic resources in everyday conversation. The study advocates for critical pedagogy approaches to foster inclusivity and cultural appreciation in the foreign language classroom, by proposing educational resources rooted in these linguistic connections.

In sum, this special issue highlights how Plurilingual and Pluricultural Competence (PPC) and Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) contribute to bridging linguistic and cultural differences. By emphasising the value of linguistic diversity and cultural understanding, these frameworks show how language can foster respect, inclusivity, and meaningful connections in a globalised world.

Contributions to this special issue

The paper titled “English in Brian Chikwava’s *Harare North: The Blueprint of the Ideal Global English*” by Dunlop Ochieng addresses the themes of overcoming linguistic barriers, advancing global citizenship, and embracing humanism through foreign languages in several significant ways. Although the paper addresses linguistic elements, it does so through an analysis of a literary work. The paper discusses how Brian Chikwava blends “Standard English” with various non-standard and non-native Englishes, including pidgin and Africanized English. This shows that hybridisation breaks down traditional linguistic barriers, making English more accessible and relatable to a diverse audience. Another feature observed by Dunlop Ochieng in the novel is the incorporation of elements from Zimbabwean languages (Shona, Ndebele, Chewa) and major African lingua francas (Kiswahili, Hausa, Yoruba). Through code-mixing and code-switching, the novel demonstrates how different linguistic systems can coexist and interact. This approach promotes understanding and communication across linguistic divides.

The use of language in the novel reflects the cultural and linguistic diversity of Zimbabwean immigrants in London and provides a platform to exhibit a variation to “standard” English. By giving recognition and value to the cultural background of the different language communities, a sense of global citizenship is cultivated. Furthermore, the paper outlines how the use of language in the novel allows characters to maintain their cultural identity and authenticity, even in a foreign context. This supports the humanistic principle of valuing everyone’s unique cultural and linguistic background. The concept of “Globlish” as described in the paper advocates for an inclusive form of English that accommodates various linguistic and cultural influences. This idea supports the notion of a global language that transcends national and cultural boundaries, promoting a more interconnected and inclusive world.

Dunlop Ochieng’s paper also observes political undertones in the use of language in Chikwava’s novel. *Harare North* can

be read as a novel of protest against linguistic imperialism and a celebration of linguistic diversity. This humanistic approach values the individual's linguistic repertoire and cultural identity, promoting respect and empathy for different linguistic backgrounds. By challenging the dominance of Standard English and promoting the use of non-standard and non-native varieties, the novel advocates for linguistic equity. This supports the idea that all linguistic forms have value and should be respected. The contribution further suggests that the hybrid language used in the novel can inspire educational practices that embrace linguistic diversity. Incorporating diverse linguistic elements into language teaching, educators can foster a more inclusive and humanistic learning environment. Ultimately, the study shows how *Harare North* exemplifies decoloniality in language use and pedagogy.

The second paper by Duncan, Kabio-Danlebo and Annoh-Achampong examines the role of study-abroad programs in fostering cultural understanding. The authors investigated the experiences of students from the University of Ghana who participated in language immersion (study abroad) programmes in Spain and Cuba, focusing on the motivations, cultural impacts, and challenges of these programmes. The results reveal that both intrinsic and extrinsic factors influence students' interest in study abroad programmes. The high number of participants (60%) who expressed a willingness to participate in these programmes even without financial assistance, provides evidence of a strong intrinsic motivation to engage in cultural immersion and language learning. This aligns with previous research suggesting that intrinsic factors, such as intellectual curiosity and the desire for cultural exposure, play a significant role in student decisions to study abroad (Dörnyei, 1998).

The study also sheds light on how immersion in a foreign language environment can enhance both language proficiency and intercultural competence, aligning with the goals of foreign language education as a tool for overcoming linguistic barriers and advancing global citizenship. Despite challenges such as

culture shocks, the overall impact of study abroad programs on students' language skills and intercultural awareness was positive, underscoring such programmes' potential for cultural understanding. To conclude, the authors argue that study abroad programmes play a crucial role in overcoming linguistic barriers by immersing students in real-world language use, which enhances fluency and intercultural competence. They explain how such experiences are instrumental in promoting global citizenship as students gain a deeper understanding and empathy toward different cultures. By participating in these programmes, students are not just advancing their language proficiency but also embracing values of mutual respect, which are very much needed in today's globalised world.

Okine's "Ghanaian-Nigerian cultural and linguistic transfer in the Pichi and Spanish of Equatorial Guinea" aligns in several ways with the themes of overcoming linguistic barriers, advancing global citizenship, and embracing humanism through foreign languages. The paper traces the historical and cultural ties between the Anglophone countries of Ghana and Nigeria on one hand, and the Hispanophone country Equatorial Guinea, on the other. The historical ties between the three countries, established through colonisation and the cocoa industry with migrant labour from Ghana and Nigeria to Fernando Po (now Bioko), facilitated language contact. The paper examines these linguistic connections in Pichi and Equatorial Guinean Spanish (EGS) through a process described by Yakpo (2023) as lexical borrowings of English-based Pidgin vocabulary and grammar into local languages, merging with Spanish and African languages to create a distinct linguistic identity. The study provides background on the shared histories and sociolinguistic profiles of the languages involved which, according to John Lipski (2004), demonstrates the complicated linguistic environment created in Equatorial Guinea with the presence of Nigerian labourers and the creolisation processes of the region. By this, the study highlights how migration, cultural exchange,

and shared histories bring a human face to language contact and embraces a humanistic approach to linguistics. Additionally, it examines the unique linguistic transfers that occur within the multicultural environment created by contact among the diverse groups of people from these countries thereby highlighting the role of language in human interaction and cultural identity constructions. By underscoring how Pichi and the Spanish of Equatorial Guinea incorporate lexical borrowings from Ghanaian and Nigerian pidgin, the paper demonstrates how languages through contact, co-exist, influence one another, adapt, and evolve. This highlights how languages create opportunities for breaking linguistic barriers and fostering mutual understanding. Furthermore, by drawing attention to the historical and cultural ties between the three countries, the paper facilitates an understanding of these connections and thereby advances global citizenship by fostering a sense of shared heritage.

Okine's study is illuminating in highlighting the socio-cultural and linguistic influence of the Anglophone countries on the languages of Hispanophone Equatorial Guinea. A key innovation is its quest to inspire the creation of educational resources that reflect the linguistic diversity and cultural richness of Equatorial Guinea and the contributions of the Hispanophone traditions to the linguistic composition of Africa. The paper is pragmatic in its proposal to harness the socio-cultural and linguistic interconnections among Equatorial Guinea, Ghana, and Nigeria to create authentic educational materials, which can enhance students' awareness of global cultures and histories and promote a more inclusive and global perspective. It further posits that learners will appreciate the human stories behind language evolution, develop a more nuanced understanding of global cultures and ultimately, foster empathy and a deeper understanding of diverse cultures.

In the next article, "Arabic language use in Ghana: retrospect and prospect", Husein provides an insightful sociolinguistic analysis of the use of the Arabic language in

Ghana. First, he offers a historical sketch of the introduction of the Arabic language in Ghana by studying details of how the Arabs, through the Trans-Saharan trade, spread Islam and the Arabic language when the indigenes came in contact with the Dyula and Hausa traders. To be more specific, Trimmingham (1959) and Ryan (1998), as cited by Sarbah (2023), argue that the Dyula traders were interacting with indigenes on personal, recreational and religious activities besides trade relations hence the rapid spread of the language. On the use and vitality of the Arabic language in Ghana, the author highlighted that across the Islamic communities in Ghana, Arabic is used as a mark of religious identity as it is used for fulfilling essential religious obligations like prayer. He explains that it is also deeply intertwined with sociocultural practices like weddings and naming ceremonies in Muslim communities. It is worth adding that Arabic is used not only during Islamic events in Ghana but also during national celebrations where leaders of different religious persuasions are invited to say prayers to foster diversity, inclusivity and social cohesion.

Moreover, the author discusses Arabic as a lingua franca between Ghanaian Arabists and the Arab community in Ghana. He argues that these interactions facilitate collaborations and interpersonal relationships and provide avenues for multilateral relationships between Ghana and the Arab countries. In conclusion, the author explores the use of the Arabic language in Ghana and demonstrates that it is influenced by social, religious, political and educational factors. He also argues that the use of the Arabic language also fosters national unity in diversity and promotes cultural diplomacy between Ghana and the Arab countries, issues which are relevant to the overarching theme of this special issue.

Lastly, Marjie and Sackey-Amakye's study explores students' motivations for learning French and Kiswahili. Their findings reveal the complex relationship between tertiary-level learners' personal goals and their performance. Through the

lenses of students' self-reports, the study highlights the crucial role of foreign language education in promoting cross-cultural interactions and understanding beyond just performance-oriented institutional expectations. This research aligns with the theme of overcoming linguistic barriers and advancing global citizenship by emphasising largely the benefits of foreign language education in fostering communication, personal growth, and cultural understanding.

Conclusions and outlook

This special issue explores the critical role of foreign language education in fostering global citizenship and addressing linguistic and cultural barriers. It will be of significant interest to linguists, educators, and sociologists whose works examine the interplay between language and society. From the impact of immersion programmes at the University of Ghana to the exploration of linguistic hybridity in Brian Chikwava's *Harare North* and the cross-cultural exchanges between Ghana, Nigeria, and Equatorial Guinea, the contributions demonstrate the potential of language as a unifying force. These findings advocate for global citizenship by viewing language learning as an asset in fostering globalisation amidst linguistic and cultural diversity.

Looking ahead, the insights provided in this issue pave the way for future research on the role of foreign language education in fostering global awareness within pluricultural contexts, such as those found in many African societies. It encourages educators, policymakers, and learners to view language as a tool for cultivating an empathetic, interconnected global community—advocating for educational environments that embrace and promote cultural and linguistic diversity.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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