**Exploring Student Perspectives on Foreign Language Programs in Higher Education: A Case Study of the University of Zambia**

**ABSTRACT**

This study investigates the attitudes and perceptions of University of Zambia (UNZA) students towards learning French and Chinese, focusing on how these languages align with their academic and career aspirations. The research aims to identify the factors influencing students' language choices, including their perceptions of the economic and cultural value of these languages, the level of institutional support, and their awareness of language courses offered at the university. Specifically, the study addresses four key objectives: 1) to assess students' awareness of French and Chinese courses; 2) to explore the reasons behind their language preferences; 3) to evaluate students' attitudes towards both languages; and 4) to assess the effectiveness of university strategies in increasing enrollment in language courses. The study’s population consisted of 30 students enrolled in French and Chinese courses at UNZA, with equal representation (15 students per language). The students were purposively selected using stratified purposive sampling to ensure equal representation from different academic years. Additionally, two faculty members involved in language instruction participated in qualitative interviews. Data were collected through interviews with the faculty members and focus group discussions with students. The data were analyzed thematically to identify key themes and patterns. The findings indicate that while there is significant interest in learning Chinese, primarily due to career prospects linked to China's growing economic influence, French is viewed as less valuable in terms of immediate career opportunities. Students cited the increasing presence of Chinese businesses and available scholarships as key motivators for learning Chinese. In contrast, French was seen as important for international diplomacy and regional integration, but the limited visibility of French courses and perceived lack of economic return deterred many students. Faculty members highlighted the challenges in increasing French course enrollment, noting low awareness and insufficient promotional efforts. In contrast, Chinese language courses benefited from strong institutional support, including scholarships and partnerships with the Confucius Institute, which significantly contributed to increased interest and enrollment.This study emphasizes the role of institutional initiatives in shaping language learning choices and underscores the need for more targeted marketing and strategic promotion of French courses to better compete with the growing demand for Chinese language skills. The findings contribute to the broader discourse on foreign language education in Africa, particularly in the context of global economi*c* shifts and the increasing importance of language skills in international trade and diplomacy.

***Keywords:*** *language learning, career advancement, University of Zambia, Confucius Institute, institutional support, Zambia, foreign language education, student perceptions, economic influence, sample selection.*

**1. INTRODUCTION**

In today’s globalized world, the ability to communicate across linguistic and cultural borders has never been more vital. As the world continues to move towards increased interconnectedness—both economically and socially—the demand for multilingual education grows ever more urgent. In the modern labor market, proficiency in multiple languages, particularly those spoken by global economic powers, is a highly sought-after skill. This trend reflects the growing recognition of multilingualism as a key factor for personal, academic, and professional success [1](Wisely, 2012). The rapid pace of globalization, combined with international initiatives such as China’s Belt and Road Initiative, further reinforces the importance of learning languages like Chinese and French, which are spoken by millions of people worldwide and are vital to international business, diplomacy, and cultural exchange (Li, 2021).

The global perspective on multilingualism shows a shift towards a more cosmopolitan mindset, where learning foreign languages is not only about acquiring new communication tools but also about fostering a deeper understanding of diverse cultures. Research highlights that multilingual education plays a critical role in cross-cultural communication, which has become crucial in global diplomacy and trade (Heng, 2018). Moreover, as countries around the world are increasingly engaged in the global marketplace, proficiency in widely spoken languages such as Mandarin and French offers tangible advantages for both individuals and businesses. The global economic dominance of China and the strong cultural and political influence of French-speaking countries make Chinese and French essential languages in the international arena (Li, 2021). For instance, in Europe, the rise of Chinese as a major foreign language reflects the growing influence of China in global trade, while the global spread of the French language highlights its importance in diplomacy and international law (Xu, 2023).

At the regional level, Africa, with its unique linguistic diversity, faces both opportunities and challenges in promoting multilingualism. On one hand, the continent’s richness in languages presents a unique asset, but on the other hand, it complicates educational efforts, particularly in the context of foreign language learning. In many African countries, including Zambia, French and Chinese are gaining prominence due to the growing economic and political ties with France and China, respectively. Africa’s increasing involvement in China’s Belt and Road Initiative has led to a surge in the interest and demand for Chinese language programs, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa (Bulolo et al., 2022). Likewise, the historical and contemporary significance of French in Africa, due to its widespread use in diplomacy, trade, and international cooperation, ensures that French remains a major foreign language across many African countries, including Zambia (Shan & Xu, 2023).

Zambia, situated in the heart of Southern Africa, has not been exempt from these regional trends. Over recent years, the demand for proficiency in both French and Chinese has risen sharply. As Zambia continues to develop its diplomatic, trade, and cultural relations with China, particularly through its participation in the Belt and Road Initiative, Chinese language learning has become increasingly popular. Chinese is seen not only as a strategic language for business opportunities but also as a bridge to strengthen ties between Zambia and China, especially in sectors like mining, infrastructure, and technology (Li, 2021). Simultaneously, French continues to play an important role in Zambia's relations with the Francophone world, as it is one of the key languages of international diplomacy and regional cooperation in Africa (Chishiba, 2012). The University of Zambia (UNZA) and other educational institutions have taken active steps to meet the rising demand for these foreign languages, with language programs focused on both Chinese and French. However, despite these efforts, challenges in language education persist, including negative attitudes toward foreign languages and a lack of resources and qualified teachers (Yin & Abdallah, 2018).

In Zambia, multilingual education faces particular challenges. One of the key barriers to effective language education is the lack of motivation among students to learn foreign languages. As English is the dominant language in Zambia’s academic and professional spheres, many students fail to see the immediate value of learning languages like Chinese and French, especially given the perceived difficulty of these languages (Chishiba, 2016). Additionally, the availability of teaching resources and qualified language instructors is limited, especially for Chinese, which requires a distinct set of pedagogical tools and methods. These challenges not only hinder the success of language programs but also limit the potential for students to acquire the language proficiency needed for future global careers (Yin & Abdallah, 2018).

This study justifies the need to examine the attitudes and perceptions of Zambian students toward learning French and Chinese, considering both global and regional trends. In particular, the study intends to address the following objectives:

1. To explore the attitudes of students at the University of Zambia towards the inclusion of French and Chinese in their academic curriculum.
2. To identify the perceived benefits and challenges of learning French and Chinese in a Zambian context.
3. To investigate the factors that influence students' interest and willingness to study these languages.
4. To provide recommendations on how the University of Zambia can improve the integration of these languages into their curriculum and learning environment.

**2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

**2.1 General Discussion**

Language learning is an intricate process influenced by a multitude of cognitive, emotional, social, and institutional factors. Within the context of Zambian higher education, specifically at the University of Zambia (UNZA), French and Mandarin have become increasingly significant due to their utility in global diplomacy, business, and regional integration. However, despite the growing importance of these languages, various factors shape students’ attitudes, motivation, and engagement with them. This literature review critically synthesizes the existing research on the predictors of attitudes toward foreign language learning, with a focus on French and Mandarin, and highlights the implications of these factors for language education in Zambia.

**2.2 Motivation and Attitudes in Foreign Language Learning**
A significant body of literature highlights the role of motivation in shaping language learners’ attitudes. Motivation, whether intrinsic or extrinsic, serves as a primary determinant of students’ language learning success. Liu (2022) and Alufohai (2019) discuss the two types of motivation—integrative and instrumental—most commonly seen in foreign language learning. Integrative motivation arises from a desire to integrate into the culture of the target language, while instrumental motivation is driven by practical considerations, such as career opportunities. For Zambian students learning French and Mandarin, instrumental motivation seems to be a dominant factor. French, often associated with regional diplomacy, and Mandarin, linked to China’s economic influence in Africa, are seen as languages that can open doors to international job prospects (Li, 2023). However, it is important to critically examine the limits of instrumental motivation. While it provides immediate, tangible incentives for students, it may lack the deeper cultural connection and personal engagement that fosters sustained, long-term language acquisition (Yang, 2024).

Furthermore, it is critical to note that motivation is not static, and it can be influenced by external factors such as teachers’ attitudes, teaching methodologies, and institutional support. In Zambia, the focus on instrumental motivation might lead to a narrow view of language learning that prioritizes immediate employability over long-term cultural engagement (Chishiba, 2016). Therefore, a more holistic approach is needed that combines both integrative and instrumental motivations, fostering students’ emotional and intellectual investment in the language beyond economic factors.

**2.3 Social and Cultural Influences**
The social context of language learning also plays a significant role in shaping attitudes. Language learners’ perceptions are often influenced by societal views and historical relationships between their native language and the target language. The historical context of French in Africa, particularly its colonial associations, makes it a somewhat controversial language to learn in some African countries, including Zambia (Chishiba, 2012). French, while considered essential for diplomacy and regional cooperation, is sometimes seen through a lens of post-colonial resistance. In contrast, Mandarin, increasingly seen as a global lingua franca, particularly in the African context, has a different cultural appeal. As China’s economic influence grows across Africa, Mandarin is increasingly perceived not just as a language of diplomacy but also as a key to economic opportunity (Xu, 2023). This shift is evident in Zambia, where students view Mandarin as a language that opens access to Chinese-owned enterprises and institutions in the region (Phiri, 2021).

However, these sociocultural perceptions are not uniform across all students. Some may view French as a more prestigious language due to its association with global cultural institutions and international organizations, while others may be more drawn to Mandarin due to its economic and pragmatic advantages (Heng, 2018). Thus, attitudes toward these languages are influenced by complex factors that intertwine global geopolitics, economic trends, and local cultural norms. What is critical in this context is the need to examine how such cultural factors influence language learning at UNZA. Students’ perceptions of language importance and cultural value may not always align with educational goals, suggesting the need for more nuanced language promotion campaigns within educational settings.

**2.4 Emotional and Psychological Dimensions of Language Learning**

Emotions play a pivotal role in language acquisition. As Shangguan (2024) suggests, positive emotional experiences can significantly enhance language learning, while negative emotions such as anxiety or frustration can create significant barriers. This dynamic is particularly relevant when examining the challenges students face when learning foreign languages with complex phonetic structures or scripts. Mandarin, with its tonal system and character-based writing, presents unique challenges for Zambian students who are more accustomed to alphabetic writing systems like English. Similarly, the perceived difficulty of French, despite its shared Latin roots with English, can also result in demotivation, especially among students who face difficulties with pronunciation and grammar (Chishiba, 2016).

The role of teachers in shaping these emotional responses cannot be overstated. According to Lindberg and Trofimovich (2020), teachers’ attitudes, classroom environments, and teaching methods have profound impacts on students’ emotional experiences with language learning. In Zambian classrooms, educators must not only focus on teaching linguistic skills but also consider the emotional needs of students. For instance, the use of active learning techniques and collaborative learning environments can reduce language anxiety and increase students’ engagement with the target language. This suggests that the effectiveness of French and Mandarin language programs at UNZA may be limited by the current emotional and psychological support offered to students.

**2.5 The Role of Teachers and Institutional Support**
Teachers play a key role in fostering positive language learning attitudes and shaping students' perceptions of language utility. Shan and Xu (2023) highlight how teachers’ beliefs about language teaching can influence classroom dynamics and student engagement. In Zambian higher education, however, the lack of adequately trained language instructors may hinder the successful implementation of language programs. Teachers’ proficiency in the target languages, as well as their ability to connect language learning with real-world applications, are essential in developing positive attitudes among learners. Furthermore, institutional support for foreign language education is often fragmented, which impedes the growth of sustainable, well-resourced language programs (Li, 2021). At UNZA, the current state of language resources and teacher development may not fully align with the growing demand for foreign language skills, particularly for languages like Mandarin that require specialized teaching approaches.

Furthermore, institutional support for language programs extends beyond teaching to include the development of language resources such as language labs, multimedia tools, and opportunities for language immersion. Programs such as the Confucius Institute for Mandarin and the Alliance Française for French have proven to be effective in other countries by providing specialized resources and teacher training (Li, 2023). However, such programs need to be integrated into the broader educational framework at UNZA, where language education is not only about linguistic competence but also about cultural fluency and international engagement.

**2.6 Theoretical Framework**

This study explores students’ attitudes and perceptions toward learning French and Mandarin at the University of Zambia (UNZA) through three key theoretical frameworks: **Theory of Planned Behavior** (Ajzen, 1991), **Sociocultural Theory** (Vygotsky, 1978), and **Expectancy-Value Theory** (Eccles et al., 1983). **Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991)** suggests that students’ motivation to learn a foreign language is influenced by their attitudes toward the language's usefulness, social influences, and perceived ability to succeed. For UNZA students, the belief in the career and academic benefits of French and Mandarin is significant, but social influences and perceived barriers, such as limited exposure to native speakers, also play a crucial role (Mouftah, 2018). However, this theory requires consideration of the social and institutional context in Zambia, where support for language learning can be limited.

**Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978)** emphasizes the importance of social interaction and cultural immersion in language learning. Students at UNZA benefit from opportunities for real-world engagement with French and Mandarin, but the limited opportunities for immersion in Zambia pose a challenge to deep engagement (Wei & Hua, 2022). The theory highlights the need for institutional support, such as exposure to native speakers or cultural exchanges, to enhance language acquisition.

**Expectancy-Value Theory (Eccles et al., 1983)** suggests that students weigh the expected benefits of learning a language against the perceived effort required. If students perceive Mandarin as difficult, they may be less motivated to pursue it, despite its future career value (Azu, 2018). The theory underscores the need for students to see clear, tangible benefits to outweigh the challenges of learning a complex language like Mandarin.

Together, these frameworks offer a comprehensive understanding of students’ attitudes toward foreign languages at UNZA. While each theory provides valuable insights, they need to be integrated to account for the unique Zambian context, where social, cultural, and institutional factors play a significant role in shaping language learning decisions.

**2.7 Gaps in Literature**

Although existing studies emphasize the importance of French and Mandarin in Zambia’s higher education system, several research gaps remain.Firstly, there is limited research on student perceptions. While previous studies have explored foreign language education policies and implementation challenges, few have focused on how students perceive and experience these languages within Zambia’s university context. This study aims to address this gap by directly analyzing student attitudes at UNZA, providing a clearer picture of their perspectives.

Secondly, there is a lack of empirical data on motivation factors. While some studies suggest that career prospects influence language learning, there is little empirical evidence on how factors such as academic background, socioeconomic status, or prior exposure to foreign languages affect students' motivations. This study will explore which of these factors most strongly shape students' willingness to learn French or Mandarin.Additionally, there is a scarcity of studies on language difficulty perception. While some students perceive Mandarin as too complex, which may impact their willingness to continue learning, few studies in Zambia have assessed how these perceptions of language difficulty affect student retention in language courses. This study will examine whether students' initial perceptions of difficulty influence their decision to persist in or drop out of language courses.

Finally, there are institutional support and policy gaps. While the Confucius Institute has strengthened Mandarin education at UNZA, there is less institutional support for French. This study will investigate how UNZA’s institutional policies and available resources impact student attitudes toward learning foreign languages.

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**3. METHODOLOGY**

**3.1 Research Design**

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the attitudes and perceptions of University of Zambia (UNZA) students towards learning French and Chinese. A qualitative approach was deemed appropriate as it allows for an in-depth understanding of students’ motivations, experiences, and perspectives regarding foreign language learning. The study focused on the factors influencing language choices, the perceived economic and cultural value of these languages, the level of institutional support, and students’ awareness of the courses offered at the university.

**3.2 Study Population and Sampling Strategy**

The study population consisted of 30 students enrolled in French and Chinese courses at UNZA, with an equal distribution of 15 students per language. To ensure diversity in perspectives, students were purposively selected using stratified purposive sampling. This sampling technique allowed for the inclusion of students from different academic years, ensuring that the data captured reflected a range of experiences and attitudes across various stages of language learning. Additionally, two faculty members involved in teaching French and Chinese participated in the study to provide insights from an instructional perspective. The faculty members were selected through purposive sampling based on their expertise and direct involvement in the university’s language programs.

**3.3 Data Collection Methods**

Data were collected using two primary methods: focus group discussions (FGDs) with students and interviews with faculty members. The FGDs provided a platform for students to express their views, experiences, and motivations for choosing French or Chinese. They also allowed for discussions on challenges faced in learning these languages and their perceived benefits. Each focus group consisted of six to eight participants to facilitate interactive discussions while ensuring that all voices were heard.In addition to the FGDs, semi-structured interviews were conducted with faculty members to gain insights into the institutional strategies supporting language learning, the challenges encountered in promoting these courses, and their perspectives on students' attitudes toward foreign language acquisition. These interviews provided valuable data on the structural and academic dimensions of language learning at UNZA.

**3.4 Data Analysis**

The data collected from FGDs and faculty interviews were analyzed thematically. This involved transcribing the discussions and interviews, coding the data, and identifying recurring themes and patterns. Thematic analysis was used to categorize responses according to key areas such as motivations for language learning, career aspirations, institutional support, and challenges in course enrollment. This approach allowed for a structured interpretation of qualitative data while ensuring that the findings were representative of the participants' views.

**3.5 Ethical Considerations**

Participants were informed about the study’s objectives, and their consent was obtained before their participation. To ensure confidentiality, participants’ identities were anonymized, and the data collected were used solely for research purposes. The study adhered to ethical guidelines concerning voluntary participation, privacy, and informed consent.

**3.6 Limitations of the Study**

One limitation of the study was the small sample size, which may not fully capture the diversity of student experiences regarding foreign language learning at UNZA. Additionally, since the study relied on qualitative data, the findings cannot be generalized to the entire student population. However, the study provides valuable insights into students’ attitudes and the institutional factors influencing foreign language education at the university.

**4. FINDINGS**

This section provides an in-depth qualitative analysis of students’ and faculty members’ attitudes toward the French and Chinese language programs at the University of Zambia (UNZA). The analysis includes thematic insights derived from in-depth interviews with both students and faculty, providing rich verbatim responses that highlight key perceptions, attitudes, and challenges in learning these languages.

**4.1 Attitude toward French Language Learning at UNZA**

Attitudes toward French language learning at UNZA are divided. While a segment of students demonstrates a strong interest in French, many others view it as an impractical option for their career trajectories. French is primarily perceived as useful for international relations and diplomacy but is considered less relevant for most students' immediate career paths in Zambia.

**4.1.1 Career Relevance and Usefulness**

Many students’ express skepticism regarding the value of French in the local context, particularly due to its limited job prospects in Zambia. One student explained:

*French is not necessary for most jobs here in Zambia. The market for French speakers is very small compared to languages like English or Chinese.* (FGD, Student 3)

This sentiment is shared by several students, particularly those in business or technology programs. A student echoed these concerns:

*I don’t see how learning French will help me. Most of the jobs in Zambia require English or maybe Chinese, but not French."* (FGD, Student 6)

However, there are a few students who do recognize the value of French in broader international and regional contexts. A student in the Faculty of Social Sciences mentioned:

*I can see how French would be useful for working in regional organizations or for international NGOs, but I don’t see many opportunities for it here.* (FGDs, Student 1)

Faculty members, particularly those teaching French, emphasize its potential in the global and regional job market, but acknowledge that student interest is low. A lecturer explained:

*French is a key language in diplomacy, international organizations, and trade with Francophone countries, but our students often don’t see it as immediately beneficial in Zambia’s context.* (Interviews, Faculty Member)

**4.1.2 Institutional Support and Visibility**

The lack of institutional promotion is a common complaint regarding the French program. Many students report that they were unaware of French language courses until later in their academic careers. One student noted:

*I didn’t even know French was offered at the university until I heard about it from a friend. It’s just not something they push very hard here."* (FGDs, Student 6)

A faculty member from the Department of French pointed out that limited advertising and promotion contribute to the underrepresentation of French:

*If the university were more proactive in promoting French, showing its value through job fairs or alumni experiences, more students would consider it seriously.* (Interview, Faculty Member)

Despite the recognition of French’s global importance, the institutional support for learning French remains minimal, which discourages many students from pursuing it.

**4.2***Chinese Language Learning at UNZA: Increasing Popularity and Opportunities*

In stark contrast, Chinese is increasingly seen as a critical language due to China's expanding economic and political influence in Zambia. Students in various fields, including business, engineering, and social sciences, are keen to learn Chinese as it is directly linked to career opportunities, particularly in Chinese-owned companies and industries that have seen significant growth in Zambia.

**4.2.1 Career Opportunities and Economic Relevance**

Chinese is widely regarded as essential for securing employment in sectors with a strong Chinese presence, such as mining, construction, and infrastructure development. A student explained:

*Learning Chinese will definitely help me get a job. So many Chinese companies are in Zambia, and they are always looking for people who speak Chinese.* (FGDs, Student)

Another student added:

*The mining companies are mostly Chinese-run, and they want employees who can communicate in Chinese. It’s one of the reasons I’m learning the language.* (FGDs student)

Furthermore, Chinese language skills are increasingly tied to scholarship opportunities. A student noted:

*The Chinese government offers scholarships to study in China, and I think that’s a big reason many students are eager to learn the language. It opens doors.* (FGDs, Student)

Faculty members also recognize the growing importance of Chinese. A faculty member stated:

*Chinese has become one of the most sought-after languages because of the economic ties between Zambia and China. It’s not just about learning a language; it’s about securing career opportunities.* (Interviews, Faculty Member)

Despite the strong interest in Chinese, students frequently acknowledge the language's complexity, particularly its tonal nature and unique writing system. However, they are often willing to persevere due to the potential career benefits. A first-year student remarked:

*Chinese is definitely difficult. The tones are tricky, and the characters are unlike anything we are used to. But I think it’s worth the effort because of the opportunities it opens up.* (FGDs, Student)

Another student, from the Faculty of Education, discussed the challenge of learning Chinese:

*The writing is hard to remember, and the tones are confusing, but it's clear that if you want to be part of industries that are connected with China, it’s a must-learn language."* (FGDs, Student)

**4.2.2 Institutional Support and Learning Environment**

The Confucius Institute, in particular, provides substantial support for students learning Chinese. Many students appreciate the resources available through the Institute, such as scholarships and exchange programs. A student shared:

*The Confucius Institute provides scholarships and exchange programs, which is a huge incentive for us to learn Chinese. It’s a clear pathway to real opportunities.* (FGDs, student)

The university's support for Chinese is seen as a positive influence on student motivation. A faculty member from the Department of Chinese Studies explained:

*The Confucius Institute has been instrumental in providing opportunities for our students, not just through language learning, but also in terms of internships and cultural exchanges.* (Interviews, faculty Member)

**4. 3. Comparative Analysis of French vs. Chinese Language Learning**

A direct comparison of the two languages reveals several important themes that differentiate them in terms of student interest, institutional support, and perceived career value.

**4.3.1 Perceived Career Value**

Students overwhelmingly perceive Chinese as a more valuable language for securing employment in Zambia’s current job market. A student from the Faculty of Social Sciences put it succinctly:

*Learning Chinese is a smart decision if you want to work in any of the industries that are dominated by Chinese companies. It’s the future.* (FGDs, student)

In contrast, French is seen as valuable primarily in specific contexts, such as international organizations and diplomacy. A student from the Faculty of Humanities stated:

*French is nice to know, but it’s not something that will help you get a job here. It's more for people who want to work in international organizations, and even then, it's not as crucial as Chinese.* (FGDs, student)

**4.3.2 Institutional Support**

 Chinese benefits from much stronger institutional support than French at UNZA. The Confucius Institute provides students with a structured learning environment and direct pathways to employment opportunities, which is a key factor in its growing popularity. A student from the Confucius Institute noted:

*The Confucius Institute makes it easy to learn Chinese because they offer resources like scholarships, language programs, and cultural exchanges. It’s a well-supported program.* (FGDs, student)

In contrast, French faces challenges in terms of visibility and institutional backing. A faculty member from the French Department explained:

*The lack of resources and promotion for French is a real issue. If the university put more effort into highlighting the value of French, I think we would see more students taking an interest.* (Interviews, faculty Member)

**4.3.3 Language Difficulty**

Both languages are perceived as challenging, but the difficulty of Chinese is widely recognized. Despite this, students are often willing to engage with its complexities because of the perceived professional benefits. A student from the Faculty of Engineering commented:

*Chinese is hard, but it’s the most useful language right now. You know you’re learning something that will open doors, especially with all the Chinese investments in Zambia."* (FGDs, student)

French, while acknowledged as difficult, is not perceived as offering the same career rewards. A student from the Faculty of Humanities explained:

*French is tough, but if it had more practical use in Zambia, I might push through. Right now, it just seems like extra work for no clear benefit."* (FGDs, student)

**5. DISCUSSION**

To further develop a critical analysis of the factors influencing students' attitudes toward foreign language learning, particularly focusing on the cases of French and Chinese in various educational contexts, it is crucial to evaluate both the socio-cultural and institutional frameworks that shape these attitudes. As studies have shown, learning a foreign language is deeply intertwined with the learner's perceived value of the language, which is often influenced by societal perceptions, personal motivations, and institutional support systems (Eccles et al., 1983; Wisely, 2012). This framework underlines that language learning is not only a cognitive endeavor but also a deeply social and cultural one.

In the case of French, especially in Zambia, Chishiba (2012) highlights that the state of the French language has been affected by sociopolitical and historical forces, including the global position of French in relation to English. The "genesis, apogee, and decline" of French in Zambia, as discussed by Chishiba (2016), shows the fluctuating value attached to the language based on geopolitical shifts, economic opportunities, and cultural identity. This analysis directly critiques the limited institutional support for French language education and the negative perceptions of its utility in Zambia's economic and political environment. While French, as a global language, holds immense cultural and economic potential, these factors render its learning less desirable when compared to English. This results in a lack of motivation among learners and, consequently, less effective language acquisition (Caceres-Lorenzo, 2015).

Similarly, the case of Chinese language learning presents a compelling example of how international influence and economic interests impact language attitudes. As noted by Liu (2022) and Wang (2019), Chinese has gained prominence, particularly in countries like Uganda, where the Confucius Institutes are instrumental in promoting the language. However, the initial challenges faced by learners—ranging from linguistic complexity to socio-political resistance—are often overlooked. Bulolo et al. (2022) illustrate that despite institutional initiatives like the Confucius Institute, the lack of genuine societal interest in learning Chinese and the perceived competition with indigenous languages and other foreign languages can create resistance among students. This is compounded by stereotypes surrounding Chinese international students, as discussed by Heng (2018), which negatively affects the learning environment. These factors show that while Chinese language education is often promoted as a strategic advantage due to China's economic rise, its adoption is not always as smooth as institutional policies might suggest.

Moreover, a critical comparison between French and Chinese in African contexts reveals stark contrasts in the societal valuation of these languages. French, rooted in colonial history and viewed by many as a legacy of French imperialism, may elicit negative attitudes among learners who associate it with past oppression (Chishiba, 2016). On the other hand, Chinese, with its connection to China’s growing geopolitical influence, is often perceived as a strategic skill for future economic opportunities (Li, 2023). These diverging perceptions reflect how broader socio-political narratives influence language attitudes and learner motivations. For instance, while students in Francophone African countries may view French as essential for international diplomacy, those in Anglophone countries may not view it with the same enthusiasm due to its colonial ties (Mouftah, 2018).

The learner's internalization of societal views and stereotypes—be it for French or Chinese—can significantly affect their attitudes and performance. Eccles et al. (1983) note that a learner’s motivation is closely linked to their expectations and values surrounding the subject. When students view a language as a “social marker” of a particular identity, this shapes both their desire to learn and their capacity for successful learning. For example, students who perceive French as a language associated with Western power may feel alienated from it, especially in contexts where nationalism and anti-colonial sentiments are strong. Conversely, students might perceive learning Chinese as a pathway to future success in a rapidly globalizing world (Xu, 2023).

In this context, Vygotsky’s (1978) socio-cultural theory becomes particularly relevant. Language learning, according to Vygotsky, is not merely a process of acquiring linguistic rules but also an activity shaped by the learner’s social interactions, cultural contexts, and the tools available to them. This is particularly evident in the role of teaching aids, as explored by Iluromi (2016), which can either enhance or hinder the learning experience depending on how well they resonate with the students' own cultural and linguistic environments. The availability of supportive educational structures and resources can significantly influence students’ attitudes, as it mediates their access to quality learning experiences.

Furthermore, the psychological aspects of foreign language learning, as outlined by Wisely (2012), also play a critical role in shaping attitudes. The emotional dimensions of language learning—such as anxiety, motivation, and enjoyment—are closely linked to the learner’s sense of competence and their expectations of success. For French and Chinese learners, these emotional factors can either reinforce or undermine their motivation. For instance, the “foreignness” of Chinese, with its tonal nature and complex script, may lead to frustration and a sense of inadequacy, thus negatively influencing attitudes toward the language. In contrast, learners of French may feel more confident due to its linguistic similarities with English, yet the external factors shaping its value could dampen their enthusiasm.

A deeper understanding of these complex socio-cultural, emotional, and institutional factors is crucial in crafting more effective language education policies. Educators and policymakers must consider not only the cognitive challenges posed by language learning but also the broader cultural and societal narratives that influence learners' attitudes. To improve foreign language education outcomes, particularly in African contexts, it is essential to dismantle negative stereotypes, address societal resistance, and create learning environments that align with students’ intrinsic motivations, while also ensuring that these languages hold clear, practical value in the students' lives.

**6. CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the exploration of learners' attitudes towards French and Chinese highlights the interplay of global, local, and personal factors that shape language acquisition. By critically engaging with the socio-cultural, emotional, and institutional dimensions of foreign language education, it becomes evident that learners’ attitudes are not simply a reflection of individual preferences but are shaped by broader societal, historical, and geopolitical forces.

The findings from this study suggest that students at UNZA prioritize languages that they perceive as offering tangible career benefits. Chinese is increasingly seen as a valuable skill, particularly in light of China’s growing influence in Africa, while French, despite its cultural and regional importance, does not generate the same level of enthusiasm or perceived utility. To enhance language learning engagement at UNZA, it is essential to provide greater institutional support for both French and Chinese. For French, this could involve strengthening program visibility, highlighting its relevance in regional diplomacy and international organizations, and offering targeted scholarships or exchange opportunities.For Chinese, maintaining and expanding institutional support through the Confucius Institute and related programs will be key to sustaining its popularity. Expanding real-world applications, such as internships or career placement opportunities for Chinese-speaking students, will further incentivize students to engage with the language. In conclusion, the study emphasizes the critical role of perceived career benefits, institutional support, and socioeconomic factors in shaping language learning preferences at UNZA. The alignment of language programs with students’ career aspirations and the global economic landscape is essential for fostering greater engagement and success in foreign language education.

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