

African-American Students' Opinions About Foreign Language Study: An Exploratory Study of Low Enrollments at the College Level

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Abstract: *Persistent low numbers of African Americans in the foreign language teacher certification program at the University of Texas at Austin motivated the study reported here. Two groups of students responded to a questionnaire that sought information on foreign language experience at elementary and high school, as well as family experiences in foreign languages. Findings revealed that whereas very few students had the opportunity to study a foreign language at the elementary level, all were exposed to at least a two-year compulsory program at high school. These experiences were not motivating enough to encourage college-level continuation, nor were family experiences. Students' language preferences did not support previous findings that low enrollment figures resulted from language offerings that lacked ethnic and cultural appeal. Rather, the study found that there appeared to be little effort made to encourage African-American high school and college students to consider teaching career paths. Students recommended more aggressive dissemination of information to African-American students at the college level about the advantages on pursuing foreign language study. They overwhelmingly suggested including a foreign language requirement in all discipline areas.*

Key words: *African Americans and foreign language education, low enrollments, minorities and foreign languages*

Languages: *Relevant to all foreign languages*

Background

Persistent low enrollments of African-American students in foreign language programs in the University of Texas at Austin captured the attention of the researcher, who was particularly concerned with the low numbers of African Americans in the teacher certification program in general and more specifically with the virtual absence of African Americans in the foreign language teaching program. From January 1994 to December 2003, there were only 6 African-American students enrolled in the foreign language teaching program out of a total of over 300. The African-American student enrollment in the university is 4% (approximately 2,000 out of 50,000). In order for the teaching program to reflect this presence there should be at least 3 African American students in the teaching program every year. What are possible explanations for the persistent low enrollment?

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Literature Review

A review of the two major foreign language journals (*Modern Language Journal*, founded in 1925, and *Foreign Language Annals*, first published in the 1960s) identified five articles that dealt with minorities and foreign language learning in general (Brigman & Jacobs, 1981; Clark, 1980; Hubbard, 1968, 1980; Wilberschied & Dassier, 1991), and three articles (Davis & Markham, 1991; Moore & English, 1997, 1998), that dealt specifically with African Americans' attitudes toward foreign languages.

It was not until the mid-1990s that researchers (Guillaume, 1994; Hancock, 1994; Peters, 1994, among others) speculated on reasons for low enrollments of minority students in foreign language programs. Some offered hypothetical explanations based on social and cultural distance theories. For example, according to Guillaume (1994), the failure to attract greater minority participation lies in the traditional historical view that foreign languages are spoken by White Europeans. Failure to include an Afro-centric perspective in instruction, and to teach languages spoken in Africa, has had negative effects.

Peters (1994) also expressed the belief that low enrollments may be explained by theories of social and cultural distances. He suggested embracing an Afro-centric German curriculum to include non-European Germanic groups. Peters echoed the beliefs expressed by Davis and Markham (1991) who had earlier called for "[B]lack experience in foreign language culture," especially in historically Black colleges. But the Davis and Markham study also pointed to other factors that seemed to have escaped the professional gaze. Students at historically Black colleges in this study "held positive attitudes toward foreign language study," (Davis & Markham, 1991, p. 233). The students did not indicate that the study of foreign languages was in any way threatening to their cultural identity, and they chose to study a foreign language because they were aware of the benefits derived from such an undertaking. Their complaints and dissatisfaction generally had to do with pedagogic deficiencies.

Significance of the Study

Studies of foreign language continuation or discontinuation have focused mainly on White middle class students (Myers, 1978; Speiller, 1988). The present study proposed to examine and highlight two groups of African-American students' perspectives of, and personal experiences in, foreign language programs, with the specific purpose of discovering reasons for students not selecting a foreign language major at the college level. More specifically, possible explanations for the virtual absence of African Americans in the foreign language teacher education programs were explored. Although this was an exploratory study, it can provide a model that can be used in other similar research settings. In addition, while the study focuses on one large

state university, the subjects may well be representative of similar populations across the country.

Study

The study employed a framework based on three guiding assumptions alluded to in the review of the literature. First, the theory of structural inequality implies that African-American elementary and high school students have greater difficulties adjusting to school demands. To counterbalance this inequality, special programs (e.g., Head Start) have been created. The assumption in the present study is that if students had an early start and positive experiences in foreign language classes at the elementary and high school level, they could be inclined to continue foreign languages at the college level.

Second, cultural discontinuity (Levine, 1982) suggests that students whose cultural patterns are in harmony with school culture tend to be more advantageously poised for success. Linguistic and cultural similarities between home and school environments make for easier transition into the school setting, thereby enhancing learning. Familiarity with the school structure and syllabus facilitates parents' ability to help and guide their children. In addition, research findings indicate that African-American parental influence has a greater impact on career choice than any other factor (Lee, 1984; Perry & Locke, 1985). The study therefore looked at family experiences with foreign languages.

The third assumption was that there would be differences across gender and between groups, particularly in career and curricular selections. Hall and Post-Kramer (1987), for example, found that while teachers tended to steer all African-American students towards less academic career routes, they showed differences in how they treated the male and female students. Specifically, they paid less attention to the African-American male students in their classrooms and demanded less work from them. In an attempt to get insights into group as well as individual differences, the researcher included three questions that elicited students' responses on their major areas of study, on languages they would like to study, and on reasons for not selecting a foreign language major.

Subjects

The researcher decided to survey groups of African-American students over a 2-year period in order to get a broad sample of the population, since the enrollment of African-American students at the university was traditionally low. The researcher contacted the professor of a popular African-American history course in which large numbers of African Americans typically enrolled. This was deemed as perhaps the easiest way of accessing the targeted group. Both groups comprised students who entered the university in the fall semesters over a 2-year period. The fall

semester was chosen because it was the semester in which there was the largest number of enrollments. Two groups of students completed the survey questionnaires. The first group comprised 14 male students and 58 female students. In the second group there were 23 male subjects and 33 female subjects. In total, there were 128 students (37 males and 91 females) who responded to the questionnaire. The students were representative of the general student body in that they were enrolled in a variety of programs and were at different stages in their programs: freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors.

Data Collection

Other studies using Likert-scale questionnaires have investigated reasons for foreign language continuation/discontinuation (Myers, 1978; Speiller, 1988). For the present study, a survey questionnaire was the main instrument used (see Appendix). Students had to respond to open-ended questions, and elaborate on their early foreign language experiences, their family experiences with foreign languages, their major areas of study, their reasons for not studying a foreign language, and the languages they were interested in studying. The questionnaire also sought students' suggestions and recommendations for increasing enrollment figures in foreign language teaching programs. In order to allow ample time for completing the open-ended questions, the researcher was able to secure class time wherein all students were able to complete the questionnaire, thus ensuring 100% response rate.

The research questions were:

1. Does positive early exposure at the elementary and the high school levels encourage continuation in foreign language study as a major at the college level?
2. Is there any relationship between family experiences in foreign language study and students' pursuance of foreign language as a major at the college level?
3. What are the reasons given by students themselves for choosing or not choosing a foreign language major?
4. Is there a mismatch between what languages students want to study and what languages are offered? Would this account for the low enrollment figures?

5. What do students believe can be done to increase enrollments of African-American students in foreign language programs at the college level?

Results

1. Does positive early exposure at the elementary and the high school levels encourage continuation in foreign language study as a major at the college level?

One of the reasons for advocating Foreign Languages in the Elementary Schools (FLES) programs is the belief that the greatest success in second language (L2) learning occurs at the early stages—the younger the better. Successful learning, it is hoped, will lead to continuation in foreign language programs and higher proficiency levels. The researcher therefore examined students' early foreign language experiences. Responses to question 4 revealed that approximately 38% of the female students and an almost equal number (39%) of male students, were exposed to FLES. (See Appendix.)

Responses to question 7 revealed a completely different picture. Almost all the students, (98.2% in the first group and 100% in the second group) had studied a foreign language at high school—probably as a result of the state-mandated university entrance requirement. The 2 students who did not study a foreign language were out-of-state students. Responses to question 19 showed that, despite the fact that almost all the students had fulfilled the high school foreign language requirement for college admission, only 56 (45%) were enrolled in foreign language classes at the college level. (See Table 1.) For 48 of the 56 students it was a course requirement. Only 8 students chose to study a foreign language even when it was not required.

Statistical Analysis

Since all but 2 subjects had taken the compulsory 2-year high school foreign language requirement, no analysis was conducted to determine correlation between high school study and continuation at the college level. The results of the correlation analysis between elementary school and college level were weak and negative: -.028 and the significance (two-tailed) was .753. The negative sign means that there was a negative relationship between the two variables.

Table 1

FOREIGN LANGUAGE EXPERIENCES BY GROUP AND GENDER							
	GROUP 1		GROUP 2		TOTAL		
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	
	58	14	33	23	91	37	N = 128
Sch. level	Female	Male	Female	Male	TOTALS		
Elem.	19	2	14	14	n = 49 (38%)		
High	56	14	33	23	n = 126 (98%)		
College	19	5	18	14	n = 56 (45%)		

Table 2

FAMILY EXPERIENCES WITH FOREIGN LANGUAGES AT THE HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL					
GROUP 1			GROUP 2		
Female	Male		Female	Male	
58	14	<i>n</i> = 72	33	23	<i>n</i> = 56
PARENTS					
F	M	TOTAL	F	M	TOTAL
35	10	45 (62%)	25	14	39 (70%)
SIBLINGS					
F	M	TOTAL	F	M	TOTAL
30	10	40 (56%)	14	12	26 (46%)

In this case it implies that studying a foreign language at elementary school reduces the likelihood of continuation at college level. Clearly, this does not make sense. A possible explanation for this strange finding may be the small size of the sample (49 students). The number is simply too small to yield results that can allow for any substantial claim.

High School Classroom Experiences

Motivational theories suggest that classroom activities should be challenging, appealing to children's curiosity, and pleasurable, and that they should promote success in order to create positive attitudes to learning. Successful achievement in any discipline is perhaps the most influential factor in a student's decision to continue in that discipline. (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991). The literature also suggests that student-teacher relationship greatly influences students' academic decisions. Questions 16a, 16b, and 16c (see Appendix) sought to elicit students' responses and opinions about (a) textbooks and other instructional material used in their classes, (b) experiences with foreign language teachers, and (c) overall experiences in foreign language classes. It should be stressed that the questions were deliberately phrased to allow students to elaborate on their responses. The assumption was that if the material was challenging, appealing, and pleasurable, as the literature suggests, students would respond with positive feelings. Similarly if students felt that their foreign language teachers were interested in their learning, supportive and encouraging in their efforts, and concerned with their success, they could be motivated to continue foreign language study, as the literature suggests. The researcher deliberately avoided questions that presumed students' judgment of their teachers' intention, such as "Were your teachers supportive of your learning?" Instead, the questions sought responses that dealt with the students' personal attitudes and reactions.

Textbooks

The majority of students did not express negative feelings about the textbooks and other instructional material that they had used at the high school level. However, 3 of the

37 male students found the textbooks unsatisfactory. One described the material as too basic and the other two thought that in general the textbook was boring. The majority of female students (approximately 96%) described the book as easy to understand and simple to follow.

While the students made no comments indicating that the textbooks lacked appeal to them as African Americans, they did give negative responses that seemed to suggest teachers' lack of interest in challenging them academically. One male student wrote "the teacher never checked my work to see if I was doing it correctly or if I was doing it at all." Three other male students wrote "the books were boring and the teacher never paid attention to see if we were doing the work." One female student also wrote "the work was so easy (and childish) that I finished it quickly and spent the rest of the time doing nothing."

Teachers

Similar statements about the teachers' seemingly uncaring attitudes also appeared in some students' comments. While most female students seemed to have had positive personal experiences with their teachers, 5 of the 91 expressed negative opinions. Two wrote "the teachers could not speak the language well." Another stated that "the teachers acted as though they knew it all" and two others wrote that the teachers "did not make sure that students learned the material." Twelve male students—more than twice the number of females, and approximately one third of the group—had negative comments about the teachers. Four of them gave specific complaints: that the teacher had no teaching skills, that the teacher was boring, that the teacher focused too much on organizing "cultural activities" and not enough on the language. One even said that the teacher did not teach them anything.

Overall Experience

When asked to respond to their overall experience in foreign language classes, only 2 students said their foreign language experience was definitely not positive. Three male students emphatically stated that the "teaching" was boring, but their interaction with their classmates was fun. Four female students felt that because they were not monitored to see if they knew the material, the foreign language experience was difficult to assess. It would appear, then, that for this group of students as a whole, foreign language study was neither overwhelmingly negative nor outstandingly positive.

2. Is there any relationship between family experiences in foreign language study and students' pursuance of foreign language as a major at the college level?

Studies have found that families exert the strongest influence on adolescent children's career development (Ford, 1993; Lee, 1984; Perry & Locke, 1985). The assumption,

Table 3

AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALE STUDENTS' MAJOR AREAS OF STUDY AND REASONS FOR STUDYING/NOT STUDYING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Major	YES	NO	REASONS
Computer Science	2	0	required
Electrical Engineering	0	2	not required
Geophysics	0	1	not required
Pharmacy	0	3	not required
Advertising	2	0	required
Business	3	0	required
African-American Studies	4	0	required
Psychology	1	0	required
Government	3	0	required
Arts & Humanities	0	9	not required
Liberal Arts	3	0	want to
English	0	4	not interested
Totals	18	19	n = 37

therefore, was that if parents and/or siblings, had studied a foreign language that they may encourage other family members to study a foreign language, or at least may not discourage them from so doing. Responses to questions 12, 13, and 14 (see Table 2), indicated that although over half of siblings or parents for both groups had studied a foreign language at high school level, that fact did not seem to influence the students to undertake foreign language as a major area of study at the college level. Although there were in-group differences, for example, in the first group more male than female students had parents and siblings with foreign language experience, well over 60% of both male and female students had family members who had experiences with foreign languages.

3. What are the reasons given by students themselves for choosing or not choosing a foreign language major?

An examination of the responses to questions 10 and 11 provided reasons for nonenrollment in foreign language programs, and responses to question 19 revealed students' major areas of study. Students were encouraged to elaborate on their responses. Although not many did, those who elaborated wrote that they were told by their teachers or counselors that foreign languages are "hard." One counselor was quoted to have said to the student to do "something practical" and something that is "within your ability, like social work or nursing." The listing of major areas of study in Tables 3 and 4 gives credibility to that statement, and supports previous research finding by Malcom (1984), Garibaldi, (1992), Williams and Norris

Table 4

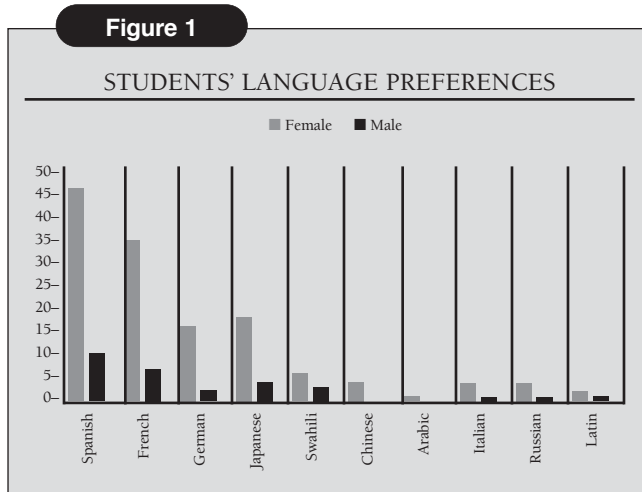
AFRICAN-AMERICAN FEMALE STUDENTS' MAJOR AREAS OF STUDY AND REASONS FOR STUDYING/NOT STUDYING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Major	YES	NO	REASONS
Zoology	1	0	required
Biology	2	0	required
Communications/Advertising	1	0	required
Math	3	0	required
Pharmacy	0	5	not required
Biochemistry	2	0	required
Mechanical Engineering	0	3	no money in it
Computer Science	3	0	required
Elementary Education	2	7	want to/ not required
Early Education	4	0	required
Special Education	4	0	required
Kinesiology	2	3	want to/ not required
Speech	0	3	not required
English	0	2	not required
Music	0	2	not required
Sociology	2	0	required
Social work	2	17	helpful/ not required
Psychology	0	3	not required
Accounting	0	3	not required
Economics	2	0	helpful
Business	4	0	required
Photojournalism	1	0	want to
Broadcast Journalism	0	5	not required
Journalism	2	0	helpful
Government	2	0	required
Totals	39	52	n = 91

(1984), and Hall and Post-Kramer (1987), that counselors tend to steer African-American students into social sciences and social welfare areas. The listing shows that the greatest number of female students (40%) were enrolled in programs in elementary education and in social work as their major areas of work.

As can be seen in Table 3, of the 18 male students who were taking a foreign language class, 15 did so because it was a requirement, and the 3 who were enrolled in a foreign language class because of interest did not intend to pursue it as their major.

Table 4 shows that 39 female students (43%) were enrolled in a foreign language class. For 28 of them, it was



a degree requirement; the remaining 11 chose to do so either because of interest or they thought it would boost their career choice.

To summarize, 57 of the 128 students (45%) were enrolled in a foreign language class. For 43 of the 57 students it was a requirement, and for the other 14 it was a personal choice. The remaining 71 students (55%) had no interest in foreign language study. Most glaringly, not one student was pursuing a foreign language major and not one was enrolled in the school teacher education program.

4. Is there a mismatch between what languages students want to study and what ones are offered?

Did students prefer to study a language that was not offered at the college level? Would this account for the low enrollment figures? The researcher did not wish to present a list of languages from which the students could choose. Rather, by allowing the students to indicate their preferences, they could generate their own list. Figure 1 shows that Spanish was the language of first preference for all students, a finding that supported their opinions of the practical purpose and value of studying a foreign language. They lived in a state where there are sizable Spanish-speaking communities and business enterprises. French was the second language choice, followed by Japanese and German. All the languages listed, Swahili and Arabic included, were offered at the university. Therefore, students had the opportunity to study whatever the language they wanted. The data, therefore, did not support previous research findings that African Americans wanted to study foreign languages that are more related to their African heritage but may not be offered in the curriculum (Davis & Markham, 1991; Turner, 1992).

5. What do students think can be done to increase enrollments of African-American students in foreign language programs?

Students provided recommendations to question 17 for increasing enrollments at the elementary level, at the high

school level, and at the college level. The most frequently cited recommendations for elementary schools included: (a) the creation of foreign language programs in more schools; (b) more emphasis on cultural instruction; (c) less concern placed on the language and grammar; and (d) disseminating more information to students on the benefits of learning a foreign language.

At the high school level, students recommended that language instruction should focus more on developing speaking skills and on developing cultural awareness, and less on writing and grammar. Some felt that greater efforts should be made to recruit more African-American foreign language teachers so that students could have visible proof that teaching was a worthwhile profession. Finally, the students in this study recommended special workshops/lectures to expose African-American students in general to the benefits of learning a foreign language.

Students stated that at the college level, study abroad programs should be mandatory and students should be exposed early in their freshman year to the benefits of learning about other cultures and of knowing a foreign language, so that they could make informed decisions about pursuing a foreign language as a possible major. Many bemoaned the fact that they had never had the opportunity of knowing about career possibilities related to foreign languages, and they strongly recommended that all college departments make foreign languages a requirement for graduation. The recommendations are not unlike those of Pavian-Roberts (1992) whose incoming freshmen expressed similar opinions.

Summary and Discussion

The study sought to investigate African-American students' opinions about foreign language education with the expressed purpose of discovering reasons for low enrollments at the college level, and the absence of African Americans in secondary foreign language teacher education programs. The findings, although specific to one state and focusing on foreign language enrollments, have national significance because of demographic similarity to many states, because of teacher shortage across the nation, and because of the low number of African-American teachers nationwide.

While findings revealed no apparent connection between early exposure to foreign languages (either at the elementary or at the high school level) with continuation at the college level, the majority of students felt that early exposure to a foreign language may be beneficial to all students. Further research on FLES programs and continuation in foreign language study should be conducted to examine the usefulness and/or effectiveness of such programs as they relate to African-American students.

Findings also indicated no influence based on the fact that members of a student's family may have studied a foreign language. Since the literature suggests that it is in early

adolescence when students make career choices and that African-American students in particular tend to be more influenced by family on decisions concerning careers, it is possible that this group of students may not regard teaching as an attractive career. Their selection of major areas of study suggests career choices that may make them more gainfully employed. Page and Page (1991) suggested that, contrary to their Anglo counterparts, African Americans do not seek out a career purely for altruistic reasons. For many African Americans—as indeed for many historically oppressed people worldwide—education, especially a college education, is a means of upward social mobility. The low interest in teaching as a career may be an indication of what Hunter-Boykin (1992) and Gordon (1994) referred to as the decreased social prestige and status accorded to teachers, and to the substantial increase in job opportunities in other areas. Indeed, there was a sizable number of female students (39 out of 91), enrolled in science and science-related programs, which are traditionally Anglo male-dominated areas.

Despite the fact that all the students did have 2 years of state-mandated foreign language education at the high school, they were clearly not interested in continuation at the college level. The 54 students (42%) who were enrolled in foreign language classes did so because it was a requirement for their major area of study. The fact that more male students were enrolled in foreign language classes suggested that foreign languages were required in major areas of study that are traditionally more “male” oriented, as can be seen from the data in Table 3.

The male students indicated almost overwhelmingly that they thought they should be told the benefits of studying a foreign language and that they would study a foreign language once it was required. The responses are similar to those found by Perry and Locke (1985) who stated that teachers have negative expectations of African-American students, in general, and male students in particular, and that African-American students in general, but African-American male students in particular, are made to believe that they cannot perform well in academic subjects.

According to the students in this study, enrollment in foreign language classes can be improved if there is suitable guidance in selecting a career path beginning at the high school and continuing even more aggressively at the college level. The responses support Hawkins's (1992) finding that no one is communicating the fact that teaching can be a career choice for African-American students. Three female students wrote that not one of their counselors ever suggested that they consider teaching or studying foreign languages as career options. Such counsel may have multiple interpretations. If the counselors were African Americans, they may consider it their responsibility to steer the next generation of African-American students towards more lucrative careers. Majoring in a foreign language offers few

career opportunities for students leaving college with only a bachelor's degree. The counsel could also have been offered based on limited information or on misinformation. Many schools may be out of touch with changing consumer patterns and demands, and counselors may still be steering students towards the more traditional careers. Career opportunities in the area of food catering and restaurant management, for example, tend not to be encouraged by teachers, yet they are career paths that can benefit from expertise in multilingual and multicultural competence.

Lack of enthusiasm for or interest in foreign languages can also stem from poor teaching practices, as with all other curricular offerings. The most commonly repeated negative criticism of foreign language experiences dealt with teachers' attitudes and teaching styles. The negative comments were that lessons were boring, the material was boring, the teachers were boring, and the teachers were not interested in whether students learned or not. Such unsatisfactory pedagogical practices may also account for the students' lack of interest in joining the profession.

Recommendations

What can be done to encourage increased enrollment of African-American students in college foreign language programs for the specific purposes of encouraging careers in teaching? Smith (1988) said that the same approach used by as athletic coaches who go after African-American prospective stars should be used to recruiting African Americans into the teaching profession, that is, aggressively identifying African-American students with interest and abilities in foreign language study and recruiting them into the profession. Post and Woessner (1987) showed that this “go-out-and-get-them” approach can work. Using clubs as a way to create interest groups and peer support, Post and Woessner succeeded in increasing numbers in college attendance and in the club membership themselves.

While there is no denying that efforts have to be made at all levels to solve the problem, many teachers and educators may not have the resources or energy for “outside the school action.” Suggestions by Davis and Markham (1991) and Hancock (1994) may be more viable. We need to look to improving the quality of instruction, particularly at the high school level and specifically for African-American students, if we are serious about increasing the presence of minority groups in the teaching profession. The recurring complaints that the textbook was boring and the lessons were boring and unchallenging must be addressed. The students in this study believed that a more functional approach to foreign language teaching might help retention and might encourage further study at the college level. If they can see the practical use of learning languages, and if they are convinced that learning a foreign language can be challenging and pleasurable, they may be more motivated to pursue it.

While it is true that appropriate instructional strategies can improve the academic performance of the students, there are also important systemic changes, particularly in the area of counseling, that must accompany pedagogical changes. One such change must begin with the attitudes of school counselors (Garibaldi, 1992). School counselors must desist from discouraging African-American students from enrolling in programs that they consider "too academic" or "too hard." African-American students have shown that they can successfully develop skills in foreign languages that have been categorized as some of the most difficult to learn (Moore & English, 1997, 1998).

It would appear from this study that universities across the nation need to assume a greater role in helping to alleviate the problem of teacher shortage. It may be that the education staff and faculty within the universities are not aware of the low numbers of African Americans in college-level foreign language programs. There is obviously greater need for more collaborative work between universities, especially colleges of education, school districts, and colleges of liberal arts to try to address the problem. Collaborative projects between high schools and university faculty such as described by Hunter-Boykin (1992) and Middleton, Mason, Stillwell, and Parker (1988), and as recommended by the Holmes Group (Soltis, 1987), can help in recruiting, retaining and graduating more African Americans in teaching careers.

Studies have also shown that students who became teachers made the career choice near the end of their undergraduate education (King, 1993). Again, university staff and faculty must consider focusing on aggressively recruiting African-American students into teacher education programs before their junior year and on encouraging them to pursue graduate-level work, thereby increasing the chances for African-American students to become college-level teachers.

With regards to foreign language instruction at the college level, it is recommended that heads of departments consider restructuring the programs to include courses that focus on developing speaking skills and cultural proficiency. This study indicated that African-American students, like most other students, are willing to study a foreign language once it is required. Programs that offer greater interdisciplinary opportunities (e.g., business, journalism, advertising, early and elementary education, social work), can include language and culture courses that better prepare students for the changing population needs.

It may also prove profitable for foreign language departments at the high school level to adopt more creative approaches to designing foreign language courses that are more relevant to changing demands of the approaching 21st century and that are more appealing. Language and culture courses that allow students to develop insights and

appreciation into their own linguistic and cultural riches may attract more minority students at the high school level.

Finally, 17 years ago, Cooper (1988) estimated that the nation will need 900,000 teachers by the year 2002. That projected figure turned out to be lower than the number actually needed. According to Cooper, in 1988 the average teacher education program of 400 students comprised a total enrollment of 22 African Americans, 7 Hispanics, 3 Asians, and 2 Native Americans (Cooper, 1988). Today, the picture is dimmer. It is even more serious for urban schools—which the majority of African-American students attend (Haberma, 1987). In 1999 there were 2.3 million public school teachers, and of this figure, minorities made up 10.3%. Between 1980 and 1995, the minority teaching population fell from 11.7% to 10.3%. It was projected to fall to an even smaller 5% by the turn of the 21st century (Hawkins, 1992).

If the patterns continue unchanged, this year 2005 will see only 5% of all college students from ethnic minorities. It is also estimated that at the same time minority school-age population will increase by more than 30%. Ironically, then, as the minority student populations are rising, the minority teaching population is falling. The foreign language teaching profession should be concerned with this national trend, especially in light of the fact that foreign languages have been added to the national core curriculum.

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Appendix

Questionnaire

Please do not sign your name

This survey is part of an ongoing study of African-American students and foreign language education. Please take your time to fill out the questionnaire. Be as explicit as possible.

- | | | |
|---------------------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| 1. Are you a state resident? | YES | NO |
| 2. What is your student status? | _____Fresh/wo/man | _____Sophomore |
| | _____Junior | _____Senior |
| 3. What is your gender? | _____Female | _____Male |

Tell us about your early exposure to foreign language study

- | | | |
|---|-------------|--------------|
| 4. Did you study a foreign language in elementary school? | YES | NO |
| 5. Which foreign language did you study? | _____ | |
| 6. Where is the school situated? | City: _____ | State: _____ |
| 7. Did you study a foreign language in high school? | YES | NO |
| 8. Which foreign language did you study? | _____ | |
| 9. Where is the school situated? | City: _____ | State: _____ |
| 10. Do you study a foreign language now? | YES | NO |
| 11. If no, why? | _____ | |

Tell us about your home environment

- | | | | |
|--|------------|-------------|------------|
| 12. Did any of your parents study a foreign language? | YES | NO | DON'T KNOW |
| 13. At what level? | Elementary | High school | College |
| 14. Did any of your siblings study a foreign language? | YES | NO | DON'T KNOW |
| 15. At what level? | Elementary | High school | College |

Tell us about your experience with foreign languages

- | | | | |
|---|----------|----------|--------|
| 16. If you did study a foreign language how would you describe your overall experience? | POSITIVE | NEGATIVE | UNSURE |
| Please elaborate: _____ | | | |
| a. Did you like the textbooks and other material that you used? | YES | NO | UNSURE |
| Please elaborate: _____ | | | |
| b. Did you like your foreign language teacher? | YES | NO | UNSURE |
| Please elaborate: _____ | | | |
| c. Did you like the classes? | YES | NO | UNSURE |
| Please elaborate: _____ | | | |
| 17. What do you think we can do to increase the African-American enrollments in foreign language classes? | | | |
| At elementary school: _____ | | | |
| At high school: _____ | | | |
| At college: _____ | | | |
| 18. If you had to chose 1 foreign language to study which would you chose? _____ | | | |
| 19. What is your major area? _____ | | | |
| 20. Any other comments: _____ | | | |

Many thanks for your cooperation