

EDITORIAL

Govt must invest more
in language education

Every corner of the globe is investing in education. It has proved to be the only sustainable way to carry on knowledge from one generation to the other.

Beyond the education routine we have known for generations, countries are investing heavily in learners being able to communicate in multiple languages.

Eventually, this will make the population more competitive in a world that is often fittingly referred to as a global village.

For decades, Ugandans have studied and learnt English, French, German, Arabic and Kiswahili besides the local languages. The National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) adopted Chinese as an examinable subject in the secondary curriculum in 2019. While there is an effort by the NCDC to adopt more languages, the investment does not match the need. For example, there is a demand on all primary schools to teach young learners in the local language. However, in many

parts of the country, schools do not have the tools and human resources to deliver on their mandate. This came out clearly during celebrations to mark the 2026 International Chinese Language Day which took place at Uganda-Sino Mbale Industrial Park in Mbale City on Saturday.

There is no school in Bugisu sub-region teaching the language yet there is a need to teach Chinese in Bugisu schools since the region houses numerous factories employing youth and locals who face language barriers at their workstations.

Mbale-Sino Industrial Park currently has 13,500 employees, but most of them don't know any Chinese. The park, which was commissioned in 2018 with a total investment portfolio of \$600m (Shs2.2 trillion), sits on 619 acres.

It currently has over 80 factories with 60 operational, producing a variety of goods, including glass, textile, household detergents, mobile phones, smart televisions, baby diapers, clothes, LED bulbs, tubes, electrical meters and socks.

This can be repeated for many regions across the country and it's not only for Chinese. Research shows that being multilingual offers significant advantages, including improved cognitive function (memory, multitasking, problem-solving), enhanced career opportunities, and deeper cultural connections.

It boosts brain health, potentially delaying dementia by 4-5 years, and increases earning potential in a globalized workforce. It also fosters broader social connections.

Clearly, becoming multilingual offers benefits that extend far beyond just language proficiency. To truly understand other cultures, see things from another perspective, or empathize with someone, we need to immerse ourselves in their experiences. Language is key to that.

Estimating the precise value of a more interconnected world is challenging. Yet, it's evident that addressing global issues requires heightened levels of international solidarity and cooperation. Government must smell the coffee.

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