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Foreign Language Education Through an International Education Lens

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Bridget Landry – PIM 73

The Value of Foreign Language Education Through An International Education Lens

August 2015

Inspired by current dialogue around foreign language education in the United States - which reveals that foreign language education faces budget cuts, dropping enrollment rates, and competition for resources – this study sought to better understand the value of foreign language education through the lenses of international education professionals. The literature review explored the relationship between foreign language education and the field of international education, and examined foreign language education's role in advancing intercultural competency. The study surveyed a sample of 57 international education professionals, and interviewed 8 of those 57. It assessed professionals' perceptions in three main areas: current trends affecting foreign language education, personal/professional experience with foreign language in the field, and the perceived relationship between foreign language education and intercultural competence.

Research findings indicate that the respondents' experiences with foreign language and understandings of the relationship between foreign language education and intercultural competence are varied. This confirms the literature's assertion that the relationship is context-based. Respondents agreed that foreign language education in the United States does not prepare students to be proficient speakers but is nonetheless a pathway to intercultural competence, is integral to the field of international education, and should be compulsory for primary and secondary school students. The results suggest that a nuanced discussion of the value of foreign language education should address both the functional and humanistic benefits, and both the extrinsic and intrinsic values; they

also suggest that professionals see humanistic value in foreign language education even if they do not agree on its functional value.