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**Sociocultural aspects of foreign language teaching
in the SEAMEO countries Philippines, Singapore: The Research Unit for
the Teaching of French and other Foreign Languages, Regional
Language Centre.**

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The report is based on a survey done by a team of researchers to investigate the factors related to foreign language learning in various country settings; this particular report is on the Philippine situation.

Among other questions, the report investigates reasons why students choose to study foreign languages, the use of a language after it has been studied, and attitudes of students towards foreign language learning.

The sample in the report consists of students, teachers, and users of these foreign languages: Chinese, French, German, Japanese, and Spanish.

Parallel questionnaires for teachers, students and users were constructed as instruments for the study. The data collection was done from August 15 to November 15, 1978. Altogether, fifteen colleges and universities were included in the sample.

The report is divided into seven chapters. Each chapter is accompanied by numerical summaries of the findings presented in tabular form. The study covers in detail the background and the problem of the study, the special foreign language situation in the Philippines, the characteristics and perceptions of students, teachers and users, practices and attitudes towards foreign languages.

The conclusions are quite interesting. Despite the circumstances obtaining in the Philippines, the students find foreign language instruction enjoyable, even though the primary aim of the study of foreign languages is to meet academic requirements. Teachers and learners report the emphasis on developing speaking ability in the classroom but very little use of the language is made outside of the classroom. As a group, teachers tend to teach in the way that they were taught. This explains why in general foreign languages are taught in a very conservative and traditional way.

In the introduction of the report, there is a false assumption, namely, the assumption that a large population of students will learn to speak a foreign language after two, three or even four semesters of study.

There is no mention of the fact that a large number of Chinese in the Philippines communicate among themselves in languages other than Mandarin and that in fact most of them speak Hokkien rather than Mandarin or Cantonese. Likewise, the distribution of respondents by categories and by foreign language is questionable. In the Philippines, Mandarin Chinese is taught in many schools and the number of students taking Mandarin is very high; only 67 students, 3 teachers and 5 users of Mandarin were included in the study.

German, which according to the report is taught in five universities with a total of only eight courses, had 130 students, 9 teachers and 16 users sampled in the survey (Table 1.1.).

The report does not mention the existence of El Centro Cultural of the Spanish Embassy, where the most complete program in Spanish is offered from the elementary level to the master's degree level. Besides formal instruction, El Centro offers free movies, musical and cultural programs, conferences and exhibits. It is a place where hundreds of Spanish-speaking Filipinos meet.

Nor does the report offer an adequate description of the work done by the **Alliance Francaise** for French and of the Goethe Institute for German.

In certain parts of the report, data on Mandarin Chinese and Spanish are no longer included. Moreover, more background on the teaching of Spanish in the Philippines should have been given for readers not familiar with the local situation. For example, the aim of the Spanish courses is to enable students to read, understand and analyze the old documents and nationalist literature written by Filipino authors in Spanish during the struggle for liberation in the last century.

Important items in the questionnaire are confusing or vague; for example, one comes across this statement (Table 6.13, Number 12): 'It is necessary to be able to pronounce like a native speaker in order to communicate effectively' to which the respondent must give a reaction. There are degrees of native-like pronunciation; one should pronounce sufficiently well to get one's message across. But the notion of native-like pronunciation is inexact, considering the varieties of Spanish acceptable these days. Again, one comes across this statement for reaction (Table 6.13., Number 15): 'It is necessary to use correct grammar in order to communicate effectively'. Here again, it is not clear what is meant by 'correct grammar', for one must follow certain rules of the language to form sentences; the message could be defective in form but effective enough to elicit an answer. Finally, there is the statement (Table 6.13, Number 18): 'Foreign language teaching should concentrate on teaching the language rather than the culture of native speakers of the language'. Can one really teach language separately from culture; in my opinion, this question is likewise misleading.

As a whole, the report is informative. It is a study which should be consulted by teachers, administrators, and curriculum designers. The findings of this survey could help them decide when a foreign language should be taught, the skills to be emphasized, the methods to be used, the evaluation of foreign language instruction, and the impact on the society where it is taught and hopefully used.