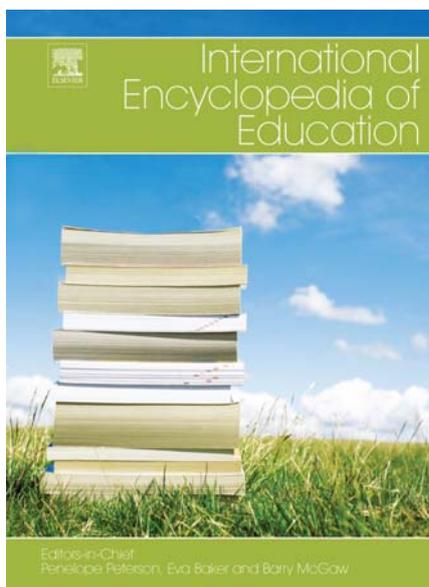




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## Curriculum: Foreign Language Learning

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This article presents an overview of various issues related to curriculum in foreign language learning, and in particular focuses on learning English as a foreign language (EFL). Foreign language learning is taken to mean the learning of a language other than the learner's first language (L1), and this language is not ordinarily used in the learner's everyday life. Thus, foreign language learning contexts are very different from second language learning contexts, for in second language learning contexts, the language being learned is often used in the learner's larger social context (even though it might not be always used in the learner's immediate home or community). This distinction should not be seen as categorical, as some contexts lie in between the prototypical foreign language learning contexts and the prototypical second language learning contexts. However, as is discussed in this review, the importance of understanding the sociocultural, sociopolitical, and socio-economic situatedness of second and foreign language learning in diverse contexts of the world has, until recently, been underrepresented in the literature.

### The Production and Circulation of Received Knowledge about Foreign Language Curricula

In the English language world, the key sites of production of knowledge about foreign language education lie in the English-speaking worlds (e.g., US, Britain) and Europe, where many applied linguists and educators work on developing (English as a) foreign language curricula and teacher education programs, and publish their findings and views in the English language academic world. Their publications have constituted the classic literature on foreign language curriculum (e.g., Wilkins, 1976). In the field of EFL education in particular, there is a lot of spilling over of knowledge from English as a second language (ESL) education, with knowledge derived from ESL research in English-speaking contexts often taken as largely pertinent to EFL education in diverse contexts of the world. Foreign language (and EFL) education knowledge paradigm shifts thus largely mirror second language (and ESL) education knowledge paradigm shifts. These paradigm shifts are discussed in the next section.

### Paradigm Shifts in Second and Foreign Language Education

The major disciplines informing second and foreign language education have traditionally been linguistics and psychological theories of language acquisition. It follows that knowledge paradigm shifts in these disciplines also lead to corresponding shifts in knowledge and views on second and foreign language curricula and pedagogy. In designing any language curriculum (or curriculum in general), two central questions naturally arise: What should be included in the curriculum and how should the curriculum content be taught (e.g., in what sequence and with what kinds of teaching methods)?

Structural linguistics has long been the chief framework underlying the development of language curricula. Richards (2001) reviewed the historical background of vocabulary and grammar gradation/selection in developing language curriculums from the 1920s to the 1970s. The assumptions underlying early structuralist approaches to language syllabus design can be summarized as follows:

- the basic units of a language curriculum are vocabulary and grammar;
- learners everywhere have the same needs;
- learners' needs are identified exclusively in terms of language needs;
- the process of learning a language is largely determined by the textbook;
- the classroom and the textbook provide the primary input to the language learning process; and,
- the goal of the syllabus designer is to simplify and rationalize this input through selection and gradation ( Richards, 2001: 15–16).

It can be seen that the basic assumptions of structural linguistics permeate the early approaches to language syllabus design. Mastering human language communication is seen as equivalent to mastering the structural units of the language system. The systematic, logical, sequencing and presentation of linguistic structural units become the central task for language syllabus designers. These assumptions had influenced the design of language syllabus and pedagogy until the 1970s, when functional linguistics became the strongest rival of traditional, structural linguistics.

## From Structural/Grammatical to Notional/Functional Syllabuses

With the rise of functional linguistics in the 1970s and 1980s, there has been a movement toward the notional, semantic, and functional syllabi (Johnson, 1982; Wilkins, 1976). Instead of treating the structural linguistic elements as the units, the units are now functions and notions. Topics, settings, functions, and notions become the units to be rationally sequenced and organized in a language syllabus. So, whereas the traditional structural syllabus is basically an inventory of linguistic items, graded and sequenced in terms of their structural complexity, the new syllabus consists of an inventory of communicative functions (e.g., requesting services, seeking information, changing topics, expressing disagreement), notions (i.e., concepts such as distance, duration, quantity, quality, location, size), organized around different settings/situations or topics. However, unlike the task of the structural syllabus designer, the functional/notional syllabus designer has a much more difficult task. Whereas traditional structural linguistics provides a straightforward approach to describing, grading, sequencing, and organizing the different linguistic elements according to structural complexity (e.g., from simple to complex structures), the functions are much more diverse and messy to organize into a finite inventory. Thus, needs analysis was proposed as the main procedure informing the design of a functional/notional syllabus for a specific group of learners, addressing their communicative needs (e.g., ESL university students studying English to learn specific academic subjects). Needs analysis was thus introduced into language teaching mainly through the English for specific purposes (ESP) movement. Functional linguistics, especially register analysis, was also drawn upon to identify the linguistic features of disciplines such as medicine, engineering, or science. It can be seen that the ESP movement and the functional/notional syllabus movement have developed together and the student body served is usually adult learners of a second or foreign language, often for immediate, identifiable, specific purposes. The procedure of needs analysis, however, may not be easily applicable to general school foreign language learning contexts, where immediate needs for learning the foreign language might not be easily identifiable.

## From Traditional Approaches to Communicative Language Teaching

While the what-question (i.e., what to include in a language curriculum) has been answered by notional/functional syllabus designers with the dual procedures of

needs analysis and register analysis, the how-question (i.e., how to teach the syllabus content) is answered by scholars working on the development of the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach. Richards (2001: 3) summarized the different teaching methods which characterized different periods in the past century:

1. grammar translation method (1800–1900);
2. direct method (1890–1930);
3. structural method (1930–60);
4. reading method (1920–50);
5. audio-lingual method (1950–70);
6. situational method (1950–70); and
7. communicative approach (1970–present).

Approaches before the 1970s are largely structure-drill-based. Behaviorist theories of language learning had emphasized the formation of accurate language behavior through habit formation based on practice and drills of structures. The rise of Krashen's (1981) SLA model and interactionist models leading to input studies of language acquisition have led to the pedagogical principles of providing comprehensive input in the classroom for students to develop their own L2 interlanguage, encouraging students' active negotiation of meaning, lowering learner anxiety by encouraging learners to speak up and take risks, and developing students' own monitoring ability to self-correct. These theories of language acquisition have converged with the rise of functional linguistics to focus on the learners' use of the foreign language for authentic, meaningful interaction and self-expression. CLT educators have since developed repertoires of techniques to promote communicative use of the target language in the classroom, for example, information-gap activities to promote authentic exchange of meaning. Task-based and project-based approaches (Nunan, 1989) to language learning have been proposed with the principle of promoting students' authentic use of the target language for meaningful communication. All these represent a departure from past approaches based on repetition and drills. However, some CLT educators also recognized the need for pre-communication activities or a pre-production phase, where practice/drill-based methods are used to help the learner acquire the necessary linguistic structures to be used later in the communicative production phase of the language lesson.

## Tension between Local Approaches and CLT in Diverse Contexts of the World

By the late 1980s, CLT was widely accepted as the latest innovative teaching methodology in the second and foreign language education literature in the Anglo-speaking

world although there were still some unsolved questions, such as those summarized by Richards and Rodgers (1986: 83) in their review of CLT:

1. Can CLT be applied at all levels of a language program?
2. Is it equally suited to ESL and EFL situations?
3. Does it require existing grammar-based syllabuses to be abandoned or merely revised?
4. How can it be adopted in situations where students must continue to take grammar-based tests?

CLT has since been implemented and received with mixed responses by teachers and students in diverse contexts of foreign language learning, especially in contexts where English is taught as a foreign language. This has led to some language educators reflecting on the importance of considering the social context in determining what counts as appropriate methodology and the need to value indigenous knowledge, perspectives, and pedagogies. The 2000s further witnessed a new body of research literature, chiefly authored by language education scholars researching on the sociocultural and sociopolitical incompatibility between local approaches and CLT in diverse sociocultural and sociopolitical contexts of the world (e.g., India, China, and South Korea). These new scholarly voices (e.g., Ramanathan, Ouyang, Shin) show the inadequacies of the classic literature on second/foreign language education, especially those canons established in the English-speaking academic world. Below is summarized the major contribution of these new scholars in pointing to the need to pay attention to the sociocultural, socioeconomic, and sociopolitical situatedness of language learning and language curriculum (Ouyang, 2000), and the need for indigenous, nonuniversalist perspectives (Ramanathan, 2006; Shin, 2006) regarding how to develop appropriate foreign language curriculum and pedagogy in diverse contexts of the world. The major problematic aspects have been summarized by several scholars around a few recurring points:

1. CLT and ELT methodologies have been treated as a neutral, objective discipline or technology that can be exported from one country to another. However, this implementation of a West-based methodology has ignored many local constraints, communal needs, and values (Ouyang, 2000; Ramanathan, 2006; Shin, 2006).
2. In CLT, the role of the teacher is constructed in such a way as to mainly facilitate the acquisition of competence in performing communicative functions in the target language. However, the teacher in many cultures and societies is also expected to play other important roles; e.g., as an authoritative, moral leader to students (Ouyang, 2000).
3. CLT has been constructed in the West-based literature mainly as a value-free technology to teach a second or foreign language effectively. However, CLT actually

carries implicit values and ideologies such as utilitarianism, egalitarianism, and individualism. The kind of social relations encouraged in the CLT classroom might not be seen as acceptable in certain traditional societies and cultural milieus (Ouyang, 2000).

4. Certain local pedagogical practices disfavored by CLT might have their own rationality and usefulness in the local contexts of the students (e.g., use of L1, use of choral responses and translation techniques, drawing on students' familiar L1 lifeworld experiences to stimulate student interest and response, systematic and authoritative transmission of grammatical knowledge, etc.) (Ouyang, 2000; Ramanathan, 2006).
5. CLT and West-based TESOL implicitly assumes that the language teacher and learner naturally want to become like the native speaker. However, this might not be the case; for example, many Korean English language teachers and students might want to keep their Koreaness while they are teaching, learning, and speaking English. For instance, the teachers might want to keep their local identities as Korean teachers, or Chinese teachers, even when they are teaching English and do not want to adopt the teaching styles of foreign teachers (Ouyang, 2000; Shin, 2006).

To the above list is added Ramanathan's (2006) point about the need to pay attention to the socioeconomic and sociopolitical embeddedness of ELT in a society, especially the position of English when compared to other languages in society and how differential access to English and different pedagogies of English contribute to social stratification and inequalities (see also Lin, 1999). It is to a consideration of this point that we shall turn to in the next section.

### **Crisscrossing of Statist and Capitalist Desires in English Language Teaching**

The list of critiques of CLT and West-based methodology in the above section can be summarized in the key observation that there is a fundamental problem with the traditional literature's key assumption and mission. This key assumption and mission can be summarized as follows: the language curriculum researcher's task is mainly that of the search for the most effective language curriculum and pedagogy as neutral technologies and procedures that are universally applicable and effective, without due attention to the sociocultural, sociopolitical, and socioeconomic embeddedness of language learning and language teaching in different societies.

Much of the critique of CLT and West-based ELT curriculum theories and pedagogies can thus be understood by situating the institution of EFL teaching in its

larger sociopolitical and global capitalist context, and by understanding the hidden but nonetheless inherent nature of (language) teaching and schooling as a socio-political and sociocultural process of (re)production of subjectivities and identities. With the processes of globalization and global capitalism growing fast at the turn of the century, the question of the global hegemony of English cannot be evaded and its impact on language-in-education policy and practice in diverse contexts of the world must be examined. Several major sources of tensions and dilemmas have arisen as scholars have examined the experience of teachers, students, parents, and language curriculum planners and policymakers in diverse contexts of the world.

### Conflicts and Social Division

Under forces of globalization, many Asian states have begun to adopt a strong ELT policy in their schooling curriculum with the aim to produce a workforce communicative in English to feed the desire of global capitalism for English-conversant human resources. [Shin \(2006\)](#) described the South Korean government's lopsided emphasis on promoting the status of English in schools and parents' strong desire for English as related to the neocolonial role of the US in Korean history and not just to the status of English as a global language. And good English is often defined as the variety of English spoken by Anglophones from Western countries while Korean teachers of English are denigrated for their Korean accent ([Shin, 2006](#)). In Iran, middle-class parents who can afford it are sending their children to private English tutorial centers to learn to be communicative in English, in reaction to the drills-based, structure-oriented English curriculum taught in public schools. In China, a CLT-trained teacher moved to a private language school to teach English and make more money after being frustrated by the traditional curriculum culture and practice of her old school which resisted her CLT-oriented efforts in curriculum and pedagogical reform, although the Chinese government has spent the past decade reforming its national English assessment format to make it more communicative to produce a workforce more amenable to the English demands of the new market economy ([Ouyang, 2000](#)). In India, [Ramanathan \(2006\)](#) wrote about the social division created by two different sets of institutional curriculum goals and practices for the haves and the have-nots in the economy of English. In Hong Kong, the government's initiative to reform the O-level public exam in oral English into a school-based speaking test, with the aim to introduce more communicative, formative assessment formats to induce progressive pedagogies in the English curriculum, has created more workload to school

teachers and worries about how to ensure fairness of such a high-stake public exam.

The above examples of tension and conflicts revolving around English are illustrative of what is happening in many diverse contexts of the world. The sources of conflict and social division can be summarized as follows:

1. Under the global capitalist desire for an English-conversant workforce, the modern states, often under internal pressure of the business sector and the state's own desire to globalize, have, in the twenty-first century, begun to initiate reforms in their traditional structure-based English curriculum toward a more communicative curriculum.
2. However, conflicts arise due to other institutional and social demands: for example, the traditional societal and cultural emphasis on national, standardized tests for screening and credentialing purposes in many Asian states (e.g., communicative functions are difficult to assess in a national, standardized exam); and the traditional cultural milieu of de-emphasizing egalitarianism and individualist self-expressiveness in classroom interactions/teacher–student relationships, which have served good social control functions in maintaining the social order of many traditional societies.
3. The desire for English as a global commodity, the marketization of languages ([Block and Cameron, 2002](#)), and the global spread of the ELT/TESOL industry, combined, in some contexts, with the legacy of political colonialism of Western countries ([Shin, 2006](#)), have elevated the status of the foreign expert ([Ouyang, 2000](#)), that is, the native-English-speaker teacher, way above the local teachers of English, whose contribution in developing an indigenous, culturally compatible curriculum ([Lin, 1999](#)) is often under-estimated or unrecognized in the West-based CLT curriculum literature.
4. Progressive pedagogies such as the CLT curriculum and methodology often require ample linguistic and cultural capital in the schools to make them work ([Lin, 1999](#)). CLT English curriculum reforms have often created difficulties for the poorer sectors of the school communities; for instance: large class-size (e.g., 40 students); heavy teaching load; limited-English-proficiency students with little familial and community support to learn English; teachers lacking the training to teach and assess communicative functions, etc.

Thus, ELT curriculum development cannot be assumed to be a neutral technology but is embedded in, and constitutive of, sources of social division, stratification, and inequalities. ELT practitioners need to be aware of how their profession falls along socially stratifying lines and explore what they can do as teachers to sidestep these policies both inside and outside classrooms. The traditional ELT curriculum and research literature is,

thus, in dire need of a critical turn, after its functional/communicative paradigm shift in the 1970s and 1980s resulting in the CLT curriculum. In foreign language teacher education, especially EFL teacher preparation, a standard course in CLT curriculum might often leave EFL teachers ill-prepared for student resistance and classroom realities, because of a lack of attention paid to students' desires and identities.

### Whose Desire Counts? Students' Resistance in EFL Classrooms

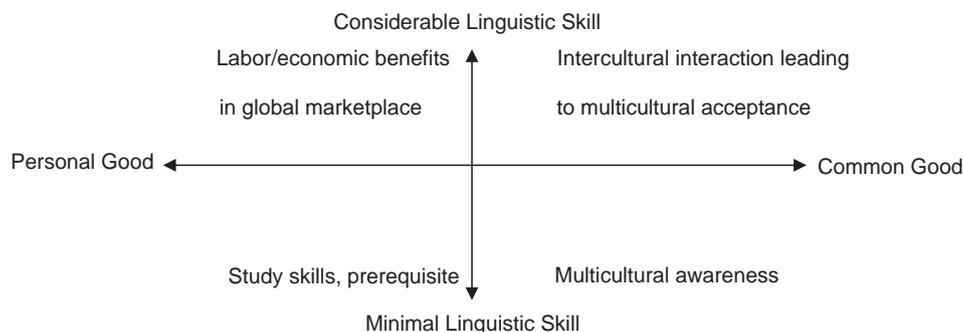
Unlike ESP curriculums tailor made for adult learners who have specific immediate needs for learning English, the general school English curriculum, especially in EFL contexts where English is not used in the students' everyday life, is often designed with the state's and the employers' desire to produce an English-competent workforce in the future. Students themselves often have no immediate communicative needs to learn English except the extrinsic need to pass English examinations. In recent years, however, many postcolonial states (e.g., Malaysia) have re-installed their former colonizer's language (which is usually English) as the medium of instruction in schools and universities under the desire to produce an English-competent workforce to participate in the global economy. Using immersion as an ambitious form of foreign language instruction has its origins in the often-cited French immersion programs started in Canada in the 1960s and 1970s. The rationale lies in creating in students an authentic communicative need for the second or foreign language by using it as the medium for teaching and learning other content subjects. However, this ambitious form of foreign language instruction has created difficulties in contexts where both students and teachers struggle to use an unfamiliar language to learn content subjects. In Kenya, the policy of installing English as the medium of instruction from Primary Four onward typifies enormous challenges to the majority of children and teachers, particularly those living in rural

and poor urban communities, where there is little access to English outside school.

The marketization of language teaching and the commodification of English have promoted approaches that lose sight of the desires of young learners themselves, who cannot be assumed to be ready and willing consumers of CLT curriculums infused with statist and global capitalist desires. What does learning English mean to young school learners, especially in contexts where English occupies a superior socioeconomic position in relation to the first language of students under increasing globalization forces? The converging desires of the state, the employers, and the larger society (including parents and principals) for students to acquire English for socioeconomic reasons has often led to the students' own resistance in the English classroom: students engage in creative verbal play by drawing on their indigenous language and youth pop cultural resources to subvert the English lesson agenda, to mock the English teacher, the English curriculum, or the language learning task being imposed on them, in a way to assert their own indigenous identities and youthful desires to engage in fun, transgressive verbal play of their own choice.

### The Critical Desire in Foreign Language Curriculum

Desire is the motivating force behind a person's investment in the arduous task of language learning. The school foreign language curriculum is usually infused with the desire of the state, the employers, the parents, and increasingly the global capitalists. The 2000s have, however, witnessed the beginning of the critical and sociocultural turn in foreign language curriculum research. **Figure 1** from [Osborn \(2000\)](#) succinctly outlines what can be conceptualized as a desire and linguistic matrix that a critical foreign language curriculum researcher can present to teachers, students, and policymakers to help them critically reflect on and decide upon their own stance toward foreign language learning in their respective contexts.



**Figure 1** Proposed curricular advantages in terms of linguistic skill requirement. From Osborn, T. A. (2000). *Critical Reflection and the Foreign Language Classroom*. Westport, CN: Bergin and Garvey. With kind permission from osborn.

While CLT curriculum researchers and developers can still apply their needs analysis procedure and negotiate with their target student groups to chart out what might possibly count as their short-, mid- and long-term valuable learning goals (e.g., specific structures, functions, communicative, academic language, or examination needs) as perceived by the students, critical curriculum researchers can simultaneously work out and negotiate with their students the humanistic goals of intercultural understanding, multiculturalism, and social justice through learning foreign and world languages, including English as a lingua franca. However, for English to serve the critical desire as a language for common good (e.g., intercultural understanding and acceptance, respect for ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity) rather than global capitalism and social stratification, the kind of English to be taught and learnt has to take on different world accents and has to be multiculturalized and hybridized by speakers of other languages in the world, that is, to be interpenetrated and interilluminated by other voices, accents, meanings, and languages (Bakhtin, 1981).

Critical foreign language curriculums/educators can be as imposing and alienating as traditional or CLT curriculums/educators, depending on the context and the actual classroom interactions that transpire. However, if “education is ultimately the process of non-coercive re-arrangement of desires,” as pointed out by the postcolonial scholar, Gayatri Spivak (personal communication, July 2002), critical foreign language educators need to work on exploring ways of noncoercively re-arranging and re-engaging students’ desires in the linguistic and critical project of learning world languages for social justice and intercultural understanding. Osborn (2006) has laid out some useful principles and practical resources that teachers can draw on in such a project. However, there will not, and should not, be any recipe books for delivering critical language curriculums, apart from some general principles and perspectives serving as guidance for the critical educator to adopt and develop their own indigenous, situated pedagogies for their students.

### **Conclusion: Toward Internally Persuasive Discourses in Foreign Language Curricula**

The analyses of students’ resistance and verbal play in their attempts to subvert the imposed English lesson agenda underscore the resilience of human agency and creativity, the human need to go beyond monoglossia, that is, the types of social languages imposed on them in school and society, the drive to turn them into future worker commodities, disciplining them in the foreign languages expected of them in the adult worker world, forcing them to parrot service-worker languages, and constituting their

voices for them. Even in such a situation, some students did not fail to accentuate the parroted utterances with their own voice and accent, attaching to the prescribed utterances their own implicit social and political commentary and meanings.

Bakhtin differentiates between two kinds of discourses: authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse. Authoritative discourse is language or discourse imposed on one, but for one to really accept, acquire, and own a language or discourse, it has to become an internally persuasive discourse, hybridized and populated with one’s own voices, styles, meanings, and intentions:

... Both the authority of discourse and its internal persuasiveness may be united in a single word—one that is simultaneously authoritative and internally persuasive—despite the profound differences between these two categories of alien discourse. But such unity is rarely a given—it happens more frequently that an individual’s becoming, an ideological process, is characterized precisely by a sharp gap between these two categories: in one, the authoritative word (religious, political, moral; the word of a father, of adults and of teachers, etc.) that does not know internal persuasiveness, in the other internally persuasive word that is denied all privilege, backed up by no authority at all, and is frequently not even acknowledged in society (not by public opinion, not by scholarly norms, nor by criticism), not even in the legal code (Bakhtin, 1981: 342).

Bakhtin’s insights on the need for heteroglossia and local creativity even in the face of monoglossia suggest a way to resolve these tensions by co-creating heteroglossic, internally persuasive dialogs of interest to students so that English (or a foreign language) can become a language populated with students’ own voices and serve as a tool that students can draw on to construct their own preferred worlds, preferred identities, and preferred voices.

Future directions of research might further draw on cultural studies, postcolonial studies, critical pedagogy, and critical sociolinguistics to develop both theoretical and pedagogical projects. These projects can explore how teachers and students can cross and destabilize the socially constructed boundaries of codified languages, cultures, races, and so on, in exploring how different languages (e.g., the first language and the foreign language) and cultures can be brought together to interilluminate, interpenetrate, and mutually enrich and hybridize each other (Bakhtin, 1981), to create a heteroglossic, multicultural language classroom where both the teacher and students’ desires can be brought to critical consciousness, to be examined, negotiated, re-arranged, and re-engaged to work toward both personal good and common good. Research also needs to focus on how foreign language curricula can draw on new digital media, youth informal literacies, youth popular culture, and Internet practices

(Gee, 2007), areas all infused with young people's intense fantasies and desires, which might, perhaps, await a non-coercive process of re-arranging.

See also: Bilingual Learning (Learning L1 and L2 in an L1 and L2 Environment); Curriculum and the Education of Cultural and Linguistic Minorities; Learning a Second Language in First Language Environments.

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Languages To Learn Learning Languages Tips Foreign Languages Learn Foreign Language English Language Learning Best English Learning App Language Study Learning Italian Language Learning Websites. Whether for pleasure or business learning a new language for free is always the best option. Here are the top sites to learn a language for FREE. Shelley McGuire. Education: Foreign Languages. What others are saying. Top 15 Educational Sites to Learn a Language for Free. See more. Spanish Alphabet. Learn Spanish Learning Spanish For Kids Spanish Lessons For Kids Spanish Activities Spanish Basics Spani Facilities for foreign language learning may be offered for a variety of purposes in a variety of settings. At one end of the scale we find FLL as an element in general education, at the other end FLL for a specific purpose. A typical example of the first situation is primary/secondary school education, an example of the second a foreign language course for airline pilots. Between the two extremes we find, for instance, general foreign language courses for adults with the ability to survive as temporary visitors in a foreign-language country as their main object. In all these cases the ability Foreign language study is one of the core educational components for achieving this widely recognized aim. Whether or not the foreign language learning and teaching are successful counts on how much cultural and linguistic information the students can get. The third reason deals with the students themselves. On one hand, curious students may be extremely interested in the people who speak English, they want to know about these people-what they are like, how they live and how they are different from themselves.