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FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING IN CUBA

ST. LOUIS, MO.
JAN. 10, 1901.

THE HON. CHAS. D. WALSH, SENATOR,
WASHINGTON, D. C.

DEAR SENATOR:

Yours of the 7th inst. received.

Foreign Language Teaching in Cuba

The objective need for educational work to promote foreign language studies became evident in Cuba as a result of plans for economic development; the rapid advance of the technical and scientific revolution; multilateral relations with countries in the socialist camp (particularly the Soviet Union); expanding relations with other countries; the rise in tourism; and especially, our internationalist aid to other peoples, in keeping with the anti-imperialist policy and Marxist-Leninist position of our Revolution.

Present State of Foreign-language Teaching in Cuba

Fundamental changes are now taking place in the national educational system, in the context of what we have termed our improvement plan. These changes include reforms in courses and curricula at all educational levels, as well as in programs, textbooks and methodology of all subject matter; also, opportunities to study various foreign languages are increasing. At the same time, the growing number of scholarship students from various African, Asian and Caribbean countries, as well as the many technicians from European countries who assist in our projects for economic development, have resulted in the establishment of programs for the teaching of Spanish as a foreign language.

Commander in Chief Fidel Castro Ruz, First Secretary of the Communist Party of Cuba and President of the Council of State and of the Council of Ministers, recently stated that our country has broad possibilities for work and assistance in the enormous Third World: this is so in the case of engineers, physicians, technicians and all other Cubans. The possibilities are broad, and we must study the necessary languages. On this subject, he said:

"Let us disregard the fact that the imperialists speak English, and let us recall instead that English is spoken in Jamaica, that neighbouring and friendly island, as well as in Guyana and other places in the Caribbean; French is spoken in other Caribbean nations; English and French are spoken in Africa and Asia. This is why languages are important. Taking this fact into consideration, we can understand the importance of studying English and French."

In keeping with the policy set forth by our Revolutionary Government, the Ministry of Education includes the study of English, beginning in the 7th grade, in the curricula of general, polytechnic and labor education; there are plans to start this subject in the 5th grade of elementary education as of the 1979-80 school year. There will be 3 class-hours a week in the 5th and 6th grades, as there are now in the 7th and 8th grades. The 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th grades have 2 class-hours a week, making a total of 800 class-hours in intermediate-level general education.

Students in vocational and military schools can also study Russian or English, depending on the specific needs of the curricula. In technical and professional education and in the pedagogical schools (where elementary school teachers are trained), students have English courses up until the third year of the curriculum.

In addition, the Ministry of Education provides courses in English, French, Russian, German, Italian, Czech, Chinese and Portugese for adult workers who did not have the opportunity to learn a foreign language in general education or who, because of specific work needs, require mastery of a foreign language. These courses are given at the adult education language schools, of which there are 66 throughout the country, with a present enrollment of over 30,000 students. Students in these schools must have a 9th-grade

education. Length of courses is four semesters for Russian, English, German, French, Czech and Chinese but only three semesters in the case of Italian, Portuguese and Spanish as a foreign language. There is an 8-hour weekly teaching load, making a total of 640 and 480 hours, respectively.

The Ministry of Higher Education makes it possible for students in all university schools to continue their studies of English, and in some cases Russian is also taught.

Further, there are preparatory schools in Cuban universities - six belong to the Ministry of Higher Education, and one, to the Ministry of Education. These university schools are a result of bilateral cultural exchange agreements that include advanced foreign language studies. This program also includes scholarships for Cuban students to continue higher studies at institutions and universities in the USSR and other socialist countries. In these schools, Cuban students take a one-year course to learn the language of the country where they will study and are also taught some of the subjects of their chosen specialty in that same language. On occasion, English and French courses are organized for students who will do postgraduate work abroad or who will present the theses for their scientific degrees in those languages.

Foreign language courses are also taught in other institutions with very specific specialization aims in different fields and at different levels of science and technology. Among these we might mention:

- National Center for Scientific Research (CENIC), where languages are taught to scientists and technicians as part of their postgraduate training.
- Higher Institute for Diplomatic Studies, attached to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which provides courses for Cuban personnel fulfilling diplomatic

and similar missions abroad.

- Cuban Academy of Science
- Ministry of Foreign Trade
- Ministry of the Sugar Industry
- Ministry of Transportation
- National Bank of Cuba

Growing popular interest in the study of foreign language has resulted in the use of mass media to enable large groups of people to carry on such studies. An example of this is the Russian Language Guided Radio Course, sponsored by the Adult Education Division of the Ministry of Education, which began broadcasts over Radio Rebelde in September, 1974, and reaches every part of the island.

This one-year course is organized on two levels: first and second. All students receive the necessary study materials, and there are periodic tests to evaluate learning. Every student who passes the course receives a special graduation certificate.

In this course, students learn around 200 basic construction patterns and more than 1000 Russian words, in standard phrases, texts and dialogues. This knowledge is sufficient to understand simple conversations, as well as to read and write, and the student can go on to more advanced studies.

At present, Channel 6 of National Television has a weekly program as a complement to the radio course.

The teaching of Spanish as a foreign language has also developed in recent years. In this case, the courses are designed for foreign personnel who assist in our plans for economic and scientific-technical development, as well as foreign scholarship students in Cuba. There are now several schools of this type in the country.

Training and Advancement for Foreign Language Teachers

Three factors mark the revolutionary change in the educational situation in Cuba. In the first place, explosive growth in enrollment, due to the unlimited opportunities our people have for furthering their education; in the second place, incessant development in the field of knowledge; and, in the third place, the rapid advance of present-day science and technology, which means that education must be continuous.

These three factors influence and determine the character of our education, not only from the point of view of content, but also in terms of its organization, methods and means.

Reform of curricula, programs, methods and means is greatly dependent on the technical level of the teaching personnel.

Training and advancement of teachers and professors is thus one of the main objectives in the educational activity of the Revolutionary Government, through the Ministry of Education (MINED) and the Ministry of Higher Education, with the support of the Communist Party of Cuba, all People's Power bodies, the National Trade Union of Educational, Cultural and Scientific Workers, and other institutions.

Of course, this process includes the training and advancement of foreign-language teachers, which takes place through different channels:

- The Advanced Pedagogical Institute for Foreign Languages
- The advanced pedagogical institutes
- The schools of philology in the universities
- The National Institute for Educational Advancement

The Advanced Pedagogical Institute for Foreign Languages (ISPLE) is a central institution located in Havana which grants licentiate degrees in education; graduates are qualified to work as

teachers in all grades of intermediate level general education. Programs leading to a licentiate's degree in education began in the 1977-78 school year and encompass two types of students:

- graduates from senior high schools (12th grade) who are presently in the first year of licentiate studies. These belong to the 6th graduating class of the Manuel Ascunce Domenech Pedagogical Detachment.
- graduates from intermediate level teacher-training schools, who will obtain their licentiate's degrees in education through a two-year complementary course. These belong to the 1st graduating class of the Manuel Ascunce Domenech Pedagogical Detachment.

The Manuel Ascunce Domenech Pedagogical Detachment was organized in 1972 as a crash program for training teachers for the new junior and senior high schools built in rural areas to meet the explosive growth of enrollment in intermediate level general education and as a part of the educational policy of the Revolutionary Government.

Courses leading to a licentiate's degree in education are given in the Pedagogical School of the Institute, and teachers are trained in 4 years (8semesters) in the following specialities: English, French, Russian and Spanish as a foreign language. Subject matter is organized in cycles:

- Cycle of Marxist-Leninist philosophy
- Cycle of pedagogical material
- Cycle of specific subject matter relating to the specialty

Further, all students have courses in Spanish language and literature, art education and physical education. The cycle of specific subject matter includes the following:

General practice; linguistics; phonetics; lexicology and semantics; grammar; style; comparative languages; history of the language; methodology of language teaching; literature and history of the nations involved; and the geographical, socioeconomic, political and cultural study of the countries where the language is spoken.

The curriculum includes both compulsory and optional seminars.

In the English specialty, compulsory seminars include the following:

- English literature from the Caribbean and/or Africa
- Theories on the concept of phonemes
- The Industrial Revolution (with a Marxist-Leninist approach)

The students do practice teaching in their 8th semester, after having passed all previous courses.

The evaluation system includes compulsory state examinations on Marxist-Leninist philosophy, general pedagogy and special didactics of the language in question, as well as language.

The ISPLE also offers two courses for acting teachers who have not yet enrolled in the university. One is based on guided studies; the other provides evening classes three times a week.

Another school at ISPLE, the School of Foreign Languages, trains translators and interpreters in different languages.

The advanced pedagogical institutes in the cities of Havana, Santa Clara, Camaguey and Santiago de Cuba have foreign language schools that offer training to the students in educational programs that are being discontinued - such as the remaining graduating classes in the pedagogical detachment and acting teachers who take these courses in order to qualify as senior high school teachers.

The schools of philology in all the universities also offer courses for training translators, interpreters and research workers in those languages. Although this is not their main purpose, they also teach students methodological techniques that equip them for teaching, if necessary.

The need for crash courses for teachers to meet the increase in the student population following the victory of the socialist Revolution and the cultural revolution it brought about led to the creation of the Institute for Educational Advancement (ISE), with a network of institutions at the provincial and municipal levels.

ISE and its dependencies are in charge of the courses for acting teachers and the further advancement of graduate teaching personnel.

These programs include the training and advancement of English-language teachers for general education.

In May, 1977, a branch of the Moscow Pushkin Institute was established in our country to serve as a center for scientific research and specialization in the Russian language and in Russian and Soviet literature and as an institution for the systematic advancement of acting teachers of Russian.

Soviet and Cuban specialists in this Institute work on various plans, designed to meet specific needs.

Growing national interest in foreign languages has fostered the development of research projects.

The Ministry of Education's General Department for the Training and Advancement of Teaching Personnel has a Department of Scientific Research and Postgraduate Studies, which, among other things, is in charge of handling research projects in the educational institutions of the country, including foreign-language schools. As an example of the kind of projects being undertaken in this specialty there is the study on the phonological and grammatical difficulties affecting students of the English specialty in the advanced pedagogical institutes.

Guiding Principles of Foreign Language Teaching in Cuba

The Foreign Languages Subcommittee of what is now the Central Institute of Pedagogical Sciences of the Ministry of Education was established in 1973 as a part of what was then the Center for Educational Development. It has conducted studies on the definition of criteria on objectives, principles and methodological aspects which should guide the teaching of foreign languages in Cuba, within the improvement plan of the national educational system.

A Starting point for this study, reaching its culmination in February, 1976, was the analysis of foreign-language programs then being used in the various educational subsystems and, especially, the diagnostic and prognostic evaluation of English programs within the subsystem of intermediate-level general education. The conclusions reached in this analysis provided data which could be generalized to all other subsystems.

Immediately afterward, the above-mentioned subcommittee (in which all different types and levels of education are represented) tackled the task of applying, within the field of foreign-language teaching, the theses and resolutions of the 1st Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba on educational policy and the recommendations included in the draft of the general guidelines for the improvement plan for the teaching of foreign languages in the national educational system. This work resulted in a general understanding of the pedagogical principles which should govern the preparation and application of

programs, textbooks, methodological aspects and educational media in foreign-language teaching, still allowing some flexibility for the consideration of the specific characteristics of each type and level of education.

These pedagogical principles are the following:

1. Principle of the scientific nature of teaching
2. Principle of the educational nature of teaching
3. Principle of direct sensory perception
4. Principle of the systematization of knowledge
5. Principle of accessibility
6. Principle of attainability
7. Principle of active, conscious assimilation
8. Principle of solidity in the consolidation of knowledge
9. Principle of independent work
10. Principle of problem-based learning
11. Principle of the interrelatedness of subjects
12. Principle of polytechnicism (in polytechnic education)

These principles set forth the basic requirements for the organization of language teaching, employing the following criteria:

- Principles dealing with the scientific and educational nature of teaching, fundamental pillars of socialist education, are given priority. They determine ways of contributing to training students in a scientific concept of the world; of defining the nature of political and ideological, technical-scientific, patriotic, moral and aesthetic education; and of reaffirming an attitude of proletarian and socialist internationalism.

- The methodological foundations for the teaching of foreign languages in Cuba are based on the Marxist-Leninist theory of learning and take into consideration the psycho-physiological and social bases of language learning, as well as the primary function of language as a means for social communication.
- The entire educational and teaching process is based on principles which tend to raise its scientific standards, promote active student participation and stimulate the students' intellectual and practical abilities.

Ways to apply these pedagogical principles in the teaching of foreign languages are explained in detail in the document which contains the recommendations of the Foreign Languages Subcommittee of the Central Institute of Pedagogical Sciences of the Ministry of Education.

Methodological Postulates for the Teaching of Foreign Languages in Cuba

The teaching of foreign languages in our country has been organized on the basis of methodological postulates founded on:

- the Marxist-Leninist theory of learning
- a dialectical materialist concept of language
- the general didactic principles of socialist pedagogy
- the application of results from linguistic research in the teaching of languages

These methodological postulates are the following:

(1) The determination of objectives

Systematic objectives are established for each area of education on the basis of the social demand for the subject matter and of the general objectives of

language teaching in our country, considering the social needs to be met by graduates, the weight and location of the subject in the curriculum, available time and number of students per classroom.

(2) The Inseparability of Objectives, Contents, Methods and Media

Ways to attain the specific objectives set for each educational level are indicated in three basic state documents: the program, the methodological guidelines and the textbook.

The program for each subject includes its general objectives and the specific objectives for each level or grade, as well as a general overview of the subject and the didactic principles which guide its teaching. A close interrelationship is established linking contents, methods and media, and the distribution of available time is indicated.

The methodological guidelines establish objectives for each unit, describe its contents and provide suggestions and recommendations for attaining these objectives.

The textbook, prepared for each type, level and grade of education, covers the contents and sets forth guidelines for exercises and other activities through which the objectives will be attained.

(3) The Establishment of Differentiated Learning Stages,
With the Resultant Concentric Distribution of Teaching
Material

The need to impart knowledge and to develop skills, abilities, and habits in a given period of time requires the formulation of partial objectives for each level and grade, which will guarantee and allow for the evaluation of progress made toward the attainment of general objectives. These partial objectives are set forth in a

logical pedagogical sequence, in line with the principle of attainability. Therefore, each grade has specific characteristics corresponding to its partial objectives. Teaching materials are presented concentrically so that the higher grades will drill, expand and deepen previous learning, in keeping with the students' ability to make a more profound analysis and application of the same.

(4) Recognition of Language as Oral and Written Communication

Communication is both oral and written, and oral communication takes place in the form of dialogue and monologue. Therefore, models and drills are provided for both forms, as well as readings and activities in written communication.

(5) Recognition of the Primacy of Oral Language

Priority is given to the establishment of mechanisms for auditory understanding and speech. This means, in the first place, that oral language is presented before written language, in order to establish good pronunciation habits and the proper grouping of words and phrases. In the second place, this implies the teaching of written language on the basis of what has been learned orally.

The primacy of oral language is also reflected in the fact that written language is taught by the phon-analytical-synthetic method. Thus, the student first identifies the correspondence between sounds and the written forms that are introduced and then reproduces them in the form of oral reconstruction, reading what he has written.

(6) Recognition of the Sentence as the Basic Unit of Communication and the Subsequent Study of Vocabulary and Morphology on a Syntactic Basis

Work is guided by the theory - borne out in psycholinguistics - that the process of language learning is simpler at the syntactic level than at the lexical or morphological levels, because it is more concrete, dealing with fully significant units.

This viewpoint on the teaching of vocabulary and morphology on the basis of sentences is also reinforced by the fact that the sentence itself is presented in relation to other syntactic units within the broader framework of a theme-situation context. Methodological requirements of sequencing and distribution are guaranteed in the syntactic approach through the ordering of structures from the simple to the complex. Both drills and analyses are based on the sentence, culminating in the breakdown of sentence elements.

(7) Regard for the Students' Native Language in the Preparation of Materials

This consideration is related to the pedagogical principle of accessibility with regard to weight and emphasis. If similarities and differences between the native and foreign languages are taken into consideration when determining the order in which materials will be presented, similarities should be used for introducing and rapidly increasing the load of linguistic material to be taught, whereas great pedagogical emphasis should be placed on differences, both in classroom analysis and in drills.

(8) The Predominance of a Functional Criterion in Selection and Ordering

A functional criterion predominates over that of linear grammatical progression in the selection and grouping of lexio-grammatical structures. Selection and grouping are determined by how important these structures are for communication at each level and by how much they contribute to real communication situations.

9) The consideration of form as the expression of content

The structuralist approach to foreign-language teaching, widely used before the improvement plan was introduced, has been cast aside, and the teaching-learning process is now aimed at applying the dialectical relation between thinking and language, considering the latter as the means of communication and expression in a given culture. Thus, active language is presented in situations involving communication, and the semantic component of the language is analyzed along with its morpho-syntactic and phonological components. Likewise, topics are introduced which lead to a geographic, socioeconomic, historical and cultural understanding of the peoples whose language is studied.

10) Theme-situation presentation of teaching materials

This form of presentation, whether in dialogues or in readings, brings out the concept of language as communication and the pedagogical principle of accessibility, since language is taught in connection with the situations in which it is really used.

11) The presentation of vocabulary by areas

The associative and contextual value of vocabulary learning in logical grouping areas is recognized. Therefore,

programs provide suggestions on vocabulary areas, linked as far as possible to grammatical structures in which they appear most frequently and arranged concentrically for increased coverage at various levels.

12) The systematic study of word formation

The appendage of prefixes and suffixes, the derivation and the composition of words are gradually stressed as they occur in the vocabulary given in the context, in order to train students in the concept of systematic word formation.

13) Silent reading as an objective in itself

Oral reading is only drilled in the early stages, as a means to teach symbol-sound correspondence and develop expressiveness. This type of reading is gradually eliminated in the intermediate level (except in language specialization courses), in order to develop habits of silent reading that students will apply in practice throughout their lives as the most natural and useful way to acquire information.

14) The teaching of writing as a means, rather than as an end

This is due to time limitations and to the possibility of transferring composition skills from the native language when necessary, once the foreign language is known.

Except in specialization courses, writing is considered a means for drilling, establishing and applying acquired knowledge; little emphasis is placed on developing skills in written communication in all its forms of expression.

15) The teaching of literature as a form of social consciousness

In those language courses in which excerpts from literary works are presented as a part of language learning, they should be analyzed as expressions of social consciousness as well as used in the development of linguistic skills.

Audiovisual media for foreign-language teaching in our country

Some teaching institutions already have language laboratories. These include the National Center for Scientific Research, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Foreign Trade, the Ministry of Transportation, the National Bank of Cuba, the Advanced Pedagogical Institute for Foreign Languages, the advanced pedagogical institutes, the Institute for Educational Advancement and the Lenin Vocational School of General Education.

Although it is true that laboratories with booths and earphones are not available on a mass scale, laboratory activities with tape recorders and film projectors are frequently used in the various types and levels of foreign-language teaching.

Conclusions

From the very beginning, the Revolution has given top priority to education, and tremendous qualitative and quantitative progress has been made in this area. Foreign-language teaching is one of the spheres in which valuable experience has been gained, providing incalculable perspectives for future development.

Even though language differences have never kept our people from establishing friendly relations with other countries or from offering fraternal aid whenever it is requested, we know that the learning of languages spoken by fraternal peoples will help to further strengthen the internationalist ties which unite us.

This becomes a pressing need in the case of the peoples in the Caribbean area who speak other languages but to whom we are united through strong ethnic and historic ties.

By eliminating these language barriers, we will be contributing to the ideal of continental unity evidenced in the hopes of Bolivar, in the thoughts of Jose Marti, in the actions of Major Che Guevara and the heroic guerrillas who have followed his example and in the spirit of the socialist revolution which has begun in America in the Republic of Cuba.

Working to achieve this aim is equivalent to being internationalists and striving to attain the unity of the peoples of America and of the entire world.

Ministry of Education

Republic of Cuba

Havana, March, 1978

YEAR OF THE 11TH WORLD

FESTIVAL OF YOUTH AND

STUDENTS