Towards a Culturally Responsive Foreign Language Teaching

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This policy brief highlights how culturally responsive teaching is contextualized in a foreign language classroom. A study by Ancho (2019) emphasized the need to develop instructional materials, establish context-specific classroom management approaches, and results-oriented strategies when it comes to teaching students learning a foreign language. By transforming the environment in a foreign language learning context where the ability of the teacher to address the particular needs of students are identified and addressed, it can be noted that an encouraging atmosphere will be realized. As foreign language learning provides avenues to know more about other people's culture and language, the student's own identity is also examined, thus bringing an affirmative mind-set in terms of putting premium on Filipino culture (Ancho, 2019). Determining how students see the meaning and value of learning a foreign language serves as significant inputs for lesson planning, academic program development, and assessment practices. These findings could inform policies and practices on instructional materials development, classroom strategies, and curriculum review: all geared towards a culturally-responsive foreign language teaching.

Commission on Higher Education (CHED) Memorandum Order No. 23, Series of 2010, mandates the teaching of foreign languages in the Philippines' higher education institutions to advocate *"understanding among nations"*. The order underscores globalization of curricular programs, which in the long run contributes to efforts of producing competitive graduates. With this, degree-granting institutions offer foreign language classes as part of the elective courses to be taken by the students prior to academic program completion.

Since learning a new language can be equated to learning a different culture (Kovacs, 2017), it is imperative that culturally responsive pedagogical methodologies are employed as these contribute to favorable student participation and improved communication skills (Chen & Yang, 2017). Orosco and Abdulrahim (2017) opined in order to facilitate a culturally responsive foundation, a policy guide should be established.

McKoy et al. (2017) referred to culturally responsive teaching as the "ability to affirm diverse cultural characteristics, perspectives, and experiences and to use these multiple perceptions of reality and ways of knowing to form bridges to new learning and ideas" (p. 51). According to Liu (2014), practical contents in a foreign language class enable students to reflect about the relation of their culture to other cultures. Foreign language learning is not solely about vocabulary and grammar as learning about culture and society also contribute to make it a worthwhile experience (Ancho, 2019).

Looking at people's way of life through the lens of Filipino culture is one step towards recognizing how language and culture can facilitate learning. By doing so, students form a comparative and retrospective perspective: being a Filipino through foreign language experience. As suggested by Ancho (2019), as students consider their foreign language experiences to be meaningful and valuable, teachers can then plan their lessons and develop appropriate programs suitable to learners. Fukunaga (2006) also noted how foreign language learners are able to enhance basic literacy skills with the help of popular culture.

A culturally responsive teaching practice breeds appreciation and sensitivity to cultures. As students begin to develop significant ideas about other people's way of life through foreign language classes, a connection emerges that broadens one's perspectives as it adds value to their life experiences. With this, understanding others (or understanding among nations" in the context of foreign language classes), begins with understanding oneself.

Facilitating a culturally responsive teaching presents a sustainable approach to foreign language classrooms. It is therefore recommended that education institutions offering foreign language classes consider the following for institutional policy and practice:

1. **Filipino culture as central in the foreign language experience.** Recognizing the potential of Filipino language and culture as a significant contributor in advancing international understanding and tolerance provides an opportunity to intellectualize the Filipino language and emphasize the crucial role of culture as a tool for embracing diversity.

2. **Appropriate and relevant teacher-made instructional materials.** While abundant materials are available online and printed books can be easily accessed, determining the level of appropriateness and relevance of each resource should be of great consideration. Revisiting course intended learning outcomes could contribute in selecting suitable texts, worksheets, and activities. Teacher-made materials should be strongly encouraged as this could facilitate effective contextualization of lessons. These materials could highlight culturally-focused, sensitive, and responsive inputs.

3. **Popular culture as a significant component.** It is worthy to note how popular culture impacts the interest of students in learning a foreign language. Looking at how movies, TV programs, and other cultural contents play a significant role in lessons on vocabulary and grammar, popular culture could also be utilized as an approach in teaching other people's culture, society, and way of life.

4. **Classroom strategies based on context and environment.** Graduate students who learn a foreign language, for example, pose different needs that should be addressed. The approach needs to be focused on the need to appreciate and learn a foreign language, to be able to see the practicality of the experience, and to highlight meaning and value of a foreign language. The consideration given to the context and environment of a foreign language classroom paves for a more effective, sustainable, and responsive teaching practice.

The role of policy making bodies is central to realizing culturally responsive foreign language teaching through mandates and directives. With these, the following recommendations are made for the CHED and other relevant agencies:

1. **Advocate the usage and promotion of Filipino language and culture in the foreign language policy.** Explicitly identifying Filipino language to facilitate foreign language classes could provide opportunities to strengthen the crucial role of the national language in knowledge production.

2. **Mandate the support for the development of instructional materials.** Providing appropriate support and encouragement for teachers to develop their own instructional materials could be realized by providing seminar, workshop and training on planning, designing, and implementing teacher-made instructional materials. This in turn could contribute to increasing locally available resources for teaching foreign languages.

3. **Formulate framework to effectively implement CMO 23 integrating culturally responsive foreign language teaching.** As Filipino students continue to consume popular culture contents from other countries, interest towards foreign language and culture increases. Given such a climate, CMO 23 is at the core to providing mechanisms for shaping and refining policies and practices in foreign language teaching that respond to the needs of the Filipino students.

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