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ABSTRACT

Results of a survey of 1,416 elementary schools and 1,349 secondary schools concerning foreign language instruction are reported. The survey sought to provide a national picture of foreign language education in public and private schools by investigating demographics, the amount of instruction provided, enrollment, specific offerings, program type, scheduling and funding (elementary schools only), the existence of curriculum guidelines, materials, student participation in foreign language-related activities, sequencing, teacher qualifications and in-service training, and major problems. Survey results are presented in graphs accompanied by narration, and reveal that foreign language instruction is currently offered in just over 20% of the elementary and 87% of the secondary schools that responded. Twice as many private as public elementary schools and slightly more private than public secondary schools offer instruction. National attention needs to be focused on developing a more rigorous foreign language program beginning in earlier grades and continuing to the fluency level. Specific recommendations include establishment of new programs, particularly starting in elementary schools and aiming at high proficiency; more intensive programs; improvement of sequencing; addressing the major problems noted by teachers and administrators; and offering more programs in the less commonly taught major world languages. (MSE)

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AT THE ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY
SCHOOL LEVELS:
A NATIONWIDE PROFILE**

**Rebecca L. Oxford and Nancy C. Rhodes
Center for Applied Linguistics**

EL12

CLEAR

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University of California, Los Angeles

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**Center for Language Education and Research
University of California, Los Angeles
1987**

Center for Language Education and Research

The Center for Language Education and Research (CLEAR) is funded by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) to carry out a set of research and professional development activities relevant to the education of limited English proficient students and foreign language students. Located at the University of California, Los Angeles, CLEAR also has branches at the Center for Applied Linguistics in Washington, D.C., Yale University, Harvard University, and the University of California, Santa Barbara.

CLEAR believes that working toward a language-competent society should be among our nation's highest educational priorities. Thus, CLEAR is committed to assisting both non-native and native speakers of English to develop a high degree of academic proficiency in understanding, speaking, reading, and writing in English and a second or native language. To work toward this goal, CLEAR has united researchers from education, linguistics, psychology, anthropology, and sociology with practitioners, parents, and community agencies.

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The **CLEAR Educational Report Series** is designed for practitioners and laypersons interested in issues in second language education and foreign language teaching and research.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Section	Title	Page
I.	Introduction	1
II.	Methodology	2
III.	Results	5
IV.	Conclusion	8

LIST OF FIGURES

Number	Title	Page
1	Percentage of elementary schools teaching foreign languages (public, private, and total)	9
2	Percentage of secondary schools teaching foreign languages (public, private, and total)	9
3	Percentage of elementary schools with foreign language programs that teach various languages	10
4	Percentage of secondary schools with foreign language programs that teach various languages	11
5	Percentage of elementary schools with foreign language programs offering various program types	12
6	Percentage of secondary schools with foreign language programs offering various program types	13
7	Percentage of elementary schools with foreign language programs reporting major problems with foreign language instruction	14
8	Percentage of secondary schools with foreign language programs reporting major problems with foreign language instruction	15

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SECTION I

INTRODUCTION

The role of foreign language education in our schools has been under close public scrutiny during the last decade. Various education commissions, policy groups, states, and local school districts have recommended ways to enhance the teaching of foreign languages in elementary and secondary schools.

The Center for Language Education and Research (CLEAR), through funding from the U.S. Department of Education, sought to address the issue of the status of foreign language instruction by conducting an in-depth, national survey of elementary and secondary schools. This report summarizes the results of questionnaires completed by principals and foreign language teachers at 1,416 elementary schools and 1,349 secondary schools (an overall 52% response rate, considered relatively high when compared with the response rates of other foreign language education surveys). The respondents represented public and private schools, ranging from nursery school through grade 12, throughout the 50 states and the District of Columbia.

The main purpose of the study was to provide a national picture of foreign language education at the elementary and secondary levels in terms of specific categories, such as public and private schools. The survey questions covered six main areas: background demographics, amount of foreign language instruction, foreign language offerings, foreign language curriculum, teacher qualifications and training, and major problems.

SECTION II

METHODOLOGY

This section provides an overview of the methodological procedures used in this survey. The methodology is described in greater detail in the Technical Report, "A National Profile of Foreign Language Instruction at the Elementary and Secondary School Levels" (Rhodes & Oxford, 1987).

A. Instrumentation

Two similar, four-page survey instruments were developed for elementary and secondary levels with variations to reflect the two different levels of instruction. In designing the questionnaires, we incorporated suggestions from key organizations in the field that had conducted related types of surveys (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, Modern Language Association, and Association to Cure Monolingualism). Content validity of the survey items was assured through several survey reviews, including a formal clinical trial in December 1985, involving 15 elementary and secondary principals, experienced teachers, and foreign language coordinators. These individuals also assured the clarity, appropriateness, and utility of each item and made suggestions for revision. After revision, the instruments were submitted to FEDAC/OMB for approval. The instruments were approved and ready to be sent out in October 1986.

B. Sample

The schools included in the study were selected through a stratified random sample from a list of 106,000 public and private schools compiled by Market Data Retrieval in Shelton, Connecticut. The strata included public/private and school level (elementary/junior high/senior high/combined). To get more reliable state

estimates, some of the smaller states were oversampled and some of the larger states were undersampled. (This is a standard sampling procedure.) Thus, we were provided with data with which we could make both national and state estimates. Adjustments in national results were later made to compensate for the oversampling of smaller states and the undersampling of larger states.

C. Data Collection Procedures

The elementary and secondary school foreign language survey was conducted by the Center for Language Education and Research from October 30, 1986 to January 8, 1987. During that time, questionnaires were completed by school principals and language teachers in 1,416 elementary schools and 1,349 secondary schools. The respondents represented public and private schools, ranging from nursery school through grade 12, throughout the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Data collection procedures included an advance letter, a survey mailout, a follow-up survey mailout, and a telephone follow-up call.

D. Data Analysis Procedures

CLEAR and Market Facts, Inc., of Chicago, a national survey firm, conducted the data processing and analysis of the study. After assigning code numbers to all surveys and editing each survey for misplaced answers, stray marks, etc., the surveys were sent to Market Facts. Market Facts supervised the editing, coding, key punching, and verification of the data from all the questionnaires. The final output was a series of computer tables reflecting the results of each question by frequencies and percentages.

E. Response Rates

As indicated above, a total of 1,416 elementary surveys and 1,349 secondary

surveys were returned. There was a 30% response rate after the first mailing, an overall 45% response after the second mailing, and a final global 52% response rate after the follow-up telephone calls were made.

SECTION III

RESULTS

This section presents a summary of the national results based on responses to the survey. Complete results can be found in the Technical Report (Rhodes & Oxford, 1987).

Whether Schools Teach Foreign Languages

One fifth (22%) of the elementary schools and 87% of the secondary schools reported teaching foreign languages. At the elementary level, the percentage of private schools that taught foreign languages was exactly double that of public schools. At the secondary level, only slightly more private than public schools taught foreign languages. See Figures 1 and 2. Many schools not currently teaching foreign languages said they were interested in doing so.

Student Enrollment in Foreign Language Courses

Approximately 42% of elementary schools offering foreign languages reported that *at least half* of their students were enrolled in foreign language classes, as compared with 23% of the secondary schools offering foreign languages. Private schools reported having higher proportions of their students enrolled in foreign language classes than did public schools.

Languages Taught

The top four languages taught in the elementary schools were Spanish, French, Latin, and German, offered by 68%, 41%, 12%, and 10% of the schools, respectively. Among the secondary schools, the top four languages taught were Spanish (86% of the schools), French (66%), German (28%), and Latin (20%). See Figures 3 and 4. Private schools at both elementary and secondary levels tended to offer the less commonly taught languages, such as Russian, Italian, Hebrew, and Greek.

Program Types

Among the 22% of elementary schools that offered foreign language study, the vast majority (86%) of them provided programs aimed at various kinds of introductory exposure to the language, while only 14% offered programs having overall proficiency as one of their goals. This means that only 3% of all U.S. elementary schools (14% of 22%) offered programs in which the students were likely to attain some degree of communicative competence in foreign languages (immersion or intensive FLES programs). See Figure 5 for diagram and program definitions.

Among the 87% of secondary schools that offered foreign languages, 96% of them reported providing standard foreign language programs covering reading,

writing, speaking, and listening skills, although the "communicativeness" of these programs was not assessed. In addition to the regular programs, secondary schools also offered a variety of other programs, ranging from exploratory courses (providing a basic exposure to language and culture) (20%), through advanced placement and honors courses (12%), to such courses as conversation only (4%). More private secondary schools offered advanced placement and accelerated/honors foreign language courses than did public secondary schools. See Figure 6.

Levels Offered and Hours per Week (Secondary schools only)

Secondary schools reported offering a wide range of levels ranging from Levels 1 to 6 (ordinarily reflecting the first six years of instruction). Most languages were taught in a non-intensive mode, with secondary schools generally offering only one to five hours per week in most languages.

Scheduling Classes (Elementary schools only)

The vast majority (89%) of the elementary schools that offered foreign languages made room for foreign language study during the regular school day.

Funding Sources (Elementary schools only)

The majority (69%) of elementary schools offering foreign languages mainly used regular school funds to cover salaries, materials, and expenses incurred by foreign language programs.

Curriculum Guidelines

Most (64%) of the elementary schools reported having an established foreign language curriculum or set of guidelines for their program. This figure rose to 85% at the secondary level.

Materials

The most frequently used types of foreign language teaching material at the elementary level were teacher-made materials (used at 86% of the schools), followed by commercially-published textbooks (70%), audiovisual materials (60%), and games (38%). In contrast, the most frequently used types of material at the secondary level were commercially-published textbooks (used at 95% of the schools), followed by teacher-made materials (89%), audiovisual materials (89%), and games (60%). Computer-assisted foreign language instruction was implemented at only 15% of the elementary schools and 20% of the secondary schools.

Student Activities

Secondary schools reported that their foreign language students participated in all types of foreign language activities at a much higher rate than foreign language students in elementary schools. For example, 64% of the secondary schools reported that at least some of their foreign language students went on local language-related field trips, compared with 31% of the elementary schools reporting such an activity for their foreign language students.

Sequencing

Sequencing of foreign language instruction from elementary to secondary levels was an issue of great concern for the respondents. Thirty-one percent of the elementary schools reported that because there was no planning ahead for their language students, those students who had studied foreign language in elementary school were placed in Level 1 classes in secondary school along with students who had no prior contact with the language.

Although the majority of the secondary schools surveyed did not have students who had previously studied languages in elementary school, those that did either placed those students in Level 1 classes (17% of schools) or made other arrangements (26%).

Teacher Qualifications

As expected, secondary school foreign language teachers were more highly certified than elementary foreign language teachers. Eighty-one percent of the responding secondary schools said that all their foreign language teachers were certified to teach foreign languages at the secondary level, while only 26% of the responding elementary schools reported that all their foreign language teachers were certified for foreign language teaching at the elementary level. These results reflect the lack of available teacher training and certification programs geared toward the elementary foreign language teacher.

In-Service Training

Foreign language teachers at approximately half (53%) the elementary schools with foreign language programs had participated in some kind of staff development or in-service training during the past year, compared with foreign language teachers at 69% of the secondary schools.

Major Problems

The most cited problems in foreign language education across both elementary and secondary levels included funding shortages, teacher shortages, shortages of quality materials, lack of an established curriculum (elementary), inadequate sequencing, poor academic counseling (secondary), and inadequate in-service training. See Figures 7 and 8.

SECTION IV

CONCLUSION

The profile of foreign language instruction in the United States revealed by the survey shows that foreign language instruction is currently being offered in just over one-fifth of elementary schools and 87% of secondary schools that responded to the survey. The percentage of private elementary schools teaching foreign languages (34%) was exactly double that of public elementary schools (17%), while only slightly more public than private secondary schools reported that they taught foreign languages (93% compared to 86%).

It is evident that national attention needs to be focused on developing a more rigorous foreign language program, with instruction beginning in the early grades and continuing through high school until fluency is reached. Efforts to increase language learning in our schools and develop a language-competent society can be strengthened by (1) encouraging the establishment of new programs, particularly those that start in the elementary school and aim at a high degree of proficiency; (2) offering more intensive foreign language programs; (3) improving the sequencing patterns for those schools that already offer language classes in the early grades; (4) addressing the major problems outlined by principals and teachers, including shortage of funding, lack of teachers, lack of quality materials, and inadequate in-service training, and (5) offering more programs that teach major world languages such as Russian, Japanese, Chinese, and Arabic.

Figure 1: Percentage of Elementary Schools Teaching Foreign Languages (Public, Private, and Total)

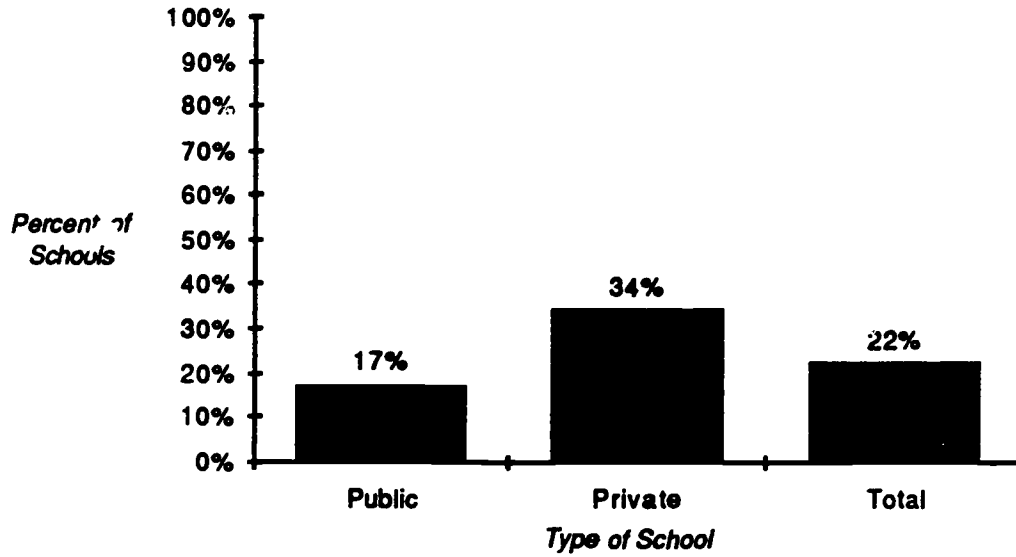


Figure 2: Percentage of Secondary Schools Teaching Foreign Languages (Public, Private, and Total)

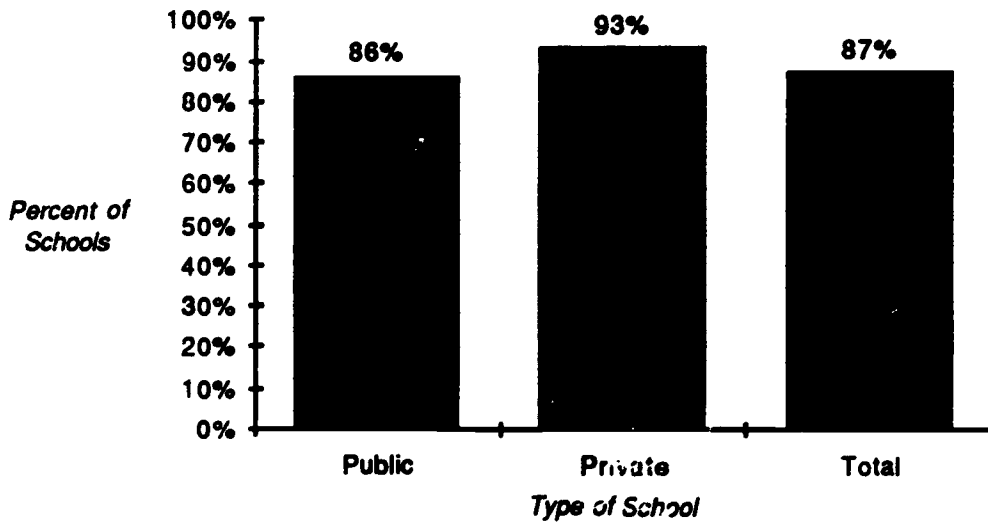


Figure 3 : Percentage of Elementary Schools with Foreign Language Programs that Teach Various Languages

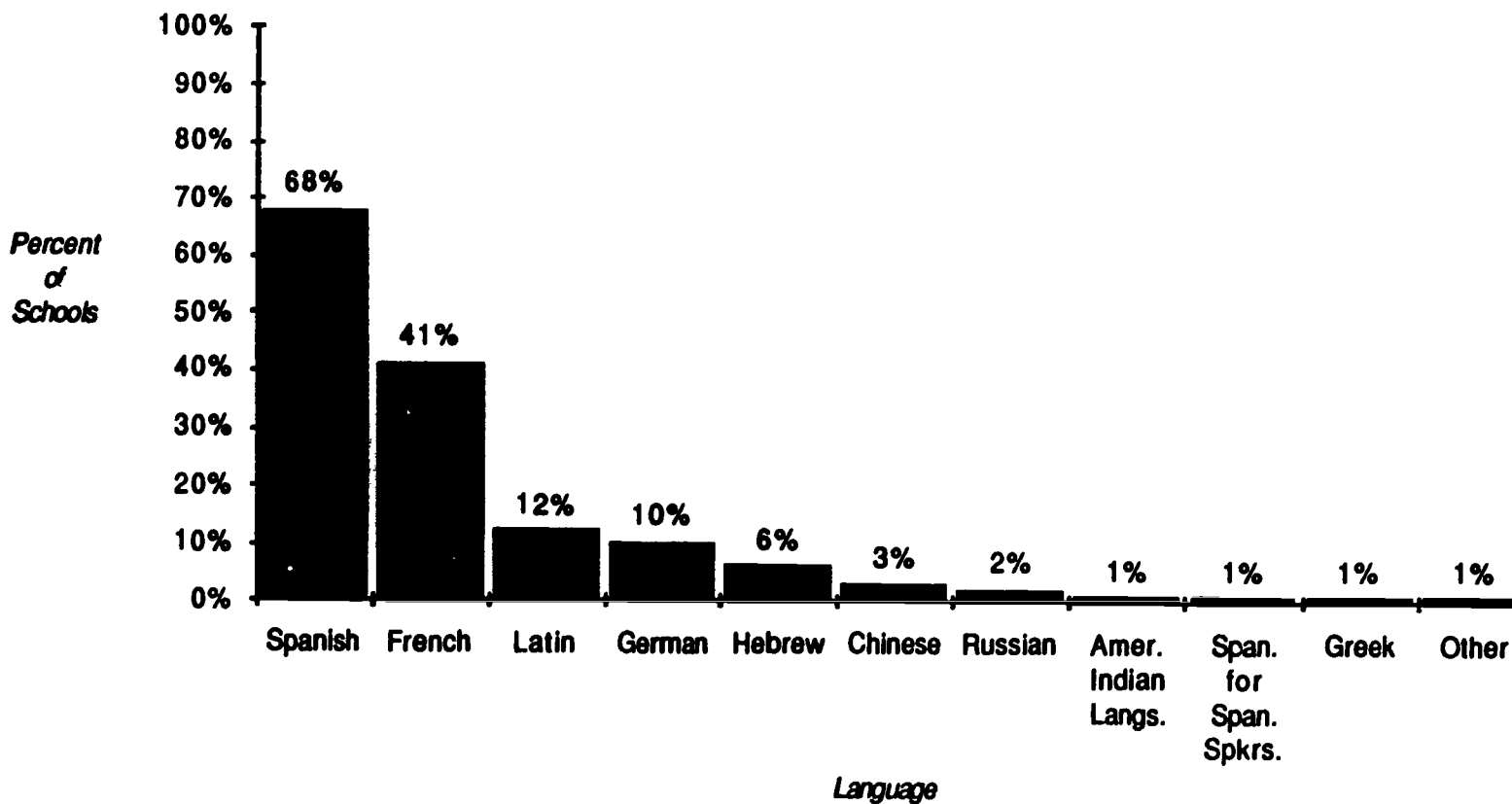


Figure 4: Percentage of Secondary Schools with Foreign Language Programs that Teach Various Languages

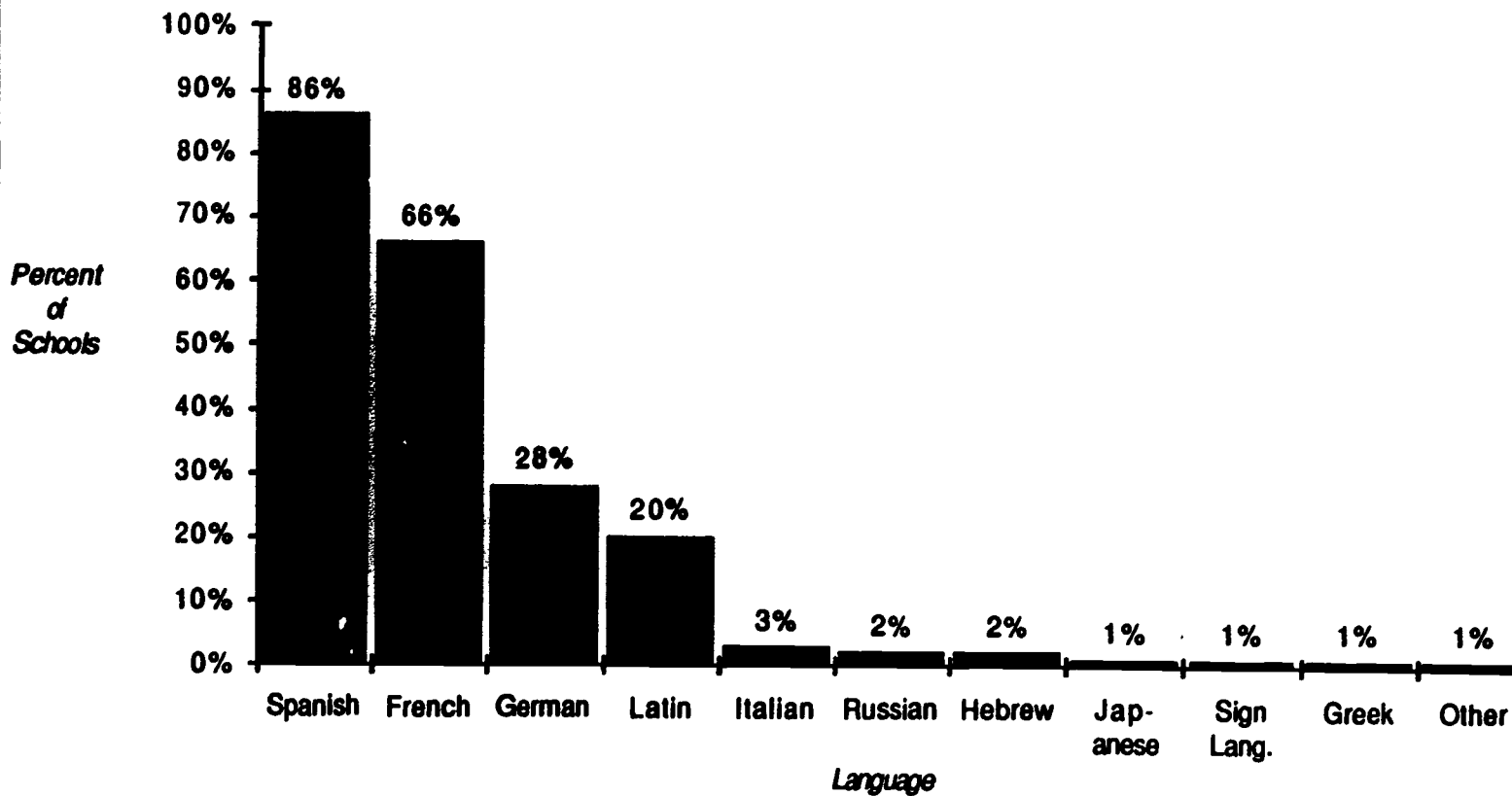
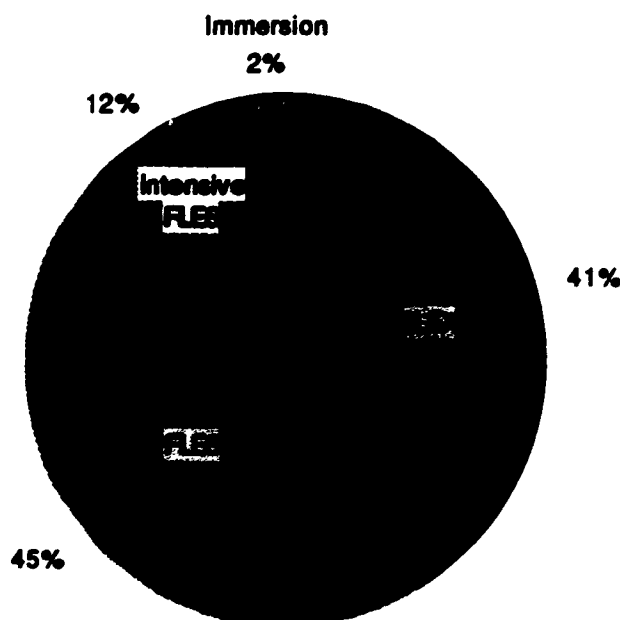


Figure 5: Percentage of Elementary Schools with Foreign Language Programs Offering Various Program Types*



Foreign Language Experience (FLEX) - The goals of this program are to get general exposure to language and culture, learn basic words and phrases, and develop an interest in foreign language for future language study. The aim is not fluency, but rather exposure to other language(s) and culture(s).

Foreign Language in the Elementary School (FLES) - The goals of this program are to acquire listening and speaking skills, gain an understanding and appreciation for other cultures, and acquire limited amounts of reading and writing skills. Lessons in early grades center around greetings, colors, numbers, food, days of the week, etc., and conversation focuses on topics children are familiar with, e.g., family, pets, school. The teacher in this type of program may speak some English in the class.

Intensive FLES - The goals of this program are the same goals as in the above program but there is more exposure to the foreign language. This greater exposure includes language classes taught *only* in the foreign language or the foreign language being reinforced in other classes. There is coordination between foreign language teachers and other teachers so that language concepts are carried over into the regular curriculum.

Immersion - The goals of this program are to be able to communicate in the language almost as well as a native speaker of the same age and acquire an understanding of and appreciation for other cultures. At least 50% of the school day is taught *in* the foreign language, including such subjects as arithmetic, science, social studies, language arts.

Figure 6 : Percentage of Secondary Schools with Foreign Language Programs Offering Various Program Types

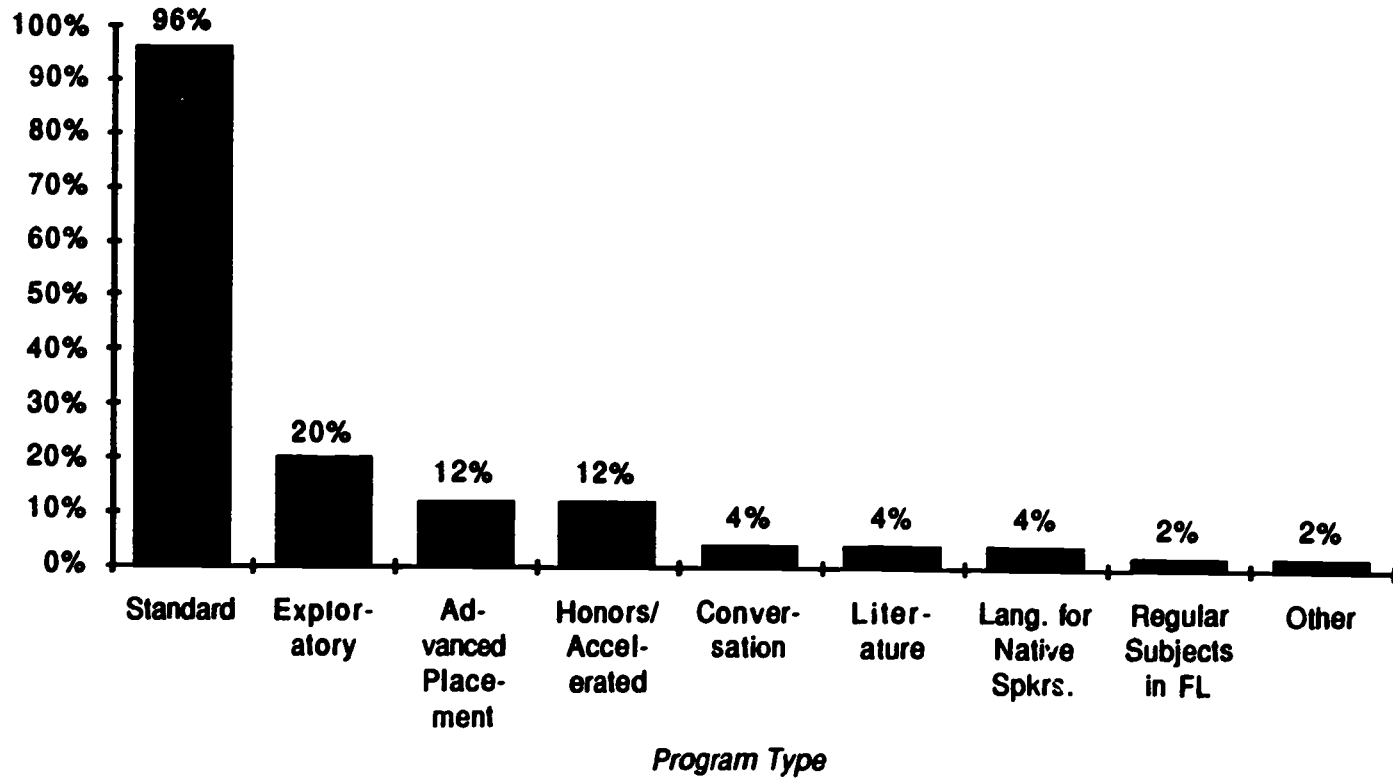


Figure 7 : Percentage of Elementary Schools with Foreign Language Programs that Report Major Problems with Foreign Language Instruction

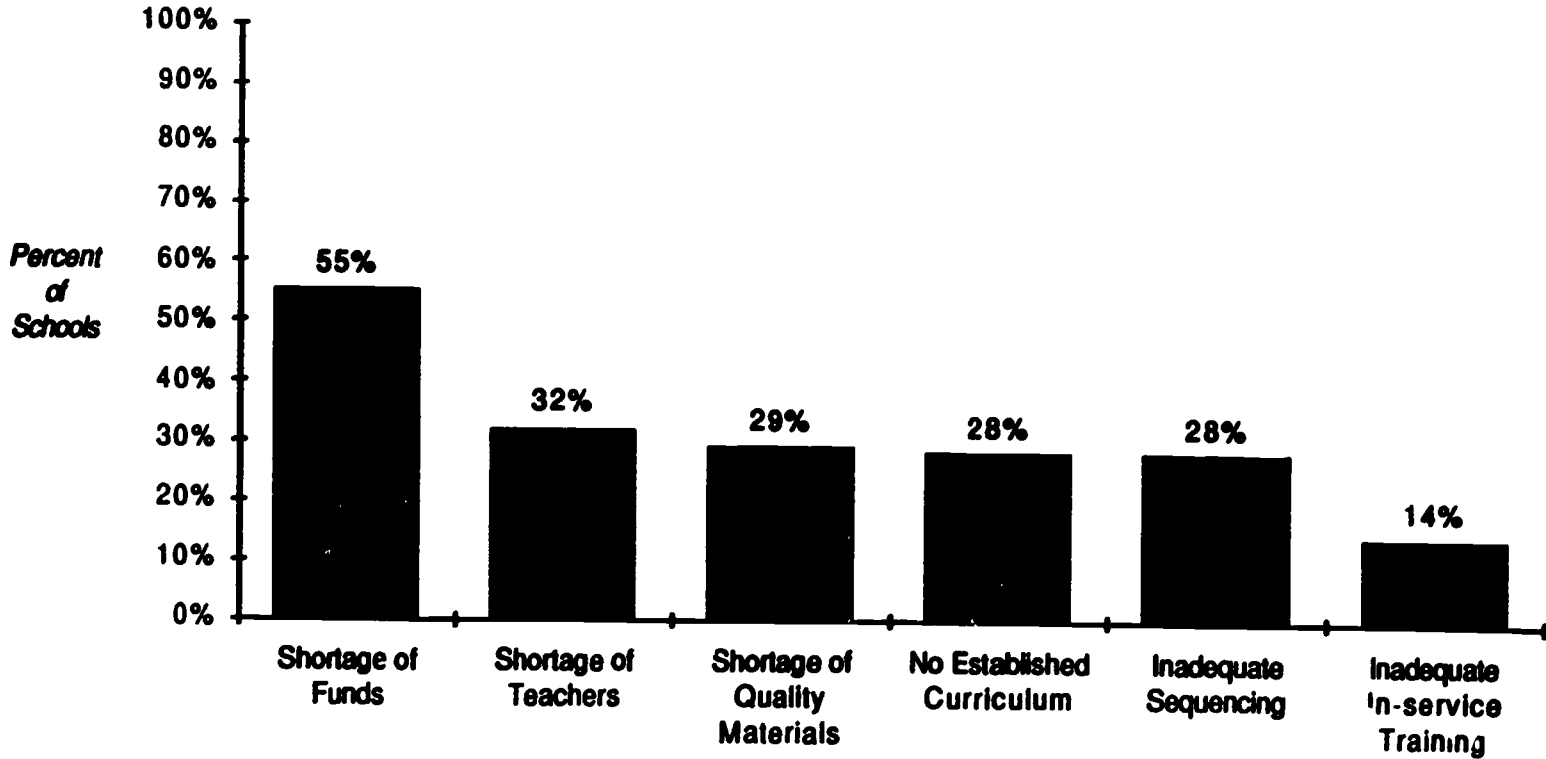
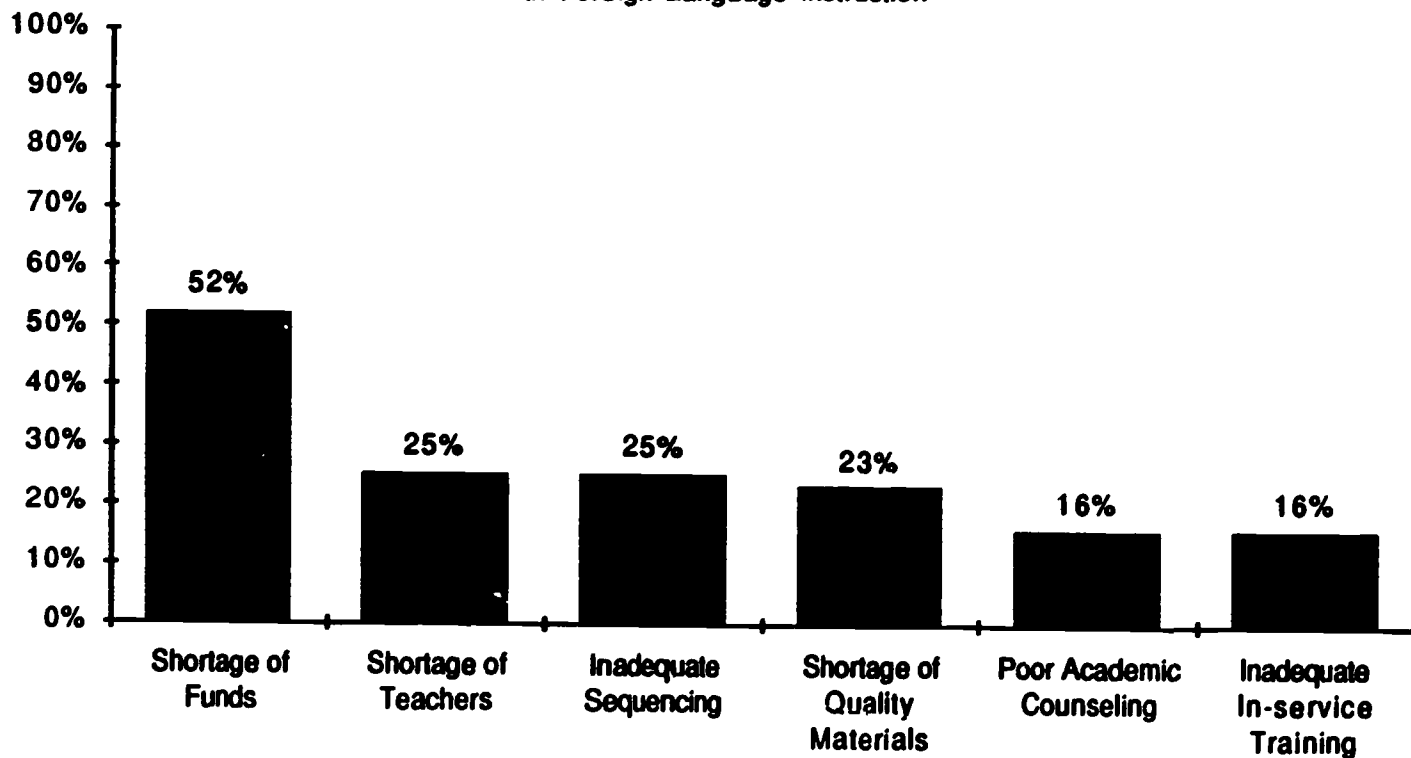


Figure 8: Percentage of Secondary Schools with Foreign Language Programs That Report Major Problems with Foreign Language Instruction



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