

Language Policy Statement

At the Swiss International Scientific School in Dubai, language is one major connecting element across the curriculum. Our focus is on the application of language across the subject areas and programs. The learning process simultaneously involves learning language, learning about language and learning through language. At SISD, we provide a caring language community in which learners feel supported by others in language learning. We structure language learning so that learners have opportunities for success. Learners grow in their understanding of how their own and other languages work in and beyond the classroom, using language as a tool to listen, think, discuss and reflect on information, ideas and issues. We believe effective language teaching and learning are social and cultural acts, dependent on relationships with others, with context, with the environment, and with the world. Language allows learners to engage with the world, express identity and to relate to and accept responsibility for helping to create a better and more sustainable world together.

Aims of this Policy

- To provide a framework for language teaching and learning within a caring learning community in which learners feel supported by others in language learning and in which learners are equipped to engage with the world in a positive fashion
- To ensure that practice is aligned with the spirit of all four of the school's key values – Bilingualism, Excellence, Sustainability and Togetherness, as well as the IB Learner Profile.

1. Bilingualism

We define bilingualism as the regular use of two or more different languages in daily life. Therefore, a bilingual person is able to communicate, think and reflect in (at least) two different languages, even if one of the languages remains dominant.

Bilingualism is promoted to offer learners the chance to develop international mindedness, to broaden their skills and capabilities and to acquire the information needed to access other cultures. SISD promotes additive bilingualism “that results when learners add an additional language to their intellectual tool-kit while continuing to develop conceptually and academically in their first language” (Cummins, 2000).

2. Immersion and Language Acquisition: two Paths to Bilingualism

In the bilingual International Baccalaureate pathways – English/French and English/German – we are committed to early immersion which research has shown to be a suitable tool to allow children to have command of their native language as well as one or more additional languages at a highly functional level. The concept of immersion is generally understood as a “language bath”, in which the children are immersed (Genesee, 1987). Through immersion, the language is used as the medium for everyday activities and taught within an authentic context. Students develop their skills in two or more languages, as well as the appropriate knowledge of the subject content and intercultural competence. Non-native speakers access the additional language in a natural setting. The language input is age-appropriate, comprehensible and lexically and structurally rich; language contact is action- and content-oriented.

Arabic B as well as French and English in the International Baccalaureate pathway are studied in language acquisition classes. Students learn the additional languages from the beginning. They follow an age-appropriate language acquisition curriculum which focus on the development of their oral and written communicative skills. Both choices offer paths to bilingualism as defined above.

3. Language Streams

3.1. Bilingual International Baccalaureate Programme : English/French or English/German

In PreKG children are taught in French or in German and are exposed to English during the day through the presence of an English-speaking assistant.

KG 1 children are taught in English and are exposed to an additional language (French or German) during the day through the presence of a French or German teaching assistant. Additionally, KG 1 learners have one daily French or German lesson, taught by a French or German teacher and two Arabic lessons per week. Comprehensive and broad differentiation caters to both mother tongue and additional language learners. The comprehension skills the learners acquire in the early years provide a foundation for subsequent immersion.

In KG 2, an English-speaking teacher and a French- or German-speaking teacher are responsible for the class through a co-teaching model. The day is divided into two parts starting with one language in the morning and continuing with the other in the afternoon. Each week the language in the morning/afternoon alternates. Language development is inquiry-driven and supported by competencies and skills-oriented methods. Students also attend three Arabic lessons per week.

In the primary school, one week is taught in English and one week in French or German. This cycle is repeated throughout the academic year. Assessments are done in both languages through collaborative planning. Students attend six (G1- G3), resp. five Arabic lessons per week (G4- G5).

In the Secondary School, learners move from a weekly bilingual cycle to a discipline-based model, where certain subjects are taught in English and others in French or German. English and French or German are studied at Language and Literature level. All learners also attend Arabic lessons up to Grade 9 inclusive for Arabic B and to Grade 12 for Arabic A, as mandated by national legislation.

In the Diploma Programme, students follow a discipline-based model, with English studied at Language and Literature level or English B at Higher Level. French, German and Arabic are also available at either Language and Literature level or Language Acquisition standard. Arab students are required to attend Ministry Arabic lessons.

3.2. International Baccalaureate Programme (English with an Additional Languages)

From Grade 1 onwards, we offer an English with an additional language programme tailored to the needs of those learners who do not wish to follow an immersive bilingual programme but still want to acquire high communicative competencies in an additional language. All subjects are taught in English and the learners attend daily additional language lessons. They have the choice between French and German. Like their peers in the bilingual pathway, they attend Arabic lessons. The additional language teacher communicates systematically in the target language, using an inquiry-driven approach while following a specific language acquisition curriculum.

4. Arabic

As the host country language and in alignment with UAE legislation, learners at SISD study Arabic. PreKG learners are invited to attend an Arabic Cultural Club as an after-school activity (ASA). Arabic lessons take place in KG 1 and KG 2. From Grade 1 learners study Arabic either as a mother tongue (Arabic A) or as an additional language (Arabic B), unless exempted by the regulatory authorities (KHDA).

In the Secondary school, applications may be made to KHDA for temporary exemption from Arabic in extraordinary circumstances, i.e. for students who are full beginners in English. This is done in collaboration with the KHDA liaison on a case by case basis involving all relevant stakeholders. This will include letters of evidence from parents, English Language and Literature teacher and Head of Secondary School as well as a copy of the most recent CAT 4 Assessment Report.

4.1. Arabic A and Arabic B

Arabic for mother tongue speakers is referred to as Arabic A. Arabic as an additional language is referred to as Arabic B. The Ministry of Education guidelines are followed. Children may receive between 5 or 6 lessons of Arabic dependent on their grade level in PYP and four to five lessons in MYP. Meanwhile, language learning is contextualized within the contexts of the Program of Inquiry. Arabic skills include listening, speaking, reading, writing, viewing and presenting in Arabic. Student progress is tracked using the standards provided by the Ministry of Education. Arabic lessons are delivered in classical Arabic and based on the IB and the Ministry of Education Frameworks. Arabic B students' levels are based on their years of study.

4.2 Enrollment in Arabic A and Arabic B

Grade 1, dual passports (one Arabic, one other):

- Students will by default be placed in Arabic B.
- Should the parents wish their children to study Arabic A, this is possible. In this case, a written request from the parents is compulsory.

Grades 2 – 10, dual passports (one Arabic, one other):

- Students will by default be placed in Arabic B
- Should the parents wish their children to study Arabic A, the following are compulsory:
 - Written request from the parents
 - Attestation from the previous school that the students have studied Arabic A before and are able to follow the challenging Arabic A curriculum

Grades 1 – 12, Arabic passport as per below list of 22 countries:

- Students will by default be placed in Arabic A, even if they never studied Arabic before. In these cases, support will be provided.
- Arabic countries: Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Yemen.

Arabic and Islamic Studies are always linked:

- Arabic A and Islamic Studies A
- Arabic B and Islamic Studies B

Any other combinations are upon written request and approval from the Head of Islamic Studies only.

4.3. Support classes

The Arabic Department offers support classes for Arabic A and Arabic B:

- To students who joined the school with no prior knowledge of Arabic (Arabic A/ B)
- To students who need extra support to achieve better results in one or more of the Arabic Language skills (Listening- Speaking- Reading- Writing)

5. Mother tongue

We believe it is essential to promote and consolidate the mother tongue in order to reinforce the identity of each student, thereby fostering self-esteem and cultural identity. This is why our learners acquire skills in language without replacing or relegating their mother tongue. In practice, this means that throughout their schooling we recognize the importance of learners' mother tongues and encourage their ongoing development and enrichment, while learning additional languages.

At SISD, the large majority of learners are English, German, French or Arabic mother tongue speakers. Our bilingual approach as well as our Arabic A programme give them the opportunity to learn in their mother tongue and to develop it further. To address and promote the diversity of languages represented at SISD, we are committed to organizing events celebrating both local and international culture. An international corner, to which parents are asked to contribute, has been set up in the Library. At class level, learners are encouraged to reflect in their mother tongue. Teachers are aware of possibilities and activities to promote the multilingual aspect of their classroom.

The After-School Activities (ASA) programme offers a range of opportunities to develop language skills. French and German Cultural Clubs as well as Arabic A and B language classes are run for Early Years learners. French and German Clubs as well as Arabic A and B, Italian, Spanish and Chinese language classes are run for learners from Grade 1 onwards.

5.1. Mother tongue programmes

Learners in Grade 6-9 who are not required to attend Islamic Studies can choose to use that time to develop their mother tongue, if other than French, German, English or Arabic. An external provider offers (at extra cost) Italian, Spanish and Russian mother tongue lessons. The same programme is offered to Grade 1-5 learners (Italian lessons being paid by the school).

Learners in Grade 11-12 have the possibility to study their mother tongue, if other than French, German, English or Arabic, as a Language A Literature SL school-supported, self-taught (SSST) programme.

6. Language Strands

There are three language strands: oral language, visual language and written language. These are learned across and through the curriculum, with each strand being considered from a receptive aspect and expressive aspect. The

receptive aspect involves receiving and constructing meaning while the expressive aspect involves creating and sharing meaning. Learners listen, speak, view, and present in both aspects. Reading falls in the receptive aspect while writing falls in the expressive aspect.

7. Language Assessment

Language is assessed according to programme and framework (PYP, MYP, DP, Swiss Matura), as defined in the Assessment Policy.

8. Admissions and Languages

Students are assessed at the admission phase, according to programme expectations – as per Admission Policy. Beginners in French/German are not accepted into the bilingual pathway after KG2.

9. Developing the Language Curricula for the bilingual pathway

Across the IB programmes offered at SISD, teachers collaborate to ensure that the curricula are integrated in the framework of the Primary Years Programme, Middle Years Programme and Diploma Programme.

10. Recognition of Dialectical Differences

As SISD is a true international school, we recognize the occasional and subtle differences in various dialects of English, French, and German. While these differences are welcomed in the students' writing, and no particular dialect will be preferred over another, we require consistency in language use.

According to KHDA regulation, Arabic educators are required to adopt standard Arabic during conversations and curriculum delivery. During lessons, an emphasis to adopt standard Arabic to communicate fluently is prioritized.

11. Language of Business

The language of business at SISD is English. Therefore, school communication is conducted in English. However, we promote respect and open-mindedness in communication and provide individual linguistic support where possible and within reason.

12. Roles in Learning

At SISD, responsibility for language learning is shared by academic staff, learners, and parents. Language instruction is transdisciplinary, touching upon all aspects of expression and communication, whether in a class setting or outside of the classroom. Roles in language learning are explained below:

12.1. Learners

- Become active language learners through inquiry and authentic real-life applications.
- Reach operational language proficiency in more than one language (B1 level and higher for additional languages).
- Are respectful of others' language and culture.

- See language as a tool for life-long learning.

12.2 Parents

- Value and share responsibility for the development of language skills.
- Recognize the pace at which languages skills develop.
- Participate in meetings regarding the IB Programmes and language of instruction.
- Commit to the Language Policy of the school, e.g. by taking opportunities to expose their children to relevant language beyond the school.

12.3 All Teachers and Teaching Assistants

- Are responsible for language development.
- Share a responsibility for developing language through multiple disciplines.
- Use a variety of strategies to help learners comprehend, interpret, evaluate and respond to a variety of sources in a range of languages and a variety of cultures.
- Encourage learners to maintain and value their mother tongue and to respect that of others.
- Give learners specific and constructive linguistic feedback.
- Incorporate language teaching and learning as a part of continuous professional development.

12.4. The School Management

- Provides the resources necessary for the delivery of a high-quality language programme.
- Reviews carefully the language profiles of prospective teachers at the recruitment stage, in order to ensure that curricular and pedagogical needs are met.
- Supports all teachers with opportunities for furthering language teaching strategies, professional development and assessment support.

13. Monitoring, review and publication

This policy is the result of the work of a team consisting of: the Head of School, Head of Early Years, Head of Primary School, Head of Secondary School, PYP Coordinator, MYP Coordinator, DP Coordinator with input from the teachers. This team will regularly review this policy, making additions and adjustments as needed. Learner and parent inputs are also welcome.

14. References

14.1 IB Documents

International Baccalaureate Organization, Guidelines for Developing a School Language Policy, 2008

International Baccalaureate Organization, Learning in a Language Other Than Mother Tongue in IB Programs, 2008

International Baccalaureate Organization, Language and Learning in IB Programs, 2008

International Baccalaureate Organization, Guidelines for School Self-Reflection on its Language Policy, 2008

14.2 Literature

- CUMMINS Jim, *Language, Power and Pedagogy: Bilingual Children in the Crossfire*, Clevedon, Multilingual Matters, 2000
- GENESEE F., *Learning through two Languages: Studies of Immersion and Bilingual Education*, Rowley, Newbury House, 1987
- GROSJEAN F., *Parler plusieurs langues – Le monde des bilingues*, Albin Michel, 2015