

Language Policy at SOS-Hermann Gmeiner International College



Purpose of the Language Policy

The purpose of the Language Policy is:

- to achieve a common understanding of the importance of language as central to learning and thus teachers' responsibilities in facilitating communication in all forms
- to provide a tool for understanding how and why language is taught at SOS-HGIC
- to support language learning and teaching consistent with the standards of the IB Diploma Programme
- to establish agreements on how to meet the needs of students with regard to the SOS-HGIC mission statement and language philosophy
- to implement a curriculum approach which accommodates language diversity
- to provide direction and support for planning, teaching and assessing, with respect to language in all aspects of school life.
- To encourage mutual understanding and appreciating of each other's culture through language

SOS-HGIC Mission and Philosophy

The Mission of SOS Hermann Gmeiner International College is to provide a school of academic excellence for students from SOS Children's Villages from all over Africa, together with students from the host country, Ghana, in a spirit of Pan-Africanism and an awareness of the social needs of society.

The School's philosophy embraces internationalism in its widest sense, a commitment to uplift Africa and active service to the community. Its educational mission is holistic in nature, aiming to develop all students into confident adults capable of facing the challenges of a fast-changing world, by inculcating in them critical and analytical abilities which will equip them to become compassionate thinkers who are aware of their common humanity, with a belief and pride in themselves as Africans. The College's ultimate mission is to graduate life-long learners who are fully prepared for the best universities worldwide and who are also committed to putting their knowledge, skills and resources into developing their continent, Africa.

Objectives of the SOS-Hermann Gmeiner International College

The principal objectives or targets of the College are to:

1. Provide supplementary education to candidates seeking admittance into the College, but who lack proficiency in certain subjects deemed as prerequisites to admittance into the College;
2. Provide the highest possible standard of education to both SOS Children and non-SOS children showing potential for advanced academic education but who do not have access to adequate facilities;
3. Prepare students for entrance into universities of high international standards;
4. Enable students to appreciate the universal values which cut across cultures, such as integrity, honesty, fairness, and respect for all humans and the environment, and in so doing build a sense of purpose that is driven by these values;
5. Instil within the students a sense of self-discipline and an approach to learning which may be used in a wide spectrum of situations and environments;
6. Encourage the students to think creatively and independently but with a spirit of both healthy competition and co-operation with others;
7. Develop a strong sense of international understanding amongst the students, a sensitivity to different world cultures and languages, and an appreciation for Africa's role within the world. Thus to develop graduates with a sense of social responsibility and a commitment to contribute to Africa's development within the international community;
8. Provide individualised career counselling to all students on a regular basis to ensure a well- directed transition from academic studies to a self-supporting career;
9. Develop formal and informal relationships with universities in Ghana and abroad to ensure smooth transitions for students graduating from the College and wishing to further their studies.

Language Profile

SOS-HGIC has approximately 350 students from about 20 different African countries. A minority originate from further afield, such as the UK or the USA. About two thirds of students are Ghanaian or of Ghanaian origin while one third come from other African countries including Ethiopia and Burundi, where English is not an official language.

A quarter of the student population do not consider English as their best language, while a large proportion of those who claim that English is their best language are not exposed to it all the time. On the other hand, the majority of students speak several of their local languages with various degrees of proficiency.

The majority of staff are Ghanaian and speak one or several local/Ghanaian languages. A minority originate from other African countries or further afield.

Language Philosophy at SOS-HGIC

In keeping with the SOS-HGIC Mission Statement, the SOS-HGIC Language Philosophy celebrates the diversity of cultures and the variety of languages spoken by our College community.

The emphasis in language use at SOS-HGIC is deliberately on English in order to facilitate learning in an English-medium curriculum and to further students' academic career potential. SOS-HGIC recognises that the knowledge and acquisition of other languages not only promotes cognitive growth but is vital to social interactions, both formally and informally, in and out of the classroom, at home and within the international community. Students are encouraged to be proud of their own language and culture and, equally, learn a language other than their own.

Admission

A student's ability to access the curriculum and to succeed at the college is highly dependent on language proficiency. In order to be admitted into the (Middle Years Programme) MYP class, students take a test in English. They must demonstrate proficiency in the language, which includes (but is not limited to) the ability to:

- communicate clearly, accurately and effectively when speaking and writing
- use a wide range of vocabulary, as well as correct grammar, spelling and punctuation
- show a personal style and an awareness of the audience being addressed.

On first admission to the College, therefore, students who have received minimal education and exposure in English are given further language learning support. However, at MYP all students are currently expected to take a Language and Literature or Language Acquisition course in English.

French-speaking students are offered a Language and Literature course in French.

- Students from Ethiopia are offered a Language and Literature course in Amharic
- Students from Tanzania are offered a Language and Literature course in Swahili

At the IB Diploma level, all students take a first language course (Language A). In order to be admitted to the Language A class, a student must have studied a Language and Literature Course in English, French, Amharic or Swahili at the MYP level:

Language Use

In the classroom:

The language of instruction is English and the curriculum is delivered in the medium of English throughout the school, though it is recognized that other languages may be used for varying purposes during instructional activities. Decisions regarding language use in the classroom are at the discretion of individual teachers. However, it should always be kept in mind that becoming proficient in English is necessary to adequately access English medium subject areas in the IB curricula. Classroom instruction is guided by the following principles:

- Though the use of a student's first language is not discouraged in the school, there will often be times in the classroom where the teacher needs to stipulate that a particular activity be undertaken solely in English in order to meet the curriculum requirements.
- In order to help their understanding, it may at times be helpful for students to think through or talk through unfamiliar or complex concepts in their first language, before learning the vocabulary and structures necessary to talk about these concepts in English.
- Students are allowed to use translation dictionaries in the classroom. Simple translation dictionaries are permitted in non-language IBDP examinations. Regulations do not permit them in language examinations.

Outside the classroom

In line with the general belief that diversity in language is a positive element in the school, no language is discouraged from use outside the classroom. However, as relevant, all members of the community need to be conscious of and sensitive to the presence of others and are therefore encouraged to communicate in the common language of English so that no one is excluded (due to the use of an unfamiliar language).

Overview of Language Courses

English

The English courses offered at SOS-HGIC are:

- MYP English Language and Literature
- MYP English Language Acquisition
- IBDP English A Literature (HL and SL)
- IBDP English A Language and Literature (SL).

First Languages other than English

The First Languages courses offered at SOS-HGIC are:

- MYP Amharic Language and Literature
- MYP French Language and Literature
- MYP Swahili Language and Literature
- IBDP Amharic A Literature (SL)
- IBDP Swahili A Literature (SL)

SOS-HGIC Language Policy

- IBDP French A Language and Literature (SL).

At IB Diploma level, other Language A options may also be offered as School-supported Self-taught. Language A if required by students. Somali A and Portuguese A have previously been offered.

Other Foreign Languages

The Foreign Languages courses offered at SOS-HGIC at the DP:

- IBDP French A: Language and Literature
- IBDP Swahili A: Literature
- IBDP Amharic A: Literature
- IBDP French B (HL and SL)
- IBDP Spanish *ab initio* (SL)
- IBDP Swahili B (HL)
- IBDP Swahili *ab initio* (SL).

Study of Language at MYP Level

As previously stated, English is the language of instruction except for the modern language classes. , At the MYP Level, students from countries where English is their official language, are required to study English language and literature. Students from Burundi, Ethiopia and Tanzania whose official language is not English study English Language Acquisition. For their Language and Literature courses, they study French, Amharic and Swahili respectively

English Language Support for Students

To be able to better support students:-

- a language profile is compiled from the information given on application forms to understand students' language background.
- Entrance examination marks in English are also taken into consideration for the mapping of a support plan for students.

The following are the measures put in place to support students with language difficulties:

Summer Programme for Students from SOS Children's Villages

A summer language programme is put in place to revise the basics of the English Language and to improve students' speaking skills. This is a three-week programme that is held before the school session begins and is tailored to discuss and work on common language issues.

A further baseline test is written to gauge students' ability and based on this and other observations, the following measures are then taken.

Setting

Students deemed to have a language proficiency issue are set in special classes which run at a slower pace and take extra foundation lessons in which emphasis is placed on improving students' listening, speaking, reading and writing skills .This measure has been largely successful in terms of value added.

Ongoing Support

Students are given extra language support as and when needed to help them succeed. These individual support lessons are handled by all English Language teachers and fall under two broad categories:

- Individual Support
These are one-on-one lessons that teachers offer students struggling with language acquisition.
- Whole Class Support.

SOS-HGIC Language Policy

- Orator of the year
This a competition aimed at promoting the art of public speaking and analytical precision
Language Placement test to help differentiate levels of proficiency for effective support
Proposed Language Club to offer opportunity to students to develop their language skills.

Study of Language at IB Diploma Level

Language A

- English A: Literature is offered either at HL or SL while English A: Language and Literature is studied at the SL only. The above mentioned courses are taken by students whose first language is English.
- Amharic A: Literature and Swahili A: Literature are available at SL for students who speak these languages as their first language.
- French A Language and Literature (SL) is offered for students from Francophone countries who would normally have taken MYP French Language and Literature.

Students who have chosen to take a Language A other than English will normally study English B as their Language Acquisition subject. If they have sufficient linguistic ability they may take two Languages A, English A as well as their own Language A.

Language Acquisition

The degree to which students are already competent in the language and the degree of proficiency they wish to attain by the end of the period of study are the most important factors in identifying the appropriate Language Acquisition course. It is essential that students are following a course that is best suited to their present and future needs and that will provide them with an appropriate academic opportunity even though a given course may be challenging.

To this end, a range of Language options is offered at SOS-HGIC.

Language B

- English B (HL) is available for students with a limited background in English who are taking a Language A other than English.
- French B (SL) is the most commonly studied and is a natural continuation from MYP French Language Acquisition.
- French B (HL) is available to students who have a high level of interest in and proficiency in French.
- Swahili B (HL) is offered to students from Kenya, who are familiar with the language.

Language *ab initio*

Alternatively, students may opt to study a new language at *ab initio* (SL). This course is not available to students with previous formal experience of or exposure to the language. The two languages offered at *ab initio* are Spanish and Swahili.

Additional Support Systems

Library

The VALCO Library and Learning Centre enables teachers, students and staff to access and effectively utilise quality information and ideas across diverse media, subjects, and languages to achieve their objectives and goals.

In terms of language support, the Library and Learning Centre maintains diverse resources that support the teaching, learning and usage of different languages. These materials include magazines, books, CD-ROMs, DVDs, audio resources, web resources and equipment such as computers and headphones. The range of languages supported includes Amharic, English, French, Spanish and Swahili.

Published Materials

Official school documents are produced in British English.

Teachers and students may use British or American spelling, whichever they prefer, provided it is employed consistently throughout.

SOS-HGIC has adopted the MLA style of referencing (see *SOS Hermann Gmeiner International College Guide to Academic Honesty and Referencing Style*).

Parents of Students at SOS-HGIC

All parents are briefed on the process of making appropriate choices of language courses through school curriculum briefings and Open Days. The importance of language study and multilingualism needs to be explained to parents who may under-value the importance of language learning in a multilingual and multicultural community.

SOS-HGIC Language Policy

Implementation of Language Policy

The Language Policy will be introduced to the SOS-HGIC community through multiple pathways including staff meetings, Heads of Department meetings, the Student Representative Council and Parents' Forum. The policy will also be featured on the school website. New staff will be familiarised with the policy during orientation.

During orientation, new students will be made aware of the Language Policy and its implications.

On a regular basis the Senior Management Team will monitor the implementation of the policy in classrooms and throughout the school as part of the staff appraisal process.

Staff Training

In order for the Language Policy to be successfully implemented, it is necessary that all teachers consider language use at all stages of curriculum planning and implementation so that students understand both the language used in the classroom and the concepts embedded in the curriculum. In support of these aims the school undertakes to provide on-going professional development for teachers in the area of ESL strategies appropriate for mainstream classroom settings.

Language Policy Review

This Language Policy is a working document reviewed regularly by the Language Steering Committee.