

LANGUAGE POLICY MAHATMA GANDHI INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL, AHMEDABAD

A. About the School

Mahatma Gandhi International school believes in the ethos of joyful learning and meaningful experiential pedagogy. MGIS promotes the free expression of feelings, thoughts and ideas, through verbal and non-verbal communication. It is a place where we give students tools to communicate through our unique multi-sensorial methodology and active learning pedagogy. Diversity here is a tool in the learning process and this diversity is reflected in the student and teacher profile, the range of teaching methodology and the use of resources. Our approach is holistic and student centered. We cater to individual needs and adapt to the background of each student through differential teaching and spiral learning.

B. Introduction

Mahatma Gandhi International School (MGIS) recognizes the need for a coherent and strong guiding policy for language, since language is fundamental to all learning and permeates the entire curriculum.

With this in mind, we foster the development of the language of instruction, regional languages as well as the mother tongue, throughout our curriculum.

C. Language Philosophy

We understand that all teachers, irrespective of subject-specific strength, are language teachers and encourage our teachers to recognize the language needs of all students and work to serve these needs within and outside of the classroom.

We recognize the need to provide a foundation for the lifelong process of language acquisition since language enables students to become inquirers as well as develop critical thinking and social skills. Furthermore, language proficiency enables students to acquire knowledge related to all areas of the IB MYP and DP curricular framework. We also affirm to the belief that language learning promotes internationalism and multicultural understanding which is at the core of the IB.

Intercultural awareness and links to real life and concrete experiences are promoted through project work, which includes the use of the host country language (Hindi and Gujarati) in the class project work where appropriate. We initiate students to meaningful and enriching learning where the use of the body, emotions, and space is actively solicited.

Language learning at MGIS is generally facilitated by native speakers of the languages offered, and parents participate enthusiastically in this effort. The diversity in our teacher profile allows us to make language acquisition a natural process through communicative methodology. Our multicultural diversity in teacher and students' profiles enables us to offer the opportunity of integrated learning through natural contexts and authentic sources like exchange programs, cultural festivals, stories and folk tales in native languages, and interactions with the community and the city.

D. Language Profile

The school has put in place a system for collection of a child's language profile at the time of admission. The language profile collects exhaustive data about a child's main familiar language, cultural language, as well as their proficiency in English, which is the language of instruction at the school.

E. Creating a Multi-lingual environment

The school encourages significant student involvement in the construction of their knowledge at every stage of teaching and learning. Intercultural awareness and links to real life and concrete experience is promoted through project work, which includes the use of the host country language (Hindi and Gujarati) in the class project work, wherever appropriate. We initiate students to meaningful and enriching learning where the use of the body, emotions, and space is actively solicited.

1. Mother Tongue Retention Program

There is growing evidence that it is most important for students to actively maintain and develop their mother tongue through a formal program of instruction. Some of the reasons for this are:

It facilitates the learning of an additional language

It ensures continuous cognitive development

It has the potential to increase intercultural awareness and understanding, both for the student and his or her peers

It makes it easier for students to re-adjust to life in their home community and education system, should they return there.

The school has put a strong emphasis on the development and retention of the main familiar language of the child, which is critical for maintaining one's cultural identity as well as helps to protect against the potential of subtractive bilingualism.

However, defining the term “mother-tongue” in the vast multicultural context of India is a complex and intricate issue. It goes beyond the standard bi or multilingual scenario of 2 or 3 languages, since most children in India are naturally tri-lingual, and often quadrilingual. This natural flair for languages is often taken for granted in a country where there are more than 3000 languages spoken today, with further variations of these languages into regional dialects.

In view of this complexity, a “simplistic” solution in the form of a rigid language policy with concrete guidelines could prove to be detrimental to the philosophy of true multi-lingualism, and might in fact prove to be counter-productive vis-a-vis the IB philosophy of the mother-tongue program.

The guidelines which govern the maintenance and development of the mother-tongue or Main Familial Language program as we call it at MGIS are therefore fluid and dynamic, in order that they may be adapted and evolved to meet the constantly changing situation. This enables the school to ensure that the cultural and familial language of the child is given value in a formal institutional setup, thus contributing to the overall cognitive development and self – esteem of the child.

These courses are designed to develop students' language and literacy skills in their mother tongue or first language. The course enables students to express themselves appropriately and creatively in a wide range of situations, both in writing and orally. Students explore different styles of their native language and literature, and are introduced progressively to a wide range of literary genres as well as the social and historical contexts within which the works are written.

2. French Immersion Mission Laïque Française Section

At MGIS, students are offered the option of enrolling in the French immersion section, which has been set up with a view to:

- a. further develop intercultural awareness and global-mindedness in the students
- b. to allow linguistically gifted students an avenue for growth
- c. provide a medium for international students from non-English speaking countries to have equal opportunities for growth

The aim of this section is to provide opportunities for acquisition of French language to those students who want to build knowledge and skills that allow them to consider multiple perspectives, and inculcate tolerance and respect.

They are taught French as a language from the early years. Non-French speaking students undergo an intensive immersion program which allows them to start communicating in French early in the year. This may be a component of a project, or an independent subject instruction in Arts, Theatre or Individual and Societies, for the students who are enrolled in the French board.

The long-term goal is to allow such students who are enrolled in this section to be able to procure a bi-lingual IB Diploma.

F. Language of Instruction

At MGIS, the medium of instruction is English. English is also the school's internal working language; it is the language used by the management and the academic and policy making committees. Due to the diversity of the student body, some teachers and students also use the regional language and/or mother tongue as a support language of communication when necessary to facilitate comprehension of important concepts, instructions and guidelines.

Moreover, while the majority of our students speak English, a statistical analysis of the demographic profile of the students reveals that there is great diversity in the languages spoken at home and that English is the mother tongue of very few students.

Because of this diversity, our students may fall into one of the following categories:

- Students who speak a local or Indian language other than English
- International Students who speak a foreign language other than English
- Students who are able to communicate orally in English but have difficulty reading and writing it
- English speaking students with limited or no second language experience
- English speaking students with prior language instruction
- Bilingual students who speak their mother tongue as well as English
- Multi lingual students who are proficient in second Language and English

G. Language Development across the Programs.

G.1 Language and Literature

At MGIS, English is generally offered as Language and Literature.

1.1 Language and Literature in Primary Years

It must be noted that in the Primary Years, Grades K-3, emphasis is laid on listening and speaking skills in English; and the focus is on acquiring a healthy vocabulary through stories,

role-plays, and multi-sensorial day-to-day activities in the school café, library and their immediate environment.

In grades 4 and 5, the children begin understanding syntax and other grammatical structures with a view to developing strong written language skills. They are exposed to various grammatical notions of language and are allowed to manipulate and utilise language in myriad forms to build their understanding of the different kinds of narratives. Grammar is taught implicitly through language building activities to ensure a good language base is developed.

1.2 Language and Literature in Middle Years

In the MYP, more complex notions of persuasive & creative writing and analytical commentaries involving complex structures are tackled, using age appropriate texts and stimuli. Children are encouraged to read a variety of literature and texts where they analyze the tone and structure of the language as well as the information provided by said texts.

Children are prompted to write detailed and descriptive passages during their reflection sessions to ensure a strong communicative base of written language before they reach MYP Year 5. The reflection sessions are conducted from the primary years, initially orally and then as children acquire writing skills, through written reflections.

1.3 Language and Literature in DP

Different levels of Language A are offered in the Diploma Program. Students are guided in their subject selection based on their performance in the previous years, and an aptitude test for languages.

International Students have the option of considering a bilingual diploma, with Language A2 as well, if they have the required proficiency in their mother tongue and are able to obtain the required professional coaching in the same.

G.2 Language acquisition – Local and National Language Inclusion

Language acquisition is currently offered as Hindi – the official national language of the country. Currently, International Students and local students who want to build knowledge and skills in French have the option of choosing French in the French Immersion section.

2.1 Language acquisition in Primary Years

Most local students in the primary years, generally speak the local and national language Gujarati and Hindi respectively, and therefore the focus is more on developing the oral skills of the students in English.

In the primary years, reading and writing in Gujarati, the regional language, is introduced. Since a majority of students generally speak and understand Gujarati; the skill of reading and writing is acquired through project based activities and community interactions.

2.2 Language acquisition in Middle Years

Hindi is the language currently offered as Language acquisition in the MYP. Hindi is the logical choice, being the national language of the country. French is an option for those children as well as international students who have little or no exposure to Hindi as a language.

2.3 Language acquisition in Diploma

In the Diploma Program, apart from Hindi Standard and Higher Level, French is also offered in 3 categories as Language Acquisition –

1. AbInitio: Students who have never been exposed to French and those who are at Phase 1 or 2 of French at the end of MYP Year 5
2. Standard Level: Students who have achieved a higher phase (3-5) during the MYP may choose this option.
3. Higher Level: International Students who are native French speakers, or those who have achieved phase 6 at the end of MYP Year 5.

G.3 Language in BTEC

The BTEC program offered at MGIS is flexible on the languages used and in fact encourages the use of local and national language for greater community outreach. Students have the option of handing in assignments and assessments in any language, English, Gujarati or Hindi, provided an assessor is available to grade the assignments in the said language.

G.4 Language Support Classes

Students from a non-English speaking country and local students who are unable to speak English due to cultural or socio-economic reasons are identified and enrolled for a strong program for the acquisition of the language of instruction – English. This program enables these students to access, take part, and achieve success in the academic, social and cultural life of the school. To this end, the school conducts Intensive English classes using proven pedagogical methods in order to ensure that each child has a smooth integration into the mainstream classroom.

Class teachers work closely with the language support persons to ensure that the needs of their students are met as soon as possible to ensure their participation in class activities and projects.

A phased support program is put in place, where the students undergo an intensive immersion program in English at the beginning of their term. This program focuses on their oral communication skills more than anything else, so that children may actively participate with their peer groups. Once this has been achieved, the students then receive support classes in English, focusing on acquiring reading and writing skills, as well as understanding linguistic conventions.

H. Language Steering Committee & Signing off on Policy

A Language Steering Committee is defined, and roles and responsibilities of the members are assigned with a view to periodically reviewing the Language Philosophy and Policy of the school. This policy and all further amendments to the same should be approved and signed off by the Language Steering Committee and School Management.