



Al Zahra College

PYP

Language Policy

Updated 28th August 2020



RATIONALE

At Al Zahra College, it is a core belief that language is integral to students developing an understanding of the world and their place in it. It is vital in the construction of meaning, and to provide an intellectual framework to support their conceptual development and critical thinking (IBO, 2009). This is particularly relevant in an internationally-minded school, where students are challenged to develop intercultural awareness, international-mindedness, and global citizenship” (IBO, 2011, p.3). Language enables students to develop broad and informed perspectives and to respond to their society in an articulate way. Language in all its forms - oral, visual, written - is the basic tool of communication in our society, and students need to master the use of their mother tongue, the language of instruction and additional languages if they are to be informed global citizens. All teachers therefore need to be actively engaged in guiding students to *learn language, learn through language and learn about language* (Halliday).

PURPOSE

This document provides a framework for language learning in the College in alignment with the International Baccalaureate Organisation and NESAs requirements. It sets out the College philosophy about language, and documents the practices and procedures that enable language learning to take place. It provides an overview of the language and literacy learning, language support, and additional language instruction in the PYP. This Policy was developed with reference to the Guidelines for Developing a School Language Policy, and in collaboration with the IB PYP, MYP and DP Coordinators, Heads of Schools, and teachers.

PRINCIPLES AND PROCEDURES

Context

At Al Zahra College, language is taught within the context of the College’s Values and through the frameworks provided by the NESAs Syllabus Documents and the International Baccalaureate Subject Guides and Policy Documents.

Mission statements

We provide students with a quality education rich in diversity of opportunity. Students are encouraged to realise their potential within a strong, nurturing community. We prepare students for life by challenging them both academically and spiritually and motivating them to make a positive contribution to the world.

IB Mission statement



The International Baccalaureate aims to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect. To this end the organization works with schools, governments and international organizations to develop challenging programmes of international education and rigorous assessment. These programmes encourage students across the world to become active, compassionate and lifelong learners who understand that other people, with their differences, can be right.

The IB Learner Profile

The aim of all IB programmes is to develop internationally minded people who, recognising our common humanity and shared guardianship of the planet help to create a better and more peaceful world. IB Learners strive to be Inquirers, Knowledgeable, Thinkers, Communicators, Principled, Open-minded, Caring, Risk-takers, Balanced and Reflective.

Curriculum Requirements

This document is based on the curriculum requirements of both the NESA and the International Baccalaureate Organisation Primary Years Programme.

College Language Profile

Al Zahra College is an independent school founded in 1998. The school population has some diversity, reflecting the multicultural nature of contemporary Australia, but the vast majority of students are of Arabic language background and have English as a mother-tongue language. Approximately 87% of students are identified as coming from backgrounds with English as an Additional language (EAL/D).

However, it is important to note the diglossic linguistic situation that exists with the Arabic language, to understand the language profile of Al Zahra College students. Diglossia refers to the co-existence of two distinct language varieties in the speech community, which are utilised to serve different communicative purposes (Sobh, Abu-Melhim & Bani-Hani, 2015, p. 275), and are vastly different. In Arabic, the standard variety (Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) or classical Arabic) is the Arabic used for writing, and is used for formal oral communication contexts such as formal speeches, university lectures and in the media. The Standard variety is learnt through formal school instruction. The colloquial variety is used in everyday communication, for conversational purposes, and consists of almost 22 different dialects. Al Zahra College students learn colloquial Arabic at home, and are exposed to the MSA at school. In effect, learning MSA equates to learning another language for Al Zahra College students.

Amongst other languages spoken by parents/carers, there is one language that dominates and that is Arabic, but the school also has small numbers of students who come from additional



language backgrounds including Farsi, Urdu, Bangladeshi, Indonesian, and Malay (between 2 and 10 individuals per language).

The host country language, English, is the language of instruction for all students at the College.

International Mindedness

In accordance with the IB Mission Statement and IB Learner Profile, Al Zahra College aims to instil international mindedness by empowering students with knowledge and understanding about the interdependence of the world, through the study of language and literature. We aim to develop values that encompass social awareness and commitment to our common humanity, within the Australian context and the wider world. Students are provided with opportunities to explore and consider diverse and conflicting points of view encouraging them to think critically and globally.

Professional Development

Teachers are provided with opportunities to develop their knowledge of literacy and language education through professional development. In order to better provide for student language learning, Al Zahra College will regularly facilitate school professional development on language acquisition and language teaching methodology. PYP teaching staff are expected to participate and are encouraged to deliver and adopt provided strategies. As lifelong learners, teachers will also be encouraged to continue to develop their own language skills.

Collaborative planning and reflection recognizes that all teachers are responsible for language development of students (IB Standard C1, Practice 8).

COLLEGE LANGUAGE PHILOSOPHY

Al Zahra College aims to equip its students to be life-long learners, and effective and productive global citizens in our rapidly changing world. In order to interpret this world and participate actively in it, students need to have a sophisticated and complex control of language, including the language of instruction, mother tongue and additional languages.

“Since language is central to learning, all teachers are, in practice, language teachers with responsibilities in facilitating communication”

- IBO, Guidelines for developing a school languages policy, 2008.

Developing an understanding of language is complex and multi-faceted. The term “language” encompasses a range of literacies, including the understanding of written, oral and visual information, and an ability to interpret numerical information, multi-media and technology. Students need to develop the ability to communicate in a range of contexts and for a range of



purposes, across the breadth of the curriculum. They should develop skills in using subject-specific metalanguage and manipulating forms of writing to suit a range of academic purposes. They should also have opportunities to use language to respond both creatively and analytically to the world around them, to express their own world view and develop an informed understanding of alternate world views. All teachers are thus language teachers, and should be engaged in the development of student knowledge about language and use of language to express their ideas and opinions.

“Recognising the linguistic and cultural diversity in our world doesn’t just mean giving a place to languages in the curriculum. It alters the very fabric of education, emphasizing that languages are integral to the curriculum and education as a whole”

- Scarino and Liddicoat, Teaching and Learning Languages, Australian Government, 2009, p.8.

Despite the multicultural nature of Australian society, many Australians remain monolingual, with English becoming a world language. Al Zahra College is committed to broadening students’ perspectives on, and engagement with the international community by positioning the learning of languages at the core of the curriculum. Understanding language is fundamental to appreciating other perspectives and developing an authentic sense of Internationalism. Rather than superficial functional uses of language or *“parallel monolingualism”* (Monica Heller, 1999), we aim to provide students with an authentic sense of the interrelatedness of language and the complex ways in which human beings communicate. Learning an additional language also teaches students about the structures and functions of language.

“The Possible slow fuse is lit By the Imagination” - Emily Dickinson.

Al Zahra College promotes language in several ways. English is promoted through the wide variety of experiences available to students through literature, Visual arts, debating, public speaking, music, IB PYP Exhibition, and other pursuits. Arabic is the main additional language studied in the PYP. It is also the most common alternative to English as a mother tongue and it is used in assemblies, liturgies, the PYP Exhibition and certain assessment tasks. Arabic is also used widely to communicate with the majority of parents, with translated notes, messages, and in verbal communication.

Students have numerous opportunities to use their language skills to pursue personal interests in HSIE, CAPA, English, Science and Technology, PDHPE, Mathematics and in Arabic.

As an IB World School, we are committed to the following Practices:

- Collaborative planning and reflection recognises that all teachers are responsible for language development of students (IB Standard C1, Practice 8).
- Teaching and learning demonstrates that all teachers are responsible for language development of students (IB Standard C3, Practice 8).



- The school places importance on language learning, including mother tongue, host country language and other languages (IB Standard A, Practice 7).
- Teaching and learning addresses the diversity of student language needs, including those for students learning a language(s) other than their mother tongue (IB Standard C3, Practice 7).
- Assessment at the school aligns with the requirements of the programme(s). (IB Standard C4, Practice 1).
- The school utilizes the resources and expertise of the community to enhance learning within the programmes (IB Standard B2, Practice 11).

Host language and Mother Tongue

The school places importance on language learning, including mother tongue, host country language and other languages (IB Standard A, Practice 7).

English is the host language at Al Zahra College and the mother tongue of some of the students at the College. Support for English as the mother tongue manifests through the school curriculum, and through activities such as drama, public speaking, interschool debating competitions, cultural and social activities, transdisciplinary (PYP) units involving English, excursions and community service practices. Students learn about the English language and its cultural context through Australian texts as well as texts from other English speaking countries. English in a contemporary context is studied alongside historically diverse language forms.

Language at Al Zahra College is taught holistically. We promote inquiry-based learning through an integrated approach that incorporates different genres, contexts and conceptual frameworks. The School invests in qualified, professional language teachers for the language of instruction / host language and other languages.

Arabic is taught by a specialised subject teacher for three periods weekly. Arabic language teaching is integrated into the POI, where possible. Arabic is also taught through Quranic Studies. The four language skills speaking and listening, reading and writing are taught with reference to the NES A K-10 Arabic Syllabus and the IB Language Scope and Sequence.

Learning in a language other than mother tongue

Many students at the college use a mother tongue other than English including Arabic, Farsi and Urdu. The College is committed to fostering bilingualism and multilingualism. The college commits to maintaining and developing resources and differentiated study opportunities for multilingual learners who are still developing threshold literacy skills in the language of instruction.

Students with a mother tongue other than English are allowed and encouraged to use their mother tongue to access the curriculum through “translanguaging” or code-switching, which enables



them to employ their linguistic resources to their fullest effect. For instance, they may complete class work and assessments in their mother tongue, and they are encouraged to share their learning and progress with their parents and other members of the community using their mother tongue. Al Zahra College also promotes multicultural understanding and supports the cultural identity of students from other linguistic backgrounds during Harmony Day, International Mother Language Day, International Mindedness week and assemblies.

Parental involvement in language learning

The school utilizes the resources and expertise of the community to enhance learning within the programmes (IB Standard B2, Practice 11).

Parents are encouraged to support their son/daughter's language learning at the College. Opportunities exist for parents to encourage and facilitate cultural and linguistic experiences, by attending performances and theatre, participating in intercultural exchanges locally and internationally, involvement in social justice and community activities, and attending Open Days. School publications on Facebook and the school webpage enable parents to connect to the school's initiatives in language learning. Where appropriate, parents and other community members are encouraged to contribute to language learning activities in the College.

Language learning across the curriculum

The learning of language in the PYP is transdisciplinary in nature. Our language programme involves learning language, learning about language, and learning through language.

It is integrated and taught within the framework of the College's transdisciplinary Programme of Inquiry. The Units of Inquiry, and their corresponding Central Ideas form the basis for our choices of core and supplementary literary texts which complement our English language learning. Specifically, the core and supplementary literary texts consolidate and reinforce the Central ideas of the Units of Inquiry, and are the springboard for teaching the interrelated skills of listening, speaking, reading, writing and media literacy. These skills are taught in a mutually reinforcing holistic manner. Language skills which are not part of the Units of Inquiry, are taught separately including spelling and handwriting.

In the PYP, language learning is based on developing two levels of language and literacy skills. The first level, namely constrained or decoding skills, includes print awareness, phonemic awareness, phonics, alphabetic knowledge, spelling and fluency (Paris, 2005). The aim of developing these skills, particularly in the early years of the PYP is to empower students to fluidly decode language, in order to engage deeply and in intentional reading and writing practice. The second level of skills, unconstrained skills refers to the development of meaning-based skills such as oral language, vocabulary, comprehension, composition and critical thinking skills. These dual



language skills are the focus language and literacy learning throughout the PYP. Beyond the language and literacy learning, the acquisition of the transdisciplinary skills (ATL) of communication are a consistent focus across students' experiences in the PYP.

An inquiry-based, authentic learning informs the way that language and literacy are taught at the College. As part of the inquiry approach, explicit teaching is “firmly in the inquiry teacher’s toolkit”, where “Like a good coach, the skilled inquiry teacher knows when it is ‘time to tell’ and will do so without hesitation” (Murdoch, 2020, p.17). As part of the inquiry learning, explicit teaching is a strategy that has been implemented in the teaching of learning of language, particularly constrained skills.

Learning Support

The College has whole-school processes for the identification, planning and delivery of language support. Individual learning plans are developed by our Learning Support staff in collaboration with students' classroom teachers, which document differentiation and learning adjustments to support students' language learning needs.

In addition, our Language Support Programme, the “Strive to Thrive”, is delivered in and out of the classroom. The Strive to Thrive Programme, implements the MultiLit (Making Up Lost Time in Literacy) literacy intervention programmes including MiniLit, Reading Tutor Program, and MacqLit. Based on initial diagnostic assessments to identify students' existing skills, the programmes implement subsequent intervention to address students' identified needs. These programmes are based on evidenced-based practice to assist low-progress readers.

In-class additional support is provided by Strive to Thrive teachers and Teachers' Aides in literacy and language learning, to support teachers in their implementation of the students' individual learning plans. Parents are a significant part of the collaboration process to support students' language learning. Parents are encouraged to assist students in developing their language skills at home through various College based informed sessions and initiatives. These include:

- Parent information night
- Class home reading programmes
- ClassDojo messages
- Premier's Reading Challenge
- Weekly College Library visits

Language extension

Students are able to undertake a wide variety of activities to develop their language use and apply their skills creatively and imaginatively. Examples of such activities include Mock Trial, Debating, Public Speaking, Writing Competitions, Theatre, Social Justice Activities, Leadership opportunities, representative roles, peer mentoring, community service involvement, etc. These activities provide opportunities for students to use language persuasively, and for an authentic audience and purpose.



Referencing and language protocols

Guidelines for appropriate referencing of work and the protocols for formal academic writing are accessible to the students in several ways, including:

- Access to online bibliography sites
- College Referencing Guide
- As part of writing and Exhibition in the upper primary years, students learn about academic honesty and referencing of work.

Language assessment in the PYP

Assessment at the school aligns with the requirements of the programme(s). (IB Standard C4, Practice 1).

Teachers regularly use diagnostic, formative and summative assessment, and self and peer assessment to assist in the teaching and learning. Assessment takes place in accordance with the Al Zahra College PYP Assessment Policy and practices that are consistent with the IB policies. Student work is assessed using rubrics and/or pre-established criteria/descriptors/objectives according to grade level. Students and parents will be informed of student progress through informal parent teacher meetings, scheduled Parent/Teacher consultations, Progress Reports and Portfolios.

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