



Practical guide to languages for Cambridge schools

This practical guide will help you evaluate your approach to languages and develop an integrated language policy. It also outlines our Cambridge language programmes and qualifications, and the support we offer you and your learners.

What is a language policy?

A language policy lays out what principles you will follow for all decisions about language in your curriculum and school. It states your school's position on language, the mission and aims for your learners in relation to language and the guidelines for practices that will help achieve them.

What are the main types of language learner?

At Cambridge International, we distinguish between three main types of language learner.



A first language learner:

- speaks this language at home and possibly in the community.
- uses this language at school as the medium of instruction.



A second language learner:

- speaks another language at home.
- often uses the second language at school as the medium of instruction.



A foreign language learner:

- speaks another language at home.
- learns the foreign language at school in language classes.

We know that schools that follow Cambridge programmes will be teaching at least part of the curriculum in English. This guide is for all schools and learners whatever their language profile.

Where can I find more information?

You can find out more about all the topics covered in this resource in our comprehensive guide *Cambridge Principles into Practice: Languages Guide for Schools*.

Key principles about language in education

While you evaluate your school's approach to language, you might find it useful to consider some of the fundamental principles about language in education. Here are nine principles, based on educational research.



1. We need language to learn.
2. Learners need support to develop academic and subject-specific language.
3. Language skills, oracy and literacy can and should be developed consciously in schools.
4. Effective language use by teachers in the classroom improves learning.
5. For bilingual learners, languages are not separate but interdependent.
6. It is important to support the development of the first language for bilingual learners.
7. Language and identity are closely interrelated.
8. There are cognitive, social and instrumental benefits to bilingualism.
9. Foreign language learning is effective when based on using language for communication.

Your school's approach to languages

Decisions about language learning and use have a direct relationship with four areas of school life: your curriculum, your learners, your teachers and your whole school. All of these need to be considered to develop a whole-school approach to languages.





Your curriculum

Each stage of your curriculum should define which subjects are taught and in which language, and which languages are taught as a subject. These choices should provide a coherent pathway so that your learners develop their language proficiency at a realistic pace. This will help them to achieve the intended outcomes for language learning, as well as supporting their learning in other subjects.

We provide comprehensive guidance on designing school curricula in *Implementing the Curriculum with Cambridge: A Guide for School Leaders*.



Your learners

Make sure you are familiar with and understand your learners' language background as it will impact on their learning, their identity and their social integration. To help you do this, you could use our *Questionnaire: The Languages in your Life*.

Think about how and when you help support the development of each learner's first language and what opportunities learners from different backgrounds have to interact regularly to help them understand each other. Consider what proactive decisions you take to help to develop intercultural understanding e.g. by marking culture-specific days.

It is important that you track your learners' progress to identify when any problems with academic progress might be as a result of problems with language.

As part of your approach to pastoral care, consider how you deal with a situation where your learners are not confident in the language used at school.



Your teachers

All teachers are responsible for learners' language development. They may need support with their own language knowledge, skills and practice – see our section on professional development.

Language proficiency

A key requirement is that teachers have a high level of proficiency in the language that they use to teach. This includes: subject-specific language; pedagogical language; and social language.

Language awareness in teaching

Subject teachers need to be aware of how language is used in their subject and the demands that language presents for different learners. When planning lessons, teachers need to think what strategies they will use to overcome any potential barriers and give support for, or scaffold, learning. For more on language awareness, see *Getting Started with Language Awareness*.



Feedback and marking

Giving learners feedback on language across the curriculum is important as it helps them develop valuable learning strategies that they can apply more widely. When your learners are working towards external exams, the language of ongoing assessment should be the same and they should also know and understand the words that are typically used in exam questions.

Resources

Resources need to meet learners' needs in terms of content and also language. Language considerations include: clarity of the language content, use of visual support, cultural relevance and what language skills your learners will need when using the resources. Teachers may need to adapt and supplement materials.

Collaboration

It is important that teachers share information about learners' development, particularly in the early years of primary when children may be learning to read and write in more than one language. Language teachers and subject teachers also need to collaborate.



Your whole school

Language is used throughout your school and school day, not only in lesson time. Consider the following areas to inform decisions about the role languages play in achieving your school's mission and vision.

Environment language in teaching

Think about the different types of written language visible in your school that relate to administration, activities or events, such as signs, notices and school brochures. This environmental language is also an opportunity for everyday exposure to a target language and helps build the language community.

The balance of learner work displayed in different languages in classrooms and communal areas communicates your learners' achievement as well as the approach and importance put on learning in these languages. Visual displays are also an opportunity to showcase all the languages and cultures represented in your school community.

Language of interaction

When designing the curriculum, your school will have made key choices about which language is used during class time. In addition to this, think about the language used during other moments of the day such as in corridors, at lunchtime and between staff, and how that fits with the school's philosophy on language.

Communications

It is essential that all staff, both teaching and non-teaching, can understand all messages for practical reasons. It also helps build a school community. For schools with international staff and/or international learners, it is important that you plan how to communicate with the parents and carers.

Co-curricular activities

Activities that take place outside curriculum time are an opportunity to provide a rich and diverse language environment. Your school should consider the breadth of its co-curricular offering and the links that can be made with learning across your school.

International links

Links with learners in other countries who speak or are learning the same language give learners real opportunities to put their language skills into practice and to develop their global citizenship. Connections could be made online, either individually or through class projects, or in person, through school visits and exchanges.

Careers guidance

Your school should be well informed so that you can provide guidance and opportunities to your learners to fulfil the requirements they need for future success. To find out about our resources to support Cambridge learners who are applying to universities, read our Guidance for schools and students.

Checklist

Use the following questions to guide your review of your school's current position in relation to languages.



Your curriculum

- Which languages should your learners know and to what level?
- Which subjects will be taught with English as the medium of instruction? In which years?
- Which subjects will be taught with another language as the medium of instruction? In which years?
- Which languages will be taught as a subject? In which years?
- How will your learners demonstrate and gain recognition for their language skills?



Your learners

- What is the language background of learners at your school?
- How do you support the development of your learners' first language?
- How do you use the school's linguistic and cultural diversity positively?
- How do you identify your learners' needs for support with language?
- How do you provide support for language?
- How do you provide language-sensitive pastoral care?



Your teachers

- What is the language proficiency of the teachers at your school?
- How can you provide language development for your teachers if needed?
- How can all your teachers develop language awareness?
- How do teachers use language(s) in non-language subjects?
- How do teachers give feedback on language?
- How do teachers respond to language in assessment and marking?
- How do teachers select, adapt and supplement resources to make sure they are suitable for your learners in terms of language?
- How do your language and subject teachers work together?
- What professional development opportunities related to language are there?



Your whole school

- Which language or languages do you use for displaying school information?
- Which language or languages do you choose for displays of learners' work?
- What range of languages and cultures are represented in visual displays?
- Which language do you use in all areas of school life?
- What language(s) do you use to communicate with all staff in your school?
- What language(s) do you use to communicate with the home?
- In which language(s) do you offer regular co-curricular activities?
- What events do you hold to celebrate different languages and cultures?
- What intercultural and international links do you have and how do you develop them?
- What support do you provide about language and international requirements for learners leaving school?



Five steps to developing your language policy

It is valuable for any school to develop and implement a language policy and it is a requirement for all our bilingual and multilingual schools. Development of your policy should take into account and engage with the whole school community, but the work could be led by a small group that draws together information, expertise and views from other stakeholders.

1. Consider your school's mission and aim for languages

Think about what role language plays in your school mission. Your school should be clear about the educational aims for your learners related to language i.e. what your school's views on languages are and what skills and competences your learners are expected to develop.

2. Know your school's current position

Gather information about all aspects of the school's language characteristics and practices to identify strengths and opportunities for improvement. Sources may include: curriculum documentation; other policy documents (e.g. assessment, behaviour); opinions from your staff, learners and parents gathered through interviews or questionnaires; learning walks; and assessment data.

To help you with your evaluation, use our Checklist.

3. Write your language policy

Your language policy document can be structured in different ways – you might have a common template you use for other policy documents in the school. Whatever format you use, the document's core information should answer the following questions:

- What is your school's position on languages?
- What are the school's aims for language learning?
- How is your curriculum structured and organised? (This should include both language as a medium of instruction and language as a subject).
- How will you identify and support your learners' English language needs?
- How will you encourage and support the maintenance of your learners' first language?

The policy should also cover areas that relate to the wider school environment. Check that you are not duplicating information that belongs in another policy. Sometimes it will be more effective to review and revise other policy documents to include principles about language.

4. Put the policy into practice

A policy is only worthwhile if it is used and influences practice and decision-making in your school. When the policy has been finalised, share and communicate it widely with your school community.

5. Review and improve

Once in place, the language policy should form part of the regular cycle of self-evaluation, monitoring and review that your school carries out to ensure a continual focus on quality and improvement. We provide general guidance on how to develop school policies in our guide for school leaders *Developing Your School with Cambridge*.

Cambridge language programmes and qualifications

We provide language programmes and qualifications for learners with different language profiles and contexts. Our qualifications are accepted and valued by many leading universities and employers around the world.

The Cambridge Pathway

Learners who are studying English as a subject usually follow either a first or a second language pathway. There are programmes and qualifications for each stage from age 5 to 19. Each of the stages builds on your learners' language development from the previous stage. For full details, see our website.

English as a foreign language

Cambridge English programmes are often most appropriate for contexts where English is being taught as a foreign language and where close alignment to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) is considered a high priority. For more information, visit the Cambridge English website.

For more information on English language university admissions requirements, visit our Recognition and acceptance webpage.



Other Cambridge language programmes and qualifications

We offer programmes and qualifications in a wide range of languages for first, second and foreign language learners. Languages include Afrikaans, Arabic, Bahasa Indonesia, Bengali, Chinese, Dutch, French, German, Hindi, IsiZulu, Italian, Malay, Mandarin Chinese, Portuguese, Setswana, Sinhala, Spanish, Swahili, Tamil, Thai, Turkish and Urdu.

For details of what programmes are available at Cambridge IGCSE™, Cambridge O Level, and Cambridge International AS & A Level, see our *Cambridge Principles into Practice: Languages Guide for Schools*.

Non-language programmes and qualifications

Language used in our question papers and other assessment materials takes into consideration different language backgrounds of learners, aiming to be as clear and widely comprehensible as possible.

Mark schemes make it clear how learners will gain marks for their answers. The focus is on evidence of learners' subject knowledge, understanding and skills. Your learners will not usually be penalised for language errors, as long as meaning has clearly been communicated and terminology used appropriately. You can find example candidate responses and other useful support resources on the School Support Hub.

Endorsed resources

In addition to the resources we produce, we endorse resources from a range of publishers. Endorsed resources go through a rigorous quality-assurance process to make sure they closely reflect the curriculum framework or syllabus and are appropriate for Cambridge schools worldwide. Find out more on our website in Endorsed resources.

Professional development

We offer a coherent framework of training and professional development for teachers and school leaders in Cambridge schools. The support we offer includes qualifications, courses and resources focused on the role of language in your classroom and school.

Cambridge International Certificate and Diploma in Teaching Bilingual Learners.

These qualifications have been designed for teachers who teach subjects other than languages who want to help their learners learn curricular subjects through an additional language. Find out more on our website in Teaching Bilingual Learners.

'Language Awareness in Teaching' online training course.

This course helps teachers of subjects other than languages to plan language support into lessons and develop techniques for overcoming language issues. To see when the next course takes place, go to our Events and training calendar.

Online introductory and extension syllabus training for language teachers.

This tutor-guided training helps you become familiar with our syllabuses and curriculum frameworks to build your confidence in teaching towards them. To see which courses and dates are available, go to our Events and training calendar.

Getting Started with Language Awareness.

This interactive online resource introduces and develops key concepts in language awareness. It links research about language awareness with classroom practice and provides new ideas to help teachers get started. Go to *Getting Started with Language Awareness*.

Approaches to Learning and Teaching: A Toolkit for International Teachers.

These subject-specific guides for international teachers supplement teacher learning and provide practical resources for lesson planning. The guides are among a number of publications produced by Cambridge University Press in partnership with Cambridge International. Go to *Approaches to Learning and Teaching*.

Language Awareness in Teaching: A Toolkit for Content and Language Teachers (Tim Chadwick, 2012).

This book helps teachers to develop language awareness to support their learners with the academic language they need to be successful in subjects taught with English as the medium of instruction. Go to *Language Awareness in Teaching*.

Excellence in Bilingual Education: a guide for school principals (Peeter Mehisto, 2012).

This book supports school principals in the implementation of bilingual education and helps schools with an existing bilingual programme to evaluate and improve their practice. Go to *Excellence in Bilingual Education*.

Implementing the Curriculum with Cambridge: A Guide for School Leaders.

This guide helps school principals, school leaders and others responsible for the educational programme in your school to design, develop, implement and evaluate the curriculum where Cambridge programmes and qualifications are followed. It includes sections on approaches to English language development and curriculum models for bilingual and multilingual schools. Go to *Implementing the Curriculum with Cambridge*.



In practice

Here are a few practical tips for supporting your learners' first language and for delivering your subject to learners who are at different stages of acquiring academic English.

Supporting your learners' first language

- Give some lessons in this language. This might be language and/or non-language subjects.
- Provide books and other resources in the library.
- Give access to online resources.
- Set up language clubs at school, so learners from different classes and year groups can meet.
- Set up online links with learners in other schools, communities and countries who share the same language. This might be as a class or for individual learners.
- Offer extra-curricular activities in the language.
- Encourage parents and carers to help children maintain their first language at home, particularly in the case of younger learners.

Teaching learners at different stages of acquiring academic English

- Plan language support to help learners understand and communicate content.
- Highlight and pre-teach content vocabulary.
- Give useful functional language (e.g. 'if..., then...' to describe cause and effect).
- Give glossaries of key words in the first language and second language.

- Provide a language-rich environment by using all four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing).
- Be aware of 'social language' versus 'academic language'.
- Think aloud and describe what you are doing.
- Give visual support using pictures and diagrams.
- Use body language and gestures.
- Give learners time.
- Repeat, say a sentence in a different way and give examples.
- Encourage learners to ask if they don't understand.
- Ask learners how they say the word or sentence in their first language.
- Consider 'translanguaging' – read/listen/watch in one language, discuss/write in another.
- Encourage language-learning skills (e.g. paraphrasing, asking for clarification, dictionary skills).
- Encourage critical thinking about language (e.g. comparing languages, being precise, assessing their own progress in a language).
- Give feedback on language as well as content.
- If a resource is difficult, adapt the resource (e.g. simplify it) or help learners access it (e.g. reading strategies).

Learn more! For more information please visit www.cambridgeinternational.org or contact Customer Services on +44 (0)1223 553554 or email info@cambridgeinternational.org

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