



STILL I RISE

INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

Nairobi

LANGUAGE
POLICY



*We raise passionate, caring and brave leaders
to shape a peaceful tomorrow
through the best quality education.*

*At Still I Rise International School Nairobi
we change the world
one child at a time.*

... Still I Rise International School Nairobi, Mission Statement

“

A different language
is a different vision of life

Federico Fellini

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A SCHOOL IN A SPECIFIC CONTEXT

Still I Rise International School of Nairobi is located in Mathare North, an area neighbouring the Mathare slum in Nairobi, capital city of Kenya.

We welcome students both from the surrounding areas and from other Nairobi's neighbourhoods (Kawanguare, Kayole, Eastleigh).

8 different nationalities are represented in our school: 51% of our students are refugees from Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Somalia, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and South Sudan, 49% are Kenyan, representing all the major ethnic groups residing in the area.

ABOUT THE STUDENTS

The varied backgrounds of our students creates a diversity of cultures and languages.

The Republic of Kenya's official languages are English and Swahili, which are spoken by the majority of the population, but every ethnic group forming the Kenyan people also uses a specific language (Kikuyu, Luo, Luhya, Kamba, Meru, Kalenjin etc.) [1] [2].

The same situation is found among many of the refugees' communities that we welcome. Ethiopians for example, could be Tigrinyas (speaking the Tigrinya language), Somali-Ethiopian (speaking both Ethiopian and Somalian languages), Oromos (speaking the Oromo language) or Amharas (speaking Amharic) [3]. This kind of cultural and linguistic differentiation can be highlighted also among the South Sudanese or the DRC people that are part of our diverse community.

The Sheng slang, a slang originated from Swahili and English, is commonly spoken among the Nairobi's youth and so do our students, both Kenyan and refugees [4].

Thanks to their background, many of our Kenyan national or foreigner students are not just bilingual but trilingual or more. Some refugee students are bilingual by birth but they also have learnt one or more foreign languages (namely English and Swahili), even in informal contexts, before enrolling in our international school.

We recognise that the cultural and linguistic background of our students is extremely powerful and we believe that the acquisition of other languages is an effective resource in order for the students to expand their knowledge and international mindset further and further [5].

ABOUT THE EDUCATIONAL TEAM

Our international School has been founded by an international organisation, operating in different countries. The directors, managers and employees of Still I Rise

come from many different places, creating a mixed and diverse organisational culture and environment.

The human resources assigned to this school comprises both Kenyan nationals and foreigners.

The management team comprises a School Director and a Head of Teaching & Learning who is the MYP Coordinator of the school. Both are Kenyan nationals.

The teaching staff comprises both local and international teachers, with the majority being nationals. Among the non-Kenyans we make no distinction in the country of origin but we promote staff hiring of the same nationalities of our students.

The auxiliary team is done by both local or international volunteers or employees.

The hiring policies implemented by Still I Rise aims to create a multicultural environment centred around an impactful investment in local professionals. This choice has been taken in order to answer legal requirements (teachers operating in the territories of the Republic of Kenya must be registered with the National Teachers Service Commission) and to value the context that hosts the school institution.

FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN KENYA

Kenya is one of the highest scoring countries in Africa on the Human Development Index. Nairobi and Kenya in general are open to foreign investments and to partner with foreign governments and organisations in developing businesses, humanitarian projects and tourism.

French, Spanish, German, Chinese, Arabic and Russian are the most studied languages in the country, while Italian is widely studied in the coastal regions.

The international mindset of Kenya will facilitate and guide the choices of this institution when it comes to promoting foreign languages courses and acquisition.

OUR PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE

The language is a mirror of a culture and cultures are part of the formation of every human being [6].

To understand the people around us and to create fruitful and constructive relationships with them we should have been first trained in decodifying - and indeed respecting - different cultures.

Language acquisition is a powerful way to promote open-mindedness, that makes the creation of effective, global relationships possible.

At the Still I Rise International School of Nairobi we put the human being at the very centre, through an educational method that implements a student-centred approach at all times.

Past, present and future are key factors to rightly understand and define a philosophy of language.

Indeed, we consider the mother tongue(s) as the key to get to know the past of every individual, to understand the cultural heritage that the person is carrying.

We value the language(s) that are spoken in the context that hosts our school, because we strive to have skilled students, able to understand their communities and their environs.

We teach foreign languages to bridge the gap between the local context and the world, opening up future opportunities for the students enrolled in our international school.

For these reasons:

1. We value the mother tongues of all the members of the school community, to discover and promote their personal background and biographies;
2. We believe that by firstly promoting their languages we can achieve and gain a stronger and deeper, mutual, cultural understanding;
3. We teach and value the languages that are spoken in Nairobi to facilitate the inclusion of all students to the communities where they belong;
4. We teach other foreign languages to generate international mindset and curiosity among the members of the school community.

Our philosophy of language will guide our future choices, shaping our curricular and extracurricular offer to the community during the implementation of the IB-MYP program.

The IB MYP describes six phases (see Appendix) or general levels of foreign languages, each one with a specific set of objectives and assessment criteria. Based on their experience of assisting students' MYP work, teachers determine which phase each class will work on. As a new candidate school, this is something we are instituting at the present moment.

Progression throughout the phases is gradual, and it typically takes students more than one year to get through one phase and move on to the next.

THE LANGUAGE POLICY AND THE PEOPLE

This language policy is written to be not only person-centred but sustainable. Students will join, learn with us and graduate. New staff members are joining the team regularly while others will decide to pursue other and different endeavours. Our language policy must be embedded in our school throughout these cycles. It is a living document that evolves together with the community which it strives to define and support.

The actions that the school takes to monitor the context and update this policy are listed in this section.

A VARIABLE CONTEXT: How we act towards change

The language philosophy and policy are rooted in the actual context and in the lives of all the students and staff members that together create the school community.

In order to keep track of the variations of the population and update the policy accordingly we regularly use a precise digital system.

We include information about the places of origin and the languages spoken by every member of our community in the personal bio pages installed in our school management software.

Thanks to the information that we collect through this system we are able to make reasoned choices which will help us be adaptable to change.

ON THE SAME PAGE: A Steering Committee for an effective language policy

In order to implement the language policy it is crucial that the document is prepared and updated by a team of people that can represent the community effectively.

A “Language Philosophy Steering Committee” is a dedicated team created among the school community in order to take care of this policy.

Part of the team are:

- *The Head of Teaching and Learning:* The person that guides the community towards the mission and the values of the school is the key figure to lead the Steering Committee and to develop and maintain the policy.
- *The Chief Schools Officer:* Even if they are not physically present in the school, their role is to take care of the educational sector of the international

organization. They are therefore a part of the committee.

- *The Class Captains:* Among the eight Students who have been elected to represent their homerooms, two are selected to take part in the Steering Committee. They are informed about the policy and they are the ones who make sure that all the students are aware of the document at all times. They are asked to take part in the sessions of editing the document and the collection of advice and suggestions from their classmates.
- *Teachers:* Two teachers are part of the Committee. New educational team members are trained and informed about the policy. Teachers are involved by the Head of Teaching & Learning for any presentation regarding updates of the policy.
- *Parents:* During the enrolment process parents and guardians are informed about the language policy. Explaining the document becomes an opportunity to elaborate more on the reasons behind asking them to declare their places of origin and languages spoken by the family members.

JENGA PAMOJA: defining our philosophy and strengthening the relationships among the community

Once a year we dedicate an entire month of events which let the students learn, understand and appreciate the languages and cultures of all members of the school community.

It was through our first Jenga Pamoja that the steering committee developed our Language Policy. The planning of this edition was done with the support of all the students through the participation in one of the first Homeroom Challenges. All the Homerooms were asked to come up with an action plan to discover and promote the different cultures of our school, imagining realistic and cost-effective events to be organised at school.

Through movie showings, drama, arts exhibitions and social gatherings and events (dinner and lunches, activities, conferences, etc.) all the school community, students, parents and team members were invited to school in order to share more about their own culture and discover others. Through this we established the foundations upon which our philosophy is built. It is a living text: through Jenga Pamoja we update and develop our principles and practices.

Jenga Pamoja is organised by the Language Philosophy Steering Committee and four parents who freely voluntarily join the organisational team. Some events are reserved for the school community and others are opened up to the communities living in the area.

Still I Rise, an international organisation, ensures that the events and their outcomes are made publicly available through the institutional channels of communications of the organisation all over the world.

LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION AND OTHER LANGUAGES

All students are language learners and all teachers are language teachers. No matter their specialised discipline, teachers support language learning. They have carefully read the IB Learner Profile which they model for the students. They also have read and subscribed to the Language Policy.

Core academic vocabulary, unit vocabulary and command terms add to the students' vernacular, whilst the ATL skills ensure communication takes places and is improved through continual, dynamic use. By centering around core global contexts and concepts, students benefit from this spaced repetition of concepts, framed in language.

Language is expected to be used correctly and formal procedures such as referencing and bibliographic styles are adhered to according to our Academic Honesty policy. Portfolios are kept in every discipline, providing frequent writing practice as well academic evidence of language development.

Once the context and the biographies of all members of the school community have been identified and understood, we have developed an action plan to reshape the language framework.

MOTHER TONGUES

As stated in our philosophy, we value the mother tongues of all the members of the school community. Developing a child's mother tongue can accelerate the rate of the acquisition of other languages, support achievement in all subject areas, increase wellbeing, develop self-awareness and expression, and engender an intercultural and international environment.

English is encouraged to be used throughout the school day but there are times where mother tongue language is not only accepted but encouraged. Language B classes of Swahili and French offer an opportunity for the vast majority of our students to study and embrace their mother tongue. There is also Jenga Pamoja and other cultural celebrations where all children are invited to speak their own mother tongue and share it with others in verbal and written form.

LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION

The English language has been identified as the language of instruction of this school. English is the first or second language of the majority of the students and according to Ethnologue, with around 369 millions native speakers it is the 3rd most spoken language in the world [7].

We choose English as the language of instruction because:

- It facilitates the inclusion of the majority of the students or prospective students in our community.
- It is one of the two official languages of the Republic of Kenya that hosts our school.
- It is a vehicle to open up future academic or professional opportunities for our students, in many different places in the world.

Therefore all MYP subjects of our school, with the exception of Language Acquisition, are taught in English and all the policies, documents, communications and materials are primarily written and printed in this language.

Language and Literature is in English.

LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION'S ACQUISITION FOR NON-NATIVE SPEAKERS

How do we promote and facilitate English acquisition among non-native speakers?

Before MYP1

Before enrolling into the IB-MYP Year 1, all students attend a Preparatory Year (PY) designed by Still I Rise. One of the aims of the PY concerning language acquisition is to strengthen the English skills of all students.

Even our Kenyan students, whose second or third language is English, lack a solid and rigorous preparation regarding English grammar, vocabulary and syntax. Language support at home is very limited, as neither English nor formal Swahili are used by parents - within households, a different dialect of Swahili is spoken.

Therefore an entry assessment to the PY is administered to all students, in order to group them according to their level of English to follow the courses offered during the PY.

The assessment is based on a "Cambridge Assessment - English" test and the grading is provided according to the six levels of the European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR A1 to C2).

During the preparatory year and MYP1, students attend differentiated English classes which are built upon many of the tenets of Language Acquisition. But because English is the primary language of IB instruction, these are therefore *not* official classes as concerns the IB, and are merely a supplementary opportunity to bridge the gap between the students' diverse backgrounds and schooling experiences, so that all reach a strong level of English aptitude by the time they are deep into the MYP and beginning their second year of it.

Courses of English Grammar, English Reading and English Writing are offered throughout the 4 terms of the Preparatory Year while a course in English Speaking together with a Personal Research Project class are offered at Term 4.

We have made this choice according to the real English mastery of our students: they normally come with strong oral skills but they lack preparation in the written forms of the language.

All the other subjects taught during the Preparatory Year (Maths, Science, Space and Time, Arts and PHE) are offered in English as well to enhance the learning opportunities for the children.

TEACHING OTHER LANGUAGES

Which other languages do our students learn?

MYP1-4

We also offer further languages starting from MYP Year 1 and beyond.

Students learn two obligatory second languages: Swahili and French.

All Language Acquisition classes commence with all students beginning MYP1 from Phase One. Despite some students having some experience with spoken dialects of Swahili or French, there are fundamental linguistic techniques which must be mastered by all students before we can continue to more advanced language usage. Group work with peer-learning measures means that those students who are more confident in the initial stages of language learning are encouraged to assist their colleagues in a supportive environment.

Swahili (All students)

The national language of Kenya and the first or second language of many of our Kenyan and foreigner students, it is also a lingua franca among the East African area spoken by around 150 million people. The language brings a vast cultural heritage of the widely spread swahili culture. Teaching the Swahili language is an opportunity for the local children to strengthen their understanding of their own culture, while it becomes a great opportunity for inclusion for the refugee children.

French (All students)

We opted to teach French as it is the most commonly spoken foreign language taught in Kenya, the 7th most spoken language in the world by number of speakers and the native or second language of a great number of our refugee students.

PRACTICES OF DIFFERENTIATION

Still I Rise's International School is for all students across all abilities and prior experience in the language of instruction. We therefore apply practical pedagogical techniques in order to differentiate for all learners:

- Visual reinforcement is provided where possible, such as showing videos instead of lone audios with less advanced students.
- Diverse contexts and backgrounds are used as we take students to intellectually push themselves beyond only their current environment. This puts all students in the same boat as they must all be curious, empathise with new perspectives and develop their own transfer skills.
- Hands-on activities such as flash cards, labelling, drawing and physical creation are encouraged in order to provide tangible reference points for new languages.
- Cultures are shared and celebrated together, giving all represented nationalities, ethnicities and languages a voice in the school.
- Students frequently learn collaboratively, bringing together their different linguistic as well as academic capabilities. Where appropriate, students of differing capacities are paired in order to bridge the gaps.
- Built into the daily school routine is flexible time where students are encouraged to seek support from their teachers about areas of difficulty.
- Classrooms and items around the school are labelled in English.

THE LANGUAGE POLICY EVERY DAY

Despite the great effort that is put into providing consistent and multiple options when it comes to curricular opportunities, we believe that the effectiveness of this policy can only be realised through daily and consistent investment in its promotion.

We have defined a range of different actions and events that should recurrently promote the values and the philosophy of this policy among all members of the school community.

THE LIBRARY: A journey to every corner of the world

We consider the school library as a space where many different journeys can begin. Through the books and the resources available, children have the opportunity to discover many different places and times.

The availability of national and international books in our library promotes:

- Different languages; we commit to offer the students books in all the languages that we teach.

- Different cultures and literatures; we commit to bring students closer to many different cultures, including those close to where they grow up and others from around the world, provoking curiosity and a spirit of research among them.

The library is always open during school hours and all students are allowed to access it at all times in order to borrow books or to read and enjoy the resources in place.

Multiple teachers share the role of 'librarian'. It is a shared responsibility to encourage children to read. Among these responsibilities are:

- Advising children on books they may appreciate, and helping them complete at least a book per week.
- Creating catalogues and exhibitions of books, by genres, topics and readers profile.
- Maintaining the library space to facilitate children's access to books.
- Being informed about the Unit Plans that are taught in the school so that they can provide the children with books that make their learning experience more enjoyable.

Reading and writing is at the heart of language development. The ultimate goal is to instil in our students a love of reading. This means being surrounded by passionate teachers and reading at every turn: fiction, factual texts, a range of genres, books, poetry, lyrics, newspapers, magazines, websites, signs, packaging, letters and emails, among other media. Teachers encourage students to make connections between words in different languages.

Students learn to interact with the language which they read. They discuss, analyse and question - in line with the Inquiry-based learning of IB. Creation is constant and habitual: students develop their grammatical and spelling skills by producing a wide variety of notes and completed texts, from presentations and scripts to essays and reports. Tone and audience consideration are key, as are the goals of their piece and its connection within wider units of study. They self-correct much of their work in order to develop their autonomy.

LANGUAGE USAGE RULES

The usage of language between students and teachers and between students and their peers is important as it sets the foundation for language development.

Our protocol on student language usage is setting and role specific.

In Classrooms

- Exclusive usage of Swahili in Swahili class
- Exclusive usage of French in French class

- Exclusive usage of English in every other class
 - The exception to this rule is made when translating a single word or concept to ensure clarity for the student.
- French Friday break
 - During the 15 minute break on Friday, the whole school, students and adults try to speak French 10:50-11:05am

Outside of the classrooms

For STUDENTS:

- Only English is used from Homeroom start until the 5pm bell
 - This means speaking English with teachers and with each other in English in the bathroom, halls, field, Common Hall, dining area etc.
- Outside of this time (breakfast or after 5pm) students may use any language, though if a teacher or staff member opens a conversation in a language, the student is expected to respond in the same language.

For TEACHERS

- Teachers speak exclusively English with students and each other from morning huddle until 5pm.

For AUXILIARY STAFF

- Only English is used between auxiliary staff and students between homeroom and 5pm
- Auxiliary staff can speak any language between each other

STREAMING & SUPPORT

STREAMED CLASSES

In Still I Rise students are separated and grouped into classes based on academic performance, enabling common paces of teaching and learning within each class. One stream is based upon language performance (chiefly English, though second languages also accounted for to a lesser degree).

Though the streaming is done without fanfare and the classes are not named numerically or with letters, there is still usually a general understanding among students of the rough order of performance and many find this an incentive to improve performance. A student typically stays for the full school year in the class to which they're assigned for the full school year, though termly reviews may result in occasional reshuffling.

EXTRA SESSIONS

This is a program that aims at creating time for students to work productively beyond the classroom. It is designed for students struggling in literacy and numeracy.

To better support these students, they are divided into two tiers based on their learning styles and the intensity of support needed from teachers.

Tier One

These are students considered to be lower achievers in either literacy or/and numeracy.

This session is early intervention. Targeted support is offered.

It comprises ten students for Literacy and ten students for Numeracy.

Tier Two

This is composed of students considered to be the lowest achievers in numeracy or/and literacy

This session is intensive intervention. Individualised support is offered. It comprises 4 students for Literacy and 4 students for Numeracy.

Tracking & Progress

Using session reports and some testing, we gather data which tracks the extent of each student's progress every 8 weeks.

If a lack of progress is demonstrated, the education team collaborates with the teacher to look at the frequency, intensity, duration, and delivery of the specific chosen intervention strategies. We then re-evaluate any changes that can be made for the next cycle of support.

If the student continues to demonstrate limited progress toward grade-level expectations and the team feels confident that they have adequately provided support in tier 1, the student may be referred to tier 2 intensive support and/or a referral for special education evaluation outside services.

THE LANGUAGE POLICY THROUGHOUT THE YEAR

In order to make this document effective we schedule recurrent and annual appointments for revision and discussion. All educational staff are involved in this review process. Each year, the team refreshes the policy and our practices through the following three leading questions:

- What should be removed or changed in this policy?
- What do we do in reality that should be added to the policy?
- Is there anything we should do regarding language which is not yet in the policy?
- Which elements of the policy do we not yet do in reality but should?

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APPENDIX

Phases

Emergent Communicator		Capable communicator		Proficient communicator	
Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	Phase 5	Phase 6
Emergent communicators in phase 1 understand and respond to simple phrases, statements and questions. They identify basic messages, facts, opinions, feelings and ideas presented in oral,	Emergent communicators in phase 2 understand and respond to simple spoken and written texts. They identify messages, facts, opinions, feelings and ideas presented in oral, visual and written language,	Capable communicators in phase 3 understand and respond to a limited variety of spoken and written texts. They understand specific information, main ideas and some detail presented in oral, visual and written	Capable communicators in phase 4 understand and respond to a variety of spoken and written texts. They interpret specific information, main ideas and some detail presented in complex oral, visual and written language,	Proficient communicators in phase 5 analyse specific information, ideas, opinions and attitudes presented in oral, visual and written language. They draw conclusions, infer information and recognize	Proficient communicators in phase 6 evaluate the important information, details and ideas presented in spoken, written and visual language in social and academic contexts. They analyse the information, draw

<p>visual and written language, and demonstrate their comprehension in simple oral and written phrases. They convey basic information in a limited range of everyday situations, using oral and written language appropriate to a very limited range of interpersonal and cultural contexts. They begin to be aware that language use is connected to a purpose and an audience.</p>	<p>and demonstrate their comprehension in short oral and written form. They interact to share information in a limited range of familiar situations, using basic language appropriate to a limited range of interpersonal and cultural contexts. They are aware that language varies according to purpose and audience.</p>	<p>language, and demonstrate their comprehension in a limited range of oral and written forms. They engage in conversation and write structured text to express their ideas, opinions and experiences in a range of familiar and some unfamiliar situations, in a limited range of interpersonal and cultural contexts. They understand that they can speak and write in different ways for different purposes and audiences.</p>	<p>draw conclusions and recognize implied opinions and attitudes in texts read and viewed. They engage in conversation and write structured text to share informative and organised ideas on topics of personal interest and global significance, in a range of interpersonal and cultural contexts. They can communicate substantial information containing relevant and developed ideas and justified opinions on events, experiences and some</p>	<p>implied opinions and attitudes. They respond and react to questions and ideas in a range of spoken, visual and written texts. They engage actively in conversations in social and some academic situations to contribute substantial information containing relevant and focused ideas supported by examples and illustrations. They organise information and ideas into a clear and effective structure to express their understanding and</p>	<p>conclusions and make inferences about ideas, opinions and attitudes implied in a wide range of spoken, visual and written texts. They engage actively in conversations in social and academic situations to contribute substantial information and give detailed analysis and explanation. They organise information and ideas logically and effectively to communicate their understanding, opinions and perspectives to a wide range of audiences, and for a</p>
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			<p>concepts explored in class. They identify aspects of format and style, and speak and write with a clear sense of audience and purpose.</p>	<p>opinions on topics of personal interest and global significance . They interpret and are able to adapt aspects of format, register and style of language.</p>	<p>variety of social and academic purposes.</p> <p>(IBO)</p>
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