



Green Hills Academy

“Towards Excellence”

Language Policy

Policy

01 March 2014

This Policy is the result of many years of discussion involving different groups at Green Hills Academy, including (i.) the administration of the school, represented by the IB Coordinator, (ii.) teachers, represented by the heads of the English, French, Kinyarwanda and German departments, (iii.) parents and (iv.) students. Based on the school's “Language Profile”, it describes the underlying “Philosophy” of the Policy and a set of specific “Values and Practices”.

“A language policy needs to be dynamic and flexible so that it can evolve with the changing needs of the school population. Thus it is essential that, when developing a language policy, there are initial and ongoing collaborative reflective practices in place that will monitor change and consider the views and wishes of the whole community.”

This document should be reviewed at least every two years, by a committee constituted as described above. The present version is the result of the first such review.

I. Language Profile of the School

Green Hills Academy is located in Kigali, the capital of Rwanda, and has established itself as the foremost English-medium school in the country. The main languages in Rwanda used to be Kinyarwanda and French, but a government decree in 2009 made English rather than French the main teaching language in secondary education. While Kinyarwanda is the most widely spoken language in the country, and for many people the only language they know, it is not used in post-primary education. Despite some government effort, schools in the country, including Green Hills Academy, have been struggling to find local teachers who are able to teach in English.

The school has a nursery, a primary and a secondary section, and many students have most or all of their education at the school, growing up through the three sections. In grades 9 and 10 students study for the Cambridge IGCSE exams and in grades 11 and 12 for the IB Diploma. The school no longer offers any course leading to the Rwandan National Exams.

The majority of the students at Green Hills Academy is Rwandan, but there is a significant number of foreigners, including both native English-speakers and native speakers of other languages, such as Hindi, German, Chinese and Japanese. Many of the Rwandan students join the school francophone, but after a few years, and certainly by the time they complete the IB Diploma programme, they are practically bi-lingual, and often tri-lingual; for many parents this is in fact a major reason for enrolling their children at Green Hills Academy.



The working language of the school is English, but amongst themselves students often speak French, and sometimes Kinyarwanda. Apart from the requirement that all teaching, other than language teaching, must be in English, the school has no rules concerning the use of particular languages. The students in the IB Diploma programme only very rarely use Kinyarwanda at school, even though the majority are fluent in the language and many speak it at home. When parents come to the school, there always is a staff member at hand who can translate into and from French or Kinyarwanda, and even at public meetings, the most important part of the proceedings is usually translated into at least one of those languages.

Amongst the other schools in the city are two smaller French-speaking schools, the Ecole Belge and the Lycee Antoine St Exupery, which is funded by the French government, and some francophone parents prefer to enrol their children in one of these schools.

II. Philosophy

1. Because of its setting, Green Hills Academy must be prepared to accept and educate students from a wide range of linguistic backgrounds, and to give all of them the greatest possible benefit.
2. Green Hills Academy is an English-medium school, and all students should be enabled to read, write and express their views orally in the academic English appropriate to their age.

At the same time, the school should not be prescriptive about what languages can be used in which situations: the aim is for each student to be comfortable in a range of languages.

Since many of the students' parents are not English-speakers, provision should be made for such parents to be able to discuss matters concerning their child in French or Kinyarwanda.

3. Reading, writing and being able to express oneself orally are such basic skills that all teachers, whatever their subject, have a responsibility to foster them: language teaching should happen across the curriculum.
4. Provision should be made for students for whom English is not their mother tongue to be able to attain as quickly as possible the competence in English to fully benefit from the education at the school.

The school has a responsibility to identify students who may have problems with any of the basic language skills and, in consultation with the student's parents, to develop a specific remedial programme for each such student.

5. Many students join the school from a francophone background, and the school should help students make a gradual transition from French to English as the main teaching language. The school should also enable those students to study French as their mother tongue, including studying literature in French, through all grades up to IB level.

Provisions should also be made, wherever possible, for students whose mother tongue is neither English nor French to study their language as a mother tongue, such as in group 1 of the IB.

6. Green Hills Academy has a strong commitment to the language and culture of Rwanda, and Kinyarwanda-speaking students should have the opportunity to continue to learn to read and write that language and to express their views orally.

The opportunity should be provided for non-speakers of Kinyarwanda to learn it.

7. Every student should study at least one language that is not a mother tongue. Because of the diverse linguistic background of the students, this might be English or French or some foreign language, such as German.

III. Values and Practices

The IB Learner Profile describes the kind of individual whom both the school and the IBO aim to develop, regardless of whether they are studying for the IB. According to the Profile, IB learners strive to be “Communicators: They understand and express ideas and information confidently and creatively in more than one language and in a variety of modes of communication. They work effectively and willingly in collaboration with others.”

What this entails for the way a school educates its students is described more specifically in other IB publications, and in particular in the “Guidelines for Developing a School Language Policy”. In what follows, the school’s values are expressed in the language of that document, and for each value the practices by which the school is presently implementing it are described.

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

Green Hills Academy recognises the central importance of reading and writing as well as the ability to use spoken language well. The Secondary School therefore has a policy of ‘Language Across the Curriculum’, as part of which language teachers have conducted seminars for other teachers to help them understand how they can help students use language more accurately and efficiently.

Amongst the specific policies are (a) the 15-minute ‘reading time’ after break every day, during which each student reads a book they have chosen from an age-appropriate selection, which is provided by the Library and should include books in different languages, or a book they are providing themselves: the book may be in any language but should have some literary value, (b) a ‘word of the week’, which homeroom teachers, whatever their own subject, discuss with their class, and (c) a great emphasis on debate, both as part of classes and as a co-curricular activity.

2. “Students are to learn at least one language in addition to their mother tongue.”

Students join Green Hills Academy with very different linguistic backgrounds, even from within the country, but whatever a student’s background, the school’s programme requires them to continue with or take up a second or even third language.

All pupils at the Primary School have classes in four languages: English, French and Kinyarwanda, and in grades 5 and 6 they also study German.

In the Secondary School,

- in grades 07 and 08, all students study English and French and either Kinyarwanda or German; every student therefore takes at least one language that is not his or her mother tongue;
- for the Cambridge IGCSE, in grades 09 and 10, all students study at least two languages, out of English, French and German; every student therefore takes at least one language that is not his or her mother tongue;
- for the IB Diploma, in grades 11 and 12, students can choose English B, French B, French *ab initio* or German B in group 2, all offered at Higher Level (except the *ab initio* course) and at Standard Level.

In order to develop a coherent teaching strategy across the whole school, a French Language Coordinator has been appointed with direct access to the Head of the School.

3. “The development and maintenance of the mother tongue for all learners is to be supported.”

While the language of instruction at Green Hills Academy is English, it is important to many francophone parents that their children be able to continue studying some of their subjects in French, including French as a first language.

In the Primary School, of the five parallel classes in each grade, three study all their non-language subjects in English, and two study half their subjects in English and the other half in French.

In the Secondary School,

- in grades 07 and 08, students choose to take either English as a first language and all their non-language subjects in English, or French as a first language and also Mathematics in French, but all their other non-language subjects in English. All students also take either Kinyarwanda, which is available both for beginners and for native speakers, or German as a foreign language;
- for the Cambridge IGCSE, all subjects are taught in English, but either English or French can be taken as the first language;
- for the IB Diploma too, all subjects are taught in English, but students take either English or French in group 1, at Higher or Standard Level; most students choose the Language and Literature course, but the Literature course is offered when there is sufficient interest;
- outside the IB programme, one of the options for non-Diploma students is to study Kinyarwanda as an additional subject.

Some of the students at Green Hills Academy have neither English nor French as their first language. In most cases it is their choice to study English in group 1, but the option of studying their first language as a school-supported self-taught subject in group 1 is explained, and the school is ready to support any student in this.

4. “There are practices in place to provide inclusion and equity of access to the IB programme(s) offered by the school for all learners, including those who are learning in a language other than their mother tongue.”

Students with any linguistic background are welcome at Green Hills Academy, and the school makes a great effort to support those students, in particular by arranging for one-on-one tutoring at the school to improve their English to a level where they are able to follow the academic programme.

Since many students at the school, including some of those who are fluent in spoken English or French, are weak in the kind of ‘academic’ English or French that is required, especially at IB level, all teachers, whatever their subject, are also helping students to develop the necessary language skills.

5. “The language of the host country is to be promoted.”

Note: the points relating to Kinyarwanda under 3. above should also be read as part of this section.

Green Hills Academy has a strong commitment to the language and culture of Rwanda. In the Primary School, all students study Kinyarwanda, and in the Secondary School two full-time teachers, who are nationally recognised professionals, give instruction in Rwandan dancing and drumming to interested students in all grades, as well as teaching Kinyarwanda to students in grades 07 and 08.

Although the language of instruction at the school is English, by the clear choice of the students’ parents, there are no rules limiting the use of Kinyarwanda or French amongst students and teachers. It is part of the vision of the school that all students be comfortable in at least two languages.

In view of the reasons that families have to choose Green Hills Academy, and specifically the IB Diploma programme, there does not seem to be any call for the school to offer Kinyarwanda as a group 1 subject. This might not be possibly in any case because the body of literature in the language (or in the closely related Kirundi), including world literature in translation, is too limited.

The CAS programme coordinator has recently started to discuss with IB students the possibility of offering Kinyarwanda as an activity for other students, and perhaps staff, who are not native speakers.

6. “Administrators, teachers, librarians and other school staff will require professional development in the fields of language learning and teaching.”

Note: Any quoted text in this document is taken from the IBO’s “Guidelines for Developing a School Language Policy”.