

Wuxi No. 1 High School

International Department

Language Policy

Wuxi No. 1 High School mission statement

By encouraging students to be curious, diligent, and reflective learners, the International Department of Wuxi No. 1 High School aspires to produce citizens who are aware of both local and global issues, and can realise their potential while acting with integrity and respect. To achieve this aim, the International Department provides a caring and diverse cultural environment that engages students in a progressive and rewarding learning experience to help them evolve along their journey in education and the world.

Philosophy

Both Chinese (which is the first language of the host country, the students, several of the teachers, and the administrators) and English have equal status in the view of the International Department.

However, because students are in the International Department of Wuxi No. 1 High School with the intention of attending a university in an English-speaking country, or a university where English is the medium of instruction, it is the view of the school that the particular focus of language instruction is the acquisition of English. This is not to downplay the native language of students in the programme, but it is to recognise their ultimate goal of a foreign education, and to furnish them with the necessary skills to succeed in their endeavours.

In addition, the centre takes the view that students should not just view English as a means to an end, but also appreciate the social, cultural and educational opportunities which it makes available to them, thus enhancing their role as global citizens of the future.

It is the aim of other stakeholders in the school community to help students realise their goal to the best of their abilities. Children can be encouraged by their parents and counsellors in their language studies, and all subject teachers have a vital role to play in this in the development of students' language acquisition.

School language profile

The languages of teaching and learning within our centre are Chinese and English. The primary language of instruction in most subjects is English, with Chinese being the language of instruction in Chinese A classes. In the centre, English is the main means of communication between Chinese and non-Chinese staff. Among students outside the school, the language of communication is Chinese since this is their first language, and it

is the language of the host country. The use of English is limited to the centre itself. Some students also speak the local language, *Wuxihua* (无锡话), but this has no official standing in China.

Apart from English and Chinese, the community currently has no other language needs. However, there have been students who are speakers of other first languages in the centre, although they have not attended classes here beyond Grade 10. Nonetheless, the International Department recognises that students who are speakers of first languages other than Chinese will require Group 1 courses so that their language needs can also be accommodated. This includes the possibility of offering a Group 2 language other than English.

In Grade 10, all students take IGCSE English as a Second Language. Regardless of which programme they subsequently enter in Grade 11, they all take English B, either as part of the Diploma Programme or as certificate students. This policy was decided by a previous Centre Principal because students did not value English courses that lacked an official final exam. The policy of having all students take English B has proved to be successful since it was first implemented.

As a general English course, English B by and large meets a practical range of students' needs, and certificate students enjoy the same benefits.

Orthographic systems

No particular orthographic system has been promoted in the centre. Students are expected to use standard Mandarin in Chinese classes, and they may choose to employ English or American orthography so long as they use it consistently.

Bibliographical style

Since it was decided to use the bibliographical style of the Modern Languages Association for the Extended Essay, it was decided that this system would also be used for the Theory of Knowledge essay and for internal assessments. It is, however, also acknowledged that Chinese citation practices are different, which is in accordance with subject expectations.

Language use expectations

In the centre, the expectation is that students should use English in classes where subjects are taught in English, and should preferably use it throughout the centre, although it is recognised that this may not be practical for effective communication where proficiency in English varies widely. In Chinese classes, Chinese is the expected language of instruction and communication.

The needs of language learners

Teachers

Language teaching should take the needs of learners into account to enable them to achieve more immediate success in their exams, and future success in higher education. In an environment where most teachers are not native speakers of Chinese, where English is the primary language of instruction, and where students intend to undertake their higher education in English-speaking countries, all teachers, regardless of subject area, are language teachers.

While all teachers in the programme are also language teachers, few of them are likely to have any experience teaching a foreign language. Those who are Chinese citizens have the advantage of having been through the language learning process themselves, and of understanding the needs of students and the issues which they face in another language.

The English Department can play a leading role in helping teachers to incorporate the techniques of language acquisition into lessons. Teachers who have some experience of EFL or ESL teaching, and native speakers of Chinese who teach in the programme can all make contributions to enhances the effectiveness of language learning in the classroom. The aim would be to equip teachers with a way of delivering subject content to students effectively (which aids their understanding) and helping with language acquisition.

The language policy in the centre can develop because of changes in staff, enabling students to benefit from a diverse range of experiences.

The incorporation and development of academic English

While many students have a good degree of proficiency in basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS), their understanding of academic styles of writing and their competence in them is typically very limited.

Because the aim of students is to study at college or university in an English-speaking country, the school recognises that for them to be successful, they need some exposure to the sort of academic language which they are likely to encounter in higher education. Part of this comes from acquiring the specialised vocabulary used in different subject areas, and part of this comes from employing such terminology correctly in context. It is not just sufficient to know a word, but to know how to use it as well. To this end, all teachers can contribute to students' acquisition of English, and to their future success.

The role of the librarian is to look and distribute resources that provide a structure for incorporating techniques in the classroom for developing students' proficiency in academic English.

The English Department can work closely with the librarian in presenting methods through training sessions for teachers to include academic English as a formal, integral part of their lessons.

As has been observed many times before, in the delivery of lessons to non-native speakers of English, all subject teachers are language teachers. Even though the content of such classes is quite distinct from that of an EAL course, academic English is a vital component across different curriculums in different subject areas.

Students

The learning of language, whether it is a first, second, or other language, is a very gradual process. There is no magic bullet for students to acquire proficiency in any language except through exposure to it and practice in it.

Multilingualism among students

As their second language, all students in the centre will continue to do Group 2 English B at either standard or higher level. However, if the situation should arise that a student has a first language other than Chinese, it would be necessary to make arrangements for instruction in their first language, and in some other Group 2 language if the former was English. It is also possible that a student might want Chinese as their Group 2 language, and the policy of the centre would be to ensure such access.

As the first language of students is Chinese, they will obviously be offered Chinese A. As was noted in the Language Profile and the preceding paragraph, steps would have to be taken to accommodate the needs of speakers of other first languages.

Both Group 1 and Group 2 courses are available to all students and can be studied at standard or higher level. It is recognised that students will have different levels of proficiency, whether they choose standard or higher level. A student with a lower level of proficiency may choose higher level to satisfy the requirement of the programme for three subjects to be studied at that level. In this case, the student is likely to require additional support to help them with the more rigorous aspects of the course. Similarly, a student with a high level of proficiency in the Group 2 language, who has already chosen their three higher level subjects, will study it at standard level, but will need to be extended, not just to maintain their linguistic competence, but also to improve it.

Additional support for students

While there are mechanisms in place to identify students who are struggling throughout the programme, the centre does not have the resources to offer additional support through English as an Additional Language (EAL), and it would not have the autonomy to do so without authorisation from other bodies. There are also practical limitations on time, and office space within the building which the centre occupies.

In such cases, parents will be informed, and this is where they can also play a role in the learning process by arranging for support from some external agency.

Students also attend outside training classes for TOEFL, IELTS and SATs. Although these are not programmes for remedial English, it must be acknowledged that these are an additional strand of the language acquisition process from which students gain some benefit.

Parents

Because of their close involvement in their children's lives, Chinese parents can play a vital role in the language learning of their children through their encouragement and through looking into additional support for those whom the centre has identified as requiring it.

Some parents have a high degree of proficiency in English, which is usually transmitted to their children, who are more receptive to instruction in the language. Other parents may know very little English and may not have much interest in the language beyond noting test results.

It is the view of the centre that it is important for parents to understand the nature of language acquisition, and that they need to be aware of the following points:

- Language acquisition
 - is a slow process, with learners taking some time to assimilate new elements of language to the point where they can use them competently.
 - needs to be done on a regular basis, not in bursts, and that proficiency cannot be improved at the last minute.
 - falters if the target language is not practised during holidays and other breaks.
 - comes from reading more widely because this will help students with their understanding and production of language, especially more abstract elements such as style and tone which non-native speakers often find difficult to perceive.
 - does not come from the acquisition of vocabulary *in vacuo* because that does not equate with improved competence.
 - is not something that is confined to books, but also includes speaking and listening (which are the primary modes of perception and production).
 - is not just another hurdle to be overcome, or something of utilitarian benefit.

The language of the host country

All of the students who have been in the programme have been native speakers of Chinese in China. They are, therefore, surrounded by their native language both inside and outside school. Unlike international schools, where students may come from a diverse range of countries and speak a wide variety of other languages, none of which are spoken in the host country where they are being educated, Chinese is promoted throughout the community by dint of it being the dominant language. Many schools in China have signs exhorting students to speak standard Chinese and use standard characters.

This is why the policy of the centre is to promote the use of English. As was noted above, students are seeking to enter higher education in English-speaking countries. Their success in acquiring the language will have an effect on their future success abroad.

Linguistic proficiency on admission to the programme

The policy of the centre is to admit students who should have an adequate proficiency in English to undertake courses principally taught in that language. “Adequate proficiency” roughly equates to an intermediate level (IELTS 4-6). Below this, students are likely to struggle in classes that are not in their mother tongue, and are likely to require extensive additional tuition outside of the programme to achieve academic success.

Assessment of language classes

How the language learning of students is assessed depends on the nature of the course. The assessment of Chinese A will reflect a different set of requirements from English B. Within each course, because of the choices which students have made, they may be assessed at higher or standard level. As was noted above, such choices may result in a disparity between the students’ level of competence in a language and the level at which they study it. However, while students should choose the branch which best suits them, the requirements of the programme may lead them to a less suitable choice.

The assessment of courses in first languages will demand higher order thinking skills and subject knowledge, where the content is significant, and not just a vehicle for the language. Courses in other languages focus on proficiency in a range of skills on the basis of which students are assessed. Although Group 2 languages may be presented through a range of topics, the content is the vehicle for language, but students are not assessed on their knowledge of those topics. Ultimately, in Group 2 languages, students gain some measure of proficiency from their results.

Library and media sources

Over the years, the library and media sources have developed gradually, but it is recognised that because the International Department is within a Chinese state school, its quasi-autonomous status means that it has no independent control over any funds that are meant to be available to it. While the centre would like to boost the number of resources available to students, the supply of such items may be intermittent because they are only acquired once the acquiescence of the main school has been obtained. Even then, supply practices often mean that resources can be unnecessarily difficult to acquire. Perforce, the current language policy acknowledges these issues.

The principal electronic media source for the international department is the online library, Questia, which is available to all students in the programme. For other English resources, students are heavily dependent on the Internet. Here, the librarian in particular plays a role in guiding students in their assessment and evaluation of other materials on line, but subject teachers can also offer advice and guidance.

The future of language learning

For the foreseeable future, the principal Group 1 language will remain Chinese. It is up to the Chinese Department in response to the needs of learners to decide which course might best suit them.

Because students plan to attend universities in English-speaking countries, the Group 2 language will continue to be English. It is possible that some other course might be deemed suitable for students who currently do English B certificate, and there is no reason for them not to switch to it. However, by teaching English B throughout the centre, all students have equal access to the same programme.

Works consulted

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