

# West African College of the Atlantic

## Language policy

Language determines the nature of a human being. The nuances with which we express ourselves reveal the traits of our personalities. Language is a precious gift to be developed.

### Process

The school has a “language committee” consisting of the Director-General as chair, the Deputy-Director, the IB Coordinator, a French teacher, an English teacher, a parent, and two students from different class levels (one from IB and one other) and representing different ethnic groups of Senegal. This committee’s role is to advise the Director-General about the development, maintenance and annual revision of this policy.

We have decided to integrate a “language philosophy” in this document on language policy since the two concepts are inextricably linked. The reader will not, then, find a separate document on “language philosophy”.

The document *Guidelines for developing a school language policy* (2008) was consulted often in the preparation of this policy. The school uses the document *Guidelines for school self-reflection on its language policy* (2012) for annual self-evaluation of the language policy. The following documents have been useful for the school administration and teachers in all classes in our bilingual school:

- *Learning in a language other than mother tongue in IB programmes* (2008)
- *Language and learning in IB programmes* (August 2012 update), in particular the section on pages 32-36 about developing a language policy.

### Linguistic and cultural profile of Senegal

Six languages are recognised as national languages: Wolof, Serère, Pular, Mandingue, Soninké, and Diola. These are official languages for media communication and are taught a little in some schools in the early years only. French remains the official language of the country for government and business.

The principal ethnic groups are: Wolof (the most numerous), Lébous, Serères, Peuls, Toucouleurs, and Diola. Each ethnic group has its own language and 90% of Senegalese speak Wolof.

Islam is the religion of 95% of the population; 4% are Christian (mostly Catholic) and 1% are animist. Some students have studied the Koran in Arabic before coming to the school; those students, therefore, have a varying degree of knowledge of this language which is considered in Senegal as the language of the Muslim religion. Parents have never asked for Arabic to be taught at WACA, so the school does not offer it. Even if there were a demand, the school would have difficulty offering one more languages in addition to the four languages (French, English, Spanish, Latin) which all students study.

### Linguistic and cultural profile of the school

The teaching, administrative and ancillary staff are almost all Senegalese for whom French and Wolof are the main languages. Four native speakers of English work at the school; they are often Americans coming from the United States.

As for the Senegalese teachers, their native language is an African one or French, or both. When the parents already speak different African languages, a child often learns two African languages at home. Even if a child speaks only African languages at home from birth, once he/she arrives at

school at 5 or 6 years old, the compulsory language of instruction is French. In a small number of primary schools an African language may be used for 3 or 4 hours per week. So we consider the native language of the Senegalese teachers to be French, even if that is not strictly the case, as has just been explained.

So, a diversity of cultures and languages is present in the school although 95% of the students are Senegalese.

### **Languages of instruction**

WACA is a bilingual school where certain subjects are taught in English and others in French, always by teachers whose native language is the language of instruction. The distribution of this bilingual teaching is set out below.

Grades 7 and 8: 60% of all lessons is *in English* – English language, maths, science; 40 % of lessons is in French – French language, history, geography, Latin, computer studies, civics education, art, music.

Grades 9, 10, 11: 30% of all lessons are *in English* – English language, history/geography; the remaining subjects, 70%, are taught *in French* including Latin (until the end of Grade 10).

Grades 12 and 13 IB: English A literature represents 20% of all lessons; the remaining subjects, 80%, are taught in French. All students who pass the examinations receive a bilingual IB diploma. French A literature and English A literature are compulsory subjects for students in the IB diploma programme.

In Grade 7 students who are weak or with almost no French receive extra classes outside normal class hours which allows the student to be present at all lessons with the others. It's a French immersion technique. The same applies to students who arrive in Grades 8 to 11 with insufficient knowledge of English. Initially, for all of these students who need to develop in one of the school's vehicular languages, except for the French for beginners course taken outside regular classes, teachers evaluate the content of responses in tests and do not deduct marks for errors of grammar, vocabulary, or pronunciation provided the teacher can understand the meaning of what the student is trying to express orally or in writing.

In Grade 7 the English lessons assume that the student has no knowledge of the language. A student who arrives in Grade 7 who is already a native or near-native speaker of English will need a different challenge during these lessons for at least the first two trimesters. During this period of time and for most of the lessons per week he/she will be given research topics and reading in English to complete with accompanying commentary on the books read. For the other lessons he/she will assist his/her classmates under the direction of the teacher – this gives the student responsibility and recognises his/her linguistic capabilities in English.

We have noticed that students reach a high level of bilingualism en English/French, and are also fluent in Spanish from Grade 9. In addition they have their own African language(s). This is evidence of a linguistic and cultural richness within the school. When they graduate, the IB diploma holders have been congratulated for their level of English by university lecturers/professors who have often thought that our students attended an English-speaking school only.

### **Other languages in the school**

All students learn Latin from Grade 7 to Grade 10. Latin provides much assistance in the learning of French, English and Spanish. Obviously Latin is no longer a spoken language (except in a few

churches) so translation from Latin into French and grammar are part of the pedagogy. Above all the student is brought to recognise the Latin origins of many French, English and Spanish words.

All students learn Spanish from Grade 9 until Grade 11, then the majority continue with Spanish B in the IB diploma programme in Grades 12 and 13. Language learning pedagogy lays emphasis on the four linguistic skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing; translations is not used as part of this pedagogy. The teachers speak in Spanish the whole time in class; this is how the students always do very well in Spanish B. The same technique applies, of course, to the teaching and learning of English and French.

In music classes students sing songs in the languages of the country as indicated above.

Every morning the school day commences with an assembly of all the students which lasts 5 to 10 minutes. Teachers speak to the students in the language in which they teach in, including Spanish. The students express themselves in the language of their choice amongst French, English, and Spanish.

The policy for conversations between students and teachers is that they take place in the language of instruction of the teacher (which means in the native language of the teacher – French or English – except for Spanish).

The school has put into place an initiative whereby for two days in the week the students speak to each other, outside classes, in English, and one day where the students from Grade 9 to Grade 13 speak in Spanish. The other days they can speak in French. This has become a habit which assists the mastery of English and Spanish, in addition to French, and thus true multilingualism.

A Spanish club started in the school in November 2013 where the younger students (Grades 7 and 8) can learn “*canciones*” songs and little poems before beginning their studies of Spanish in Grade 9. Other activities also take place on Saturday mornings in English: theatre (and in French and Spanish), discussion groups, etc.

### **Communication between the teachers and with the parents**

All documents concerning the school (the philosophy, the pedagogical approach, the school rules, school policy documents, the assessment Reports, the “correspondence diary”, etc.) are available in bilingual versions – French and English. The end-of-term reports are printed in both languages and the teachers’ comments are written in the language of instruction for the subject.

The school web site is in English and in French. The school *Newsletter* is published twice a year and has articles and poems by students, former students and teachers in English, French and Spanish. This Newsletter is posted on the school web site.

When a teacher meets with a parent, the teacher adopts the language of the parents with the help of another teacher to translate if necessary; these discussions take place in French most of the time.

Meetings of the whole school staff take place in French and English; meetings between teachers of the same subject areas take place in the language of instruction of those subjects. For interdisciplinary subject meetings, the most convenient language(s) is chosen according to the linguistic capabilities of the participants.

Teachers communicate between themselves in their languages of instruction; several teachers speak both French and English or French and Spanish with ease.

### **Links with other school policies**

This document has links with the following policies:

- School admissions where a knowledge of the two vehicular languages is essential.
- Special needs where students who are native or near native speakers in English in Grade 7 are “gifted” for those lessons; they undertake research and reading assignments for about half of the English lessons per week and assist the teacher and their classmates for the rest of the time – this teaches them responsibility and recognises their linguistic competence at this stage.

### **Communication of this policy**

This policy is available to the whole school community and publicly on the school’s web site

<http://www.waca-school.com/index.php>

One of the agenda items for the meeting with all staff at the beginning of each year is devoted to making sure staff know about this policy. The teachers responsible for each grade level must speak to the students about this policy.

The prefects committee – two representatives elected by their peers (so there are 14 members) – discuss this policy once a year so they can see that the school is aware of the diversity of languages in Senegal and adopts strategies to promote the vehicular languages of WACA and the other languages which are taught.

### **Language policy committee**

A document indicating action points from the November 2013 meeting of this committee is attached.

28.11.2013

Attachment