

Children who speak the languages of India in Hampshire Schools (Tamil)

Overview

Population

India has a population of 1.2 billion (1200 million) according to the last census report in 2011. This is more than the entire population of Europe. There are 22 recognised languages, each distinct with their own script, evolved from the mother language Sanskrit, which is only taught for academic purposes (similar to Latin and European languages). The official languages of India are Hindi and English. Hindi is the most spoken language and is commonly spoken in the North of the country. Hindi is less spoken in the South, but is taught in schools and there is an encompassing exposure to Hindi through films, media and signage. India is culturally diverse and it is hard to generalise based on any one feature; religion, ethnicity, region, language to name a few. This has led to multiple identities amongst Indians e.g. Gujarati, Bengali, Punjabi. However, there are many qualities that do overlap across the population of the semi continent with an unambiguous fixed identity based on nationality as being Indian.

Climate

India has temperate (North), tropical (South) semi arid and arid climates. Generally it can be thought to be tropical with many exceptions. Seasons in India are summer, Monsoon, Post Monsoon and winter. Almost all of the rainfall happens during the Monsoon and Post Monsoon season. The weather is usually predictable and is of less interest in mundane conversations. Temperatures are usually around 30°C but can vary between seasons / regions from -6°C to 40°C.

Education System (for children from India)

Broadly, there are two systems parents have to choose for their children when joining school. A regionally agreed "State Board" curriculum or a nationally agreed "CBSE/ICSE" curriculum.

Education System – main differences and implications for schools

School starting age

Children begin formal school from the age of 3 or 4 (based on their age at the start of the school term) usually around April or June.

- School is usually 2+10+2 (two years of Kindergarten, Year 1 to 10 followed by Plus 1 and Plus 2 in Year 11 and Year 12).
- English letters and numbers are usually taught from Kindergarten before their mother tongue.
- Group activities are not common and children sit at their desks in class. Children are hesitant to speak in front of the class or may not be used to discussing topics with their peers whilst in class.
- Learning is not through play and concepts are taught formally in class.
- Children have three terms, each term ending with tests. The final terms tests decide whether a child is moved to the next year or whether they repeat a whole year.
- Parents can understand simple one to one spoken English or if it is written down. Conversations over the phone may be harder for them to understand.

School day

- School days are usually 7 hours (with a short and long break in the middle) from year 1. Start and end times vary from school to school.
- Parents may not be used to the concept of "learning through play". There is a general perception of not being taught seriously in UK schools held by some parents. Inviting parents to classroom sessions would help increase awareness.
- Schools /classrooms are usually mixed (segregated faith schools may be an exception) but close interaction between boys and girls or separated seating between boys and girls is not uncommon.
- State funded schools have a basic free school meal, mostly to encourage poor families to send children to school.

Curriculum

- Children have a planned, set curriculum per year.
- They often have homework to complete every day.
- Children bring and take home all books and parents get to see everything done in school.

Literacy

- English is not phonetic, but Indian languages are phonetic with vowel sounds and consonant sounds adding up to roughly 50 letters (This varies between languages).
- New words are introduced in each lesson alongside grammar rules and meanings explained using synonyms in English vs translations.
- Cursive writing in English is encouraged with a right side tilt.
- All Indian languages except Urdu are written from left to right.
- Some Indian script is written wholly beneath the line.
- Noun, verb and connective placements in sentences are different from English and children who are bilingual often need to restructure a sentence if asked to translate.
- Newly arrived junior school children often try direct translations which appear as badly worded, but understandable sentences often in the wrong tense.
- Independent writing with chronologically arranged ideas and detailed character descriptions may not be familiar to newly arrived children from the subcontinent.

Maths

- Schools do not use number lines, counters and Numicon.
- For applied mathematics, where children have to derive mathematical sentences based on the text, "plus", "minus", "times" and "divided by" are used in almost all cases. "Add" and "take away" may be unfamiliar words.
- Pupils are competent counting in English, sometimes better than they can in their mother tongue but understanding of quantity and place values may not reflect their knowledge of the number sequence memorised.
- Longer numbers may be expressed as "Lakhs" (vs one hundred thousand; 1, 00,000) and "Crores" (ten million; 1,00,00,000) *Notice the comma placements.*

Cultural sensitivities

- UK schools often include Indian cultural events as part of the curriculum. These are limited to the faith/region children are from. It may be a new concept despite being labelled as an Indian custom.
- Interventions from school may need to be explained delicately as parents may assume their child is underachieving.
- Parental expectations often run high and discussing progress can influence parental involvement/support from home.

Parental involvement and attendance in India:

- A minimum pass level is mandatory to progress to a higher class and the onus rests on parent vs schools to ensure this is achieved. Lack of attendance is less of a problem in India (Drop outs and attendance can be a problem in deprived areas because of socioeconomic reasons).
- Attendance issues for Indian children in the UK may reflect the absence of wider family to fall back on, strong home ties of parents, support during maternity, extended family woes etc.
- Private tuition and extracurricular lessons in arts and crafts /religious education etc. are not uncommon.
- Parent-teacher meeting sessions happen once a year. Inviting a parent to school apart from for these events can be concerning for both the parent and the child, if not dealt with delicately.
- School talent shows and sporting events are widely regarded as a platform to promote talent and are conducted with much pomp and show. Children are encouraged by schools and parents to advance to higher tier competitions. Exam boards/Universities give grace marks/admission quotas to pupils who secure prizes in District/State/National level competitions.

Language differences that may cause problems with Literacy:

Alphabet/Script

- Indian languages have about 50 letters and are phonetic. English is not taught phonetically; children are taught the letter names only.
- Word order is different from English.
- There are no capital letters.

Spellings

- Spelling mistakes are mostly the wrong choice of letter, based on levels of stress applied to a sound. Mixing formal and informal words can also cause misspelt words.

Auxiliaries/negatives/questions/tenses

- Auxiliaries are usually added on to the verb.
- Negatives can be a conjoint word (usually preceding) or after the clause as a stand-alone negative converting the positive to a negative.
- Questions usually have a distinct intonation style that varies between languages. “May I” and “Can I” can be replaced by intonations. A directly translated question can come across rude.
- Tenses are often made out with specific tweaks to the verb, sometimes entirely based on the context of the conversation.

Modal verbs

- Tweaked verb: must/should/may do are written “do” (must), “do” (should) “do” (may). Subtle differences between Indian languages exist.

Word order

- Word order is different from English for Indian languages.
- “I went to the park yesterday” when translated would read “I yesterday park go” (go is tweaked to fit the tense).
- “Are people gathering there?” is written “There people gathering (are)?” “Are” is usually a tweak of the verb and the tone/punctuation makes it a question. There are variations between Indian languages as well.

Gender/Articles

- Some Indian languages only have a male and female gender eg Hindi. Inanimate objects can have a male or female preference. Other Indian languages have a neutral gender too.

Vocabulary

- English words are often written in Indian script; this is called ‘transliteration’ (a way of adapting to cultural influxes).
- Translations for an English word, something as common as a footpath, can be a highly advanced word (literally meaning “ that which people walk on” often using joint, higher order synonyms).

Useful classroom words (Tamil)

Greetings

Welcome நல்வரவு **nal va ra vu**
Hello வணக்கம் **van a kam**

Thank you நன்றி, **nan dri** ThanksPlease (tweaked words)Goodbye (formal) **same as hello** Bye (casual) **gestured**

Morning **same as hello**
Afternoon **same as hello**
Are you OK? **நல்ல இருக்கீர்களா** nalla iru keergala

School Routine

English / English word written in Indian scripts.

Playground – **Ground/ playground**
School office - **Office**
Hall – **Hall / big room**
School- School பள்ளிக்கூடம் **palli**

Assembly - **assembly**

Toilets- **toilet**

School field - **ground**

Classroom – **class**

Registration – **to register**

Computer suite- **computer room**

Tutor group (class) - **class teacher**

Break time - **break**

இடைவேளை, **E dai ve lai**

Outside – வெளியே **veliye**

Inside - உள்ளே **uil lae**

Fire drill – if fire, தீ வண்டி **thee van**

Packed lunch – **home lunch**

School dinner- **school lunch**

School nurse – **school nurse**

First aid room- **first aid**

Staff room- **teachers’ room**

Lunchtime - **lunch**

School uniform - **uniform**

Library- நூலகம் **noo la gam**

Book- book புத்தகம் **Pu tha gam**

Copy- **copy**

Label- **label**

Colour- நிறம் **ni rum** (not colouring)

Pen – பேனா **pay na**

Pencil - **pencil**

Yes – **gestured**

No - **gestured**

Days of the week

Monday திங்கள்கிழமை
Tuesday செவாய்க்கிழமை
Wednesday புதன்கிழமை
Thursday வியாழக்கிழமை
Friday வெள்ளிக்கிழமை
Weekend சனி ஞாயிறு (Sat-Sun)

Numbers

Zero பூஜ்யம்
One ஒன்று
Two இருண்டு 20 இருப்பது
Three மூன்று 30 முப்பது
Four நான்கு 40 நாப்பது
Five ஐந்து 50 ஐம்பது
Six ஆறு 60 அறுவது
Seven ஏழு 70 எழுபது
Eight எட்டு 80 எண்பது
Nine ஒன்பது 90 தொன்னூறு
Ten பத்து 100 நூறு

How many? எவ்வளவு (**ev va la vu**)

Instructions/Questions

புரிந்ததா?/புரிஞ்சுதா? **Understand?** (**pu rin dhadha**)

ஸ்கூல் படிச்சிருக்கா? **Like School?**

School (pidi chi ruka)

உடும்பு சரியாய் இருக்க? **Ask if “sick” (Udambu seri ya iruka)**

வீட்டுக்கு போகனுமா? **Do you want to go home?** (**veet iku ponuma**)

ஏதாவது பிரச்சினை? **Any problems?**

(**edhav vadhu prachanai ya**)

யாரு? **Who (yaaru)**எதற்கு? எதுக்காக?

For what? (edhar ku)

இங்கு வா **Come here (ingu vaa)**

பிசியா? **Hungry? (pasi ya)**

அழாதே **Don’t cry (azha they)**

பயமா இருக்கா? **Are you afraid?**

(**bayama iru ka**)

உனக்கு தெரியுமா? **Do you know?**

(**unakku theri yuma**)

நீ போகலாம் **You can go (nee po ga laam)**