

The Global Promotion of the Portuguese Language

Introduction

Much of Portugal's soft power and global influence stems from the extensive reach of the Portuguese language. At present, it is the fifth most spoken language in the world and an official language of Portugal, Brazil, Angola, Cabo Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, São Tomé and Príncipe and East Timor. Entities such as the Camões Institute for Cooperation and Language and the Community of Portuguese Language Countries support the promotion and dissemination of the Portuguese language.

The Camões Institute for Co-operation and Language (Camões, I.P.)

The Camões Institute is a Portuguese public institution under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It mainly promotes the Portuguese language through Portuguese Cultural Centres across the globe¹. These spaces host and support cultural initiatives² and offer courses in the Portuguese language. In collaboration with the Institute for Educational Assessment (IAVE), Camões, I.P. has developed certification exams in Portuguese as a heritage language and Portuguese as a foreign language for children and young people. Camões, I.P. has also increased the scope of the current Portuguese as a Foreign Language Assessment and Certification System (CAPLE). Camões, I.P. is working with a consortium of six Portuguese universities, Aveiro, Coimbra (FLUC), Lisbon (FLUL), Minho, NOVA de Lisboa (FCSH), and Porto (FLUP), to provide online Portuguese language summer courses with scholarships available for accessibility purposes. The Camões Virtual Centre offers e-learning courses at various levels for foreign students all year round. Camões, I.P. also aims to implement the Portuguese language into the curricula of as many countries as possible, where Portuguese is not an official language. For example, right now, Portuguese is in the curriculum in Senegal, Namibia and Uruguay.³

Learning Portuguese as a foreign language is also incentivised through scholarships provided by the institute to foreign students living abroad who have the intention of improving their language skills. Researchers specialising in Portuguese language and culture for master's or doctoral degrees in Portuguese universities can also obtain funding through Camões, I.P.⁴

The Virtual Centre supports teacher training of Portuguese language teachers abroad, both as Portuguese as a Foreign Language (PLE) and as Portuguese as a Second Language. Continuous training is offered for translators and interpreters as well as specialised language training for future professionals across fields like medicine, international relations, economics and law.

¹ The Camões Institute for Co-operation and Language. (2016). Portuguese Language Centres (by country).

² The Camões Institute for Co-operation and Language. (2022). RELATÓRIO DE ATIVIDADES E AUTOAVALIAÇÃO.

³ The Camões Institute for Co-operation and Language. (2017). Missão e prioridades do Instituto Camões.

⁴ The Camões Institute for Co-operation and Language. (2016). Scholarship Students.

The Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP)

CPLP is a multilateral forum made up of Portuguese-speaking countries, including Angola, Brazil, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Portugal, and São Tomé e Príncipe. They published a plan for the promotion and dissemination of the Portuguese language 2021-2026. Policies included increased circulation of texts written by Portuguese-speaking authors, increased Portuguese presence in international book fairs and increased festivals, exhibitions and events in countries that are not members of the CPLP. More libraries and digital collections should be created for the cultural preservation of Portuguese heritage, and there should be increased establishment of networks of school libraries and public libraries with Portuguese material. Additionally, the Portuguese language should become more present in international organisations and bodies such as the International Labour Organisation and the World Health Organisation. Furthermore, May 5th should be recognised as World Portuguese Language Day by UNESCO.⁵

UK focus

The Camões Institute supports and promotes the teaching of the Portuguese language through its centres in Edinburgh, Leeds, Newcastle, Oxford, and London⁶. The Camões Institute also supports The Anglo-Portuguese School of London (APSoL), a bilingual school also supported by the Portuguese Embassy in London and the Portuguese Ministry of Education.⁷

The objective of the APPG on modern languages is to increase language learning across the UK. One way they aim to do this is by increasing the accessibility of international visits and exchanges in UK schools by lowering the costs of paperwork. They want to re-establish group-travel paperwork with a new group passport scheme as well as re-introduce the visa waiver form, which previously enabled young people who are not EU nationals to travel without a visa to EU member states without a visa on school trips. They also want to simplify the process of applying for funding for opportunities abroad (Turing).⁸

Their call for a National Recovery Programme focuses on routine MFL inspections in all stages of education and a sufficient supply of trained MFL teachers at primary and secondary; for those studying MFL degrees, the UK is a full participant in Erasmus+, facilitating study abroad. Additionally, the government is to reward companies that promote language training through tax incentives, and language training should also be incorporated into other vocational training programmes.⁹

⁵ The Community of Portuguese Language Countries. (2021). Plano Operacional para a Promoção e Difusão da Língua Portuguesa (2021 – 2026).

⁶ The Camões Institute for Co-operation and Language. (2016). Portuguese Language Centres available in the United Kingdom.

⁷ Anglo Portuguese School of London. (2024). School Governance - Anglo Portuguese School of London.

⁸ All-Party Parliamentary Group on Modern Languages. (2024). The APPG on Modern Languages calls for an urgent plan of action to safeguard accessibility to international visits and exchanges in all schools.

⁹ All-Party Parliamentary Group on Modern Languages. (2019). MPs and Peers in urgent call for a National Recovery Programme to revolutionise language skills in the UK.

The documents from APPG on Modern Languages lack clarity on which languages are being focused on. But, the British Council notes that French and Spanish continue to be the most taught languages in the UK; however, there is a Heritage Programme which allows UK students from a Portuguese background to access examinations in Portuguese and obtain GCSE and A-Level qualifications.¹⁰

Why is this issue important?

According to UNESCO, Portuguese is the most spoken language in the Southern Hemisphere, and it is a key language of global communication with an ever-growing presence. Policies supporting the global promotion of the Portuguese language are important for the diplomatic and economic power of Lusophone countries.¹¹

In regard to its importance in the UK, the APPG on Modern Languages asserts that we are currently in a language crisis. The promotion of foreign languages, including Portuguese, is essential in order to build an export-led economy, assert the UK's global leadership through international relations, security, and soft power and reduce dependence on foreign recruitment for language expertise.

Recommendation for taking this work forward

One problem identified in this report is the lack of focus on the Portuguese language, specifically in UK policies. There should be an aim to integrate the Portuguese language into the British curriculum, an engagement with the British Council in expanding Portuguese language resources and visibility in the UK, and an increase in support and access to GCSEs and A-Levels in Portuguese, specifically for heritage speakers. The Camões Institute could increase its UK presence, beyond Edinburgh, Leeds, Newcastle, Oxford and London, as well as its online presence.

¹⁰ British Council. (2024). Language Trends England 2024.

¹¹ UNESCO. (2022). World Portuguese Language Day.

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Stakeholders

The Camões Institute for Co-operation and Language (Camões, I.P.)
The Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP)
International Portuguese Language Institute (IILP)
The International Association of Lusitanists
The European Federation of Institutions National Language (EFNIL)
The Association of Universities of Portuguese Language
The American Councils for International Education
UNESCO
UNRIC
UNICEF
Portuguese Embassy, London
British Council
The United Nations
Foreign office UK
European Union National Institute for Culture
APPG on Modern Languages
APPG Portugal
SPEAK social Lisbon
The Foundation Antonio Pargana
Jorge Álvares Foundation
Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation