TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

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Language and Literacy

Two linguistic systems coexist in Trinidad and Tobago: English and English-based Creole. English, the country's official language, is the language of instruction and assessment at schools and universities. English also is the language of print and electronic media, the courts, and official documents. English typically is used in formal situations and is central to national curricula at every level of preprimary, primary, and secondary school.[1]

English-based Creole is the most commonly spoken language in Trinidad and Tobago, and is the first language of much of the country's population. The vocabulary of English Creole draws largely from English with influence from West African languages, French, Spanish, and Bhojpuri (an Indo-Aryan language spoken in parts of India and Nepal). The structure, pronunciation, and grammar of English Creole are distinct from English.

Because Spanish is recognized as the country's first official foreign language, it is included in the primary and secondary school curricula. French is offered at some secondary schools, and Hindi is an integral part of the curriculum in Hindu primary schools and some Hindu secondary schools. The curricula in some Muslim primary schools includes Quranic Arabic.

Heritage languages from Africa and India—including Arabic, Hindi, Sanskrit, and Yoruba—are used primarily during religious ceremonies. Trinidad and Tobago's rich oral tradition dates to the period of slavery and indentured servitude, and is expressed through communication forms such as folk storytelling, Quranic recitation, *panchayat*, "talk tent," "robber talk," *extempo*, calypso, and *rapso*.[a] These traditions manifest the richness of the Creole language.[2]

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[a] *Panchayat* refers to a system of assistance that involved five persons from the village who would help solve problems; it came to Trinidad during East Indian indentureship. Currently, it can be taken to mean giving someone assistance. "Talk tent" refers to a forum in which local storytellers and personalities dressed as traditional Carnival folk characters and comedians participate, to give an entertaining but enlightening portrayal of aspects of life in Trinidad and Tobago. The term "robber talk" is derived from the speech used by the Midnight Robber Carnival character, who is known for his monologues expressing empty threats. *Extempo* refers to the art of impromptu composition of Calypso; the artiste is given the topic a few minutes before he or she is expected to perform. Calypso is a type of folk song originally from Trinidad but also sung elsewhere in the Caribbean. The subject of a calypso text usually is witty and satiric, and the lyric often incorporates Spanish, Creole, and African phrases. *Rapso* is a unique style of street poetry from Trinidad and Tobago that originated in the 1970s; it was created to relate to the everyday experiences of people.

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The Ministry of Education prioritizes literacy education by emphasizing students' literacy development while bridging learning gaps. The coexistence of two dialects has an impact on teaching and learning, and contributes to the literacy challenge. Thus, the Ministry focuses on building content knowledge and pedagogical skills among teachers and on deploying staff with specialized training in reading instruction. Literacy coaching was implemented at schools on academic watch from 2014 to 2016 to support the implementation of the primary school curriculum. Among other things, these coaches modeled effective literacy practices and organized on-site workshops specifically targeting reading instruction.

Libraries have long been partners in literacy development in Trinidad and Tobago. The National Library and Information System Authority operates the library system, managing all libraries in the public sector (e.g., public, special, and school libraries). Students and parents have access to reading materials through a variety of services including digital, educational, heritage, mobile, and special education libraries.[3] The National Library and Information System Authority has collaborated with the Ministry of Education, the Trinidad and Tobago National Commission for UNESCO, and corporate sponsors to host projects. Librarians in the public system organize "readathons," readings by visiting authors, storytelling, and other activities to generate interest in reading. Libraries have been established in most schools.

Overview of the Education System

The education system in Trinidad and Tobago includes publicly and privately funded schools. The country's education system falls mainly under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education. The Tobago House of Assembly and the Ministry of Education collaborate to ensure standardized practices in the education system on the island of Tobago.

The education system comprises five levels: preprimary, primary, secondary, postsecondary (including advanced proficiency, technical, and vocational programs), and tertiary (postsecondary education). The Ministry of Education is the administrative authority for preprimary through tertiary education. Education is compulsory for students ages 5 to 16. Preprimary education, which is not compulsory, at Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) centers and nursery schools is provided by government schools, government assisted schools, and private individuals. The Ministry of Education is working toward the goal of universal high quality early childhood care and education through the provision of additional ECCE facilities via public and private partnerships and ongoing construction of new centers in collaboration with the Inter-American Development Bank. The Ministry has established a preprimary education curriculum, and monitors all aspects of this level's educational and developmental roles. The Ministry monitors all schools over which it has direct control, with policy being prepared to encompass all early childhood care programs.[4]
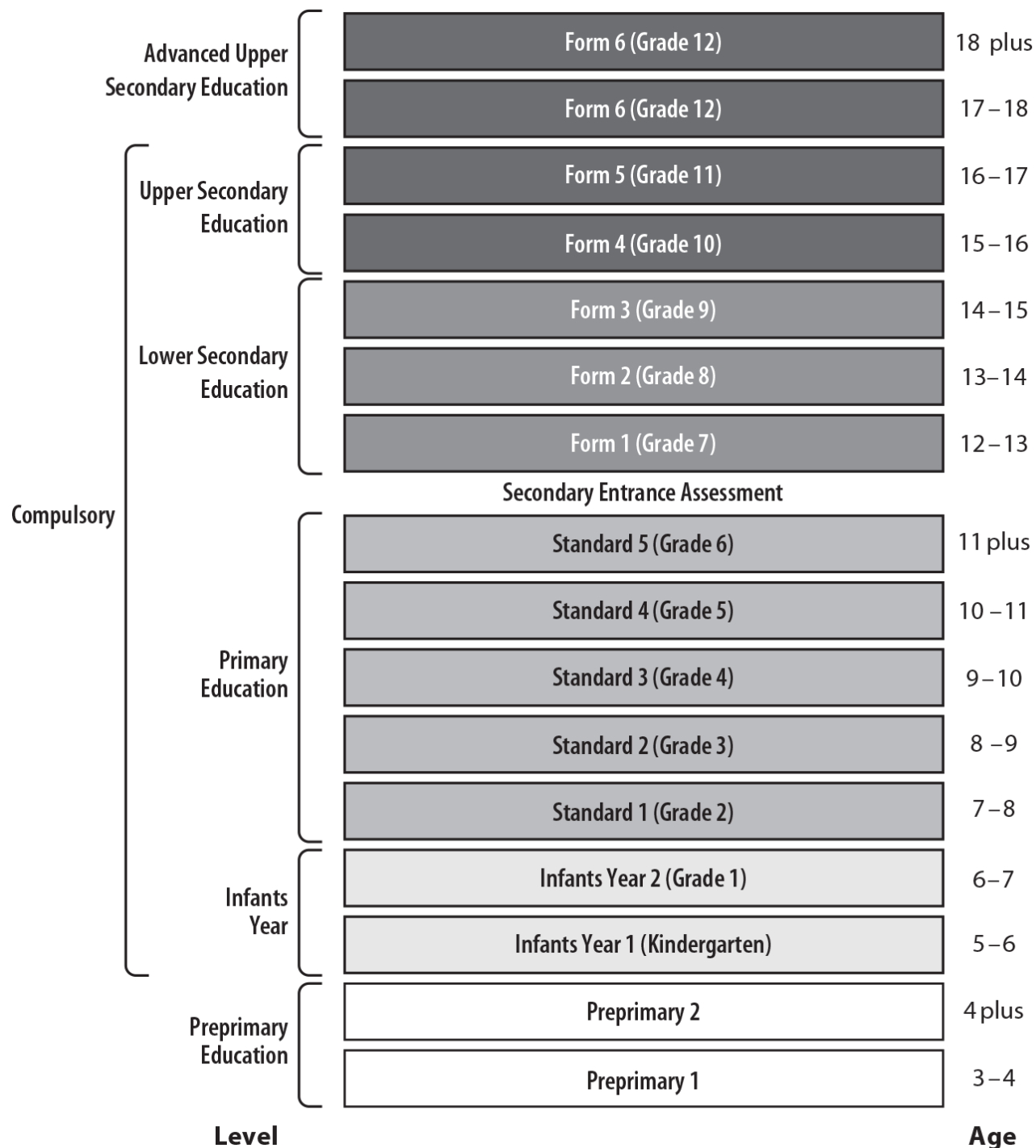
Preprimary education lasts two years, with children typically entering the program at age 3. The curriculum at this level involves readiness for learning, play, music, sound, movement, visual creativity, and expression. Some programs focus on emerging written language acquisition and reading. There are 211 public centers in Trinidad and Tobago, including 152 government centers and 59 Service Volunteered for All centers. There are 904 private ECCE centers, and a company called Education Facilities Company Limited has opened 80 newly constructed ECCE centers, with an additional 26 centers yet to be constructed. The Ministry of Education's planning division is developing ECCE positions and policies to help further the goal of universal high quality ECCE centers.

Primary education begins with a two year course termed Infant Years 1 to 2 (kindergarten to Grade 1) for students ages 5 to 6. Students continue into Standards 1 to 5 (Grades 2 to 6) at ages 7 to 11 plus. Curriculum guides contain content specifications for English Language Arts, Mathematics, Social Studies, Science, Agricultural Science, Physical Education and Health, Spanish, Values, Character and Citizen Education, and Visual and Performing Arts (which include visual arts, music, dance, and drama). Religious instruction is common among denominational schools. Selected primary schools also have piloted Spanish. Primary education culminates in the Secondary Entrance Assessment, a selection mechanism for passage into secondary education.

Secondary education offers a great degree of program variety, with a wide range of subject choices for students ages 12 to 18 plus. Lower secondary education comprises Forms 1 to 3 (Grades 7 to 9) for students ages 12 to 14. Upper secondary education comprises Forms 4 to 5 (Grades 10 to 11) for students ages 15 to 16. Advanced level schools provide a two year program termed Form 6 (Grade 12) for students ages 17 to 18 plus. Secondary schools also offer continuation classes at the upper secondary level (Forms 4 to 5; Grades 10 to 11) for students who must repeat or complete courses. Exhibit 1 presents the education levels in Trinidad and Tobago from the preprimary through advanced secondary levels.

Exhibit 1: Overview of Preprimary Through Secondary Education in Trinidad and Tobago[5]

Level		Stage	Age
Advanced Upper Secondary Education		Form 6 (Grade 12)	18 plus
		Form 6 (Grade 12)	17 – 18
Upper Secondary Education		Form 5 (Grade 11)	16 – 17
		Form 4 (Grade 10)	15 – 16
Lower Secondary Education		Form 3 (Grade 9)	14 – 15
		Form 2 (Grade 8)	13 – 14
		Form 1 (Grade 7)	12 – 13
		Secondary Entrance Assessment	
Primary Education		Standard 5 (Grade 6)	11 plus
		Standard 4 (Grade 5)	10 – 11
		Standard 3 (Grade 4)	9 – 10
		Standard 2 (Grade 3)	8 – 9
		Standard 1 (Grade 2)	7 – 8
Infants Year		Infants Year 2 (Grade 1)	6 – 7
		Infants Year 1 (Kindergarten)	5 – 6
Preprimary Education		Preprimary 2	4 plus
		Preprimary 1	3 – 4

Compulsory spans from Infants Year through Lower Secondary Education.

Level   **Age**

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In addition to public secondary and advanced level schools, several youth development and apprenticeship centers not managed by the Ministry of Education offer technical and vocational education. Institutions including the University of the West Indies, the University of the Southern Caribbean, and the University of Trinidad and Tobago offer various education degree and training programs at the tertiary level. Foreign universities collaborate with local institutions to provide additional tertiary education options. Education continues to be high on the national agenda and has received a high proportion of the government's budgetary allocation over the years. During the 2014–2015 fiscal year, approximately 8.621 billion Trinidad and Tobago dollars were allocated to education and training.[6]

Language/Reading Curriculum in the Fourth Grade

Reading Policy

The national English language arts curriculum for primary schools considers reading to be a core skill that must be taught systematically with consideration of students' differing abilities and learning rates. As students progress through school, their acquisition of reading skills is supported by their writing, speaking, and listening skills. Advocating for the use of reading materials that are culturally relevant and age appropriate, the goals of the reading curriculum are to allow students to understand and process oral, written, and multimodal texts; help them become strategic and critical thinkers; empower them to read independently; and motivate them to use literacy as a tool for lifelong learning.

Summary of National Curriculum

The English language arts program values literary appreciation as a means to enhance students' behavior, emotions, attitudes, and social values. In appreciating literature from various cultures, the learner gains pleasure and valuable insights that serve to build appreciation. Therefore, the curriculum acknowledges the role of literature in broadening students' knowledge base, strengthening their critical thinking skills, and developing their awareness of new words and language itself. Teachers are encouraged to read aloud to students in English works of literature from a variety of cultures.

Teachers, Teacher Education, and Professional Development

Teacher Education Specific to Reading

Prospective teachers in Trinidad and Tobago must earn a bachelor's degree in education to enter the educational system. The University of the West Indies, the University of Trinidad and Tobago, and the University of the Southern Caribbean offer graduate programs in education resulting in a bachelor's degree. In addition to courses in reading instruction, these programs offer classes on educational theory, curriculum studies, and subject area content, with special education as an additional option.

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Requirements for Ongoing Professional Development in Reading for Teachers

The Curriculum Planning and Development division of the Ministry of Education conducts ongoing national workshops based on the needs determined from data on student performance in English language arts. The Ministry encourages teachers to participate in these training sessions and attend subject-specific workshops sponsored by stakeholders. Curriculum officers conduct needs assessment and provide on-site training in reading throughout educational districts as needed.

Reading Instruction in the Primary Grades

The academic year consists of three 13-week terms that run from September to early July. The number of school days ranges from 185 to 195 per year. At the primary level, approximately 25 percent of instructional time per week is allocated to reading, writing, listening, speaking, and viewing instruction in English language arts. Teachers devote 15 percent to 20 percent of this time to the mandatory skill components of reading, phonological awareness, phonics, comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency.

An average class session at the upper primary level (Grades 5 to 6; Standards 4 to 5) lasts 40 to 50 minutes. At the start of Infant Year 1 (kindergarten), however, a lesson may last 15 minutes. Students in Infant Year 1 receive approximately 10 to 15 lessons per week in language instruction, and those in Grades 2 to 6 (Standards 1 to 5) receive 15 to 20 lessons per week in language instruction.

Instructional Materials

While Trinidad and Tobago's Ministry of Education has not mandated specific materials for reading instruction at the primary level, it provides instructional materials including texts and manipulatives such as puzzles, games, globes, stickers, and Reading Rods kits (color-coded cubes with interlocking letters). The Ministry of Education supplies textbooks to schools based on the school's request. In 2016, the Ministry established the Learning Materials Evaluation Committee to review the country's national textbook policy.

Schools may select other reading materials to supplement their reading programs; however, official approval of other textbooks must be obtained from experts at the Ministry of Education. In some schools, computer use related to reading complements daily reading instruction. Libraries continue to play an important role in reading education in Trinidad and Tobago, with many schools and individual classrooms having their own collections from which students may select and borrow books.

Use of Technology

The national primary school curriculum of Trinidad and Tobago, implemented in 2013, highlights the use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) tools in schools to support teaching and learning. Teachers are expected to use appropriate technology to enhance the reading experience of young children. Although some teachers use videos, computer software, and interactive whiteboards, the use of ICT tools in primary schools—including during reading instruction—still is limited. While secondary schools usually have computer laboratories and classrooms containing computers, few

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primary schools are sufficiently equipped to offer efficient electronic learning environments. Teacher training, availability of ICT tools, and Internet access are major factors affecting the use of technology in reading instruction. Use of traditional print media remains popular.

Role of Reading Specialists

Trinidad and Tobago's Ministry of Education does not assign reading specialists to primary schools; rather, classroom teachers are responsible for teaching reading throughout the seven years of primary education. Teachers also are responsible for assisting students who experience reading difficulties. However, literacy coaches worked with teachers in selected primary schools that were on academic watch in support of implementation of the new English language arts curriculum from 2014 to 2016, by building teachers' pedagogical skills and content knowledge in reading instruction. The literacy coaches diagnosed and planned interventions for students experiencing reading difficulties. This program may be expanded.

Second Language Instruction

The national English language arts curriculum for the primary level in Trinidad and Tobago is designed to support students throughout the process of acquiring, developing, and mastering requisite skills and knowledge for effective communication. The coexistence of two major linguistic systems in the country—English Creole and Standard English—poses problems for some learners. The English language arts curriculum explicitly recognizes this challenge and seeks to address it through a student centered learning approach that respects students' linguistic experiences. The language students bring to the classroom—their first language—is a tool for building their awareness of the English language. The English language arts program reflects awareness of both English Creole and Standard English as major linguistic systems. The teaching of grammar is central to students' understanding of the structures of the languages and the relationship between them.

Accommodation Policies for Instruction and Testing

The use of differentiated instruction is another foundational pillar in Trinidad and Tobago's new primary curricula, implemented in 2013. Teachers are encouraged to differentiate in terms of content, process, product, and the learning environment to accommodate students' diverse interests, abilities, and learning styles. Primary schools may additionally be supported by the Ministry of Education's Student Support Services division, which offers professional assistance to students with special needs through a referral system. Through this department, students may obtain accommodations for assessments (e.g., extra time, Braille and large print test materials, testing in separate rooms with a test administrator) during national written examinations at the primary level.

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Students with Reading Difficulties
Diagnostic Testing

The Ministry of Education collaborates with the Ministry of Health to manage a program of auditory and visual screening for all students entering primary school. The Ministry of Education additionally has taken steps to strengthen its Student Support Services Division, which collaborates with schools to guide and support schools with the goal of improving the performance of students at all grade levels. Schools identified as "underperforming" receive support from the Ministries. Whereas screening for reading difficulties may be carried out by all primary schools, the Student Support Services Division uses standardized screening tests to identify students with special needs. Special education teachers also use diagnostic tests to identify challenges to learning and areas for special attention, allowing them to provide individual instruction and offer professional services to students with reading difficulties.

Instruction for Children with Reading Difficulties

Throughout primary education, students with reading difficulties are integrated into classes under the supervision of regular classroom teachers. While there is no mandatory screening instrument prescribed by the Ministry of Education to monitor students' reading progress, the Ministry's Student Support Services Division intervenes when teachers identify students with special learning needs, deploying a multidisciplinary team of officers to clusters of schools. Officers within the division include educational psychologists, guidance officers, behavioral specialists, and specialists in the diagnosis of dyslexia, visual impairments, and other disabilities that affect learning. A significant number of teachers receive guidance by the Student Support Services Division, by means of checklists to assist teachers in identifying characteristics of students with special needs. These teachers intervene when learning problems are detected, to eliminate the practice of promoting students who would face challenges at the next grade level. The goal is to leave no student's reading difficulties unattended.

Special Reading Initiatives
National Initiatives for Reading Instruction

From February 2014 to January 2016, the Ministry of Education hired Master of Education (Reading) Program graduates to serve as literacy coaches in selected primary schools. The coaching program was established to assist teachers of the Infant 1 (kindergarten), Infant 2 (Grade 1), and Standard 1 (Grade 2) levels by improving their knowledge of pedagogy and content in relation to early literacy instruction. From 2013 to 2015, seven curriculum officers specializing in reading were appointed to the Curriculum Planning and Development Division to help primary and secondary school teachers in Trinidad and Tobago improve their literacy instruction.

In 2013, the National Commission for UNESCO launched the Leading for Literacy project in conjunction with the Ministry of Education and other stakeholders. In a multipronged approach to develop the literacy skills of Infant 1 and 2 students, the project facilitates the annual training of 80 teachers from 40 primary schools in the use of a synthetic phonics program, 40 principals in

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leadership, and parents on the use of techniques to improve their children's reading literacy at home. This program is expected to last five years.

With the introduction of the new, integrated thematic primary curriculum in 2013, primary schools have been provided with a variety of literacy resources to facilitate a hands-on approach to literacy instruction. These resources include phonemic awareness, word recognition, vocabulary manipulatives, and phonics and comprehension kits. Additionally, teachers were trained in effective use of these resources.

Other Reading Initiatives and Policies

Although the Ministry of Education promotes inclusive and equal educational opportunities for all, many initiatives seek to assist lower achieving students. These students may receive additional reading instruction geared toward remediation; however, few efforts are made to challenge higher achieving students. While achievement gaps are not addressed by an official policy, schools are encouraged and guided to create internal programs to address the challenge of meeting students' individual learning needs. The Ministry's Student Support Services Division helps schools formulate these programs.

Use and Impact of PIRLS

Trinidad and Tobago's improved performance in PIRLS 2011 over PIRLS 2006 has motivated schools to take steps to further develop students' reading literacy. The Ministry of Education has identified literacy as a ministerial priority and has implemented training initiatives in support of teachers' content knowledge and pedagogical skills. Schools under academic watch have been given significant support by curriculum officers with the Student Support Services Division. To meet the goal of building higher order thinking skills in students, schools have been encouraged to assign longer reading passages from a variety of genres.

At the tertiary level, the Ministry of Education has held discussions with higher education providers about aligning their curricula with needs of the Ministry of Education. These institutions have been advised on the adequacy of current reading courses and the necessity of reading pedagogical skills among teachers.

Suggested Readings

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