

**Best Practices in Spanish as a Foreign language**  
*Connecting Cultures, Creating Opportunities:*  
*Secretariat for the Implementation of Spanish (SIS)*

Ministry of Education, Trinidad and Tobago

**Trinidad and Tobago**

**Context**

Trinidad and Tobago, a twin-island nation of approximately 1.4 million inhabitants, is predominantly English-speaking, with Trinidadian and Tobagonian Creole widely used in daily life. Although Spanish is not an official language, it has gained strategic importance in recent decades due to the country's geographic proximity to Venezuela, its diplomatic and commercial ties with Latin America, and the regional mobility of workers in tourism, energy and services. Within the education system, Spanish is taught as a foreign language at the secondary level, but opportunities for real-world practice and structured exposure remain limited for many students and teachers.

In this context, the Ministry of Education created the Secretariat for the Implementation of Spanish (SIS), a pioneering initiative designed to strengthen the presence, visibility and practical use of Spanish across the country. The SIS represents one of the most sustained public-sector efforts in the Anglo-Caribbean to institutionalise Spanish through educational programming, cultural engagement, teacher development and community outreach.

**About the Initiative**

The Secretariat for the Implementation of Spanish (SIS) was established under a Cabinet directive on 9 September 2004 and formally launched on 22 March 2005, as part of the national policy labelled "Spanish as the First Foreign Language" (SAFFL). The initiative emerges from the Government's intention to expand bilingual competencies and strengthen relationships with neighbouring Latin American countries. It builds on earlier policy discussions about positioning Spanish as a strategic asset for trade, diplomacy, tourism and community engagement.

**Key Components of the Programme**

Based on the information systematised in the Excel matrix and refined in collaboration with national stakeholders, SIS advances its objectives through several components:

**1. Curriculum Enhancement and Teacher Support**

- Collaboration with curriculum units to modernise Spanish syllabi.
- Professional development workshops for Spanish teachers, focusing on communicative methodologies and updated instructional materials.
- Integration of contemporary topics to increase student engagement and cultural relevance.

## 2. Cultural and Educational Events

- Annual Spanish-language festivals, cultural days and school-based immersion activities.  
For example, the National Library and Information System (NALIS) partnered with the Ministry of Education and embassies to celebrate Spanish Language Day, broadening the reach of the Spanish-language promotion beyond the classroom.
- Public events in partnership with Latin American and Spanish embassies, showcasing music, food, film and traditions from Spanish-speaking countries.
- Activities tailored to enhance listening and speaking skills in informal, motivating settings.

## 3. Strengthening Institutional Partnerships

- Coordination with embassies, universities (e.g., University of the West Indies, St. Augustine) and cultural centres, as well as private-sector sponsors.
- Development of joint events and resource-sharing initiatives to expand opportunities for both students and teachers.
- Promotion of regional collaboration with neighbouring Caribbean nations also seeking to enhance Spanish proficiency.

## 4. Public Awareness and Advocacy

- Communication campaigns highlighting the benefits of learning Spanish for employability, travel, business and intercultural understanding. SIS maintains a Facebook page to publicise conversation clubs, cultural nights and competitions in Spanish.
- Engagement with media outlets and visible bilingual signage in public spaces (street names and highways) to normalise Spanish visibility in the national landscape.

## What Makes This Initiative Noteworthy?

The SIS stands out as a **government-led, structured and sustained** strategy for promoting Spanish—not just as a school subject, but as a national resource. Unlike isolated projects or short-term programmes, the Secretariat functions as a dedicated institutional mechanism, ensuring continuity even as governments change. Its aims to enable citizens to “learn and effectively utilise Spanish as the First Foreign Language (SAFFL) by the year 2020” reflect a strategic orientation towards regional integration and workforce development. [moe.gov.tt](http://moe.gov.tt)

Key strengths include:

- **Institutionalisation:** Spanish promotion embedded within formal structures of the Ministry of Education.
- **Multisectoral Collaboration:** Regular coordination with embassies, higher-education institutions and cultural organisations.
- **Teacher-Centred Approach:** Emphasis on capacity-building for educators as the foundation for long-term impact.
- **Cultural Integration:** Activities that help students and communities experience Spanish beyond the classroom.



## Insights and Value for the Wider Caribbean

The experience of the SIS offers actionable lessons for other Caribbean countries seeking to elevate the role of Spanish in their national agendas:

- Establishing a dedicated coordinating body helps ensure strategic focus and long-term sustainability.
- Strong partnerships with embassies and cultural institutions enrich language programmes and broaden learning opportunities.
- Promoting Spanish through public events increases motivation and improves attitudes toward language learning.
- Investing in teacher training creates a multiplier effect across the education system.
- Visible language promotion (signage, media, public campaigns) helps normalise the language in everyday life.
- However, as shown in the literature, challenges remain in defining measurable outcomes and ensuring sufficient resources for long-term implementation.

