
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

42 languages



NB: This is not a word-for-word transcript

Rob

Hello I'm Rob. Welcome to 6 Minute English. I'm joined today by Finn.

Finn

Hello. Or, as we say in Chinese, "你好，我是 Finn", which means "Hello, I'm Finn".

Rob

Ah, 你好. Where did you learn to speak Chinese?

Finn

At university. Though I must say I'm a bit **rusty** now!

Rob

Rusty? You look OK, but what you really mean is you're not as fluent as you were before!

Finn

That's right.

Rob

Learning, and practising, a language requires effort. But the children of the school in London that we're going to be hearing about today had no choice. They're from different countries and no less than 42 languages are spoken in the **playground**.

Finn

It's incredible! In the playground – that's the area in the schoolyard where children play during their break between lessons – they speak 42 languages?! Wow.

Rob

Yes. Of course they all have to learn English because they live here. But more on that in a moment. First, as the tradition goes, I'm going to challenge you with a question, Finn.

Finn

OK. I'm ready or... 我准备好了!

Rob

Huh?

Finn

I'm ready!

Rob

OK. Which country has the most official languages? Is it:

- a) India
- b) Nigeria
- c) South Africa

Finn

Good question. I would say India or Nigeria... Let's say Nigeria.

Rob

OK. I will reveal the answer at the end of the programme! So let's talk about Byron Court, a school with 600 pupils in north-west London. The school gets high **marks** for **integration**.

Finn

Marks – so here you mean scores in tests or exams. They get high marks for integration – integration means bringing people together – as they have pupils from all over the world.

Rob

Yes, they come from places as far apart as Iraq, Somalia, India, Romania and Slovakia. Many are children of immigrants and refugees.

Finn

So how difficult is it for these children to learn English?

Rob

Well, let's listen to this pupil from Byron Court. Where did she learn her first words in English?

Pupil, Byron Court school, London

*When I was two years old I went to **nursery** and then I learnt a bit of English there. And when I came here I got to learn all my English.*

Finn

She says she began to learn English at nursery – that's a place where very young children are looked after while their parents are at work.

Rob

Byron Court's **head teacher** – the person in charge of a school – believes children feel integrated because she tries to celebrate all the different cultures and avoids suggesting one culture is better than the other.

Finn

It all sounds very nice, Rob, but I wonder what happens in the classroom. I mean, many pupils are learning basic words in English while, at the same time, studying things like science and maths also in English. So, quite a challenge?

Rob

It is indeed a big problem.

Finn

So does this lower **educational standards**? Those are the knowledge and skills students should have at a particular level.

Rob

Yes it does, but not for long, says Martyn Pendergast, educational officer at Brent Council, that's the area where the school is located. Listen out for the verb he uses which means testing children's performance.

Martyn Pendergast, educational officer at Brent Council

*In Brent our children perform just below national averages when they are **assessed** at seven years old. But by the time they're 11 they've **caught up** with national standards, and at 16 they're flying.*

Finn

He says they are assessed – which means tested and given scores – when they are seven years old. At that time they have worse results than children in other British schools.

Rob

But by the time they celebrate their 11th birthday, they've caught up – they've become equal with pupils of their age elsewhere in the country.

Finn

And by 16, he says, "they are flying", which is a nice way to describe these children's progress. It's good for them because they end up as **bilingual** adults – speaking two languages fluently.

Rob

So their effort pays off. At Byron Court the concern is more about pupils who are native speakers of English.

Finn

Parents worry about their children not learning much.

Rob

Maybe the best thing is for everybody to try to learn a second language. Not a bad thing in today's small world.

Finn

Talking about learning languages, I want to know if I got the answer to your question right. The question was about the country with the most official languages.

Rob

And the options I put to you were India, Nigeria or South Africa.

Finn

And I said Nigeria. But... maybe I think India now. Can I change my mind?

Rob

You can if you want because you'd still be wrong.

Finn

Oh, no, really?

Rob

The country with most official languages is the Republic of South Africa with 11 languages.

Finn

Eleven!

Rob

Interestingly India has 18 languages that are recognised by its constitution and can be considered as official, however, the difference is that each language is recognised as the official language of a certain area such as Kashmir, for example.

Finn

OK. Right. So I was kind of right in a different way.

Rob

The overall official language is Hindi.

Finn

Fascinating! Well, lots of languages to learn, in any case.

Rob

I'll stick with English for now. It's time to wrap up.

Finn

OK.

Rob

So let's remember some of the words we explained today.

Finn

They were:

rusty

playground

marks

integration

nursery

head teacher

educational standards

assessed

caught up

bilingual

Rob

Merci beaucoup. Thank you, Finn. That's it for today. But please do log on to bbclearningenglish.com to find more 6 Minute English. Bye for now!

Finn

Bye or, as we say in China, 再见!

Vocabulary**rusty**

(of a language) not as fluent as before

playground

area in a school where children play between lessons

marks

score in a test or exam

integration

bringing together

nursery

place where very young children are looked after while their parents are at work

head teacher

person in charge of a school

educational standards

the knowledge and skills students should have at a particular level

assessed

tested and given scores

caught up with

became equal with others in the same level

bilingual

being able to speak two languages fluently