

LegCo Panel on Education

Study on Enrichment of Language Learning Environment

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the progress of a Study on “Enrichment of Language Learning Environment” (the Study), which was formerly known as “Study on ‘Two-mode’ Instruction in Secondary Schools”.

Background

2. The objectives and the content of the Study were explained in the Administration’s reply (Annex 1) to an oral question asked by the Hon Yeung Yiu-chung on 13 December 2000, and in the speech of the Secretary for Education and Manpower (Annex 2, Chinese version only) during a motion debate at the Council meeting on 7 February 2001.

3. To briefly recap, the Study was suggested in September 2000 by the Working Group (WG) on Medium of Instruction jointly set up in 1998 by the Board of Education and the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research. The WG recognised that the new Secondary School Places Allocation (SSPA) mechanism would result in greater diversity of students' language ability in secondary schools and this would have impact on schools' medium of instruction. The Study would provide reference for the Education Commission (EC) in its review of the SSPA mechanism in the 2003/04 school year.

4. A Steering Committee comprising academics and school principals was subsequently set up in December 2000 by the Education Department (ED) to work out the details of the Study and to monitor the progress. In its deliberations on the research design, the Steering Committee has proceeded on the basis of a clear understanding that the Government is committed to fully implementing the medium of

instruction policy which emphasizes the use of the mother-tongue to ensure that students acquire subject knowledge and develop high order thinking in an environment with the least language barriers, and that a multi-pronged approach should be adopted to create a favourable learning environment to enable students to become biliterate and trilingual.

The Study

Objectives

5. The Steering Committee has held a series of meetings to deliberate on the research design and the possible approaches, and resolved that the Study should aim to address the following issues:

- (a) Adaptation in English-medium (EMI) schools – The diversity in students' ability in a secondary school to learn effectively in English may widen as a result of the reform of the SSPA system. The Study would explore effective support measures to help students adapt to the English-medium learning environment; and
- (b) Enrichment and transition in Chinese-medium (CMI) schools – The Study would explore the effectiveness of an enrichment programme in helping students increase their exposure to English, while they continue to learn in the mother tongue to ensure effective subject content learning and high order cognitive development. As a number of CMI schools may use English to teach some subjects in Secondary 4 classes in the 2001/02 school year and onwards, the Study would also explore whether the enrichment programme can help students smoothen the transition from Chinese-medium to English-medium at Secondary 4 and above.

6. To more accurately reflect the above objectives of the Study and to avoid misinterpretation, the Steering Committee has agreed that the

Study should be more appropriately named as **‘Study on Enrichment of Language Learning Environment’**.

Research Design

EMI Schools

7. As the first step, a survey would be conducted on what support measures are being used by EMI schools to help students learn effectively through the English medium. The survey will cover all the 112 EMI schools. Good practices in addressing the diversity of students’ ability will be identified.

8. EMI schools would be invited to try out the good practices. A sample of three to five interested schools would be given assistance in developing a more structured support programme for Secondary 1 students in the 2001/02 school year. The support programme would be further developed for tryout on the Secondary 1 students in the 2002/03 school year. To study the effectiveness of the programme, the two cohorts of Secondary 1 students of the participating schools in the 2001/02 and 2002/03 school years would be followed longitudinally as they move up to higher forms. The support programmes, if proved effective, would be disseminated to other EMI schools.

CMI Schools

9. For CMI schools, the Steering Committee recommended that an enrichment programme should be developed at Secondary 2 and 3 levels respectively to increase students’ exposure to English learning. The main body of the programme would be a series of teaching modules (about 30 for each of the two levels) written and taught in English on cross-curricular themes or selected topics from some key learning areas.

10. About 10 - 15 schools would participate in the Study. They would take part in programme development and tryout. These schools would be requested to set aside a certain percentage of teaching time, say 5% at Secondary 2 and 7% at Secondary 3 (approximately 3-4 teaching periods per cycle), for teaching the modules. They would also have to design

their own school-based implementation plans such as time scheduling, manpower deployment and support strategies.

11. The enrichment programme would be introduced concurrently to the cohorts of students at Secondary 2 and 3 in the 2001/02 school year. These students would be followed as they proceed to higher forms so as to gauge the full effect. The Steering Committee considers it inappropriate to introduce the programme at Secondary 1, so as not to burden Secondary 1 students with adjustment problems.

12. All CMI schools would be invited to apply to take part in the Study. The Steering Committee would consider whether an applicant school is suitable to take part in the Study based on the following criteria:

- (a) whether the target student group(s) would be able to benefit from the programme, having regard to their language ability;
- (b) merits of the school's proposed implementation plan;
- (c) teachers' capability;
- (d) adequacy of the support strategies/measures; and
- (e) school's commitment to programme development and tryout.

13. In case of over-subscription, a random sample of 10-15 schools which satisfy these criteria would be selected for the Study by the Steering Committee.

Monitoring and Assessment

14. Participating EMI and CMI schools would be visited by research teams regularly to ensure that the respective programmes are implemented properly.

15. An in-depth qualitative study will be conducted to collect information on the implementation process and the impact on students' learning process. Achievement tests and questionnaires on the social and affective domains, such as self-concept and perception of school life will

be administered. Class observations will also be conducted to assess the effects of the programmes.

Implementation

16. The first and second reports will be completed by October 2002 and September 2003 respectively. They will provide reference for the EC in its review on the SSPA System in the 2003/04 school year. The Study will continue until December 2005 when the two cohorts of students covered by the Study would have completed their Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examinations in 2004 and 2005 respectively.

Financial Implications

17. The Education Department has planned to provide \$3 million for the Study, to cover the costs for developing and producing support programme(s) for EMI schools and enrichment programme(s) for CMI schools as well as assessing their effectiveness.

Progress so far

18. The ED intends to commission out the development and assessment of the support programme for EMI schools and enrichment programme for CMI schools to experts. Tenders are being invited and contract(s) are expected to be awarded in May 2001.

19. Circulars have been issued to invite all secondary schools to apply to take part in the Study. A briefing session on the Study will be organised for schools on 28 April 2001. It is scheduled that the list of schools participating in the Study will be firmed up by early June 2001.

Conclusion

20. The Steering Committee will continue to steer the implementation of this longitudinal study. Members are invited to note the contents of this paper.

Education and Manpower Bureau
April 2001

Trial Scheme on Two-mode Teaching in Junior Secondary Classes

1. MR YEUNG YIU-CHUNG (in Cantonese): *Madam President, it is learnt that the Education Department (ED) will soon conduct a three-year trial scheme on "two-mode teaching" in junior secondary classes. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council of:*

- (a) *the names of the schools which will participate in the scheme;*
- (b) *the resources required for the scheme; and*
- (c) *the impact of the scheme on the existing policy on the medium of instruction, and how it ties in with the policy of mother-tongue teaching?*

SECRETARY FOR EDUCATION AND MANPOWER (in Cantonese): *Madam President, the Government's objective in implementing mother-tongue teaching is to enable students to acquire subject knowledge and develop higher-order thinking in an environment with the least language barrier.*

Since the implementation of the Medium of Instruction Guidance for Secondary Schools in 1998, it has been generally recognized in the education sector that mother-tongue teaching helps enhance students' cognitive and learning ability. It facilitates more lively discussion in the classrooms, expedites the progress of teaching, and promotes more in-depth learning. Thus, I would like to emphasize the Government's affirmation of the benefits of mother-tongue teaching to learning, and its commitment to the policy of using mother-tongue as the principal language in teaching.

In reviewing the secondary school places allocation system, the Education Commission (EC) proposed that starting from 2001, the number of banding will be reduced from five to three, and that five years later, students' banding will solely be determined according to their internal assessment. In other words, each primary school will have students of band one to band three. Under the proposed allocation system, the diversity in students' ability in a secondary school may widen, and it would be difficult to ensure that each and every student allocated to an English secondary school is suited to learning through English as the medium of instruction.

In view of the above, the Joint Working Group on Medium of Instruction (JWG) has discussed whether schools should be allowed greater flexibility in deciding on the medium of instruction so that they can properly take care of the diverse student abilities. Some JWG members suggested that secondary schools should be allowed to adopt different media of instruction for certain subjects or classes at Secondary One to Secondary Three, but the JWG could not reach any consensus. The JWG recommended in September 2000 that the ED should study the desirability of "two-mode" teaching for reference by the EC in reviewing the secondary school places allocation system in 2003-04.

The ED has formed a steering committee comprising expert academics and principals to formulate the scope and other details of the study on "two-mode" teaching. This work is still at an early conceptual stage. The ED has also contacted a number of schools to see if they are willing to participate in the trial scheme and to solicit practicable options. There is no pre-set policy direction for this study. The role of the ED is to facilitate local experts and academics in jointly examining this issue. It is hoped that by collecting views from different parties, the study will accommodate a diversity of viewpoints so that the outcome of the study will be more credible and can serve as a more useful reference in policy formulation.

I must stress that the starting point of the study is to explore effective ways to deal with the widened range of abilities among students at the same level in a secondary school which may arise in future. In designing the study, we will remain committed to achieving the objective of mother-tongue teaching, that is, to ensure that students can learn in an environment with the least language barrier. The specific objectives of the study are to explore, on the premise that students' acquisition of subject knowledge will not be affected, the feasibility of "two-mode" teaching on a group, subject or topic basis, the preconditions for success, and the support measures required.

The ED has not yet finalized the list of participating schools. The resources required for the study will be determined by the number of participating schools, the methodology of the study, and the support required for the schools. Insofar as school sampling is concerned, we aim to include schools adopting different admission standards and medium of instruction. For greater comprehensiveness, we may also conduct the study at different class levels.

The Government's policy on medium of instruction is very clear. We must, taking into account the language ability of both teachers and students, adopt the suitable medium of instruction to ensure the effectiveness of learning. At the same time, we have to take appropriate support measures to create a favourable language environment to enable students to become biliterate and trilingual. The basic policy of mother-tongue teaching will remain unchanged.