



**Unison's opinion on
Education for ethnic minority children**

(for the meeting of LegCo Panel on Education on 9 Jan 2006)

Hong Kong Unison Limited (hereinafter called "Unison") is a non-government organization dedicated to serve ethnic minority members in Hong Kong and to promote racial equality. We believe that children have the basic rights to education regardless of their ethnicity and race. In response to the above-mentioned subject, we have the following feedback and comment.

A. Current Situation

1. Lack of support in mainstream primary school

According to the data provided by EMB previously, only about 70 EM children were allocated to mainstream primary school in September 2004 whereas the figure dropped to less than 40 in September 2005. As we know, many ethnic minority parents felt hesitate to opt for mainstream primary schools because they thought the support measures for their children in mainstream schools are not enough. Moreover, parents have difficulties to coach their children in finishing homework assignment and communicate with the schools because many of them can neither speak English nor Chinese. To a certain extent, it reflected the actual situation faced by these EM children. Many EM children have difficulties to understand what the teacher said as they all are delivered in Chinese. Besides, they feel difficult to mix with their peers. All these imposes negative impact to their self-esteem.

As we observed, the school teachers also faced a hard time even though they have tried their best to help these students. They are required to spend extra time and resources to design specific programme, curriculum and teaching materials, and at the same time they have to address to the learning needs of other students such as the newly arrivals and the physically or mentally handicapped children. Moreover, teachers should have more training about the cultural characteristic of different ethnic, skills and knowledge required for multi-cultural education etc. Furthermore, teachers also complained the language barrier made them difficult to get the co-operation from parents. This situation is even worse for those schools that received only a few ethnic minority students. Teachers felt stressful to handle these children and their families.

2. Neglect the learning needs of other ethnic minority students

As the existing policy does not affect those EM children who admitted to primary school before





2004, most of the EM students are still studying in those schools that traditionally admit a large number of NCS students (hereinafter called “NCS schools”). Currently, the EMB relies NCS schools to deploy their own manpower and resources for developing their own school-based Chinese Language curriculum. The on-site support provided by the EMB to them, in fact, is far from adequate. Hence, these EM students are still lack of opportunities to learn proper Chinese.

Furthermore, owing to the negative consequences of the education policies in the past, these EM students are always reported to have lower academic attainments and learning motivation. Teachers need to spend extra effort to address their problems especially in class management and student guidance. Without extra resources, it is difficult for them to help these students effectively and we deeply worried that it will cause adverse effect to their future lives in Hong Kong.

3. Limited opportunities for further studies and vocational training

As we observed, only less than 10% of the F.5 EM graduates will be promoted to F.6. Hence, most of them will opt for vocational training. Although the VTC offers numerous English taught courses for them, but in reality, we found the EM youth are still hanging around without proper training. There are possible reasons to explain why these courses are not accessible. First, the VTC would like to enroll them in a specific subject class whereas the EM youths have diverse interests and they would like to polish themselves in different disciplines. Second, the entrance requirement of some courses, say the Foundation Diploma programme of IVE, expected students to have study Chinese up to Secondary 5 level. This excludes majority of the EM youth. Third, for those students who would like to study in an award bearing programme (e.g diploma course), they need a spring board to help them to get a qualification equivalent to 5 subjects pass in HKCEE. Currently, there is no Yi Jin course and Pre-associate Degree programme offered in English.

4.. Lack of a culturally sensitive language policy

In fact, lack of a culturally sensitive language policy is the root of the above problem. In principle, we support the policy of equipping students to be proficient in Chinese and we appreciate the government to open up admissions to the mainstream primary schools for the ethnic minority children. However, the issue of proficiency in a language can easily be used to mask racial discrimination. Most developed societies recognize and respect different levels of proficiency amongst language minorities, and have enacted laws that ban universities and employers from requiring a higher level or different type of language proficiency than a particular course or a job actually requires. In Hong Kong, we do not have the “Chinese as second language” policy. They rely on the school (both primary and secondary schools) to develop their own school-based curriculum without giving any extra resources and support. Thus, different schools provide different Chinese language curriculum for NCS students.





Usually, the syllabus and standard of these curricula will lag behind those local mainstream students. As a result, NCS students could only have a piece meal exposure to Chinese Language and have a poor grasp of it during its Basic Education (P1-S3). Without the lead and support from government, it will be an impossible mission for schools to develop a proper curriculum.

5. Possible disasters resulted from 3-3-4 education reform

In the proposed curriculum reform, Chinese Language is a core subject for all students and all of them compulsorily required to sit for a new credential external examination which is aligned with the curriculum. It is unrealistic to assume the NCS students to have the same Chinese language proficiency as their local counterparts in Senior Secondary Education given that there is not enough extra support.

B. Suggestion and recommendation

Immediate actions taken by the Government:-

1. Continuous support and resources should be provided to schools or NGOs to organize after-school tutorial for EM students studying in mainstream and NCS schools.
2. Extra resources should be given to mainstream and NCS schools to improve or adjust their existing Chinese language curriculum
3. Extra resources should be given to mainstream and NCS schools for hiring native speaking (ethnic minority languages) teaching assistant to foster better communication between schools and parents
4. Provide proper and adequate in-service training for teachers to acquire specific skills and knowledge in providing multi-cultural education.
5. If possible, allow NCS schools to adopt small class teaching to address the learning needs of students and provide adequate resources
6. Review the entrance requirement of the foundation diploma programme organized by IVE and abolish the Chinese language requirement
7. Provide different English taught vocational training courses (different subjects) in order to meet the diverse learning interests of EM students.
8. Offer English taught spring board programme(s) for EM youths to attain an education qualification equivalent to HKCEE 5 subject pass.

Long-term action plan

1. Develop an alternative Chinese language curriculum leading to well-recognized exams e.g. GCSE / GCE and SAT II Chinese which enhances EM students to attain adequate Chinese proficiency.





Hong Kong Unison Limited
香港融樂會有限公司

2. Examine the possible negative impacts of the 3-3-4 education reform to the EM students. Make discretions in the new credential external examination (Chinese language) until EM children can catch up their local counterparts under the mainstream education.

9 January 2006

為
種族
平等
For
Ethnic
Equality