

For information

Legislative Council Panel on Education

Fine-tuned Medium of Instruction for Secondary Schools – Implementation Arrangements for the Third Cycle

Purpose

This paper informs Members of the implementation arrangements for the third cycle (2022/23 to 2027/28 school years) of the fine-tuned medium of instruction (MOI) policy at junior secondary levels.

Background

2. The Education Bureau (EDB), premised on the learning effectiveness of mother-tongue teaching, has implemented the fine-tuned MOI arrangements in secondary schools starting from the 2010/11 school year after extensive consultation with various stakeholders, with a view to enabling each and every student at junior secondary levels to have the motivation and be given more opportunities to use English to learn subject knowledge in a progressive manner that best suit their learning needs and abilities. The key features of the fine-tuned MOI arrangements are as follows –

- (a) We uphold the three prescribed criteria (including student ability, teacher capability and school-based support)¹ for schools adopting English as the MOI as stipulated in the *Medium of Instruction Guidance for Secondary Schools* promulgated in 1997, but schools are no longer bifurcated into schools using Chinese as the MOI (“CMI schools”) and schools using English as the MOI (“EMI schools”). If a class of a school satisfies the “student ability” criterion, the school will be given full discretion to determine the MOI arrangements in the class concerned (“by-class” arrangement).

¹ The prescribed criteria under the fine-tuned MOI framework include: (i) “student ability” (i.e. the average proportion of Secondary (S) 1 intake of a school admitted to a class belonging to the “top 40%” group (territory) in the “Secondary School Places Allocation” (SSPA) of the previous two years under a six-year cycle reaches 85% of the size of a class); (ii) “teacher capability” (i.e. teachers adopting English as the MOI should have Level 3 or above in English Language of the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination (or Grade C or above in English Language (Syllabus B) of the defunct Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) / Level 3 or above in English Language of the HKCEE in 2007 to 2011), or other recognised equivalent qualifications (e.g. Band 6 or above in the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) (academic domain))); and (iii) “school-based support” (i.e. support measures provided by schools for students in adopting English as the MOI).

- (b) In order to increase the exposure to English during lesson time for students learning content subjects in their mother tongue, schools may conduct extended learning activities (ELA) in English by using up to 25% of the total lesson time (excluding the lesson time for English Language subject) for each of the junior secondary levels (“by-session” arrangement).
- (c) To provide students with more motivation to learn English in content subjects and facilitate their progression to senior secondary levels at which EMI teaching may be adopted to a comparatively greater extent, schools are allowed to transform the above-mentioned 25% ELA lesson time into the teaching of a maximum of two content subjects in English for each of the junior secondary levels (“by-subject” arrangement).

3. During the first six-year MOI cycle (2010/11 to 2015/16 school years), schools made their best efforts to accumulate experience and develop their whole-school language policy, including school-based MOI arrangements. When devising the arrangements for the second MOI cycle (2016/17 to 2021/22 school years), the EDB considered that the MOI arrangements of schools had begun to take root with students in general benefitting from the teaching experience of teachers and the effectiveness of school-based support measures. A stable language environment was also crucial for teachers to develop learning and teaching strategies of content subjects. In this regard, we maintained the overall arrangement of MOI fine-tuning for the second cycle. In other words, schools were allowed to extend their school-based MOI arrangements of the first cycle to the second cycle, and were required, as usual, to devise professionally their MOI arrangements taking into account their school-based situation in each of the school years of the cycle.

Mapping Out the Way Forward for the Third MOI Cycle

4. To facilitate the planning and preparation for the third MOI cycle (2022/23 to 2027/28 school years), we have been studying the effectiveness of the fine-tuned MOI arrangements through keeping track of students’ learning effectiveness and academic performance, collecting stakeholders’ views on their implementation of school-based MOI arrangements as well as commissioning a study to look into the strategies adopted by schools in integrating the learning of the English language and content subjects. Details are set out in the ensuing paragraphs.

Student learning effectiveness and performance

5. The primary objective of the fine-tuned MOI policy is to enhance students’ exposure to English in schools thus boosting their confidence in using English to facilitate their transition to senior secondary and tertiary education, but at the same time without compromising their learning effectiveness in content subjects. To

assess if the policy has been operating well, we have examined students' performance in English Language and common content subjects in the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination (HKDSE) prior to (i.e. HKDSE 2012 to 2015) and after MOI fine-tuning (i.e. HKDSE 2016 to 2020). Our observations are as follows –

- (a) On the whole, there was improvement in students' overall performance in English Language after MOI fine-tuning. We believe that the increased chances to use English for learning and the greater exposure to English for students in schools as allowed under the fine-tuned MOI policy could be one of the contributory factors for the improvement in performance.
- (b) As for major content subjects², a stable performance was noted, with individual subjects even displaying improvement after MOI fine-tuning. We observed that schools on the whole have been professionally sound in deploying the flexibility allowed under the fine-tuned MOI policy framework whilst upholding mother-tongue teaching to safeguard students' learning effectiveness in content subjects.
- (c) In general, schools could exercise their professional judgment in making the “by-subject” arrangement without compromising students' learning effectiveness in content subjects, but more professional support would have to be provided in case the arrangement is used in subjects requiring a greater use of language rather than symbols, formulas or computations such as Biology and Geography (“language-loaded” subjects).

Stakeholders' views

6. The EDB has engaged stakeholders in collecting their views on the fine-tuned MOI arrangements, with some 150 schools involved through professional dialogues as well as focus group discussions. Overall speaking, schools are able to make good use of the flexibility allowed under the fine-tuned MOI policy, and decide professionally appropriate MOI arrangements which best suit students' needs and ability after thorough discussions with teachers. For example, some schools, despite having MOI discretion, choose to adopt mother-tongue teaching in “language-loaded” subjects with due regard to their students' ability. Various support measures are also put in place by many schools, such as conducting bridging programmes, fostering an English-rich language environment and enhancing the collaboration between English and content subject teachers to facilitate students' adaptation to learning in the English medium. Some common strategies to cater for learner diversity are also adopted by schools such as the use of graded learning materials, split-class / group teaching, after-school support, adapted English curriculum for weaker students, etc.

² The major content subjects include Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Geography, History, Economics and Information and Communication Technology.

7. There have also been concerns over the impact of student population fluctuations on schools' MOI discretion in the third cycle. Many schools have shared that a stable language environment at school is crucial for sustaining school development and effective learning and teaching. On the other hand, some teachers have indicated that their collaboration and dedication to teaching could contribute to students' learning efficacy. For students not meeting the "student ability" criterion, they could still show improvement in subjects taught in English progressively with effective teaching strategies and school-based support. In view of the above, some consider that the other two prescribed criteria, i.e. "teacher capability" and "support measures", should deserve more weighting and alternatives have to be explored to alleviate the effect of student population fluctuations on individual schools' MOI discretion.

Study on language across the curriculum

8. Language across the curriculum (LAC), which advocates the integration of language learning and content learning, is an approach through which schools can enhance students' language proficiency and understanding of the academic content. Upon the implementation of MOI fine-tuning, LAC has been widely promoted in schools to varying extents and in different modes with a view to enhancing the collaboration among content subject teachers and English teachers for students' learning effectiveness in the English medium. We commissioned the University of Hong Kong in October 2019 to conduct a study on LAC to identify good practices and success factors of schools in implementing LAC which are conducive to learning and teaching in the English medium, and disseminate to schools for professional sharing and enhancement. The study has concluded that with the effective implementation of LAC, students could strengthen their English proficiency and master subject knowledge in English at the same time. Findings of the study will be shared with schools for professional enhancement at the dissemination seminars planned for mid-2021.

Implementation Arrangements for the Third Cycle

Continuous implementation of the fine-tuned framework

9. In view that the present fine-tuned MOI arrangements have generally been operating well, with schools on the whole being able to professionally devise appropriate MOI arrangements to safeguard the interest of students, the EDB has decided to uphold the present MOI framework for the third cycle. In other words, schools' discretion on MOI arrangements in the third cycle will continue to be determined by the three prescribed criteria of "student ability", "teacher capability" and "school-based support", so that students can continue to benefit from the merits of fine-tuned arrangements. On the other hand, we acknowledge the need to refine the implementation arrangements for the third cycle to cater for the

operational and development needs of schools in present-day circumstances. In mapping out the implementation arrangements for the third MOI cycle, we have been keeping close liaison with major school councils and principal associations to solicit their views.

Refinements to implementation details

10. We have decided to replace the use of “allocation class size” under the SSPA mechanism with the “average class size”³ in secondary schools as the parameter for determining the number of places for which schools will be given full professional discretion to determine the school-based MOI arrangements according to the current “student ability” criterion (i.e. the “by-class” arrangement). This would more accurately reflect the criterion of 85% of students belonging to the “top 40%” group in a cohort and help minimise the impact of changes in Secondary One (S1) population on the stable environment for MOI arrangements.

11. Noting that there are merits for schools to plan holistically for the entire key learning stage of junior secondary levels in respect of the ELA lesson time and “by-subject” arrangement for classes in which students mainly learn content subjects in their mother tongue, we will provide more flexibility to schools in the third MOI cycle to cater for their actual needs and facilitate students’ smooth transition to the senior secondary curriculum. On top of the existing arrangements mentioned in paragraphs 2(b) and (c) above, schools could opt to take the entire junior secondary learning stage (i.e. S1 to S3) as a unit, and adopt an orderly and progressive approach to make blanket allocation of ELA lesson time from S1 to S3 for the same cohort of students, up to 25% of the total lesson time (excluding the lesson time of English Language subject) in the junior secondary learning stage. Likewise, schools could also opt to transform the 25% ELA lesson time for the “by-subject” arrangement holistically for the same cohort of students, with the aggregate count of such transformation from S1 to S3 capped at six for this cohort of students. Schools should fulfil the overall objective that the opportunities to use English to learn subject knowledge for classes adopting mother-tongue teaching should be given in a progressive manner which best suit students’ learning needs and abilities. As guiding principles for schools in considering whether such “by-subject” arrangement should be adopted, they should continue to take into account factors such as whether the arrangement would fit into the overall curriculum plan to ensure consistency and integrity of the whole school curriculum throughout the secondary levels, students’ ability, needs, interests, and aspirations and progress in learning through English, as well as teachers’ capability and readiness.

³ “Average class size” refers to the average number of students per class from S1 to S6 in all secondary schools in the territory.

Professional assessment and support mechanism

12. In the third MOI cycle, if schools fail to meet the “student ability” criterion for maintaining their existing MOI arrangements, they should adjust their school-based MOI arrangements. We will put in place a professional support mechanism for affected schools whose MOI discretion would have to be reduced in the third MOI cycle. In this connection, we will engage in professional dialogues with the affected schools to provide them with advice on how to make suitable adjustments to their school-based MOI arrangements. On the other hand, acknowledging that some individual schools may have shown strong foundation in teacher capability and school support measures in the first and second MOI cycles in devising appropriate strategies to sustain students’ learning effectiveness in using English as the MOI, we will provide an avenue for such schools to seek permission to maintain their present MOI discretion for the third MOI cycle. For schools which intend to maintain their existing school-based MOI arrangements in the third cycle after consultation with relevant stakeholders and reviewing their own circumstances, they would be allowed to present their specific cases by submitting a proposal to the EDB, setting out, among others, the support measures planned for the third cycle as well as an evaluation of the effectiveness of their existing school-based MOI arrangements for special assessment. With students’ learning efficacy as the primary concern, the EDB will scrutinise each case in a professional and rigorous manner and carefully review the circumstances of each applicant school, including the experiences accumulated with fine-tuned arrangements and their teaching effectiveness, before deciding whether an application should be approved. To ensure learning and teaching effectiveness, schools which would be approved to maintain their MOI discretion in the third cycle after passing the assessment are required to participate in tailor-made school-based support programmes as well as teacher professional training. If schools fail to pass the assessment, they will have to adjust their school-based MOI arrangements accordingly in the third cycle under the mechanism.

Monitoring and transparency of information

13. We will continue with the established monitoring mechanism to ensure the proper implementation of MOI arrangements in schools in the third MOI cycle. With respect to schools’ annual submission of school-based MOI plans for the third MOI cycle, the EDB will continue to engage schools in professional dialogues when required and schools shall review and revise their MOI arrangements where appropriate. In line with the spirit of the School Development and Accountability Framework, schools are held accountable for their MOI arrangements in respect of students’ learning outcomes. Schools should incorporate their whole-school language policy (including the MOI arrangements) in the School Development Plan, and conduct annual review and include the findings in the School Report, which should be uploaded to the school

website. For parents' easy reference, information on schools' MOI arrangements should also be included in the Secondary School Profiles and made available on the school website.

Professional support for teachers and research

14. To ensure the quality of classroom learning and teaching, the EDB will continue to provide various kinds of school-based support and teacher training programmes, with a view to consolidating the experience gained and promoting professional exchange. The EDB will also step up the support for LAC and elevate teachers' professional standards in the relevant aspects. In parallel, the EDB will conduct in the third cycle a comprehensive review of the fine-tuned MOI policy for secondary schools, which includes reviewing the "student ability" criterion as well as students' learning efficacy under different MOI arrangements, with a view to refining our policy according to review findings by the end of the third cycle to cater for the development and needs of the society.

Way Forward

15. We have just notified schools of the implementation arrangements for the third MOI cycle and a briefing for schools will be held in early June 2021. To facilitate schools' smooth transition to the third MOI cycle and allow ample time for them to consult stakeholders on the school-based MOI arrangements, we will inform schools of their MOI discretion for the third cycle (i.e. the maximum number of places for which they will be given professional discretion in respect of MOI arrangements in each of the school years within the third cycle) in early July 2021. While the present fine-tuned MOI policy is bearing fruit, we will continue our efforts to review its implementation to keep abreast of the development of society and changing needs of students.

**Education Bureau
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