

Comments and suggestions in Education for Ethnic Minority Children

By Ethnic Minority Concern Group

Background

A. Medium of Instruction Policy

Since 1986, Education Department has been providing programmes to schools adopting mother-tongue teaching to help strengthen the teaching and learning of English. From September 1998, the number of secondary schools adopting mother-tongue teaching rose from some 70 to about 300.

The aims of the mother-tongue policy :

- Promote Mother-tongue Teaching
- Develop Biliteracy & Trilingualism in Students

The aims are strengthen the teaching and learning of Chinese and English to enable students to be biliterate and trilingual, ie be conversant with written Chinese and English, and be able to speak fluent Cantonese, Putonghua and English.

For the Non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students, EMB require students should study English (actually English is their second language) and another languages. However, base on HKCEE the syllabus of second language is French or German. Then some secondary schools provide these two languages as second language curriculum, most of them select French.

B. Inequality Policy in School Allocation

The about 700 primary schools had already adopted mother-tongue teaching policy (Chinese as medium instruction). Only 7 government-aided schools use English as medium instruction (excluding schools under English Foundation Group). According to the figure of secondary schools are converting from EMI to CMI, then significant less schools for NCS students.

In 2004, EMB rearranged the school allocation system, which was to allow NCS students also have a chance to choose any schools nearby by their home. This rearrangement was claimed to provide equal opportunities to the NCS students, was as they previously not allocated to mainstream CMI schools. However, EMB did not have any planned language support programmes for those students, who chose CMI schools. During meetings with EMB officers, they said that they had a plan for those children who wanted to return back to those EMI schools in the case they were unable to adapt to a CMI environment. However, there was no protective measure to ensure that they could return to EMI schools, traditionally the chose

of NCS students. There are no more seats for their return.

Therefore, the rearrangement of school allocation system presented 'equal opportunities' on paper, not in practice.

3. Inequality and Mismatch Syllabus in second language

For NCS students, they study Chinese as second language in their primary school stage at EMI schools. However, EMB have no systematic planned curriculum, expert's support, teachers' training and extra funding for those schools regarding in Chinese as a second language teaching. The only programmes for tutorial base, which were provided by Home Affairs Bureau, for student's and parent's support. However the programmes were short-term and not systematic throughout the students' primary education.

In their secondary school stage, they should follow the HKCEE syllabus and will 'chosed' students in EMI schools will select French as in order to a second language curriculum. Students learn French are only want to pass the examination, but no in daily life or any benefit for their future learning. However the only reason for studying French is to satisfy EMB's language policy and no benefit is obtained which can help them in their future plans. French is useless in Hong Kong and few countries use French worldwide to justify studying the languages.

Discussion

Rights to learn by Native Language

Hong Kong is an international city. Due to globalization, migrants have come from many other countries. Hong Kong will be a multicultural and multilingual city, like other world's cities. Then it needs to update education policy regarding to concept of Multilingual education.

Teaching full literacy and content in two languages, usually English and another languages. Students should allow emerging with the ability to read, write, speak, and function academically in two languages (or, in multilingual programs, up to five, as is common in Europe).

According to EMB information, educational research worldwide and in Hong Kong has shown that students learning through their mother tongue generally perform better than those learning through another language.

It is the position of EMCG that English may be adopted as our 'First language' for NCS students and ethnic language as 'Second Language'. If we can learn our own language, we

will have more chance for further studies and will be good human resources in connection among Hong Kong, Mainland China and our origin countries. We will also be able to retain our cultural identity in Hong Kong whilst contributing to Hong Kong's cultural and economic growth.

Our demands (based on the above information):

It must highlight that any students whose mother tongue is not Cantonese is automatically discriminated against by Mother-tongue Teaching policy in Hong Kong. For the purpose of equal opportunities, an additional language policy or alternative policy must be introduced to ensure all students are able to attain the aims set out in the above policy and that any discriminatory effect of the original policy will be eliminated.

1. Conduct a survey regarding the education needs of ethnic minority and population survey in language used of ethnic minority for establishing language needs and constraints.
2. Syllabus reform of HKCEE : Accept ethnic languages and Chinese as second languages in addition to French and German.
3. Teaching training for cultural and language requirement awareness for NCS students. The training can produce teachers and teaching assistants.
4. Provide courses for ethnic languages, if school has certain number of students in particular ethnic background.
5. Provide systematic planned Chinese as second language curriculum through NCS students' education.
6. Provide planned bridging course for Chinese at all levels, which match to school curriculum and free education for pre-school and facilitate early language attainment.

Contact persons :
Mr Ahmed, Raheel (Chairperson)
Mr Hafiz Mohammad (Secretary)
Ms Mok Miu Ying (Treasurer)

January 2006