



Second-language education policies abroad and in Hong Kong

April 2014

1. Introduction

Oxfam has been concerned about the rights of ethnic minorities in Hong Kong and their ability to integrate socially. We have paid particular attention to their education opportunities, because without them, the minorities cannot fully participate in society or take advantage of their other rights, such as the freedom of speech and occupation.¹

Even though minorities put great efforts into studying Chinese, the existing curriculum for the subject cannot cater to the linguistic learning needs of students who do not speak the language at home. Figures show that a lower percentage of non-Chinese speaking, or NCS, students in Hong Kong receive post-secondary education compared to the general population.² The education system does not promote upward mobility for minorities, so they are unable to join careers with better prospects and higher incomes. As a result, they get stuck in a vicious cycle of poverty.

In light of this, since 2006, we have been advocating with our partners for the Education Bureau to launch a curriculum for students for whom Chinese is a second language, or CSL learners. We hope that through such a curriculum, young minorities can enjoy better opportunities in life. The government addressed the Chinese-language learning needs of minority students for the first time ever in the 2014 policy address, and announced that it would introduce what it called the

¹ Carmichael Sarah, 2009, p.1. *Language rights in education: A study of Hong Kong's linguistic minorities*. Centre for Comparative and Public Law, Faculty of Law, the University of Hong Kong. Occasional Paper No. 19.

² In 2011, only 1.3 per cent of minority students aged 15 and above were in full-time post-secondary courses, according to the Census and Statistics Department's "2011 Population Census Thematic Report: Ethnic Minorities", which was published on June 2011. Ten per cent of non-Chinese speaking candidates received offers under the Joint University Programmes Admissions System, according to Legislative Council panel of education paper no. CB(4)852/12-13(05) from July 2013.

Chinese Language Curriculum Second Language Learning Framework. However, it is not clear how this and other measures will be implemented, nor do stakeholders in Hong Kong have a clear picture of how this “framework” will work. The concept of Chinese as a second language is new for Hong Kong, and the territory would benefit greatly from countries that have experience in implementing measures for it.

Many English-speaking countries started developing policies for second-language speakers as early as the 1960s and 1970s. Hong Kong could study their measures as examples. In this paper we, compare key components of the policies:

1. goals
2. definition of an English learner and learner numbers
3. placement and assessments
4. programme structures
5. duration
6. measures for improving high school performance and graduation rates for second-language learners
7. teachers’ qualifications
8. budget

The report looks at the second-language policies of three countries. For the **United States**, it will consider both the country’s English-language and bilingual curricula; for **Canada**, its English-language curriculum; and for **Australia**, its curriculum for students with English as a second language, or ESL. The report aims to explore ways in which Hong Kong can adapt their curriculum structures for use in its public schools.

2. Comparisons of English-language learning policy for non-English speaking students in different countries

2.1 USA (California)³

2.1.1 Policy goals

The two goals of the English-language learning services are: to ensure that students acquire full proficiency as quickly and effectively as possible and attain parity with native speakers; and to ensure that they can, within a reasonable

³ Unless otherwise stated, information in this section is based on “*Facts about English Learners in California*” (www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/cb/cefelfacts.asp) and the frequently asked questions and answers (www.cde.ca.gov/sp/el/er) from the California Department of Education.

period of time, achieve the same academic standards that are expected of all students in their respective grades.

2.1.2 Definition of an English learner and learner numbers

An English learner is a student in kindergarten to grade 12 who, based on an objective assessment, has not developed a proficiency in English sufficient for participating in the regular school program.⁴

There were 1,441,387 English learners in California public schools in 2011, comprising 23.2 per cent of the overall enrolment. A total of 2,325,748 students speak a language other than English at home. The number represents about 37.4 per cent of the state's public school enrolment. About 82.7 per cent of these students spoke Spanish at home.

2.1.3 Language level and grade placement mechanism and ongoing assessments

All students whose primary language is not English must take the California English Language Development Test, or CELDT, after they enrol in a public school for the first time.⁵ The students are assigned to different ESL levels according to their CELDT scores.

The CELDT also must be administered once per year to English learners until they are reclassified as “fluent English proficient”, which means they do not need extra support in English learning at school.⁶

2.1.4 English-learning programme structures

The government of California has reserved a budget for English-language development instruction for different levels of ability in three kinds of settings:

- **Alternative Program (Alt):** This is a language acquisition process in which learners receive English-language instruction but academic subjects are taught in their *primary language*, for example, Spanish.
- **Structured/Sheltered English Immersion (SEI):** Teachers use *English* as

⁴ It is equivalent to form six in Hong Kong.

⁵ According to the California Education Code, students who do not speak English at home must be assessed within 30 days of enrolment using the state-designated assessment instrument, the California English Language Development Test. There are five levels of achievement in the test: beginning, early intermediate, intermediate, early advanced, and advanced.

⁶ Learners classified as “fluent English proficient” have attained sub-scores and overall scores corresponding to the early advanced or advanced levels in the CELDT.

the language of instruction, but with a curriculum and method of presentation designed for students with less than what the California Department of Education defines as “reasonable fluency” or those who are classified as English learners, who also are referred to as “limited English proficient” students.⁷ SEI includes: (1) English language development, which enhances **proficiency**; (2) specially designed academic instruction in English, which refers to an approach whereby teachers deliver instruction in different **subjects** (e.g. mathematics, science and history) in English. This structure is specially designed to meet the needs of English learners.

- **English Language Mainstream (ELM):** This is a classroom setting for English learners who have acquired reasonable fluency. They leave the SEI setting and study English and other subjects with other local students in mainstream classrooms.

2.1.5 Duration of the English language learning program

Language support services must continue until English learners meet the reclassification criteria.

2.1.6 Measures for improving high school performance and graduation rates for English learners

In order to place English learners on more level playing field, the state allows them to take the California High School Exit Examination with certain variations. For examples, the students may be allowed to take additional supervised breaks, hear a translated version of the test instructions, and ask questions in their primary language for clarification.

2.1.7 Teachers' qualifications

Teachers who are assigned to provide instruction to English learners must hold an authorisation recognised by California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, the state body responsible for issuing licenses and credentials to professional educators.

2.1.8 Budget for English-learning programmes

The base grant for each grade group (kindergarten to grade three, and grades four to six, seven to eight, and nine to 12) varied from US\$6,845 to US\$8,289 per

⁷ There are three classes of English proficiency in CELDT: Limited English proficient, reasonable fluency, and fluent English proficient. See www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/el/documents/celdtinfo1213.pdf

student in 2013. A supplemental grant equal to 20 per cent of the base grant is given to each targeted student.⁸ The supplemental grants are to cover the expense of hiring additional teachers for the English learners.

2.2 Canada (British Columbia)⁹

2.2.1 Policy goals

Since 1999, English-language learning, or ELL, services have assisted students from kindergarten through grade 12 in becoming proficient in English, developing both intellectually and as citizens, and achieving the academic standards required under the provincial curriculum.¹⁰ Initially called English as a second language programmes, they have been in existence since the 1970s. The programme respects diversity in British Columbia communities and attempts to bridge cultures and eliminate racism.¹¹

2.2.2 Definition of English language learners and learner numbers

English language learners are those whose primary language of the home is other than English and who require additional services in order to develop their potential within the British Columbia's school system. A total of 62,080 such students were enrolled in ELL programmes¹² in 2011/12. In total, 135,651 children comprising one-quarter of the overall public school student population (23.8%) spoke a primary language at home other than English in 2011/12.¹³

2.2.3 Language level and grade placement mechanism and ongoing assessments

An initial assessment is conducted at school through the use of a series of standardised tests. Students are usually assigned to age-appropriate classes by English language learning specialists and mainstream classroom teachers. An annual assessment of the students' English-language proficiency and understanding of subject-specific content is carried out. If the review determines that the student is functioning at their age and grade level, the student will no

⁸ *Local Control Funding Formula*. California Department of Education 2013/14.
www.cde.ca.gov/fg/aa/lc/lcffoverview.asp

⁹ Unless otherwise stated, information in this section is based on *English Language Learning: Policy and Guidelines [Consolidated 2009]*, which was published by the British Columbia Ministry of Education.

¹⁰ Previously, this was called the English as a Second Language programme, which came into existence in the 1970s.

¹¹

www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/topic.page?id=C6FB99D78C804FA3912D24CC00C6923D&title=English%20Language%20Learners

¹² ELL students are those whose use of English is found by standardised testing to be sufficiently different from standard English.

¹³ *Education funding: A brief to the Selection Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services from the British Columbia Teachers' Federation*. British Columbia Teachers' Federation, October 2012.

longer require the ELL services.

2.2.4 Different kinds of English-learning programmes

After receiving funding from the Ministry of Education, school districts hire ELL specialists to provide support in one of three ways, according to the students' level of proficiency:

- **Self-contained classes:** This is a setting comprising only identified English learners. They are taught with other students from the same grade with a similar level of proficiency. This arrangement could be used for teaching them other subjects, too. For example, English could be used to teach mathematics.
- **Pull-out support:** This setting involves using small groups for specialised language instruction. The setting is often used for learners with moderate proficiency who are studying in mainstream classes.
- **In-class support:** A supporting teacher assists learners in their regular classrooms in the presence of other students.

During the class, teachers use adapted instructional materials and not just verbal explanations. For example, they might use more visual aids and examples that related to the lives of the learners. They also use adapted assessment methods to understand the students' progress, such as multiple choice instead of long questions for examinations. They also use assessment tools that place a greater weight on in-class participation and homework instead of exams, so that the students can achieve the intended learning outcomes of the provincial curriculum.

2.2.5 Duration of the English Language Learning programme

The Ministry of Education provides up to five years of ELL funding per eligible student. Those five years need not be consecutive.

2.2.6 Measures for increasing high school performance and graduation rates for English-language learners

Some school districts offer ELL acquisition or culture courses. These are electives that count for credit for fulfilling high school graduation requirements for students whose primary language is not standard English and who may require ELL support. The purpose of the language and culture course is to support these students in transitioning into public schools in the province, participating in Canadian society, and understanding the country's culture.¹⁴

¹⁴ Board/Authority Authorized Courses: Requirements and Procedures Guidebook. British Columbia

2.2.7 Teachers' qualifications

ELL specialists must meet requirements set by the British Columbia Ministry of Education's Teacher Regulation Branch, which assesses and issues teaching certificates.

2.2.8 Budget for English-language learning support

The basic allocation for each eligible, full-time school-aged student enrolled in a standard school is CAD\$6,900 in 2013/14. An additional CAD\$1,340 is provided for each ELL student, which represents a supplement of about 20 per cent of the standard allocation.¹⁵ The extra funding is for recruiting ELL specialists and other teaching staff to assist the learners in various ways.

There were 64,714 ELL students in 2012/13, and the ELL programme cost amounted to CAD\$86.7 million.¹⁶

2.3 Australia (New South Wales)¹⁷

2.3.1 Policy goals

New South Wales has had a programme for students for whom English is a second language since 1969. The goal is to improve the English abilities of ESL students in kindergarten through upper secondary school so that they achieve the state academic standards in their grades. The hope is that they can then fully participate in school and be able to pursue further education independently.

2.3.2 Definition of a second-language English student and student numbers

Students with English as a second language are learners from "language backgrounds other than English" or LBOTE, who are learning English as a second or additional language¹⁸, and developing literacy skills in it.

A total of 30.2 per cent of the students at public schools (229,106 pupils) were LBOTE in 2012.¹⁹

Ministry of Education. (Updated 2012).

¹⁵ *Operating Grants Manual, 2012 and 2013*. British Columbia Ministry of Education.

¹⁶ "Student Statistics-2012/13". British Columbia Ministry of Education.

¹⁷ Unless otherwise specified, information in this section is based on *English as a Second Language: Guidelines for Schools*. New South Wales Department of Education and Training Multicultural Programs Unit. 2004.

¹⁸ Learning English is an additive process that builds on and expands the learner's linguistic repertoire. Usually an additional language is used for the purpose of studying.

¹⁹ *Language diversity in NSW government schools in 2012*. Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation, Education and Communications Office of Education.

2.3.3 Language level and grade placement mechanism and ongoing assessments

ESL Scales, an assessment and reporting framework, is used to identify the level of proficiency of students with a language background other than English.²⁰ In general, it is preferable to place ESL students in the ESL targeted support programmes appropriate for their age.

Two written reports based on the ESL Scales are given to parents each school year. The ESL Scales outcomes can be used to inform planning and programming for the language-learning needs of ESL students.

2.3.4 Different kinds of programmes for students with English as a second language

The following are the different kinds of *ESL Targeted Support Programmes*. The availability of these services depends on funding and the number of students at different proficiency levels in each school:

- **Direct ESL teaching modes:** ESL students are placed in a separate class and taught English and other subjects using English as the language of instruction. (This bears similarities to the SEI model in the US and the self-contained classes in Canada.)
- **Collaborative ESL teaching modes:** ESL and mainstream teachers share the responsibility for planning, programming, teaching, assessment and evaluation. ESL students who are taught separately may join projects with students in mainstream classes.
- **Resource ESL teaching modes:** This mode uses the expertise of ESL teachers as a professional development resource for *individual teachers* or the whole school staff. These are usually found in schools which have no trained ESL teachers. The teachers from these schools learn from others who have experience in this area.

2.3.5 Duration of the programme for second-language English students

The state has set no upper limit on the length of time for which a student may continue on the ESL programme. In general, it takes five to seven years for ESL students to become able to speak fluently and competently.

²⁰ There are six levels in the ESL Scales. ESL one on the reporting scale indicates that the student is a beginner, while ESL six indicate the student is an advanced learner.

2.3.6 Measures for improving high school performance and graduation rates for ESL students

All upper secondary students in Australia – those in years 11 and 12²¹, otherwise known as stage six of the system – must prepare for the Higher School Certificate. English is a compulsory subject at this level. The state government allows ESL students who have had five years or less of English instruction to choose English at the standard level or as a second language in year 11, the preliminary year of study for the certificate.²² The ESL course provides a flexible programme of study to accommodate different needs and backgrounds. In particular, during the preliminary year, the topics of study and materials are not prescribed by the state.

2.3.7 Teachers' qualifications

ESL teachers must have obtained the internationally recognised Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages certificate, or TESOL. This certifies that a teacher has been trained in providing instruction to students learning English as a second language.

3. Possible applications in Hong Kong

All of the three countries mentioned have a long history of immigration and started implementing ESL programmes in the 1960s and 1970s. We can draw the following comparisons:

- i. The governments of the three places in this study have set **clear goals** under their ESL policies. They aim to enable students to gain a firm grasp of the English language so that they would be able to join the mainstream education system. The programmes cover kindergarten to upper secondary school and, as such, allow the students a sufficient amount of time to learn English. Notably, the programmes provide the children with the opportunity to study the language in kindergarten, when they are at a stage of development that is ideal for language acquisition. The governments also provide regular funding to employ additional teachers to provide English-language instruction.

²¹ This is equivalent to forms five and six in Hong Kong.

²² The preliminary course of study aims to support the students in moving toward either the English (Standard) or English (ESL) course, and to assist them in learning the language. The aim is to equip them to pursue further studies, employment opportunities and other goals later on. At stage six, students first study the preliminary English course, then move onto the English (ESL) course.

- ii. The three countries decided on the contents of the curricula under their programmes and the expected learning outcomes at different grade levels when they introduced their ESL programmes. Because of this, teachers were able to have a clear understanding of what material they should teach at each level and to what depth. The governments also decided what materials should be used so that teachers could save time and devote more of their energy to their students.
- iii. **All three places set up assessment systems recognised throughout their jurisdiction.** This made it possible for educators to objectively assess the levels at which they should place students. The students would also be regularly reassessed to measure their progress, so that both they and their parents would know where they stood in terms of language proficiency. An objective system of assessment allows students, parents and teachers to better understand where the students need to improve in order to achieve a firm grasp of the language.
- iv. The schools provide a more comprehensive set of measures for supporting second-language English learners, placing them in classes suited to their level of proficiency. Students whose English-language abilities are below that of their native-language peers are placed in separate classes (the SEI in the US; self-contained classes in Canada; and the direct ESL teaching modes in Australia). They are placed with children of a similar level of proficiency so that teachers can provide instruction that is specifically tailored to their level of ability and cultural backgrounds. This allows the students to learn English more comfortably. These students can also continue to interact with first-language English students in classes for other subjects, for example, music and physical education. The time they spend in mainstream classes increases as their English abilities improve. In this way, the students integrate more smoothly. When the ESL students join mainstream classes, they continue to have additional English-learning support. Such support can be provided in-class, in a separate class, or after school.
- v. Besides providing English-language instruction, these governments have also **designed adapted curricula.** Examples include those for history and mathematics. This approach allows the students to continue learning other

subjects in English. Not only that, the adapted texts and teaching methods make it easier for them to absorb the material so that they can develop their analytical abilities. For subjects that require stronger language skills, for example, history, the students can watch films and go to museums. When studying math, teachers use references related to the children's backgrounds. For example, when teaching trigonometry to Chinese or Indian students, they illustrate what they are saying by referring to tea plantations. The teachers may also provide explanations using simpler language or by writing it up. In this way, the students have an easier time understanding the subject matter. **The education authorities provide special support to the students as they approach the end of their secondary schooling, including special arrangements for exams and further courses in English. Through these measures, they help the students achieve better grades for graduation,** so that they can meet university-entry requirements, study at the tertiary level, and find jobs.

- vi. All three governments mandate that teachers assigned to provide instruction to ESL students must have the necessary professional certifications. This is to ensure that they understand the students' needs and their differences from native speakers in terms of culture and language. It also ensures that they have learned the techniques that should be used to teach English to students of different levels of language ability.

3. Poverty and education opportunities for South and Southeast Asian minorities in Hong Kong in recent years²³

Ethnic minorities are not only small in number. Their income levels and rate of enrolment in higher education are also lower than their Chinese counterparts. In this section, we shall focus on South and Southeast Asian minorities, one of the most disadvantaged and long-neglected groups in Hong Kong.

In 2011, 113,815 South and Southeast Asians comprising 36,298 households were living in Hong Kong. Of them, 23.9 per cent fell below the poverty line, 3.5 per cent higher than the overall population. Of these poor households, 68 per cent had at least one member who was working, versus 41 per cent for the population

²³ "South and Southeast Asian ethnic minorities" refers to Pakistanis, Nepalis, Indians, Indonesians, Filipinos and Thais, according to a paper by the Hong Kong Council of Social Services published in December 2011, titled "Poverty among Hong Kong's South and Southeast Asian ethnic minorities in Hong Kong".

in general. The median monthly income for Hong Kong overall was \$12,000. Five groups of ethnic minorities made incomes that were lower than this amount. Indians were not one of them. Indonesians made the lowest incomes, bringing in only \$8,000 per month. Thais made \$8,500 per month, while Pakistanis, Nepalis and Filipinos brought in \$10,000.²⁴ These figures show that a substantial number of South and Southeast Asian workers receive lower wages.

Unfortunately, minority children appeared to be hindered from taking advantage of education as a means of upward mobility. The dropout rate for South Asian students aged 13 to 19 was 13.1 per cent (702 persons) in 2011, compared to 6.4 per cent for those who were Chinese (35,558 persons).²⁵ Only 1.3 per cent of the territory's minorities aged 15 and over were taking full-time post-secondary education in 2011, much lower than the general student population, for which that figure was 12.5 per cent.²⁶

This wide gap in terms of education opportunities has resulted from the fact that there are no policies in place to help minorities learn Chinese, and teachers to use it as a medium of instruction for teaching academic subjects. As a result, their overall academic performance lags behind those of other students.

4. Evaluation of Hong Kong's Chinese language policy for ethnic minority students

Policy background

South and Southeast Asian minorities are no strangers to Hong Kong society. Indians, Pakistanis, and Nepalis migrated to Hong Kong during colonial times. Since Hong Kong was a free port, other minorities arrived to find jobs and seek out a safe haven away from the political turmoil in their home countries. Some of them chose to make Hong Kong their home.

Before 1997, the colonial government exempted minorities at government-subsidised schools from learning Chinese. The minorities were also not required to fulfil any Chinese-language requirements for admission to local

²⁴ Domestic helpers are excluded from the report. Ibid.

²⁵ The Hong Kong Institute of Education. October 2013. *Education opportunities and child poverty of local Ethnic Minorities Press Release*. "Ethnic minorities" here include Indians, Pakistanis and Nepalis.

²⁶ Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department. *Population Census 2011 Thematic Report: Ethnic Minorities*.

universities and becoming civil servants. The Education Department then grouped minority students who could not afford the fees at international schools into a few government schools. These institutions used English as the medium of instruction. They were free to offer Chinese as a subject, and decide how to teach it and to what depth.

After the Handover, Chinese became one of the requirements for admission to post-secondary institutions and becoming a civil servant. However, the government did not formulate any policy to accommodate the learning needs of minority students. Consequently, non-Chinese speaking students – education policymakers do not use the term “ethnic minority students”, instead distinguishing them linguistically from those whose mother tongue is Chinese – have been held back by various policies, which have deeply influenced their educational and career advancement.

The lack of Chinese-language curriculum guidelines, textbooks and territory-wide assessments for teachers of Chinese as a second language

In 2012/13, there were 27,188 non-Chinese speaking students²⁷, or NCS students, in kindergarten to secondary school in Hong Kong. The breakdowns are found below.²⁸

Table 1: Chinese- and non-Chinese speaking students in 2012/13

	No. of NCS students	No. of students overall	NCS students as a percentage of all students
Kindergarten1-3	12,324	164,764	7.5
Primary 1-6	7,945	272,802	2.9
Secondary 1-6	6,919	396,836	1.7
Total	27,188	438,798	6.2

Source: *Examination of estimates of expenditure 2013/14. Education Bureau controlling officer's reply to an initial written question. Reply no. 251.*

Both students who are first- and second-language speakers have the same Chinese-language curriculum now. The Education Bureau issued a document titled “Supplementary guide to the Chinese-language-curriculum for NCS students

²⁷ “Non-Chinese-speaking students” refers to those who do not speak the language at home. As such, students who are ethnically Chinese but who do not speak Chinese at home are also classified as NCS students. “Education Bureau Circular Memorandum No. 57/2013”.

²⁸ *Examination of Estimates of Expenditure 2013-14. Legislative Council paper no. EDB251.*

in 2008”, which only describes guidelines and principles in Chinese teaching. There is currently no concrete teaching methodology or textbooks that can be referenced.

Before September 2013, there were no territory-wide, standardised initial or ongoing assessments. There were also no proficiency benchmarks for NCS students at different grades which could be referenced. As there was no relevant framework providing guidance on what should be taught, teachers had to adjust and prepare suitable materials to match their NCS students’ backgrounds. The Education Bureau introduced the Chinese Language Assessment Tool for Non-Chinese Speaking Students in September 2013, but it only consists of assessment papers and does not provide a clear learning framework or teaching materials for teachers to overcome the problems mentioned above. NCS students may sit in their classrooms throughout their primary and secondary school years, but they still cannot attain the academic standards required to sit the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education, or HKDSE, exam for the subject of Chinese.

After a long wait, the government announced in the 2014 policy address that it would implement the Chinese Language Curriculum Second Language Learning Framework in primary and secondary schools in the 2014/15 school year. The framework is intended to help minority students bridge over to mainstream Chinese classes by indicating clearly the level of performance they should achieve at each level and complementing the assessment tools introduced in 2013. In fact, it is still unclear how this is different from the existing Supplementary Guide to the Chinese Language Curriculum for Non-Chinese Speaking Students. The new framework is derived from the curriculum for Chinese used for native speakers, which has four learning phases. It will be divided into eight learning phases, which is supposed to fit the learning patterns of NCS students. But there is not enough information to show the framework is suitable for NCS students.

According to the information currently available, the new framework so far only covers the first four learning phases, that is, primary one to six. It remains unclear how the government will help minority students in primary school transition over to the secondary curriculum. In addition, the framework is only applicable to primary and secondary students. Kindergarteners are left out of the territory-wide support mechanism. Although Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying mentioned in the policy address that the Education Bureau would enhance school-based support for kindergartens, “school-based”, to a certain extent, implies that the institutions

would still need to rely on themselves for teaching NCS students Chinese. It is comparable to what NCS students are currently experiencing at primary and secondary schools. The sooner that NCS students can start learning Chinese in well-supported programmes, the faster they can catch up to their native-speaking counterparts.

Ethnic segregation caused by the use of designated schools

Non-Chinese speaking students have been eligible for all government-subsidised schools since 2004. However, a majority of the students still go to the so-called “designated schools”.²⁹ NCS students comprise more than half the population at these schools.

In 2013, the government revised its description to “schools designated for intensive support by the bureau in servicing the needs of non-Chinese speaking students”, or “獲教育局提供經常撥款用於加強校本支援以照顧非華語學生需要的學校” in Chinese. From September 2014 onwards, these schools will also adopt the new framework to teach Chinese. However, the medium of instruction at these schools will remain English. The Education Bureau has intended to keep the designated schools. The change in description and the implementation of the framework has not altered the ethnic distribution, and de facto ethnic segregation remains. Minorities comprise 80 to 90 per cent of the student population at some of these schools.³⁰ It appears that these students would have far fewer opportunities to learn Chinese compared to those studying in the mainstream schools. Ultimately, their Chinese proficiency is still not enough to allow them to sit the HKDSE examination in the Chinese language subject.

The government has budgeted around \$200 million to carry out the framework. Our concern is whether the framework will be like the ESL programmes in foreign countries – for example, those in this study – and provide a setting where NCS students are grouped together in self-contained classes to learn Chinese through different topics and subjects. So far, the bureau has not mandated that schools that receive additional funding must provide **self-contained CSL classes** for newly admitted NCS students. Moreover, now the bureau has left it up to schools with fewer than 10 NCS students to apply for the new funding. This implies that

²⁹ The Education Bureau provides \$300,000 to \$600,000 in supplementary grants to designated schools that take NCS students for the extra expenses of hiring teachers, teaching assistants and buying services from non-governmental organisations.

³⁰ *Examination of Estimates of Expenditure 2013-14*. Legislative Council paper no. EDB150.

even if the framework is implemented, some NCS students will not be taught in intensive Chinese classes. Each school admitting fewer than 10 NCS students receives a grant per academic year. This amount will not be enough to enable them to provide systematic language support to their NCS students.

This leaves the students with no choice but to study at designated schools which provide more comprehensive support for learning Chinese. In the end, ethnic segregation will persist after the introduction of the framework. The students will still be deprived of the chance to learn Chinese in a natural context.

Alternative Chinese qualifications for university admissions fail to encourage true social integration

The bureau dealt with the lower proficiency of NCS students and the need for a system to determine university applicants' Chinese abilities by accepting alternative but simpler international public examination qualifications, including the General Certificate of Education, General Certificate of Secondary Education, and International General Certificate of Secondary Education. An A grade in GCSE Chinese is equivalent to the proficiency level in Hong Kong's grades two to four. The second-language learners' Chinese proficiency probably stays around this level after they graduate from secondary school, which is still not enough for their further studies or vocational training. Hong Kong employers might question these qualifications. Even worse, this level of proficiency is not enough to survive everyday life. All these factors prevent the minorities from truly integrating into the community.

In order to enhance the employability of minority school leavers, the government said in the 2014 policy address that starting from the 2014/15 school year, the Education Bureau would provide the Applied Learning (Chinese Language) subject in senior secondary school. NCS students who start school in Hong Kong in senior primary or junior secondary school may not be able to achieve the standards required in Chinese when studying the language in CSL classes. They have no alternative but to take the applied learning subject to obtain a qualification that can later enable them to become employed.

In fact, the applied learning subject comprises a group of smaller, career-oriented subjects which aim to provide more vocational training and career-related skills to

NCS students. The highest grade that a student can achieve in the subject is “attained with distinction”, which is equivalent to level three in the HKDSE. The subject will be pegged to levels one to three of the Qualifications Framework, a system created by the bureau in 2008 to help residents set clear goals for continuing education.³¹ However, with these qualifications, the opportunity for career and academic advancement remains quite limited for young minorities. They will encounter barriers once they start applying to universities or looking for jobs that require a university education.

But why is the Chinese proficiency of NCS students who have been born and raised, and educated for a decade in Hong Kong not on a par with mother tongue students? This reflects the failure and negligence of the current language education for minority students.

Since the new subject cannot substitute the HKDSE Chinese language subject as a qualification for applying to university or for civil servant jobs, it should be regarded just as extra support for helping NCS students perform better in secondary school. The most thorough and comprehensive way to enhance their Chinese-language skills is by instituting a CSL curriculum for all of them.

No professional training programme for teaching Chinese as a second language

Hong Kong does not offer any training for CSL teachers who use Cantonese as the medium of instruction. As a result, teachers must explore how to provide instruction to NCS students through trial and error. This is a waste of the students’ time. Moreover, because there is not much assistance, only a few teachers are willing to join schools with NCS students, exacerbating the situation.

Even though the Education Bureau provides professional support and in-service professional development programmes to enhance teachers’ skills in providing CSL instruction, it does not state whether those programmes are up to international standards, nor does it require all CSL teachers to take them.

A master’s course on teaching Chinese as a second language which the Education Bureau is going to offer is self-financed. Its tuition is double that of

³¹ There are seven levels in the Qualifications Framework. The seventh is the highest and equivalent to a doctorate degree. Level three is equivalent to a Yi Jin Diploma, an alternative pathway for form six school leavers and adult learners launched by the government. For details, please see www.hkcaavq.edu.hk/en/

university grant funded courses. Such a high tuition fee is definitely not effective in encouraging teachers to get professional training. In the end, it is NCS students who have to bear the consequences.

5. Oxfam's recommendations

Having examined the examples abroad and the problems in Hong Kong's existing policy, Oxfam urges the government to provide NCS students with the support they need to learn Chinese – something that should be its responsibility. The agency also urges it to **develop a comprehensive, well-planned and detailed CSL policy** as soon as possible so that NCS and minority students can be equipped with the necessary mastery of Chinese to develop skills in all areas of life. By strengthening their Chinese abilities, these students can take better advantage of their education and career opportunities and participate more in the community. In doing so, they will have a chance at breaking free from poverty.

The government should do the following:

1. It should release important **details about the framework**, such as those regarding the size of the self-contained classes, the material to be taught at different phases, the ways of funding and the kinds of programmes that will be offered. The Education Bureau should set short- to medium-term goals, for example, regarding the number of NCS students who it hopes will sit the HKDSE examination in the Chinese subject and their university admission rate. These are details which can let stakeholders evaluate the effectiveness of the framework and its related policies.
2. The bureau **should set down rules for using the additional funding**. For example, it may stipulate that all of it must be spent on the cost of teaching NCS students, but not administrative expenses, or that CSL teaching assistants should mainly assist the students in adapting to the local Chinese-language curriculum. The bureau should implement **the new mandatory initiatives at all schools** which admit NCS students. Oxfam suggests **looking at examples in the US, Canada and Australia and providing Chinese self-contained classes to NCS students**, so that teachers can address the differences in their students' proficiency, cultural backgrounds and pace of learning, and adapt material in other subjects to their

needs. The bureau should also state in their policy that there should be arrangements to allow NCS students to interact with mainstream students in class or during after-school activities.

3. The bureau should take the initiative to give **funding to schools with fewer than 10 NCS students for recruiting additional teachers for the self-contained classes**, so that NCS students can have equal opportunities in education. Oxfam suggests that the bureau **specify what Chinese-learning support each school provides when it publishes its upcoming annual update of primary and secondary school profiles**. With this information, parents will be able to make better-informed decisions about which school to choose to suit their children's Chinese-learning needs.
4. The period before a child turns five is the ideal time for language acquisition. Younger NCS students can absorb Chinese faster and in a less self-conscious manner. Therefore, we would suggest that the government **extend the use of the framework and assessment tools to kindergartens**. For example, it should provide the self-contained classes just mentioned at that level.
5. The government introduced the assessment tools in September 2013. **The bureau should further observe and evaluate them, and ask frontline teachers for their opinions.**

We strongly recommend that **the bureau use the assessment tools to track the progress of NCS students regularly and at different stages of learning**. To date, the bureau still has not specified what level of proficiency students must achieve in order to join mainstream classes. **It remains basically up to the teachers' judgement. There may be a big variation in standards among schools**. Hence, the bureau should have operational guides for teachers to reference.

In English-speaking countries, **non-native language learners are observed for a period of time, for example, two years, after being reassigned to a mainstream class. When needed, they can be switched back to the self-contained classes to improve their language foundation**. We recommend the government adopt this policy in Hong Kong.

6. **The bureau should also assist schools to use Chinese as a medium of instruction for teaching NCS students.** A weak mastery of Chinese would hamper them in absorbing the information taught under each subject, developing socially and psychologically, and improving their thinking skills. It will gravely curtail their chances of receiving tertiary education in the future. Thus, the bureau should also allocate money for initiatives that deal with this problem – for example, services in and outside of class, adapted textbooks, teaching aids, teaching assistants – so NCS students can be more well-rounded in their development.
7. In the long term, the bureau must **provide an internationally recognised training programme for teaching CSL in Cantonese**, so that teachers can learn the relevant pedagogical theories and skills. The bureau should set a transition timetable for all CSL teachers to take this programme. In the meantime, the University grants committee should disburse its recurrent grants for these courses in the period from 2015 to 2018. The bureau should also provide incentives to make it attractive for teachers to improve their skills in teaching Chinese as a second language.

Comparison of second-language learning policies among four places

Area	California, USA	British Columbia, Canada	New South Wales, Australia	Hong Kong SAR
Policy goals	To ensure that English learners (kindergarten to grade 12) acquire full proficiency in English as rapidly and effectively as possible and attain parity with native speakers of English, and to ensure that English learners, within a reasonable period of time, achieve the academic standards that are expected of all students in each grade.	The English-language learning services assist students (kindergarten to grade 12) in becoming proficient in English so they can develop both intellectually and as citizens and achieve the expected learning outcomes under the province's curriculum. The programme values diversity and attempts to bridge cultures and eliminate racism.	The English as a Second Language programme aims to develop the students' competence in the language and improve their performance to a level where they can fully participate in school and independently pursue further education and training. The programme applies to students from kindergarten to year 12.	<p>The Chinese Language Curriculum Second Language Learning Framework will be available to primary and secondary non-Chinese speaking students in the 2014/15 academic year. It aims to help them transition to mainstream classes.</p> <p>The framework lists the expected learning outcomes for NCS students. It assumes that the students will take a Chinese class that is not at a lower level than that taken by students native in the language, and its</p>

				<p>ultimate goal is for the students to sit the HKDSE exam in the Chinese subject.</p> <p>The new framework will be broken down into eight learning stages instead of four. However, there is no information to indicate that the framework will be more suitable for the NCS students.</p> <p>So far, the framework is designed up to primary six. It is unknown how it will link to the secondary curriculum.</p> <p>The Education Bureau's Chinese Language Assessment Tool for Non-Chinese Speaking</p>
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				<p>Students only covers the primary and secondary learning stages. NCS students in kindergarten are not included. The learning materials and teaching examples are not integral to all learning stages.</p> <p>The bureau has no intention of abolishing eight schools that have traditionally admitted more NCS students. Students there will continue to face an unfavourable Chinese-learning environment.</p> <p>The bureau has not set any short- to medium-term goals regarding the number of NCS students</p>
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				who it hopes will take Chinese in the HKDSE, or their university admission rates. As a result, it will be hard to determine how effective the policy is.
Definition of a second-language learner	<u>An English learner</u> is a student who, based on objective assessment, has not developed a level of proficiency sufficient for participation in the regular school program.	An <u>English language learner</u> is a student whose primary language or languages at home are not English and those whose use of English is found by standardised testing to be sufficiently different from standard English.	<u>A student with English</u> is a <u>second language</u> is a learner from a language background other than English who is studying it as a second or additional language and developing literacy skills in the language.	<u>A non-Chinese speaking student</u> is a student whose spoken language at home is not Chinese. The bureau does not clearly define what level of proficiency NCS students should attain under programmes that support Chinese-learning.
Placement and ongoing assessments	Learners take the California English Language Development Test and are placed in an English-language classroom. The CELDT also must be	The initial assessment is conducted at school and students are usually assigned to age-appropriate classes. An annual assessment is carried out. If the review	ESL Scales, an assessment system, is used to determine an LBOTE student's proficiency English. It is preferable to place ESL students in classes with	All public schools can admit eligible NCS children. A territory-wide initial and ongoing assessment system based on the tool introduced by the bureau has been in use

	<p>administered once per year until the students are reclassified as fluent English proficient.</p>	<p>determines that the student is functioning at the mainstream age and grade level, they may no longer require the ELL services.</p>	<p>children of the same age. Two written assessment reports based on the ESL Scales are given to parents each school year.</p>	<p>for monitoring the Chinese-learning progress of NCS students in primary and secondary schools since September 2013. However, it does not include kindergartens. The assessments tools is set to be further evaluated and its validity is currently under discussion.</p> <p>The schools themselves determine the level of proficiency that students must achieve in order to be placed in mainstream classes. As a result, there will be significant differences among the schools. The bureau also does not indicate whether it will continue to monitor the students'</p>
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				Chinese-learning progress after they join the mainstream.
Second-language learning programmes	<p>There are three settings for <i>English language development</i> instruction:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Structured English Immersion ● English Language Mainstream ● Alternative Program 	<p>ESL support might come in one of three forms:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● self-contained classes ● pull-out support ● in-class support 	<p>There are several modes of delivery for the <i>ESL Targeted Support Program</i>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Direct ESL teaching modes ● Collaborative ESL teaching modes ● Resource ESL teaching modes 	<p>The government has budgeted \$200 million to carry out the framework. Schools admitting 10 or more NCS students will get more funding for various intensive Chinese-learning programmes. But the bureau has not mandated that schools must provide CSL classes for newly admitted NCS students. Currently the bureau has left it up to schools with fewer than 10 NCS students to decide whether to apply for the new funding. If successful in their applications, the schools will get funding for after-school</p>

				<p>language-learning programmes alone.</p> <p>The bureau is not going to provide support to NCS students for learning other academic subjects in Chinese. This will gravely limit their chances of receiving a tertiary education in the future.</p>
Duration of the second-language learning programme	Services must continue until English learners meet the objective reclassification criteria and are classified as fluent English proficient.	The Ministry of Education provides up to five years of English-language learning funding per eligible student. Those five years need not be consecutive.	There is no limit on the number of years that an ESL student can spend in the <i>Targeted Support Program</i> . In general, after five to seven years, students no longer require ESL support.	<p>The framework and funding only applies to students in primary and secondary schools. Kindergarten is not included. The bureau does not specify the number of years for which it provides funding for Chinese-learning programmes.</p> <p>The bureau will provide “school-based”</p>

				<p>professional support to kindergartens. However, this implies that the kindergartens will have to rely on themselves for teaching NCS students Chinese. The support offered to the students is still not enough. Such an arrangement means that the students might miss out on learning Chinese when they are toddlers, which is the ideal period for doing so.</p>
Measures for increasing high school graduation rates for English learners	<p>English learners are allowed to take an adapted form of the California High School Exit Examination. Examples: They are given extra time or allowed to hear the test instructions in their primary language.</p>	<p>Some school districts offer language and culture classes to English learners in grades 10 to 12 to help them prepare for graduating from high.</p>	<p>The ESL course for the Higher School Certificate English is open to students who have been studying in classrooms with English as the language of instruction for five years or less by the time they start the preliminary course.</p>	<p>Since 2008, alternative Chinese qualifications, e.g. the General Certificate of Education, General Certificate of Secondary Education, and the International General Certificate of Secondary Education, have been</p>

				<p>accepted for admission to programmes funded by the University Grants Committee.</p> <p>A new subject, Applied Learning (Chinese Language), will be available for senior secondary NCS students in 2014/15.</p> <p>The new applied learning subject cannot replace the Chinese subject in the HKDSE as a qualification for applying to university or for government jobs. It should be regarded just as extra support for helping NCS students perform better in secondary school. The most thorough and comprehensive way to enhance their</p>
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				Chinese-language skills is by instituting a CSL curriculum for all of them.
Teachers' qualifications	Teachers who provide ESL services must hold an appropriate authorisation recognised by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing.	ELL specialists must meet requirements for certification by the British Columbia Teachers' Federation.	ESL teachers must obtain the Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages certificate.	Teachers are not required to obtain any professional certification. The bureau will open a self-financing master's programme. Its tuition is more than double that of courses funded by University grants committee. This will not be helpful in encouraging teachers to improve their knowledge.
Second-language learner numbers	There were 1,441,387 English learners who comprised 23.2 per cent of the total enrolment in California public schools in 2011. A total of 2,325,748 students speak a language	In 2011/12, a total of 62,080 students were enrolled in public ELL programmes. One-quarter of public school students (23.8% or 135,651) spoke a primary language other than	A total of 229,106 pupils representing 30.2 per cent of the state's student population came from language backgrounds other than English in 2012.	As of September 2012, Hong Kong had the following numbers of students in each grade range. The percentage of the total student population they represent is shown in

	other than English at home. This represents about 37.4% of the state's public school enrolment.	English at home.		brackets. Kindergarten 1-3: 12,324 (7.5); primary 1-6: 7,945 (2.9); secondary 1-6: 6,919 (1.7). The total NCS students in Hong Kong was 27,188 (6.2).
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