

For discussion on
13 April 2015

**Legislative Council Panel on Education
Using Putonghua as the Medium of Instruction
for Teaching the Chinese Language Subject
in Primary and Secondary Schools in Hong Kong**

Purpose

This paper reports the latest developments of using Putonghua as the medium of instruction for teaching the Chinese Language Subject (PMIC) in primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong.

Background

2. Our language education policy is to enhance the biliteracy and trilingualism of our students. In the 1997 Policy Address, the Chief Executive reiterated the goal for “secondary school graduates to be proficient in writing English and Chinese and able to communicate confidently in Cantonese, English and Putonghua.”

3. The Government is committed to promoting trilingualism, i.e. nurturing students’ ability to communicate effectively in English, Cantonese and Putonghua. The Chinese Language Education Key Learning Area provides a primary Chinese Language curriculum and a secondary Chinese Language curriculum under one central curriculum framework which offers schools and teachers the flexibility to plan and develop a range of diverse strategies to meet their students’ varied needs.

The primary and secondary Chinese Language Curricula in Hong Kong

4. Chinese Language and Putonghua are two core subjects in the Hong Kong Basic Education Curriculum (Primary 1 to Secondary 3). Their learning targets and learning contents complement each other. The current primary and secondary Chinese Language curricula in Hong Kong, which consist of nine learning strands (including Reading, Writing, Listening, Speaking, Literature, Chinese Culture, Moral and Affective

Development, Thinking and Independent Language Learning), aim at enhancing students' abilities in reading, writing, listening, speaking, thinking, appreciation and independent language learning, and nurturing students' interest in language learning. The objective of Putonghua Subject is to enable students to master the common spoken language of Han nationality and to give them an advantage of communicating effectively in Putonghua. Learning and teaching of Putonghua at primary and lower secondary levels focuses on strengthening students' listening, speaking, reading aloud and self-learning skills as well as enhancing students' knowledge about the language and Chinese culture.

5. After completing the Putonghua curriculum offered until Secondary 3 level, students will be offered two elective modules related to Putonghua Subject, namely "Putonghua Communication and Application" and "Putonghua and Performing Arts" in the Chinese Language Subject at senior secondary level for additional learning opportunities and aspiration for further studies.

6. With respect to the medium of instruction for teaching the Chinese Language Subject, primary and secondary schools can select Cantonese and/or Putonghua as the medium of instruction according to their own circumstances. Use of Cantonese and/or Putonghua as the medium of instruction for teaching the Chinese Language Subject should not affect the delivery of the Chinese Language curriculum to their students. PMIC is a long-term and developmental target of the Chinese Language curriculum. At present, schools may flexibly use Cantonese and/or Putonghua as the medium of instruction for teaching the Chinese Language Subject having regard to their own circumstances, such as readiness of teachers, standards of students, curriculum planning as well as availability of learning and teaching resources/support.

7. Schools which plan to integrate the Chinese Language Subject and Putonghua Subject should ensure that the curriculum objectives and learning targets of both subjects can be achieved, and both the Chinese language and Putonghua competency of students can be enhanced through the teaching activities. The ultimate goal of the integration is to develop students' Chinese language and Putonghua competency and language literacy in a comprehensive and balanced manner, thereby maximising students' capacity of learning, including their thinking skills and capability of knowledge construction.

“Scheme to Support Schools in using Putonghua to teach the Chinese Language Subject” by the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research (SCOLAR)

8. Under the current policy, schools may use either Cantonese or Putonghua as the medium of instruction to teach the Chinese Language Subject. The “Action Plan to Raise Language Standards in Hong Kong”, published by SCOLAR in 2003, points out that the Government needs to better understand the conditions necessary for schools to make a successful switch to Putonghua, before formulating a firm policy and implementation timetable for all schools to adopt Putonghua as the medium of instruction for the Chinese Language Subject. In the light of the above, SCOLAR conducted a research study on “Factors Affecting the Use of Putonghua to Teach Chinese Language in Hong Kong Primary and Secondary Schools” from 2004 to 2006 and launched the “Scheme to Support Schools in using Putonghua to teach the Chinese Language Subject” (the Support Scheme) in the 2008/09 school year based on the research findings obtained.

9. The objective of the Support Scheme was to provide schools which wished to try out using Putonghua to teach the Chinese Language Subject with the necessary support. The Support Scheme was carried out in four phases, providing support to 40 schools, both primary and secondary, in each phase. Applications from schools were invited once every year from the 2008/09 to 2011/12 school years. Each school received support for three consecutive school years.

10. The support measures given to schools included: (i) professional support rendered by Mainland teaching experts and local teaching consultants to help schools implement their plans on using Putonghua to teach the Chinese Language Subject; (ii) seminars/workshops for teachers on theories of and pedagogy in using Putonghua to teach the Chinese Language Subject; and (iii) local or Mainland exchange activities to increase teachers’ exposure to different teaching practices. In addition, a supply teacher grant was also provided to participating schools to create room for teachers to implement their school plans and attend professional development programmes.

11. The Support Scheme was a pilot scheme and was completed in August 2014. Through providing the necessary support to schools which wished to try out using Putonghua to teach the Chinese Language Subject,

better understanding and experience in implementing PMIC in primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong was obtained.

Review of Experience in implementing the Support Scheme

12. Schools trying out using Putonghua to teach the Chinese Language Subject adopt different operation modes for PMIC classes. While a small number of the schools implementing PMIC in all grade levels and classes, most of the schools implement PMIC only in some grade level(s) or in some class(es) of the same grade level. For instance, most secondary schools only implement PMIC in junior forms.

13. Scholars hold different views on whether Putonghua should be used as the medium of instruction for teaching the Chinese Language Subject. There is no consensus probably because there are many variables affecting the efficacy of Putonghua as the medium of instruction for teaching the Chinese Language Subject. Such variables include, for example, teachers' ability to use Putonghua fluently, the language environment of the schools, the social circles of the students concerned as well as the students' home language environment. Schools are given the flexibility to use Cantonese and/or Putonghua as the medium of instruction for teaching the Chinese Language Subject having regard to their own circumstances.

14. According to the initial findings of a longitudinal study commissioned to a local university on the implementation of PMIC under the Support Scheme, to ensure the effectiveness and quality of learning and teaching in the Chinese Language Subject, apart from the qualifications of teachers¹, it is important to allow sufficient time for teachers to master the pedagogical content knowledge (including curriculum knowledge, teaching design and evaluation strategy) for using Putonghua to teach the Chinese Language Subject. In addition, teachers

¹ In accordance with the Recommendations of SCOLAR on Language Teacher Education and Qualifications, starting from the academic year of 2004/05, new Chinese language teachers in primary and secondary schools should at least hold a Bachelor of Education (BEd) degree majoring in the relevant language subject, or both a first/ higher degree majoring in the relevant language subject and a recognized teacher training qualification majoring in the relevant language subject. For those schools which participated in the Support Scheme, SCOLAR required that the teachers who tried out using Putonghua to teach the Chinese Language Subject should have attained the Putonghua Language Proficiency Requirement (LPR) on Classroom Language Assessment or at least Grade 2B in Putonghua Proficiency Test.

should be aware that the switch from using Cantonese to Putonghua in teaching the Chinese Language Subject is not simply a change of instructional language. During the course of exploring the relevant pedagogical content knowledge with teachers, appropriate support and training should be provided to teachers for building their confidence and competence in using Putonghua to teach.

Mainland-Hong Kong Teachers Exchange and Collaboration Programme

15. The Education Bureau is also financing the Mainland-Hong Kong Teachers Exchange and Collaboration Programme (the Programme). Mainland experts give advice to schools on their request on developing school-based plan for PMIC according to their needs. Through collaborating with these experts in developing their school-based curricula and teaching strategies, teachers can enhance their confidence and competence in implementing PMIC and in establishing a collaborative and reflective culture.

16. The Programme operates in a “station-in-school” mode of collaboration. Mainland experts are normally stationed in a school for two days per week and collaborate with teachers in planning their school-based curricula and teaching strategies through meetings, collaborative lesson planning, school-based teacher development activities or inter-school exchange activities such as co-teaching and lesson demonstration. The experts make reference to the educational mission of the schools and their unique situations and support them in developing different modes of implementing PMIC. These modes include: (i) whole school or by level implementation of PMIC in accordance with the readiness of the school; (ii) re-organising the learning content of the Chinese Language and Putonghua Subjects to make learning more systematic; (iii) enhancing teachers’ capacity in the use of classroom language and developing effective teaching strategies such as the teaching of pin-yin, reading aloud and integrating speaking and writing; (iv) creating a Putonghua-rich environment through conducting a variety of activities such as morning sharing, lunch time games, Putonghua ambassador scheme, Putonghua radio channel and public speaking/speech competitions.

17. On completion of the first-year collaboration with the Mainland experts, continued support through the Programme may be provided,

upon request, to help schools develop context-relevant PMIC. In addition, schools may also seek advice from the regular professional school-based support services offered by the Bureau.

Enrich Putonghua environment in the community and school

18. To ensure the successful implementation of PMIC, it is essential to cultivate a Putonghua-rich environment to extend learning beyond the classroom².

19. At present, most primary and secondary schools organise a wide range of Putonghua extra-curricular activities outside classes and create a rich language environment in schools. These provide ample opportunities for students to use Putonghua to communicate with one another. A number of schools launch “Putonghua Day” or “Putonghua Week” and assign students to be the Putonghua ambassadors. They also organise multifarious activities such as Putonghua game booths, speech competitions, songs/films appreciation, talent and drama shows. Schools are making good use of multi-media resources, such as campus TV/radio station, to create a Putonghua environment for students to apply what they have learned.

20. Since 2002, year round activities have been organised by SCOLAR to create a more conducive Putonghua language environment at schools and in the community to boost the interest and proficiency of the public, especially students, in Putonghua, as well as to provide more opportunities for them to apply what they have learned.

21. In addition, a growing number of Hong Kong schools and students are participating in the “China Essay Competition for Secondary Students”. In the 2014/15 school year, over 100,000 students have participated in the competition. Among all participants, there are always representatives from Hong Kong who could enter the final round to compete with their mainland counterparts, by giving speeches or debating in Putonghua, for winning the honor of “the Star of Literature”.

² To ensure the teaching effectiveness of Putonghua, all Putonghua teachers holding a permanent post should have attained the Putonghua Language Proficiency Requirement (LPR), i.e. obtaining pass in Putonghua Language Proficiency Assessment (comprises four papers, including Listening and Recognition, Pinyin, Speaking and Classroom Language Assessment) since the 2006/07 school year.

Way Forward

22. The Government is committed to promoting trilingualism, i.e. nurturing students' ability to communicate effectively in English, Cantonese and Putonghua. The Education Bureau continues to give schools professional support on teaching the Chinese Language Subject irrespective of whether the schools' medium of instruction is Putonghua or Cantonese. At the same time, the Bureau also provides complementary measures to continuously raise the standards of Chinese (including Cantonese and Putonghua) of Hong Kong students.

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