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Panel on Education

Meeting on 2 July 2016

**Background brief on using Putonghua as the medium of instruction
for teaching the Chinese Language Subject in
primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong**

Purpose

This paper summarizes the major views and concerns expressed by Members on using Putonghua as the medium of instruction for teaching the Chinese Language Subject ("PMIC") in primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong.

Background

Language education policy

2. As advised by the Administration, the existing language education policy is to enhance the biliteracy and trilingualism of students. The Government is committed to nurturing students' ability to communicate effectively in English, Cantonese and Putonghua. Meanwhile, 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.

3. At present, primary and secondary schools may flexibly use Cantonese and/or Putonghua as the medium of instruction ("MOI") for teaching the Chinese Language Subject having regard to their own circumstances, such as readiness of teachers, standards of students, curriculum planning and availability of learning and teaching resources/support. The use of Cantonese and/or Putonghua as MOI for teaching the Chinese Language Subject should not affect the delivery of the Chinese Language curriculum to their students.

Scheme to Support Schools in using Putonghua to teach the Chinese Language Subject

4. In 2003, the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research ("SCOLAR") published the "Action Plan to Raise Language Standards in Hong Kong" and pointed out that the Government needed 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 MOI for the Chinese Language Subject. Subsequently, 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 2008-2009 school year based on the research findings obtained.

5. Among about 1 000 primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong, a total of 160 schools had implemented PMIC on a pilot basis under the Support Scheme from the 2008-2009 to 2013-2014 school years. Under the Support Scheme, schools could adopt different modes to implement PMIC. While a small number of these schools implemented PMIC in all grade levels and classes, most of the schools implemented PMIC only in some grade level(s) or in some class(es) of the same grade level. For participating secondary schools, most of them implemented PMIC in junior forms.

6. According to the Administration, PMIC is a long-term and developmental target of the Chinese Language curriculum. Although the Support Scheme was completed in August 2014, the Education Bureau ("EDB") would continue to provide relevant support to schools, such as through the Mainland-Hong Kong Teachers Exchange and Collaboration Programme. Meanwhile, the Administration had commissioned a local university to carry out a longitudinal study on the implementation of PMIC under the Support Scheme.

Deliberation on issues of concern

Implementation of PMIC

7. Members in general agreed with the policy objective to enhance the biliteracy (Chinese and English) and trilingualism (Cantonese, English and Putonghua) of students. However, when deliberating on the policy of PMIC at the meeting of the Panel on Education ("the Panel") held on 13 April 2015, members expressed different views. Some members supported PMIC and considered it a move in the right direction. They referred to the successful

experience of some schools in implementing PMIC and enquired on the timetable, if any, to further promote PMIC among schools. According to EDB, schools could decide whether to teach the Chinese Language Subject in Cantonese or Putonghua having regard to their own circumstances. On the question of whether the Administration would require all Chinese Language teachers to possess the capability of teaching the subject in Putonghua, the Panel was informed that currently, there was no additional qualification requirement on Chinese Language teachers in schools which practised PMIC. EDB had put in place a number of support measures to enhance teachers' capability to use Putonghua to teach the Chinese Language Subject.

8. Some members objected to the implementation of PMIC as they were worried that too much emphasis would be placed on Putonghua proficiency, at the expense of the learning of Chinese language and literature. They considered that the learning of Chinese involved not only the linguistic but also the cultural aspect. They were concerned that students' Cantonese proficiency would be undermined. Noting that EDB had set PMIC as the long-term and developmental target of the Chinese Language curriculum, some members queried that this might have been based on political consideration rather than any solid evidence of the pedagogical value of PMIC. They stressed the need for public consultation and in-depth study before promulgating PMIC as the long-term target.

9. As advised by the Administration, setting PMIC as a long-term and developmental target was not based on political consideration. In fact, SCOLAR had recommended in 2003 that before formulating a firm policy and implementation timetable for all schools to adopt Putonghua as MOI for the Chinese Language Subject, the Government needed to better understand the conditions necessary for schools to make a successful switch to Putonghua. The Administration would study the implementation experience gained from the Support Scheme before deciding on the way forward. It did not consider that the implementation of PMIC would reduce the use and importance of Cantonese.

10. To enable the Panel to better understand the current implementation of PMIC in Hong Kong, the Administration was requested to provide relevant information, such as the number of primary and secondary schools as well as the number of classes using PMIC, the number of Chinese Language teachers who were qualified to use Putonghua to teach the subject, etc. According to EDB, it would provide the requested information to the Panel for discussion at the meeting to be held on 2 July 2016.

11. At an earlier Council meeting of 7 May 2014, Hon Starry LEE raised a question to enquire, amongst others, the measures in place to encourage schools

to adopt PMIC. In its reply, the Administration advised that scholars and schools held different views on whether Putonghua should be used as MOI for teaching the Chinese Language Subject. There were many variables which could affect the efficacy of Putonghua as MOI for teaching the Chinese Language Subject, for instance, teachers' ability to use Putonghua fluently, schools' language environment and the social circles of students.

Review of the Support Scheme

12. Some members queried the cost-effectiveness of the Support Scheme launched by SCOLAR on a pilot basis under which some \$180 million had been spent on various support measures. There was a view that the Administration should examine whether the use of Putonghua or Cantonese as MOI would be more effective in raising the standard of Chinese among primary and secondary students.

13. In this connection, the Administration advised that according to the initial findings of the longitudinal study commissioned to a local university, there was improvement in students' written Chinese, as shown in the reduced use of slangs. The longitudinal study also revealed the need to provide appropriate support and training to school teachers in teaching the Chinese Language Subject in Putonghua. According to the feedback of some schools, the standard of Putonghua of their students had also improved. At members' request, the Administration would provide the findings of the study report in due course

Latest position

14. The Administration will brief the Panel on the latest developments of PMIC at the meeting to be held on 2 July 2016.

Relevant papers

15. A list of relevant papers on the Legislative Council website is in the **Appendix**.

List of relevant papers

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Legislative Council	7.5.2014	Record of Proceedings Pages 48-50 (Question 9)
Panel on Education	13.4.2015 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes

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