

Educational support for non-Chinese speaking students does not end at pumping funds to schools; Look beyond providing the bare minimum

By now, it should be a widely known fact that since 2014-15, the Hong Kong government provides all schools admitting 10 or more non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students with the enhanced funding ranging from HKD800, 000 to HKD1, 500,000 per year depending on the number of NCS students, with the supposed objective of supporting and aiding NCS students' education¹. However, there are certain pressing problems in relation to this initiative which have caused this measure to become a letdown when it could have been life-changing for ethnic minorities. These problems shall be brought to light below.

Firstly, most schools fail to display accountability regarding the use of the funding which essentially nullifies its whole purpose. It is understood that schools are required to submit to Education Bureau (EDB) a school plan and a school report on the deployment of the Grant and the support measures every year, but this mechanism is just another facet of negligence because more than 60% of the schools who receive these funds failed to either submit their school plans and/or school reports late in 2018-19². This elucidates that NCS students are heavily neglected as many schools have showed failure in simply reporting about NCS students' education progress in a timely manner so one could only imagine the kind of attention they are subjected to during actual learning.

Moreover, these funds are backed up with extremely limited transparency to stakeholders and hence, there needs to be an active effort of making at least parents aware about schools that receive such funding and more importantly, the way these funds are utilized because their children are supposedly the direct beneficiaries. There is absolutely no point in making such crucial information non-transparent. Indeed, increasing the transparency of the funding will allow parents to track its utility and potential benefits which is important in determining the effectiveness of it.

Additionally, there is barely any means of evaluation deployed by schools which could reflect on the effectiveness of these funds. As a matter of fact, results from a 2019 survey revealed that just 38% of Chinese language teachers had the confidence in teaching NCS students, owing in part to a lack of professional support while the government revealed that just 13% of NCS students were able to transition to mainstream, Chinese classes in 2015-16. Therefore, it is highly necessary to adopt certain objective performance indicators to assess the effectiveness of these funds. The importance of ensuring quality education should not be overridden amid distributing these funds to schools. Simply pumping funds to schools in a passive manner is inadequate because what many schools lack is the encouragement and guidance to make good use of these funds (e.g., 10% of the kindergartens used less than half

¹ <https://www.legco.gov.hk/research-publications/english/1920iss33-educational-support-for-non-chinese-speaking-students-20200708-e.pdf>

² https://www.aud.gov.hk/pdf_e/e76ch02sum.pdf

of the grant in 2017-18)³. To provide genuine educational support to NCS students, there needs to be a vision that looks beyond providing mere financial support to NCS students because there clearly is a problem when schools have the funds in hand but are reluctant to use them for the right cause.

All in all, it is high time we debunk the myth that only passively providing financial subsidies to schools would equate to the betterment of NCS students' learning process. Aspects of as accountability, transparency and ensuring quality education, which are building blocks of genuine educational support require more than just funding to bring into action. There are indeed many gaps within the initiative of providing such funding to relevant schools which need to be eliminated to see a positive change.

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³ <https://www.thestandard.com.hk/breaking-news/section/4/170843/School-receiving-non-Chinese-speaking-grant-not-monitored-by-Education-Bureau>