

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The Standing Committee on Language Education and Research (SCOLAR) has issued the final report of its language education review. The report can be found on the SCOLAR website at www.language-education.com. Following is a summary of the Committee's recommendations:

SPECIFYING AND ASSESSING LANGUAGE COMPETENCIES EXPECTED OF OUR STUDENTS AND WORKFORCE

- To give our students and working adults a clear target to work towards, **Chinese and English competencies** expected of our students, university graduates and entry-level professionals **should be specified** using descriptors and exemplars.
- **Assessment instruments should be developed** to help the Government, educators and the learners themselves evaluate if the expected language competencies are being achieved.

Students in Primary 1 to Secondary 7

Basic competencies

- The development of **basic competencies in Chinese and English Language for Key Stages 1 to 4** (i.e. Primary 1 to Secondary 5) by the Curriculum Development Council (CDC) is supported. The same effort should be extended to Key Stage 5 (i.e. Secondary 6-7).
- Both **educational and vocational considerations** should be taken into account in developing the basic competencies for Key Stages 3 to 5 (i.e. Secondary 3-7). The advice of human resources professionals with expertise in language training should be sought.
- Basic competencies should be regularly reviewed to cater for changes in societal demand as well as changes in the language proficiency of the population over time.
- School management and teachers should **help students achieve** not only the basic competencies but **the full range of learning outcomes** that the language curricula aim to deliver.

Basic Competency Assessment

- The **System Assessment** of the Basic Competency Assessment (BCA) to be conducted on students at the end of Key Stages 1 to 3 **should be a low-stakes assessment**. Neither the Government nor the school management should release the results of individual schools to the public.
- The **Student Assessment** of the BCA is an online programme, which will give schools additional information on individual students' attainment of the basic competencies in reading and listening. It will provide a large pool of assessment items, which teachers and students can use as **a language learning resource**.
- The Government should channel available resources to schools taking into consideration their need for support in language education as reflected in their performance in the BCA.
- School management should provide additional support to students who have difficulty in achieving the basic competencies in Chinese or English Language for their Key Stage. However, these students should not be kept from moving up to the next school level unless they also had problems in other subjects.

Standards-referenced public examinations

- The development of **standards-referenced Hong Kong Certificate of Education (HKCE) Chinese and English examinations** by the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) and their implementation **in 2007** are supported.
- The Authority should also develop standards-referenced Hong Kong Advanced Level (HKAL) Chinese and English examinations and implement them in 2009.
- The HKEAA and CDC should decide which grades in these standards-referenced examinations reflect the basic competencies of students in Secondary 5 and Secondary 7 (i.e. Key Stages 4 and 5) respectively.
- **To help evaluate Secondary 3 and Secondary 5 students' proficiency in Putonghua**, the HKEAA should revamp its HKCE Putonghua examination to make it **a standards-referenced assessment** of listening and speaking suitable for students of Secondary 3 and above. The Authority should complete the

revamping of the examination in time for implementation **in 2007**.

- The HKEAA and CDC should decide which grades in the standards-referenced HKCE Putonghua examination reflect the levels of proficiency expected of students who have completed the Secondary 3 and Secondary 5 Putonghua curricula respectively.

Language requirements for university admission

- The University Grants Committee should work with local universities to determine, with the help of HKEAA and CDC, which grades in the standards-referenced HKAL examinations reflect the level of Chinese and English required for university admission, taking into account relevant English standard adopted overseas.

University graduates and working adults

- University graduates and working adults should strive to attain the language competencies expected of individuals at their educational level. However, imposing a minimum language requirement for university graduation is not recommended.
- **Employers**, particularly the Government, **should adopt the language competencies expected** of working adults at different educational levels **as requirements for recruitment and/or promotion**.
- To assess their competence in English, working adults can make use of the international English tests available in Hong Kong, including the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and the tests accepted by the Workplace English Campaign.
- To help local working adults assess their competence in Chinese, the HKEAA should develop **a general Chinese proficiency assessment** and offer it to the public **no later than 2010**.
- To help local workers plan and assess their progress in Putonghua learning, the HKEAA has been commissioned by SCOLAR to develop **a Putonghua proficiency scale** based on its Test of Proficiency in Putonghua.

CREATING A MORE MOTIVATING LANGUAGE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

- School management, teachers, parents, the mass media and other

relevant parties in the community should work together to create a more motivating language learning environment for local students and working adults.

Curriculum and pedagogy

- At the pre-primary level, development of a child's mother tongue should take precedence over the acquisition of other languages. Language activities should be authentic, enjoyable and pressure-free. **Exposure to English and Putonghua should only be introduced where teachers with the required proficiency are available and an appropriate informal approach is adopted.**
- The **student-centred approach** of the ongoing **curriculum reform** at primary and secondary levels is supported. School management and teachers should adopt **more lively teaching methods** and make use of a wider variety of print texts, multi-media resources and co-curricular activities to **increase students' interest in language learning**.
- More attention should be given to the **teaching of grammar, phonics and phonetics in English Language and Cantonese pronunciation and standard modern Chinese writing in Chinese Language. Language arts should also be promoted** to enrich students' understanding of Chinese and English-speaking cultures.
- **Native-speaking English teachers (NETs)** should be **properly deployed** to enrich the language environment in schools, bring in innovative teaching methods and promote the professional development of local English Language teachers. The Education and Manpower Bureau should **ensure** that the NETs recruited are **adequately prepared in subject knowledge and pedagogy to teach English as a second language in local schools**.
- The Curriculum Development Institute should encourage publishers to produce **more stimulating and interesting language textbooks**.

Teachers

- To ensure the success of the curriculum reform, **more intensive and focused professional development programmes** on curriculum leadership, development and management will be provided **for panel chairpersons** (or curriculum leaders) of language subjects.

- In addition, **a task force of district-based teaching consultants** should be set up to **help individual schools improve their language curricula and pedagogy.**
- To ensure that **language teachers** are adequately prepared for their work, i.e. **proficient** in the language they teach, well grounded in **subject knowledge** and acquainted with the **latest theories and practices in language teaching and learning** –
 - All English and Putonghua teachers should **meet the Language Proficiency Requirement for Teachers (LPR) within the time frame specified by the Government.** The attainment of LPR should be recognised by teacher education providers with the granting of credits or advanced standing for Bachelor of Education (BEd) programmes, and become a pre-requisite for admission to postgraduate-level teacher education programmes.
 - Starting from the 2004/05 school year, new language teachers should hold at least a **BEd degree majoring in the relevant language subject**, or both **a first degree and a Postgraduate Diploma (or Certificate) in Education (PGDE/PCEd) majoring in the relevant language subject.**
 - New language teachers without the recommended qualifications should **acquire them within 3 to 5 years of their entry into the profession.** The Education and Manpower Bureau should re-deploy its resource to provide more training places for these new language teachers.
 - **New language teachers who have not received any initial teacher training should attend a preparatory course** before and/or shortly after assuming teaching duty. The course should cover basic language teaching skills.
 - An **incentive grant** covering 50% of the course fees, subject to a maximum of \$30,000, **should be provided to encourage serving language teachers to acquire the recommended qualifications.** Priority will be given to those who have neither a degree nor any teacher training in the relevant language subjects.
 - The Education and Manpower Bureau should develop a career ladder for language teachers, specifying the qualifications and core competencies to be attained for advancement in the teaching grade.

School management

- **School principals should** familiarise themselves with the principles of the curriculum reform and **enhance their skills in change management** through continuing professional development.
- To allow language teachers to focus on improving the quality of language teaching and learning, school management should critically review their schools' work processes and deployment of resources to **reduce language teachers' non-teaching workload**, and facilitate the adoption of appropriate group teaching strategies.
- School management should nurture a high quality team of language teachers, promote a language-across-the-curriculum approach, and discourage ineffective use of textbooks, homework and assessment in their schools. They should encourage more extensive use of information technology and multi-media resources, and explore new experiential learning opportunities for their students, such as language camps and joint school activities with international schools.
- School management should **strengthen their communications with parents** and **help them understand the school's approach to language teaching and learning**.

Parents

- **Parents should help their children** cultivate an interest in language learning and **develop good reading habits**.
- Parents should learn more about the current curriculum reform and support their children's teachers in its implementation. Parent-teacher associations can act as a forum for the exchange of views on language teaching and learning among school management, teachers and parents.

The wider community

- Schools, parents and students should **make better use of the mass media**, particularly English and Putonghua television and radio programmes, **as resources for language learning**.
- To promote the use of English television programmes in the teaching and learning of English –

- All English television programmes should have **English subtitles**; and
- Students, teachers and parents should help to select programmes of interest to students for broadcast on the free English television channels.
- The Language Fund will continue to sponsor the Annual Hong Kong News Awards to recognise Chinese and English news and headline writing of high language standard.
- Adult language learners should take advantage of the various funding schemes and training programmes offered by the Government to improve their language competence.
- A **high-level inter-bureau working group should be set up and chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration to consider language policy issues** that are relevant to enhancing the biliterate and trilingual environment in Hong Kong but **beyond the scope of language education**. Relevant issues may include -
 - whether certain organizations in public and private sectors should provide written materials for public consumption in both Chinese and English and provide trilingual frontline services;
 - how to enhance the quality of language used in programmes produced and/or broadcast by local television and radio service operators, including ensuring the accurate Cantonese, Putonghua and English pronunciation of presenters and performers;
 - whether more quality English and Putonghua radio programmes, with improved quality of reception, should be provided through, e.g. the introduction of digital radio service; and
 - whether support should be given to non-Chinese residents and new immigrants for learning Cantonese and written Chinese.

MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION (MOI)

- **SCOLAR supports adopting the students' mother tongue as the MOI.** If a second language is to be adopted as the MOI, three preconditions – teachers with the capability to teach in that language, students with the proficiency to learn in that language, and the provision of suitable support measures - must be fulfilled.

- The MOI policy review should re-examine the mechanisms used to ensure that these three preconditions are being met by schools using or wishing to use English as the MOI for all subjects.
- Both English-medium and Chinese-medium schools should create an environment that provides more opportunities for the use of English outside the classroom.

TEACHING CHINESE LANGUAGE IN PUTONGHUA

- **SCOLAR fully endorses the Curriculum Development Council's long-term goal of teaching Chinese Language in Putonghua.**
- Findings from a limited number of local studies conducted so far indicate that students who learn Chinese Language in Putonghua show improvement in Putonghua proficiency and Chinese writing but not necessarily in general Chinese competence. No firm policy or timetable is thus recommended for using Putonghua to teach Chinese Language, pending further studies on the conditions required to ensure a successful switch and prevent possible negative outcomes.
- **Schools** that believe they have the preconditions for success in place are strongly **encouraged to try using Putonghua to teach Chinese Language**. As a basic condition, these schools **should ensure** that the Chinese Language **teachers** deployed to teach the subject in Putonghua **satisfy the Language Proficiency Requirement for Putonghua teachers in speaking and classroom language**.
- To help Chinese Language teachers enhance their Putonghua proficiency, the Language Fund will provide them with subsidies to attend Putonghua summer immersion courses in the mainland.
- Engagement of Chinese Language teachers from the mainland is supported as an interim measure to help interested schools try teaching Chinese Language in Putonghua. The teachers engaged should hold qualifications equivalent to a local degree and recognised teacher training both majoring in Chinese Language.

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