

## The Positioning of Chinese Language Education in the New Senior Secondary Academic Structure

### Language Policy of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and the World Trend

To sustain the competitiveness of Hong Kong as a vibrant international city, Hong Kong citizens need to develop proficiency in both Chinese and English. Hence, one of the important goals of education, as stated in the Chief Executive's Policy Address in 1997, is to help "secondary school graduates to be proficient in writing English and Chinese and able to communicate confidently in Cantonese, English and Putonghua." Likewise, the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research (SCOLAR) recommended in its final report on the review of language education in Hong Kong in 2003 that when a new three-year senior secondary education structure is introduced, the policy of "biliteracy and trilingualism" on language education should apply to Primary 1 to Secondary 6 students.

The number of people studying Chinese as a second language at school has been growing steadily in many parts of the world, reflecting a booming need for, and an advantage in, learning the Chinese language and culture in the global economy today.

### Catering for Students' Diverse Needs

Non-Chinese speaking students are encouraged to study Chinese because it will help them integrate into the local community through effective communication and a better understanding of the local culture. The Chinese Language curriculum in Hong Kong has set clear learning targets for each Key Stage in primary and secondary education, and developed a learning outcomes framework with level descriptors that reflect students' language abilities and areas for improvement. With the support of the curriculum guidelines and the learning outcomes framework, schools will know better what their students have learnt, their learning pace as well as other factors that affect their progress, and can therefore adapt and improve their learning and teaching plans and strategies. They are encouraged to follow the central Chinese Language curriculum, which is intended for all students, but schools might decide, having regard to the background and needs of the students, the level of Chinese language to be offered and make suitable curriculum adaptations. The Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) has pledged to provide assistance and supporting materials to help teachers teach Chinese to non-Chinese speaking students.

While the majority of Chinese-speaking students will take part in the Chinese Language public examinations (the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination and the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination at present and the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) in future), the non-Chinese speaking students who wish to get certification for studying Chinese but are not ready to take these examinations may sit for overseas Chinese language examinations such as the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) conducted by the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) or the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) to be arranged by HKEAA /EMB starting from 2007. Chinese returnees are also encouraged to study Chinese Language. They may choose to sit for the New Senior Secondary (NSS) Chinese Language examination or other overseas Chinese language examinations mentioned above.

In the case of Putonghua, in line with the language policy recommended by SCOLAR, the Basic Education Curriculum Guide (Primary 1 to Secondary 3) (2002) prepared by the Curriculum Development Council (CDC) recommends that all students learn Putonghua. Students more proficient in Putonghua may select those elective modules offered in the NSS Chinese Language curriculum that enable them to further extend their Putonghua ability. Students may continue to study Chinese Language and be assessed in Putonghua in listening and speaking.

### Opportunities for Learning Other Languages

Hong Kong is an international city and a melting pot of different cultures. We will, through the NSS academic structure, continue to provide students with opportunities to learn other languages. The HKEAA will liaise with overseas examination authorities on matters regarding the administration of related international examinations. Taking the needs of the ethnic minority groups and students' requests for learning foreign languages into consideration, EMB supports HKEAA's proposal to offer Cambridge Assessments for French, German, Hindi, Japanese, Spanish and Urdu at the NSS level. Students' performance in the above examinations will be reported separately in the HKDSE following the conventions adopted by the overseas examination authorities.

Although EMB provides opportunities for learning other languages as well as support through the Diversity Learning Grant for schools to offer languages courses under the NSS, the learning of these languages should not be at the expense of learning Chinese.

## **Diverse Choices for Different Students**

In short, Chinese-speaking local students should take the NSS Chinese Language curriculum in order to enhance their language mastery and understanding of the Chinese culture. They may choose to take one more foreign language in addition to English, depending on their competence and interest. As for non-Chinese speaking local students, while they are encouraged to study Chinese, they may choose between examinations for the NSS Chinese Language subject and the other Chinese language examinations, based on their interest, competence and need for certification.

The Heads of Universities Committee has announced that when the NSS curriculum is implemented, attainment in Chinese Language will normally be one of the core requirements for admission to local universities. However, the current practice of accepting other languages as an alternative to Chinese Language on an exceptional basis will continue. It should be noted that students without certification in Chinese will have difficulties in enrolling in some local undergraduate programmes.

The continuous success of Hong Kong depends on citizens that are biliterate and trilingual. Hence, the goal of our language education policy is to develop the full potential of our students in Chinese as well as in English. We are firmly committed to ensuring that our students have the opportunity to learn Chinese so that they will remain competitive in the global community where the Chinese language is flourishing.

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