

EdUHK Forum on Inclusive and Equitable Education for All in Hong Kong

Briefing Paper No. 4

The Education University of Hong Kong

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Summary

Minority language students face a number of challenges from the current education system. Whilst the number of minority language students, including South Asians (e.g. Pakistani, Nepalese and Indian) and Southeast Asians (e.g. Filipino, Thai, Indonesian) attending school full-time in Hong Kong has increased since 1997, the number of schools offering English as a medium of instruction has reduced.

Many minority language students attend government schools where Cantonese is the medium of instruction or attend schools (formerly known as “designated” schools) where they are streamed into English-medium of instruction classes. Provision for learning Cantonese as a second language at such schools is often limited. This places minority language students at a disadvantage when applying for jobs and higher education (academic and vocational) in Hong Kong.

This forum series was developed by the EdUHK as a way for stakeholders to meet to discuss how education can be improved for minority language students and the role of the University as the trainer of many of Hong Kong’s teachers.

This series of Briefing Papers presents the findings of these Forums.

Inclusive and Equitable Education for All in Hong Kong: Briefing Papers Series
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Teaching and Learning Experiences

Introduction

This Forum is the fourth in an ongoing series on Inclusive and Equitable Education for All in Hong Kong organised by the UNESCO Chair in TVET and Lifelong Learning. The forum was hosted by the Education University of Hong Kong (EdUHK) on 19 May 2017.

The first Forum was held in October 2015, which identified a number of priority areas in education for minority language students in Hong Kong. One area was the role of the EdUHK in enhancing pre-service and in-service teachers' cultural sensitivity and competence in handling classes of students with diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. The second Forum in May 2016 continued dialogue on issues raised by the first Forum, and focused upon the specific theme of raising awareness of multiculturalism and diversity through teacher education programmes at EdUHK.

The third forum explored examples of good teaching methods that have had success in the classroom and received positive feedback from minority language students. The aim was to lead to development of ideas as to how the University could improve our teacher education programmes, particularly for teachers of minority language students.

This fourth forum continues on the same theme by inviting stakeholders recall their experiences of teaching and learning, and also to briefly review a draft of a teaching module for student teachers to learn how to be more sympathetic with the needs of minority students.

The Forum brought together 19 relevant stakeholders and specialists, from the EdUHK, members from minority and concern groups, and minority students who were in tertiary education.

The Forum was introduced and facilitated by Professor Bob Adamson, Chair Professor in Curriculum Reform, EdUHK.

Background

Key issues in education for minority students in Hong Kong

Minority language students face a number of challenges from the current education system, including access and language barriers. Whilst the number of minority language students, including South Asians (e.g. Pakistani, Nepalese and Indian) and Southeast Asians (e.g. Filipino, Thai, Indonesian) attending school full-time in Hong Kong has increased since 1997, the number of schools offering English as a medium of instruction has reduced.

Many minority language students who do not have the socioeconomic means to attend private international schools instead attend government schools where Cantonese is the medium of instruction or attend schools (formerly known as

“designated” schools) where they are streamed into English-speaking classes with other minority language students. Provisions for learning Cantonese as a second language at such schools are often limited, with lack of curriculum support and educational resources. Many students sit alternative assessments such as GCSE and GCE Chinese, which do not equate to local Chinese proficiency requirements. This places minority language students at a disadvantage when applying for jobs and higher education (academic and vocational) in Hong Kong, which frequently require a high level of proficiency in spoken Cantonese and written Chinese.

Despite the introduction of the “Chinese Language Curriculum Second Language Learning Framework” by the Education Bureau in 2014, there are still concerns over how this framework will be implemented and the lack of a corresponding examination that is accepted by tertiary institutions. Aside from Chinese language proficiency, there are also concerns that minority language students are further disadvantaged by institutional factors, such as streaming, which often prevents interaction with Chinese students.

Outcomes

Key areas of consensus centred around the importance of the need for sympathetic and understanding teachers. However, it was cautioned that teachers cannot undertake this alone and support from parents and community groups is very important in the education of minority students.

Areas of consensus amongst the group discussion at this fourth Forum included a discussion over learning the use of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy, the student-teacher relationship and the importance of parental support. The forum concluded with a discussion on the teaching materials developed by EdUHK and Mr Chura Bahadur Thapa, with suggestions for inclusion from the participants.

Key areas of consensus

Teaching practice

Relevant and responsive pedagogy

Bob Adamson started the discussion by asking what was lacking in terms of pedagogical skills and what was needed for successfully teaching minority students. Participants discussed the importance of culturally relevant pedagogy in Hong Kong schools. Celeste Yuen talked about the possibility of collaborative home schooling for minority students because parents could not relate to the teaching methods used in Hong Kong schools and could not assist students with their studies. Celeste emphasized the importance of parental and community support to assist teachers in an already stressful occupation. Taehee Choi, from her personal experience talked about the difficulties of learning Chinese – for example her daughter was taught simplified Chinese in school, but could speak Cantonese. She also made the point that in the mainstream education system, students with less written Chinese ability also suffered in other subjects such as maths that were not in themselves language related. She considered that use of mentors from the same cultural background in the classroom could assist minority students.

Sin Lam Li from UNISON talked about her research in this area and had identified that there was a lack of standardized assessment and benchmarking for the level of Chinese (and other subjects) at various ages of minority students which led to mixed abilities in the classroom. There was also significant variation in learning experiences in different schools which was affecting access to tertiary education. She advised that further work was needed on assessment research.

Jim Kan from Hong Kong College of Technology described the techniques they had developed for minority students, e.g. using very interactive methods such as presentation skills and using WhatsApp groups to encourage semi-self learning that could get instant feedback from other students. He had found that the optimum class size was around 15 students. Higher numbers reduced the attention students received from the teacher, but fewer could restrict group activities. He considered that more practice was needed in Chinese for English medium students. HKCT was culturally sensitive to issues such as mixed class teaching, evening classes and teaching at weekends which could cause parents to stop students attending. Jim raised the issue that developing teaching materials was difficult because of the need to follow standard EDB curriculum. He also thought that having a minimum standard of Chinese was important and this could be encouraged by having teachers who could easily move between teaching in English and Chinese. Taehee Choi thought this could marginalize non-Chinese speakers and should be supplemented with extra help such as mentors or personal tutors.

Khristayle Tan thought that some schools lacked provision of the extra support needed for teaching Chinese needed by minority students and there was a lack of understanding as to why minority students could not work in mother-tongue

standard Chinese. She noted that she had visited schools to show that it was possible for minority students to get into tertiary education.

Linnie Wong thought that teacher training should include more awareness so that discrimination (whether intended or not) could be reduced.

Deepen Nebhwani pointed out that not all the teachers at his school were properly qualified and the standard was noticeably different in terms lack of lesson planning and knowledge of child psychology. This affected grades and student behaviour.

Qi Zhang thought that it was important for teachers to learn more about minority students and that there was no standardized way of teaching Chinese to minorities – schools could decide their own methods.

Amod Rai agreed, saying a deeper understanding was needed with a better learning culture in schools. He also thought the IB curriculum in international schools created a better culture of appreciating diversity.

Khristayle said that in some schools there was limited choice of elective subjects with EMI and even in these lessons teachers would use Cantonese for detailed explanations without translation which clearly appeared to favour Chinese speakers over minority students. Celine Vitto said teachers needed to be sympathetic to the situation faced by minority students, they should encourage positive attitudes and not think in terms of stereotypes.

The student-teacher relationship

Kunal Narwani felt that the quality of the student-teacher relationship was very important. He considered a top down approach (typical in many schools) was not appropriate for minority students. Teachers and students needed to connect in a two way process for successful teaching and learning. An appreciation and understanding of different cultures was necessary to deal with assessments and working hours and teachers needed parents to understand that teaching methods in Hong Kong may be very different to those they experienced. Jim agreed with this – saying that teacher assessment scores (by the students) indicated that teachers that communicated well were given good scores.

Shahid Karim asked for more detail on how teacher-student interactions worked and Kunal responded with some examples: one teacher had created a relationship that went beyond the classroom and helped with family issues; another teacher was always optimistic and others formed more of a teacher-friend relationship with students. However, he was also aware that the students needed to understand the teachers' constraints such as large classes and students needed to take responsibility for themselves.

Deepen's experiences differed from Kunal's. At his first school he was in classes of over forty students so there was very little personal attention and he felt he was overlooked for attention and access to extra-curricular activities, particularly those that had some financial support. At his second school, class sizes were around 15, which he agreed with Jim, was ideal. This school

supported athletes and Deepen noted that there should be more support (such as scholarships) for the creative arts. In this environment he had more attention and friendship from the teachers resulting in a continuous improvement in grades which got him a place at the Chinese University (and an offer from UCL).

Khristayle's experience was that her teachers had favourites and lost interest in the academically weaker students. When she moved to a smaller class the teachers took more time and were more willing to help and her grades improved. Celine had teachers who were willing to support lower performers and provide extra assistance. They were also encouraging and optimistic. Kunal advised the need for teachers to avoid bias and stereotyping which, in his experience, resulted in a negative reaction by minority students.

Jim commented that in the classroom teachers have to be fair and equal. Special attention should also be taken outside the classroom to ensure students should be grouped so they mix.

Parental support

The degree of continuity between school and the home environment was discussed. Phyllis Cheung thought it was very important for parents to be more involved in their children's education as teachers could not shoulder all the burden. Celeste agreed that this was necessary and schools should embrace this concept.

Amod asked the forum for their experiences of parental involvement. Jim said consultation with parents on teaching methods and content was important but could be difficult because of language issues and a different cultural perception of teachers (i.e. they should be respected and not questioned).

Segregation and affirmative action

Kelvin Cheung commented that socio-economic data indicate minorities are behind the Chinese economically. It was important to remember that improvements in education do not automatically turn into economic gains – possibly due to discrimination. He raised the question of whether minority students wanted a segregated education because without this it is difficult for schools to provide the extra support because it is needed.

Deepen asked the forum about affirmative action in Hong Kong. Phyllis advised that they were looking into the legal implications of this. Bob made the point that this was rarely a satisfactory solution as employers can use this to try to legitimize discriminatory hiring policies (i.e. students who have had affirmative action may not actually have reached the same standards as others). Phyllis replied that employers still attach great importance to Chinese language skills even for Chinese students educated overseas.

Amod considered that English language was part of the culture of Hong Kong and should be treated more equally. Shahid thought the whole education system lacked the necessary support to create a truly integrated society.

Review of lesson plan produced by Mr Chura Thappa

Bob Adamson ran through the PowerPoint presentation of the unit that had been developed for inclusion in the Department of International Education and Lifelong Learning's Minor in Key Issues and Changing Values in Education and/or the course Philosophical and Socio-Cultural Issues in Education.

Vera Liu thought that materials for teacher training should pay more attention to relevance. Shahid emphasized the importance of knowing students and their backgrounds and that we should remember that there are differences within cultures e.g. there are over 30 languages used in Pakistan and Urdu is often a second language for students with cultural roots in Pakistan.

Miron Bhowmik agreed saying teachers should know about diversity within countries as well. He thought that some of the materials needed updating in view of more recent data and publications. He thought there should be information on racism and on the Race Discrimination Ordinance (CAP 602) should be included, in particular that language of educational instruction is exempted. Also there should be more about domestic workers and their treatment. There should also be comparisons with other countries such as Singapore, Taiwan and Korea treat minorities.

Sin Lam asked whether the data could indicate whether people were locally born or were immigrants as this could affect the educational experience received. She also advised that UNISON was aware of a new PolyU programme for teachers addressing the greater stress that is experienced when teaching minority students. She also made the point that teachers of minority students often felt they had lower status than other teachers.

Taehee mentioned projects in Mexico and Australia where students' expertise is brought into curriculum development.

Summary

Shahid was asked to summarise the key points discussed:

- attitude, knowledge and skills of teachers were discussed. The importance of needing extra support from teachers was raised by the students;
- good pedagogy was discussed and it was noted that it was important for teachers to learn about the culture and home practices of minority students;
- we cannot separate or consider knowledge, attitude and skills in isolation. This is a triangular relationship. Attitude leads to learning about minorities which leads to improved knowledge which leads to greater teaching skills in the classroom. How teachers learn in these three areas is very important; and
- teaching practices need to link with society outside the school to reduce discrimination. We need to think about policy gaps to provide more

support so minority students become part of mainstream society without segregation. How can policy inform better?

A summary of conclusions from the Third Forum is included for information in Appendix 3.

Conclusion

This Forum provided key areas of consensus amongst stakeholders on teacher education, which can be used to improve (future) teachers' awareness by the EdUHK so as to improve education for minority language students. It also explored teaching methods for minority language students, concluding with specific suggestions that could be implemented within both teacher education programmes and schools with ethnic minority students.

Contact details:

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Appendix One: Forum programme

Fourth Forum on Inclusive and Equitable Education for All in Hong Kong

Teaching Methods and Materials to Enhance the Learning Process for Minority Language Students

The Education University of Hong Kong
Friday, 19 May 2017. 9:00am-12:30pm

PROGRAMME

08:45 – 09:15am	Arrival
09:15am	Introduction Professor Bob Adamson, EdUHK a) Purpose of Forum: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• to review teaching methods and materials with specific reference to a teaching unit developed by Mr Chura Thapa with EdUHK; and• to look at how access to EdUHK can be enhanced for minority language students (time permitting) b) Introduction of participants
9:20am	Presentation of a lesson prepared for use in programmes provided by the Department of International Education and Lifelong Learning
9.30am	Discussion Session One Experiences in teaching minority students and experiences of students.
11:00am - 11:15am	Short Break
11:15-12:15pm	Discussion Session Two Review of teaching materials, comments, suggestions and feedback.
12:00pm	Summary and consensus for actions/plans

Appendix Two: Forum attendees

Professor Bob Adamson (EdUHK)
Ms Phyllis Cheung (UNISON)
Ms Sin Lam Li (UNISON)
Dr Shahid Karim (post-grad student EdUHK)
Dr Miron Bhowmik (EdUHK)
Mr Kunal Narwani (student EdUHK)
Ms Khristayle Tan (student EdUHK/Section Juan)
Ms Celine Vitto (student EdUHK/Section Juan)
Dr Zhang Qi (EdUHK)
Dr Celeste Yuen (EdUHK)
Dr Linnie Wong (EdUHK)
Dr Taehee Choi (EdUHK)
Dr Qi Zhang (EdUHK)
Dr Manynooch Faming (no affiliation)
Mr Amod Rai (Pamoja Education, HK)
Mr Jim Kan (HKCT)
Ms Vera Liu (HKCT)
Dr Kelvin Cheung (EdUHK)
Mr Deepen Nebhwani (student CUHK)
Mr Will Douglas (EdUHK)

Appendix 3: Summary of good practices identified in the Third Forum

What works:

- **Teachers developing and utilizing relevant cultural pedagogy**
- **Develop attitude of respect amongst teachers.** The actions or words that demonstrate respect were discussed amongst the group. All agreed that a respectful teacher should emphasize commonalities amongst students of different backgrounds, whilst respecting differences, should understand each student's learning needs, find out what motivates each student, appreciate the strengths and weaknesses of each student, be open-minded and listen. Similarly, teachers in Hong Kong should focus on all students rather than focusing on weaker students. The consensus amongst forum participants was that teachers must move towards respect for ethnic minority students, rather than solely tolerance.
- **Celebrate diversity.** Building upon respect, schools must view diversity as a resource to be capitalized upon. How this can be instrumentalized is important, particularly examining what multicultural teaching competencies mean to Hong Kong teachers.
- **Understanding that teachers may need to 'unlearn'.** Given that teachers themselves learn through their own personal experiences and previous teachers, teachers need to understand that they may 'unlearn' their teaching methods. Indeed, future teachers may need to observe, understand and adapt different pedagogies to their classrooms.
- **Acknowledge that the nature of education is changing.** Khristayle Tan mentioned the importance of students being prepared for their future, and as Professor Bob Adamson highlighted, rapid developments in the 21st century mean that students are not being trained for the variety of jobs they may have in the future. How we can fully identify 21st century competences needs to be fully explored.
- **Contextualising learning.** Instead of enforcing the idea of memorization, teachers should bring out what can be used in real life, particularly in language learning in Hong Kong.
- **Encouraging reflection.** This could be done through initiatives such as a staff learning day, where a learning community is created for teachers to share their experiences in teaching ethnic minority students.
- **Create meaningful extracurricular activities.** Activities which combine a meaningful social purpose and language learning could be initiated. For instance, visits to the elderly could be combined with teaching context relevant Cantonese words beforehand. This therefore encourages more language practice in the social world.

- **Empowering the community and parents.** Community education is important to break stereotypes surrounding ethnic minority students. The Boston Public Schools Parent University was cited as a way to empower parents in their child's education.
- **Building supportive conditions for students and teachers together.** This includes increasing interaction between different students with different cultural backgrounds and promoting practices towards understanding each other. Such initiatives would help the welfare of students and their ability to deal with future challenges, emphasizing further the need for culturally responsive teachers.