

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

Briefing Paper No. 2

The Education University of Hong Kong

6th May 2016



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
Editors: Bob Adamson and Will Douglas (Education University of Hong Kong)

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The role of the Education University of Hong Kong to enhance teacher education and cultural sensitivity

Introduction

This Forum is the second in an ongoing series organized by the UNESCO Chair in TVET and Lifelong learning of the Education University of Hong Kong (EdUHK). It was co-organised with the EdUHK Centre for Governance and Citizenship and Yew Chung Community College. It took place on 6th May 2016 at the EdUHK.

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 aim of this second Forum was to continue dialogue on issues raised by the first Forum, and to focus upon the specific theme of raising awareness of multiculturalism and diversity through teacher education programmes at EdUHK.

The Forum brought together seventeen relevant stakeholders and specialists, predominantly from the Education University of Hong Kong, along with members from minority and concern groups.

The Forum began with a keynote presentation by Mr Paul Tarrant, Chairman of the Yuen Long Minorities Parents' Concern Group.

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

Areas of consensus amongst the group discussion at this second Forum included linguistic issues, such as the recognition of linguistic minorities, mother tongue learning and the role of storytelling in learning Cantonese. Further areas of consensus included the need for parental support, classroom management and taking into account the diversity of minority language students. Other forms of learning were discussed, including vocational Chinese learning and diversifying pathways for minority language students.

This report begins with key points from Mr Paul Tarrant’s keynote presentation, before moving on to key areas of consensus amongst participants.

Keynote presentation

Mr Paul Tarrant (Chairman of the Yuen Long Minorities Parents' Concern Group)

Key points:

- it is crucial to recognize that every child is unique. A holistic education system is needed that is customized continually for the needs of each child;
- the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child has not been fully implemented in Hong Kong despite the UN expressing concern that child sensitive environments have not been provided;
- Article 30 of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child states that “in those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities or persons of indigenous origin exist, a child belonging to such a minority or who is indigenous shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of his or her group, to enjoy his or her own culture, to profess and practise his or her own religion, or to use his or her own language.” Our discussion should therefore include not just ethnic minorities, but indigenous people too;
- assimilation is happening in Hong Kong, whereby Cantonese is replacing the mother tongue of minority language students. Chinese has become the Medium of Instruction (CMI) for many minority language students. This was reflected by a student in the first Forum, Deepen Nebhwani, who despite speaking Cantonese and English well, admitted that his native language ability was poor;
- the recent spate of student suicides in Hong Kong also suggests that the current education system needs improvement; and
- parents have the primary legal right (“prior right”) for their children’s education. The UN Declaration of Human Rights Article 26.3 states: “*Parents have the prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children*”. Parents must have the freedom to choose the kind of education they want for their children: to choose a school, to choose the Medium of Instruction as Chinese (with the option of either Cantonese or Putonghua) (CMI) or English (EMI). For children choosing EMI they will learn Chinese as a subject (Cantonese or Putonghua). For ethnic minority children learning their native language as a subject in school should be an option for parents.

Key areas of consensus

Classroom practice

The Forum began with an anecdote from Dr Liz Walker, who had supervised an EdUHK student on her teaching practice at a primary school. The class contained students predominantly from Indian and Pakistani backgrounds. Dr Walker noticed that despite the children being very enthusiastic, the trainee teacher became frustrated with the students and often angrily told them to keep quiet. After recording the lesson and reflecting back on her teaching, the trainee teacher was able to recognize her lack of sensitivity. Nevertheless, this then raised the question amongst participants at the Forum as to whether the teacher did not have the appropriate classroom practice or whether she was having difficulty specifically teaching minority language students.

Dr Tae Hee Choi reported having observed teachers at an international primary school who focused on keeping students quiet. She was also concerned about the method of teacher recruitment at such schools, where English language proficiency was prioritized in candidates.

Linguistic issues

Discussion on linguistic issues followed on from concerns raised in the first Forum, including the rights of the child to their sense of identity, access to their own language and access to languages of power and high status, including English, Cantonese and Putonghua. Parental choice over medium of instruction and schools was also raised. The difficulties that many minority language students face when learning in Cantonese were addressed; for example the loss of potential employment opportunities faced by students who do not know Cantonese. The role of both English and Cantonese as a form of linguistic capital in Hong Kong was addressed by Dr Gao Fang. Similar to the first Forum, the role of biliteracy and trilingualism was highlighted, with a focus upon a balance of languages to fit individual lifestyles, situations and experiences.

Linguistic minorities

The role of linguistic minorities in Hong Kong was discussed. Dr Lisa Lim gave a detailed overview of her research on linguistic minorities and explained the corresponding course that she ran at the University of Hong Kong. The lack of contact between minority language and Chinese students was raised – for some Hong Kong Chinese students on Dr Lim's course, it was the first time that they had spoken to a peer from South East Asia. Dr Lim also stressed the importance of getting students to reflect upon their own cultural backgrounds throughout her course on linguistic minorities. Ms Lucinda Pike suggested incorporating a module on linguistic diversity in teacher education programs at the Education University of Hong Kong, by getting pre-service and in-service teachers to reflect upon their own diversity before commencing and during teaching practice.

Cantonese as a second language – the role of preparedness and storytelling

How best to teach Cantonese as a second language was discussed amongst the group. Professor Hin Tat Cheung observed that what we mean by “Chinese as a second language” has not yet been well defined in the literature. For instance, there is the need to distinguish between interpersonal linguistic abilities (i.e. expressing feelings) and academic language use. His recent project had explored the relationship of oral language to written language in bilingual development, examining the role of preparedness and narrative in learning Cantonese. The first part of Professor Hin Tat Cheung’s longitudinal study focused upon examining personal narratives and storytelling, by presenting pictures and scenarios to participants, such as going to see a doctor. Different prompts were given in Cantonese, however preliminary findings showed that most of the minority language children could not respond with more than two sentences in Cantonese. Professor Cheung therefore argued that developing Cantonese narrative and storytelling in minority language children is essential to learning Cantonese effectively.

Dr Cheung Chi Kin suggested that the difficulties of learning a second language may be shared by people in Hong Kong. For instance, for most Hong Kong Chinese learning English, they do not have an English home learning environment but yet recognise that speaking English is a form of social capital in Hong Kong. Therefore, there may be more similarities between Hong Kong Chinese and ethnic minorities in terms of having to learn another language to be able to advance in Hong Kong.

Diversity of students

The different learning styles between minority language students and local Hong Kong Chinese students was touched upon, following Dr Liz Walker’s anecdote describing enthusiastic minority language students. Dr Gao Fang raised the concern that local Chinese students may be quieter in a classroom environment compared to minority language students who may be more active. This cultural stereotyping she argued may not be negative, but may in fact be a positive way of teaching students from different backgrounds. Ms Phyllis Cheung added that unfortunately many teachers were not sensitive to these differences, misdiagnosing active minority language students as having Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

Mr Chura Bahadur Thapa considered that how teachers engage with minority language students and make topics relevant are crucial. Ms Phyllis Cheung reported only seeing one school where minority language students who had difficulty learning Chinese were placed in the same class as other Chinese students, effectively dividing them by their learning difficulties rather than by their ethnicity. She argued that teachers need to consider each individual student’s learning needs rather than their ethnicity.

Parental support

The role of parents in educating minority language students was discussed. Professor Bob Adamson recounted his experience finding a school for his son

in Hong Kong. His son spoke English and Cantonese fluently, however needed help with his written Chinese. As such, finding a school was initially difficult because he failed the Chinese written tests set by schools. Despite receiving 14/100 on his written Cantonese test at the EdUHK Jockey Club Primary School, the Principal recognised the fact that he was bilingual as a positive asset to the school, bringing a diverse cultural perspective, new ways of thinking and doing, and that he would help improve the English language skills of other students. Professor Adamson conceded his son did need a lot of parental support with his Cantonese homework, for instance learning Mathematics through the medium of Chinese. Nevertheless, his son was happy at the school, made a lot of friends and achieved 86 out of 100 in his final Chinese test. Ultimately though, the success of schools accepting similar students requires a level of support and commitment from schools, along with parents and teachers being willing, open and cooperating together.

However this led to discussion that for some minority language students, parents may have difficulty in supporting students with their Cantonese homework, when they may be unable to speak the language themselves. Research has also shown that some parents may prioritise other after school activities, such as religious homework.

EdUHK has nevertheless explored ways of teaching parents of minority language students Cantonese. Professor Cheung outlined a recent project where sixteen parents had enrolled, however none attended the first day of the course. This was attributed to the course taking place in a secondary school which was far away from the community. Subsequently, the course was moved to a local community centre, and three parents ultimately completed the ten week program, comprising a total of 20 sessions. The group therefore agreed upon the importance of parental support and involving multiple parties in order to provide sufficient language support to minority language students and their parents.

Other forms of learning

EdUHK service learning initiative

Dr Andy Chin discussed a course that the Department of Linguistics and Modern Language Studies at EdUHK had recently launched called “Co-curricular service learning” which sends students to work in the community applying knowledge they have learnt at university. The course partnered with the HK Playground Association, an NGO offering community services to students, and focused on understanding linguistic barriers for language minority and socially underprivileged students (such as newly arrived students from Mainland China). One of the students from EdUHK was particularly keen to learn more about the motivation of minority language students, and found that many did not get support from their families, particularly female students who were expected to work after leaving school or to return to their countries to marry and consequently had less motivation to learn. Many minority language students that participated in the course had a good level of proficiency in oral Cantonese, but lacked the skills to read and write. An EdUHK student participating in the course devised cards to teach minority

language students Cantonese. Some examples were matching names such as kinship terms, vocabulary and numbers. Dr Chin stressed that this was not a formal learning environment and so through this informal learning, EdUHK students were keen to try to engage with minority language students, through examples such as learning cards, games, treasure hunts and matching idioms. Many students reported enjoying the course, and as such, EdUHK plans to work with the HK Playground Association again.

Dr Chin also suggested that despite having the training, knowledge and experience to deal with minority language students, many social workers do not have the specific training to help students with their education, for instance understanding what they may lack in their language skills. Thus, the course provides a bridge for EdUHK to provide training for social workers in language and teaching, to prevent the isolation that may arise at school when minority language students cannot express themselves well in Cantonese.

Diversifying pathways for minority language students

Ms Shida Lee from the Hong Kong College of Technology (HKCT) discussed the launch of their Applied Learning Chinese course for non-Chinese speaking students with the aim of opening up vocational options for minority language students, for example in the hospitality sector. Dr Celeste Yuen concurred that it was important to engage students in different vocations and to diversify pathways available. The difficulty of recruiting teachers for such courses was discussed as many teachers had found it difficult to adjust their pedagogy to minority language students. In the first cohort of students, retention of teachers for the course had been low, with some reporting varying levels of motivation and learning diversity amongst students. Now on their second cohort of students, HKCT were keen to engage with local communities.

The launch of the Youth Life Planning Programmes was one such way that the HKCT were cooperating with communities. HKCT were also working with organisations such as in the aviation industry to improve upward mobility opportunities for minority language students. Ms Shida Lee indicated that given this was only the second cohort of students, there was still some course development needed, both in terms of pedagogy, curriculum and materials. HKCT anticipate that half of their students would move into further study, and another half into work.

Ms Phyllis Cheung expressed concern that the Applied Learning Chinese was not part of the Learning Framework launched by the Education Bureau in 2014. She stated that when the course was first launched, there were concerns as to whether it would be an alternative qualification to enter university and whether this would be an elective or a required course. Furthermore, despite suggestions that the course could pave the way to university, Phyllis maintained that the course content was focused on hospitality and retail, and as such neither course was preparing minority language students for university level Chinese, despite claims that it would be a higher level of Chinese than GCE. Phyllis also expressed concern at the length of travelling time for students attending the course – either at HKCT or the Baptist University. There had been offers that if there were enough students in a different school,

instructors would travel to the school to teach the course however this had not yet happened. She agreed that many students do lack motivation, but it was unclear if this was from the students themselves or whether they saw their chances of upward mobility as low.

Child poverty

Dr Cheung Chi Kin presented his research on child poverty in Hong Kong, stating that whilst the overall level of child poverty has not changed, child poverty for vulnerable groups (e.g. ethnic minorities, single parent families) has risen. The recent government report on child poverty however does not separate out ethnic minorities but instead combines immigrants and ethnic minorities, masking the fact that Chinese migrants and ethnic minority migrants have very different trajectories. For instance, Chinese migrants show improvements in poverty levels by their second generation, whereas ethnic minority migrants become worse off. He stressed the importance of understanding different ethnicities have varying socioeconomic status, for instance, South Asians are more likely to experience child poverty compared to Koreans and Caucasians and therefore each group has different needs in terms of social mobility. However from a practical perspective, in order to lift vulnerable groups out of poverty and provide more social capital, learning languages is crucial. Dr Cheung made the important point that ultimately the aim was poverty reduction and improved quality of life for Hong Kong residents. Education was a means to achieving this but was not an end in itself.

Conclusion

This Forum provided key areas of consensus amongst stakeholders on key areas of concern and measures that can be taken by the Education University of Hong Kong to continue to improve educational pathways and opportunities for minority language students. It also raised priority areas for teacher education programmes at the University, with the goal of raising awareness of multiculturalism and diversity through such programmes.

Contact details:

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Appendix One: Forum programme

The role of the Education University of Hong Kong to enhance teacher education and cultural sensitivity

The Education University of Hong Kong
6th May 2016. 9:00am-12:45pm

PROGRAMME

08:45 – 09:15am	Arrival
09:15am	Introduction Professor Bob Adamson, Director of Centre for Lifelong Learning Research and Development, EdUHK a) Purpose of Forum: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To consider the role of the Education University of Hong Kong to enhance teacher education in terms of handling and cultural diversity; and• To explore the issues in more detail with development of plans and actions.
9:30-10:00am	Keynote Presentation Mr Paul Tarrant, Chairman of the Yuen Long Minorities Parents' Concern Group
10:00-11:00am	Discussion Session One What are the key issues for the University to consider?
11:00am- 11:30am	Group Photo Session – Short Break
11:30-12:30pm	Discussion Session Two Exploration of key issues in further detail
12:30pm	Summary and consensus on areas of focus for further workshops
12:45pm	Way forward. Thanks to participants (Professor Bob Adamson). End Forum.

Appendix Two: Forum attendees

Professor Bob Adamson (EdUHK)
Dr Chi Kin Cheung (EdUHK)
Professor Hin Tat Cheung (EdUHK)
Ms Phyllis Cheung (UNISON)
Dr Andy Chin, (EdUHK)
Dr Tae Hee Choi (EdUHK)
Dr Manynooch Faming (Yew Chung Community College)
Dr Gao Fang (EdUHK)
Professor Kerry Kennedy (EdUHK)
Ms Shida Lee (HKCT)
Dr Joanna Lijuan Li (EdUHK)
Dr Lisa Lim (HKU)
Ms Lucinda Pike (EdUHK)
Mr Paul Tarrant (Yuen Long Minorities Parents' Concern Group)
Mr Chura Bahadur Thapa (Yuen Long Minorities Parent's Concern Group)
Dr Elizabeth Walker (EdUHK)
Dr Celeste Yuen (EdUHK)