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**Research Grants Council of Hong Kong (General Research Fund 840012)**

**Models of Trilingual Education in  
Ethnic Minority Regions of China  
Project**

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**Interview with Policy Makers**

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## **Models of Trilingual Education in Ethnic Minority Regions of China Project**

This research project offers a holistic and descriptive account of trilingualism and trilingual education in China. Policy changes have led to the introduction of English language teaching and learning in primary schools. These reforms pose particular challenges to communities in ethnic minority areas, where Putonghua often competes with the minority language, and English is often taught in under-resourced schools with teachers with the requisite training in short supply.

The project involves extensive and intensive research comprising investigations into school- and community-level practices, policies and perceptions relating to trilingualism in such key regions as Xinjiang, Yunnan, Inner Mongolia, Sichuan, Gansu, Guizhou, Guangxi, Qinghai, Jilin, Tibet and Guangdong. Using first-hand data collected from each region, the researchers examine language policies and curricula, as well as language allocation in the classroom and in the community, and analyse them in their specific historical, socio-political, demographical, economic, geographical and cultural contexts.

A distinctive feature of the project is its presentation of a new methodology and approach to researching such phenomena. This methodology encompasses policy analysis, community language profiles, as well as school-based field work in order to provide rich data that facilitates multilevel analysis of policy-in-context.

*Models of Trilingual Education in Ethnic Minority Regions of China Project* Technical Papers Series Editors: Anwei Feng (University of Nottingham, Ningbo, China) and Bob Adamson (The Education University of Hong Kong)

This series of Technical Papers presents information about the research instruments used in this project.

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# Interview with Policy Makers

## Introduction

One of the key research questions driving the project is how the policy goals of trilingualism is being interpreted and realised in the People's Republic of China (PRC).

The project distinguished four distinct policy models of trilingual education (Adamson and Feng, 2013). The first model focuses strongly on the ethnic minority language. Typically, the nine years of compulsory education from Grade 1 in primary schools to Grade 3 in junior secondary schools is provided through the medium of the minority language. Chinese and English are taught as subjects in the curriculum. Chinese could be used as the medium of instruction for certain school subjects in late primary and secondary years. The second model is a balance between Chinese and the minority language. The balance is evident in terms not only of the medium of instruction but also of the ethnicity of the teachers and students. The third model often exists in two different forms. The first form is the reverse of the first model, i.e., Chinese is used as the primary medium instruction and the major ethnic minority language is taught as a subject to all students in the school, irrespective of their own ethnicity or mother tongue. The second form is found in many remote village schools in which one minority group dominates. In these schools, the minority language is used as the medium of instruction for the first two to three years with Chinese taught as a major school subject. Starting from Year 3 or Year 4, all school subjects are taught in Chinese. In both cases, English is taught as a school subject, with Chinese being used when necessary in those lessons. A fourth model is represented by schools that proclaim to be an ethnic minority language school but, in reality, do not use the minority language as the medium of instruction nor even teach it as school subject. Such schools also claimed to be bilingual, in the sense that Chinese and English are studied as languages in the curriculum and Chinese serves as the medium of instruction.

## Factors Shaping the Trilingual Education Models

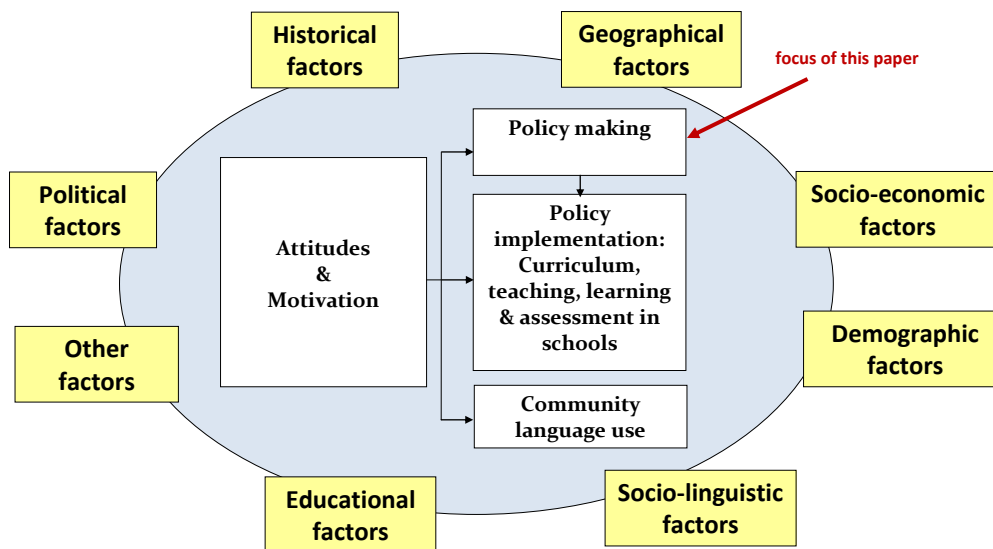
What factors shape and sustain the various models of trilingual education? This question denotes a particular view of education policy—that it emerges from, and forms part of broader contexts.

At the outset of the project, it was possible (on the basis of relevant literature) to identify key contextual factors that would likely play a role in shaping trilingual education policy. For instance, Fägerlind and Saha (1989) propose a triadic framework that positions education policy under the influence of socio-economic, socio-political and educational priorities.

A key concept for the study is ethnolinguistic vitality, the strength of life force of a language within a community. Ethnolinguistic vitality is influenced by geographical, historical, demographic and socio-linguistic factors, in addition to socio-economic and socio-political factors (Landweer, 2000). Other factors, such as religion, are emerging from the first phase of the project.

Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework for the study of models of trilingual education in the PRC.

Figure 1—Conceptual framework



To conduct the research into the factors that shape and sustain the various models of trilingual education, a range of methodological tools were adopted.

A suite of research tools as shown in Table 1 were designed. A typical study of each single school would include:

- focus group interviews with 3-6 community leaders
- 2-3 interviews with regional and local education officials
- 1-3 interviews with school principal, deputy and other school leaders
- focus group interviews with 5-10 teachers
- focus group interviews with approximately 10 students
- 3-5 interviews with former students
- focus group interviews with approximately 10 parents
- documentary analysis of policy papers, syllabuses, timetables, learning resources and curriculum materials
- 5-10 lesson observations
- questionnaire surveys focusing on language attitudes and views of trilingual education among 60-100 students, 20-30 teachers including headteachers and deputies.
- field notes (e.g. observations of the school buildings and wall decorations, of languages used in the school outside of the classroom and of language use in the community).

These tools are described in detail in other Technical Papers in this series.

*Table 1 – Methods to study factors that shape and sustain the models of trilingual education*

<b>Paradigm</b>	<b>Instrument</b>	<b>Focus</b>
Qualitative	Semi-structured interview with head-teachers and teachers (focus groups or individuals)	Perceptions of and attitudes to trilingualism and each language, and their experiences implementing trilingual education models
	Semi-structured interview with policy makers (for individuals)	Perceptions of & attitudes to trilingualism and each language, and their experiences in policy making and implementation of trilingual education policy
	Semi-structured interview with parents (focus group or individuals)	Attitudes to different languages, their knowledge of what is going on in schools and their experiences of their children’s trilingual education
	Semi-structured interview with pupils (focus group or individuals)	Attitudes and experiences in using and learning languages in a trilingual education context
	School observation	Language environment: notice boards, signs, pictures, etc.; languages used by staff, pupils, etc.; the role and distribution of languages, as shown in curriculum documents
	Classroom observation	languages used by teacher and pupils, for classroom instruction and activities
	Ethnographic study	To study the language environment in a minority community
Quantitative	Teacher Questionnaire	Teacher’s perceptions of current practice, views of language use and views concerning language education
	Parent Questionnaire	Parents’ knowledge of current practice and views of language use and language education
	Student Questionnaire	Students’ attitude to current practice and views of language use and language education
	Subjective vitality survey	Ethnolinguistic vitality of a minority language
Other (Archival)	Objective vitality study	Ethnolinguistic vitality of a minority language by collecting data through archives, mass media, official documents, etc.

### **Questionnaire and Interview Protocol**

The qualitative research aims to produce a thick description of the model of trilingual education that is in operation in the school under study, and probes the factors that produce and sustain this model.

Policy makers are key stakeholders and informants. They set policies relating to language education that are to be implemented by the schools.

Semi-structured interviews offer the possibility for the research team to deepen our understanding of the perspectives of policy makers—how they view the different languages, which languages they want to prioritise, the language learning outcomes they want to achieve and the life chances they want to provide for the pupils, and so on. In a semi-structured interview, there are a number of guiding questions that cover important aspects of the research project, but the researcher should feel free to ask supplementary questions on interesting aspects that arise as the interview proceeds.

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Step 1 – Identify and approach the policy maker to seek his/her consent to participate in the study. The consent should be in writing but—if the informant is reluctant to sign the consent form—an oral agreement is acceptable.

Step 2 –Conduct the interviews with the policy maker in an appropriate (comfortable, non-threatening) venue, using the guiding questions below.

Step 3 – Analyse the interview data as soon as possible, ideally soon after each interview (not necessarily transcribing them, which is time consuming). Whenever necessary, conduct a follow-up interview with the same policy maker if there are further points that arise from the analysis.

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## INTERVIEW WITH POLICY MAKERS

### (For Semi-Structured Interviews with Policy Makers Locally)

Date of Interview: .....

Language used for the interview: Chinese  Minority Language  Other. Specify .....

Thanks for your time. I hope our conversation is informal and casual. Please do feel relaxed. Though I have some questions for you, you can also ask any question during our talk. We understand that this area, region or country is dominated, or has a large ... minority population. We are doing some research on the languages minority pupils learn and use in schools in this region. The languages we talk about include pupils' home language, Chinese and English. ...

#### Questions:

**1. Could you please first of all say something about yourself?**

- Gender: ..... Ethnic background: .....
- Highest education received: .....
- Experience as a policy maker: .....
- Age range: 25 or below  26 to 35  36 to 45  46 and above
- Linguistic background:

	Fluent	OK	Limited	No knowledge at all
Chinese				
Minority language				
English				
Other				

**2. Could you please say something about your area, region or county and the minority groups?**

- Population: .....
- Percentage of people who are of ethnic minority(ies): .....
- Percentage of people who are ethnic Chinese: .....
- Economic conditions: .....
- Total number of schools: .....
- Teachers: .....

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3. Is the home language (L1) of the minority pupils used and taught in schools where minority pupils dominate or attend?  
Possible probing questions:
    - Why or why not?
    - And if yes, how?)
  
  4. How is Standard Chinese (L2) used and taught in these school?  
Possible probing questions:
    - Can minority pupils handle school subjects in L2 as well as Chinese children?
    - Is there policy for cases where minority pupils lag behind? If yes, what?
  
  5. Do the schools offer English (L3) to minority pupils?  
Possible probing questions:
    - When (from which Grade)?
    - How (how many lessons per week)?
    - Do minority pupils follow the same syllabus as the majority Han children?
    - Do they cope with the language equally well?
  
  6. Some people say the most important language for minority students is Chinese. What do you think of this comment?  
Possible probing questions:
    - Others say the most important language minority students should develop is first of all their own home language. What do you think?
    - Are they disadvantaged at Chinese being used as the medium of instruction? Or is their Chinese as competent as the majority Han children?
    - Do you think it is important for them to learn English?
  
  7. How is the competence in each language assessed in the schools?  
Possible probing questions:
    - L1, the minority language?
    - L2, Chinese?
    - L3, English?
  
  8. What's your general view about minority pupils' L1, L2 and L3 in terms of their usefulness for their future?
  
  9. Any comment on how language education can be improved for the minority pupils in this region or county, or for minority pupils in general?



## 对决策者的采访

采访的日期

采访所使用的语言:汉语○ 少数民族语言○ 其他○

感谢您抽出时间接受我的采访。尽管在我们的谈话过程中我会提出一些问题，您也可以向我提出一些问题，但是我们的谈话是非正式的，随意的，请放松。据我了解这一地区很多人都是少数民族。我们正在对这一地区的少数民族学生在校中的语言学习以及使用情况进行调研。我们谈论的语言包括：学生们在家里所使用的语言，汉语以及英语。

问题：

1. 首先您可否介绍一下您的一些个人信息？

性别：                      民族：

最高学历：

在当地学校就读的孩子：

年龄范围： 25 岁以下    26—35 岁    36—45 岁    46 以上

语言背景：

	流利	一般	有限的	根本不懂
汉语				
少数民族语言				
英语				
其他				

2. 您能否介绍一下你所在的地区或是村庄以及这一地区的少数民族呢？

人口：

少数民族所占比例：

汉族所占比例：

经济状况：

地理条件：

教师：

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3. 在少数民族学生们所就读的学校中是否使用并教授少数民族语言？

进一步的探索性问题：

为什么使用或不使用少数民族语言？

如果答案是的话，请问他们是如何教授此种语言的？

4. 在此地区的学校中标准汉语是如何教授的？

进一步的探讨性问题：

少数民族的学生和汉族学生是否上同样的课程？

如果少数民族学生落后的话，是否有任何对策？如果有，他们是？

5. 少数民族的孩子在学校上英语课吗？

进一步的探讨性问题：

什么时候开始上？（从几年级开始）

怎么上？（每周多少学时）

少数民族的孩子所用的教学大纲于大部分汉族孩子一样嘛？

他们把握语言的能力一样好吗？

6. 有的人说，对于少数民族学生来说，最重要的语言是汉语，您怎么看？

进一步的探讨性问题：

其他一些人说，少数民族学生应该学的最重要的语言应该是他们的母语，您怎么看？

汉语作为教学的媒体少数民族学生是否处于劣势呢？他们的汉语能力跟汉族学生们一样吗？

你认为学习英语对于少数民族学生来说重要吗？

7. 在学校每种语言能力是如何进行评估的呢？

进一步的探讨性问题：

少数民族语言

汉语

英语

8. 就少数民族语言、汉语、英语的对少数民族孩子未来的有用程度而言，你的看法是？

9. 在这个地区你觉得如何能改善少数民族学生的语言教育呢？

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