

Section 2: Language Education

Target

The language policy of the HKSAR Government is to enable students and the working population to be biliterate (in Chinese and English) and trilingual (in Cantonese, Putonghua and English).

Review

The community in general supports the policy of biliteracy and trilingualism. There are, however, different views as to how best to achieve this policy. There has also been concern about the lowering of language standards in the community as a whole, and among the student population in particular. Therefore, in early 2001, the Government commissioned the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research (SCOLAR) to conduct a review on language education.

Last Year's Progress

The SCOLAR not only conducted a literature review on studies relating to language education and official documents relating to language policy, but also visited a number of primary and secondary schools. In August 2001, nine Expert Groups were formed, each headed by a SCOLAR member and comprising academics, school principals and teachers, parents and other professionals, to look into specific areas. They then submitted progress reports to the SCOLAR in December 2001. Deliberations by the Expert Groups and the SCOLAR are ongoing. Below are the major issues which have been discussed so far and the workplan ahead.

(1) Language Standard and Measurement Mechanism

- The SCOLAR considered it necessary to align the existing language standards and measurement mechanisms (HKCEE, HKALE) with those which are being developed (Basic Competency Assessments, English language proficiency test) in order to form a coherent and transparent system, with grade descriptors and exemplars to illustrate the specific listening, speaking, writing and reading skills represented by the different levels of proficiency.

(2) Medium of Instruction

- In the context of reviewing language education in Hong Kong, the SCOLAR is also considering whether a long-term strategy for the medium of instruction policy should be formulated.

(3) Language Teachers

- Language teachers are central to the teaching of languages. They are role models of language learning for students and implementation agents of the curriculum as promulgated by the Government. Their proficiency in the language they teach, subject knowledge, as well as pedagogical knowledge and skills, have a direct bearing on the effectiveness of their teaching. The SCOLAR is currently looking into these issues.

(4) Curriculum and Pedagogy

- As mentioned above, the SCOLAR will work with the HKEA and the CDC to set out, as early as possible, clear standards for the HKCEE and for different key stages of education, as well as transparent measurement mechanisms. The SCOLAR will also consider funding the development of research-based teaching materials for English, Chinese and Putonghua in the new curriculum framework for pre-primary, primary and secondary levels. Apart from providing teaching packages, ancillary teacher training on the use of the materials and teaching methods will also need to be provided.

(5) Attitudes and Motivation of Students

- The literature review suggests that the attitudes and motivation of students are important factors in affecting their language learning. While there have been some isolated local research in this area, the SCOLAR considers it useful to conduct a more structured survey to ascertain the factors which affect students' attitudes and motivation in language learning.
- Preparation work for this survey is underway. The survey will be conducted in early 2002, and the findings will provide input to the further deliberations of the SCOLAR on the other components in the review, such as curriculum and pedagogy, as well as school and parental support.

(6) School Management Support in Language Education

- The SCOLAR will, in consultation with the ED, identify measures to reduce the workload of language teachers and help school management deploy resources more effectively.

(7) Parental Support

- During school visits conducted by the SCOLAR, many students indicated that their interest in language learning was affected more by their parents than by their teachers. The SCOLAR considers that parent education should include information about the basic principles of children's language acquisition and learning, how to inculcate good reading habits, and how parents should act as role models of life-long learning. The SCOLAR considers that such materials should be published and that a publicity campaign targeted at parents should be launched (see item (8) below).
- The SCOLAR also considers that assistance should be provided to parents themselves (for example, through Parent-Teacher Associations) so as to enable them to support schools in organising various language learning activities. This could provide strong support for language learning.

(8) Wider Environment

- The SCOLAR considers it necessary to launch a large-scale publicity campaign to raise the public's awareness of the importance of biliteracy and trilingualism, as well as of the ways to improve language proficiency. The campaign should target students, parents, employees and employers.
- The media plays a crucial role in the development of good language standards. The SCOLAR is considering possible ways to draw the public's attention to this and encourage the community to make better use of language learning resources available through the media.
- The SCOLAR is also considering launching a Workplace Putonghua Campaign and Funding Scheme which is similar to the Workplace English Campaign.

Tasks Ahead for the Coming Year

- The above are still preliminary deliberations. The SCOLAR and its Expert Groups will continue to discuss the various issues with relevant parties with a view to drawing up concrete recommendations by mid-2002.