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# Language policies for Hong Kong schools since 1997

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Language in education debates in Hong Kong focus on the role and status of English (as the former colonial language and an important means for international communication); Cantonese, the mother tongue of the majority of the population; and Putonghua, the national language of China. This paper examines the language policy formulated in 1997–1998, and finds that it radically departed from previous policies by mandating the use of Cantonese as the medium of instruction in secondary schools. The paper then analyses two subsequent policy revisions and concludes that, while the tonal emphasis on mother-tongue education has remained, the policy revisions have reversed the language policy to previous practices that emphasised the importance of English.

**Keywords:** language; policy; trilingualism; Cantonese; Putonghua; English

## Introduction

Hong Kong's geographical location and political history have endowed the territory with a rich linguistic culture. Located on the southern coast of China, Hong Kong has been populated by migrants; many were Cantonese-speakers from Guangdong; some spoke Fujianese and other varieties of Chinese. All enriched the Hong Kong form of the Cantonese language. From 1841 to 1997, it was a British colony, a territorial asset seized as a prize in the Opium Wars. Colonialism brought the English language to prominence, being perceived as a key to economic prosperity and driving a wedge between the haves and have-nots, and this phenomenon has endured in the post-colonial era, with English serving as a major language of international trade and other manifestations of globalisation. It also led to the immigration of people from India and other parts of the British empire, and from many other international trading partners. The handover of sovereignty in 1997 to the People's Republic of China – a motherland from which Hong Kong had become culturally, politically, educationally and, to some extent, linguistically estranged as a northern form of Chinese known as Putonghua ('standard language') had been introduced as a national *lingua franca* – added further complexity to the linguistic environment and the cultural melting pot, as a increasing number of mainlanders came to settle in the Special Administrative Region.

As schools in Hong Kong provide the key service in the socialisation of students and their preparation for the workforce (Kennedy 2005), the linguistic complexities have to be addressed and resolved in the curriculum. A long-standing controversy in education in Hong Kong concerns the languages to be taught in schools and the language to be used as the medium to teach subjects across the curriculum. Language is a part of culture and helps to define a person's cultural identity and, as such, can be contested terrain that is often reflected in debates about language in education policies (Tsui and Tollefson 2007). However, besides cultural issues, there

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are other questions to be considered by policy-makers, who, as Fägerlind and Saha (1983) argue, are influenced by political, economic and educational forces. Which languages are politically and/or economically important? What choices would be most appropriate to help students learn effectively? And where should the locus for policy decisions be? These questions are not exclusive to Hong Kong, as many societies have to grapple with complex interrelationships of national and international languages, as well as dialects and the languages of ethnic minority groups.

In terms of official recognition, the three prominent languages in Hong Kong are Cantonese, Putonghua and English. Cantonese is now spoken (to some level) by approximately 97% of the population. Since the 1960s, Cantonese has formed part of a distinctive Hong Kong culture (such as Cantopop and the Hong Kong movie industry), and is used in government and the legal system. As the first language of many students, Cantonese would appear to be the best medium of instruction for learning. However, there are some problems with Cantonese, most notably the gap between the spoken and written forms of the language. The vernacular of Cantonese, with its distinctive vocabulary and turn of phrase, does not exist in a one-to-one relationship with the available characters and structures of standard written Chinese. This means that oral literacy in Cantonese and written literacy in Chinese require a command of different forms of lexis and grammar. Also, Cantonese does not have as high a status in Hong Kong as English, or (after the handover of sovereignty in 1997) as Putonghua (Morris and Adamson, 2010).

Putonghua had a low status in Hong Kong for many years before preparations for the handover began in the 1980s. It was based on a northern variety of spoken Chinese and the grammar of modern literary works. In 1955, it was adopted as the standard language of the People's Republic of China, but it made little impression in Hong Kong and was rarely found in the curriculum in schools. Then, with the handover approaching and the mainland's economy growing under the modernisation reforms, people in Hong Kong began to appreciate the value of Putonghua. However, there are problems facing students in learning Putonghua. The written characters used in Mainland China were simplified in the 1950s to encourage mass literacy, but the traditional, full-form characters are still used in Hong Kong. Also, there are significant differences in the vocabulary and grammar of Cantonese and spoken Putonghua.

The case of English is interesting in that, as the former colonial language, it might be expected to have less importance after the handover. However, English has another role – as an important language for international communication, business and academic study. This role has given English a high status in Hong Kong and resulted in schools that use it as the medium of instruction becoming very popular with parents (Choi 2003). English, though, is not an easy language for many Hong Kong students to learn. It is very different from Chinese languages, and is not commonly used for every day communication in Hong Kong.

This paper analyses three language policy phases in post-handover Hong Kong, specifically in respect of the medium of instruction (MoI) for secondary schools. The purpose is to identify the linguistic priorities of each phase, the underlying forces that determine the policies and the nature of policy enforcement. The three phases are the initial implementation in 1998 of the Medium of Instruction Guidance for Secondary Schools policy, a mid-term review of this policy in 2003–2005 and a discussion on 'fine-tuning', as termed by the government, in 2007–2009. The paper begins with an historical overview of language policies in Hong Kong prior to the handover from British to Chinese sovereignty in 1997. The analysis then compares the policy formulated in 1997–1998 with the recommendations of two subsequent reviews to detect any shifts in the policy. The analysis also considers whether the Hong Kong government has instigated what Cummins (2000) describes as 'coercive' or 'collaborative' language policies. Coercive policies force students to learn a specific language, often at the expense of another language, such as their mother tongue. Collaborative polices try to create an environment that supports more than one language, such as the mother tongue, the national language (if different from the

mother tongue) and an international language (such as English). The final part of the paper draws conclusions about the formulation of language policy in Hong Kong and, although the paper is not explicitly comparative, offers some observations about language in education in general.

## Language policies in colonial times

From the late nineteenth century onwards, there have been many debates in the Legislative Council in Hong Kong about the MoI for schools, with a recurrent theme of lamentation that English standards among young people were declining. Various solutions have been implemented and revised. Historically, language policies for education have changed in Hong Kong as political, social, economic and educational circumstances have changed. This paper identifies two main periods prior to the handover in 1997 as identified by Sweeting (1992), namely colonial élitism and tentative vernacularisation (1950s–1990s).

### *Colonial élitism (1860s–1950s)*

As a British colony, education initially served the interest of the colonial rulers, creating a buffer class of educated élite from the local population. This educated élite tended to be fluent in English and an increasing number studied at British universities. In the 1860s, Frederick Stewart, the Inspector of Government Schools and first Headmaster of the Central School in Hong Kong, advocated that equal emphasis should be given to Chinese and English in the curriculum, and that students should not lose their sense of Chinese identity. However, the governor of the time, John Pope Hennessy, while sympathetic to these ideas, argued that English was important for trade and administration, and that local parents supported the teaching of English (Sweeting 1990). English was the main language taught in government schools, while Cantonese and written Chinese (with a strong emphasis on classical literature) were learnt in the private schools and missionary schools that most students attended (Adamson and Auyeung Lai 1997). English had a utilitarian function, being the key to finding a post in the civil service or in a trading company, as well as apparently being, for girls at least:

> … a social asset and a matrimonial qualification. It is one of the marks of their modernity, like unbound feet, proficiency in swimming, and the use of lip-stick. Also it opens their eager ears to Western culture as voiced by Hollywood. (Burney 1935, quoted in Sweeting 1990, 406)

It was clear by the 1930s that, as the government provision of schooling expanded, the curriculum was not keeping track with Hong Kong's development as an entrepôt port and light manufacturing centre, nor with the modernisation of China in the Republican era. The Burney Report (1935), compiled by a schools inspector from the UK, called for greater attention to be given to teaching Cantonese (at that time seen as low status) – and for a shift from a highly academic to a more vocation-oriented curriculum. The changes actually took place after the Second World War, when the decline of the British Empire meant that Hong Kong had to strengthen its own economic base while, at the same time, coping with a huge numbers of refugees fleeing the civil war and its aftermath in China.

### *Tentative vernacularisation (1950s–1990s)*

In the 1950s, the government permitted the establishment of schools using Chinese as the medium of instruction (CMI) to cater for the burgeoning population, while maintaining a large proportion of English-medium (EMI) schools. However, CMI schools never received strong support from the government before 1997. A report by the Education Commission (1963) recommended that more CMI schools should be set up to enhance the learning of

Cantonese-speaking students. The government's response was familiar: English was valuable as an international language and was prized by parents in terms of the career prospects that students would have. A decade later, a Green Paper (Board of Education 1973) called for a strengthening and expansion of CMI in schools, stating that CMI should be the standard, with English taught as a second language. However, government policy, set out in 1974, merely suggested that the choice of MoI should be left to schools. A similar response followed the report by a Visiting Panel (1982), which questioned the educational value of EMI.

It appears that the government was very reluctant to bear the risks of a whole-hearted commitment to CMI. Morris and Scott (2003) argue that the government did not press for the policy to be implemented as to do so would have necessitated conflict with various sectors of the community and could have threatened the survival of the government, which enjoyed only tenuous legitimacy. Also, the government was wary that the promotion of Chinese might be imbued with cultural significance and serve as a vehicle for political indoctrination, and therefore ensured that the Chinese Language curriculum adopted an abstract, anodyne, academic approach, concentrating on classical literature and historical cultural themes (Adamson and Auyeung Lai 1997), but at the same time promoting liberal pedagogic approaches, such as student-centred and activity based learning (Sweeting 1993). Chinese cultural subjects were closely vetted by the Syllabuses and Textbook Committee established in 1952, with the express remit of ensuring that curricular content was free from Communist or Nationalist propaganda.

Putonghua was not strongly evident in the school curriculum in this period. There was a suggestion in the Burney Report that consideration should be given to the use of *kwok-yu* (*guoyu* or a forerunner of Putonghua as a national language of China) but it was not followed up. It was not the variety of Chinese used in most daily interactions in Hong Kong (or in the Pearl River Delta area of southern China, whence many immigrants originated), and was latterly associated negatively with the Communist government in Mainland China (Pierson 1992), and equally with the Nationalists in Taiwan.

By 1990, more than 90% of secondary schools remained EMI. Most primary schools were CMI, but many parents favoured those that had a reputation for achieving good results in English (and therefore, potential access to prestigious EMI secondary schools). Within the run-up to the handover in 1997, a number of policies did address concerns arising in EMI schools, such as many students struggling to learn through a foreign language and teachers struggling to teach, given their own limited competence in English. Bridge programmes were established to help students move from CMI to EMI education at appropriate points. However, despite the government's encouragement to adopt CMI by providing various incentives (such as extra native-speaking teachers of English), most secondary schools still chose to be an EMI school, responding to market forces.

## The post-handover language policy

After the handover, the government identified knowledge-intensive economic activities as a priority, as advocated in a policy speech by the new Chief Executive Tung Chee Hwa (Tung 1999). He stated that education reform to improve learning and language policies were priorities to help to achieve government objectives. The interplay between Cantonese, English and Putonghua was addressed in the government's goal of establishing a 'biliterate and trilingual' society (biliteracy in English and Modern Standard Written Chinese; trilingualism in spoken Cantonese, Putonghua and English), which, together with goals such as the development of critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity and information technology skills were seen as critical components of the preparation of human capital to face the economic challenges of globalisation (Curriculum Development Institute 2001), a theme that has been elaborated since then with the determination

by the government for Hong Kong to become an education hub in the region (Hong Kong Yearbook 2004). Cantonese was associated with enhanced student learning. At the same time, political influences (most notably the desire for national unity) and economic forces (opportunities for investment in China's booming economy) led to Putonghua being given increased attention in the school curriculum, while English remained a powerful force, being the main language of higher education, international trade and cross-cultural communication, and as an important asset to build Hong Kong into a 'world-class' city (Tung 1999) and therefore a key component of the strategy to develop the regional education hub.

In 1997, the Education Department issued the 'Medium of instruction guidance for secondary schools'. Despite being drafted in the form of Guidance (a form of official communication usually reserved for everyday civil matters, such as public health), the policy was deemed compulsory and thus binding for all Government and Government funded secondary schools from 1998. The weight of enforcement implicitly associated with the policy was a major departure from the approach that had characterised language in education policies before the handover, whereby the choice of MoI was left to schools and parents.

The intent of the Guidance was detailed in the form of several Policy Objectives:

(1) to enable students to learn effectively, to be biliterate and trilingual.
(2) to commit to promoting mother-tongue teaching.
(3) to introduce measures under the Guidance, to enable schools and parents to see for themselves the benefits of mother-tongue teaching.
(4) to strengthen the teaching and learning of English in schools using Chinese as the MoI.
(5) to monitor progress to see how best to achieve the ultimate objective of the language policy. (Education Department 1997)

The details of the Guidance are shown in Table 1.

The impact of the new policy, in numerical terms at least, was substantial. In 1997, prior to the Guidance, less than 80 of the 400+ schools were CMI; by 1998, some 300 schools had to be. As a concession by the government following opposition from schools, students and parents

Table 1. Policy objectives and means of the Guidance (Education Department 1997).

| Policy objectives | Policy means |
|---|---|
| 1. To enable students to learn effectively, to be biliterate and trilingual | 1. Cantonese, English and Putonghua are all featured in the Secondary 1–3 curriculum, either as MoI or as a subject |
| 2. To commit to promoting mother-tongue teaching | 2.1 The majority (~75%) of secondary schools must teach all academic subjects from Secondary 1–3 in Chinese<br>2.2 Limited school based autonomy for Secondary 4 and 5; complete school based autonomy for Secondary 6 and 7* |
| 3. To introduce measures under the MoI Guidance, to enable schools and parents to see for themselves the benefits of mother-tongue teaching | 3. Official statistics compiled from Medium of Instructions Grouping Assessments, and the Secondary School Places Allocation list |
| 4. To strengthen the teaching and learning of English in CMI schools | 4. Provision for additional English teachers, classes, teaching aids and library grants |
| 5. To monitor progress to see how best to achieve the ultimate objective of the language policy | 5. Triennial review** and a three year longitudinal study on the first batch of cross-over students |

Notes: *Secondary 7 will cease from 2012 under the new secondary school curriculum structure; **a review on MoI adoption by schools, not the MoI policy.

to the initial plan to impose CMI on all schools, 100 secondary schools were designated by the Education Department as EMI schools – those that could demonstrate that the teachers and students had the ability to cope with EMI (Poon 2004). The move produced a further angry reaction from schools that were omitted from the list and who feared a drop in status that was associated with CMI education. On appeal, 14 more schools were deemed to be capable of delivering EMI education.

The actual outcomes of this policy can be gauged through two later developments: the Education Commission Report reviewing the MoI for secondary schools and the Secondary School Places Allocation; and the fine-tuning of the MoI (Education Bureau 2009a). This paper views them as *de facto* evaluations on the policy set out in the Guidance. The report by the Education Commission (2005) is an official review by the highest advisory body on education in Hong Kong and contains considerable analysis and numerous recommendations. Its timing is noteworthy because it was conducted after one complete cycle of implementation (Secondary 1 to Secondary 5) and was meant to be a recommendation for a long term 'final' policy. The subsequent fine-tuning (Education Bureau 2009a) is an *ad hoc* proposal that was responsive to public demand; the detail of its adhesion to and departure from the Education Commission's report provides an interesting insight into the dynamics of language policy-making in Hong Kong.

In 2003, the Education Commission commissioned a working group to conduct a public consultation, to review the implementation of the Guidance and to give recommendations on change, if any, to the policy on MoI. This Education Commission Report, because of the consultation exercise, was not released until December 2005. The substantive recommendations were:

(1) Uphold the existing policy on CMI for S1–S3.
(2) Modify the criteria for schools wishing to adopt EMI.
(3) Enhance English proficiency in schools by:
    (a) extending learning activities;
    (b) increasing learning resources;
    (c) providing English enhancement schemes;
    (d) enriching the language environment;
    (e) increasing teachers' professional development (Education Commission 2005).

It is noteworthy that the report's recommendations prioritised the enhancement of students' English, despite the fact that the overall objective is to foster biliteracy and trilingualism with an emphasis on mother-tongue education. The report explains that English proficiency is often perceived by parents as a significant benchmark of learning, and that parents also hold English in disproportionately high regard for students' career prospects. Therefore, according to the report, the English enhancement recommendations were measures to reassure parents and students that their aspirations had been heard and responded to – while reinforcing the underlying premise of the Guidance that the mother-tongue policy was in fact best for the students.

Against this backdrop argument of 'what is best for our students' from the Government and 'what is best for my children' from the parents, a statistic included in the Education Commission Report revealed the number of schools switching away from CMI to EMI at Secondary 4, where the Guidance allowed for some school-based autonomy, was approximately 50% at the time, which indicated that there were only marginally fewer EMI senior secondary classes after a five year implementation of enforced mother-tongue education, or, that only a handful of schools sought to maintain CMI in the senior secondary school even with the benefit of five years of mother-tongue education experience. Thus, the Recommendations of the report effectively made the following evaluation on the outcome of the Guidance: that English proficiency was viewed in the community as a singular standard of success for biliteracy and trilingualism, as

opposed to the more comprehensive view the Guidance sought to promote; and five years of implementation had not changed the fact that the general demand for EMI schools exceeded the allowable benchmark set by the Guidance.

While the Education Commission Report generally hailed the promotion of mother-tongue education as being appreciated and successful, the accommodations reflected in the Recommendations most certainly suggested the Education Commission's awareness of some unpopularity that would not be defused by more promotion of the policy. It was an acknowledgement that parents and school administrations were indeed substantial stakeholders and that their consensus was required in relevant policy-making. This acknowledgement raised the most pertinent 'intent *vs*. outcome' question – if strict enforcement of CMI is deemed untenable by the community and reverting back to *laissez-faire* equally unacceptable to the government, then what should be the way forward? This question would not be answered for another four years, which effectively relegated the Education Commission Report to an *ad interim* status rather than a definitive solution.

Two years after the report's publication, and nine years after the original Guidance, with a revamped agency (the Education and Manpower Bureau had been disbanded, and the Education Bureau had been formed) and a new Secretary for Education (Hon. Michael Suen, who took office in July 2007), the government embarked on a second, unscheduled round of consultation in an attempt to put forward a language policy that would gain wide acceptance, stability and traction – something that had been lacking since the Guidance was introduced in 1998. Termed 'Fine-tuning the Medium of Instruction for secondary schools' (Fine-tuning), this exercise was designed as a two-year consultation period before the announcement of the revisions to the policy in May 2009, and a further one year of planning before implementation in September 2010.

The Fine-tuning reiterates the government's conviction of the virtues of the original intent of the Guidance. The pronounced objectives of the proposal do not deviate from those of the Guidance or the Education Commission Report. The substance of the Fine-tuning was modestly outlined in three sub-objectives:

(1) To increase exposure to English for Secondary 1 to Secondary 3 students.
(2) To allow greater school-based autonomy on the choice of MoI.
(3) To remove the differentiation between CMI and EMI schools (Education Bureau 2009a).

Sub-objectives 2 and 3 can be seen as extensions of Recommendations 2 and 3 of the Education Commission Report. As autonomy for schools increases through initiatives such as School-based Curriculum Development (launched in 1998), School-based Management (2000) and School Development and Accountability (2003), it is a natural consequence that the CMI/EMI bifurcation has to be removed. Autonomy is but an allowance to increase the proportion of EMI; and that proportion will ultimately reach a point when the bifurcation becomes meaningless or even farcical.

Sub-objective 1, however, is far more significant – both in form and substance. Since the handover, the one bedrock conviction of the policy-makers has been 'mother-tongue education is best, especially for junior secondary students' – it was enforced by the Guidance and defended by the Education Commission Report. Every English-related initiative had been qualitative (enhanced proficiency, enriched environment, and so on) in nature up to this point, but what Fine-tuning terms 'greater exposure' is defined as an increased allocation of teaching time, and thus represents a quantitative departure. Given the zero-sum nature of curriculum, more English will mean less of other subjects – most likely to be subjects delivered through CMI. This measure therefore contradicts the long-insisted benefits of mother-tongue instruction. In short, the Fine-tuning is saying 'given our conviction in the benefits of mother-tongue education, we will encourage schools to teach more English; and to teach more subjects in English'.

## Discussion

It can be seen from this brief review of language policy that cultural, political, economic and educational threads are entangled in a Gordian knot. Government intervention to promote, at the rhetorical level at least, the educational interests of students, has failed to untie the threads, so the task is once more left to the market forces of lobbying by interest groups, parental choice and curriculum decision-making by schools. This resolution reflects the preferences of pre- and post-handover governments in Hong Kong for collaborative rather than coercive policy implementation, in Cummins' (2000) terms. Before 1997, as Morris and Scott (2003) note, the government's concern was self-preservation through the avoidance of conflict with powerful sections of the community. After the retrocession to Chinese sovereignty, it is significant that one of the first policies in the area of education was to promote mother-tongue learning through 'firm guidance', arguably denoting an assertion of self-confidence and strength by the new administration.

However, with a helicopter view (Table 2), it is not difficult to notice a continuous pattern of erosion of the initial post-handover commitment to mother-tongue education. Although every iteration of policy goals since 1997 has remained committed to the cause of mother tongue education, the Education Commission Report and the Fine-tuning represent an incremental unwinding of the Guidance's intent by actually promoting English. As this analysis has highlighted, the Fine-tuning is major re-engineering that facilitates a reverse to the previous *status quo*, a move being hailed as 'consensual' and 'progressive' (Education Bureau 2009).

A number of factors could explain this reversion to consensus-building: the enduring power of key stakeholders, such as parents and schools; the tension between central control of policy decision-making and the increasing devolution of curriculum decisions to schools through various school-based management initiatives in recent years; the growing prominence of English in Asian schools, with the adoption by a number of countries (including China) of EMI in core subjects such as science and mathematics; and a desire to maintain social harmony. However, the driving force that is explicitly acknowledged in official documents is the need for Hong Kong to be seen as being in step with current international trends, not least given its ambitions to be a regional education hub. The press release (Education Bureau 2009b) announcing the Fine-tuning quotes the Secretary for Education as saying that the measures 'will enhance students' ability to learn in English, prepare them to embrace new challenges from globalisation and enhance Hong Kong's status as an international city'.

The strong position of English in Hong Kong after 1997, which is reinforced by the fine-tuning of the language policy, has been interpreted by some commentators (see Pennycook 1998; Choi 2003) as an enduring legacy of colonialism, with the discourse privileging English

Table 2. Comparison of three policy interventions.

| Intent – 1997 guidance | Outcome 1 – Education Commission report (2005) | Outcome 2 – fine-tuning (2009) |
|---|---|---|
| To enable students to learn effectively, to be biliterate and trilingual | Uphold the standing policy on CMI for Secondary 1–3 | Increase exposure to English for Secondary 1–3 students |
| To commit to promoting mother-tongue teaching | Modified criteria for schools wishing to adopt EMI | Allow greater school based autonomy on MoI |
| To strictly enforce CMI for Secondary 1–3 | Enhance English proficiency in schools by various qualitative measures | Remove the CMI and EMI schools classification |

being dominated by powerful international business interests. On the other hand, Sweeting and Vickers (2007) ascribe its prominence to a pragmatic disposition in the Hong Kong community that sees significant economic and other social advantages attached to competence in English. This paper would support the latter argument, as, since the establishment of public education in early colonial times, key stakeholders such as parents, teachers and school leaders have not demonstrated supine docility towards government policies; on the contrary, they have been willing to protest vehemently if they feel that their interests have been threatened. Successive governments, each preferring, for their own reasons, collaborative rather than coercive policies, have sought to avoid exacerbating tensions through strategies such as leaving unpopular policies at the symbolic or rhetorical level rather than actively promoting them, or reversing them through linguistic sleight-of-hand.

While the government's 'consensual' claim for the Fine-tuning is valid, 'progressiveness' is a far more difficult claim to justify. After all, the Guidance once promoted mother tongue education as progressive – so how could 'more English' be similarly labelled? It appears that the government deems being popular (or consensual) as more important – at least at this juncture – than being logical, which, in policy terms at least, should have translated into being consistent and coherent in its view of progressiveness. An education policy that prevails on the grounds of popularity, moreover, does not render itself immune from pedagogical consequences. Previous experience of the market in language education policies suggests that the result will leave the language or dialect with low political or economic status vulnerable to the allocation of limited resources or even exclusion from the education system. In the case of Cantonese, the mother-tongue of the students, their educational opportunities and their development of a distinct cultural identity will be threatened. High status languages, such as English and Putonghua, which are seen as bestowing political or economic advantages, have sufficient weight in the community to undermine policy intentions that are premised on the view that students learn best through a familiar language.

As students once again fail to grasp their subject knowledge because of the MoI, a tendency documented in Kirkpatrick (2007), many mainstream students will find themselves struggling while only the elite or privileged excel (Morris and Scott 2003). This outcome will be a setback to the Guidance's declared goal of changing the education landscape to a better one for all. An ironic possible outcome for any education system that follows the course now being set by the language policy in Hong Kong, is that, if students lack sufficient competence in the language that is used as the MoI, they will tend to learn superficially (by rote) and to lack autonomy and self-expression, thus frustrating other educational goals that have been set for the development of human capital in the new globalised economy.

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