

LCQ11: Raising public's Putonghua standard

Following is a question by the Hon Tang Fei and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Dr Choi Yuk-lin, in the Legislative Council today (November 6):

Question:

There are views that with the integration of Hong Kong into the overall development of the country, raising the public's Putonghua standard is of significance to enhancing their sense of national identity and patriotic education, and being conversant with Putonghua can help the public better understand the policies, culture and history of the country, thereby deepening their patriotic sentiments and sense of belonging. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the specific measures currently taken by the Government to raise the Putonghua standard of Hong Kong students, so as to enhance their sense of national identity and awareness of patriotism; whether it has plans to increase the proportion of school curriculum using Putonghua as the teaching medium;

(2) to facilitate the implementation of Putonghua education, whether it has provided targeted professional training to teachers to raise their standard of teaching in Putonghua; whether a dedicated training fund or scholarship has been established to support teachers to pursue further studies in Putonghua;

(3) whether it has policies or plans to raise civil servants' Putonghua standard; whether it will include the Putonghua proficiency test as a criterion for the recruitment and promotion of civil servants; if so, of the specific arrangements; and

(4) whether it has conducted surveys on the implementation of Putonghua education in Hong Kong at present to assess its effectiveness; if so, of the assessment outcome for recent years; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Under the "one country, two systems", Hong Kong's policy on language education is to develop the biliterate and trilingual abilities of our students, enabling them to express themselves and communicate fluently in Putonghua, English and Cantonese. Putonghua is the standard Chinese language of our country. It is also a symbol of our nation. A good mastery of Putonghua not only enhances expression and communication but also facilitates

integration into the overall development of the country, boosting national pride and confidence.

Our reply to the question raised by the Hon Tang Fei is as follows:

(1), (2) and (4) The Education Bureau (EDB) has been actively promoting the teaching and learning of Putonghua, and adopting a multi-pronged strategy, which covers the aspects of curriculum, learning and teaching support, student activities and teachers' professional development, to promote students' learning of Putonghua within and beyond the classroom.

Curriculum

Since 1998, Putonghua has officially been included as a core subject at the primary and junior secondary levels to ensure that all primary and secondary school students can master Putonghua. We will continue to review the curriculum, closely keep in view the grading standards and the testing outlines of the Putonghua Proficiency Test for secondary and primary school students (pilot version) promulgated by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China and the State Language Commission (SLC), and make timely refinement to the curriculum of the Putonghua subject for primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong, so as to align with the national standards and enhance the effectiveness of Putonghua learning and teaching.

Learning and teaching support

To support the learning and teaching of Putonghua, the EDB has been developing diversified learning and teaching resources for reference and use by teachers and students. These include enhancing the content and the functions of the "Tong Da Xue Pu" self-learning website, producing resource materials such as a Glossary of Easily-mispronounced Terms, a game booklet on the Correct Pronunciation and Application of Putonghua and the "Voice and Expression: Learning Materials for Reading Aloud in Putonghua with Background Music for Primary and Secondary Schools", as well as preparing school exemplars.

Furthermore, the EDB provides school-based support services for primary and secondary schools, collaborating with teachers to enhance the learning and teaching of Putonghua in schools such as developing Pinyin teaching, encouraging students to read aloud, telling stories relating to classical Chinese poetry, and designing various Putonghua learning activities. The EDB also works under the Mainland-Hong Kong Teachers Exchange and Collaboration Programme to arrange for Mainland expert teachers to enhance teachers' professional capacity in implementing Putonghua teaching through on-site collaboration, teacher networks, open lessons and teacher professional development activities.

To further promote the effective use of Putonghua by students so as to boost their national pride and national confidence, the Chief Executive has also announced in his 2024 Policy Address that the EDB would earmark approximately \$200 million in the Language Fund for providing a one-off grant

to each public sector primary and secondary school in the 2024/25 school year. This grant aims to enrich the Putonghua language environment and enhance the atmosphere for learning Putonghua.

Multifarious activities and Mainland exchange

The EDB has all along been encouraging schools to organise multifarious activities to give students more opportunities to use Putonghua on and off campus. The EDB also collaborates with schools, educational organisations and social organisations to regularly organise various kinds of Putonghua activities for students such as the Putonghua Public Speaking Competition for Primary and Secondary Schools. The Standing Committee on Language Education and Research (SCOLAR) makes use of the Language Fund to encourage and provide funding to different sectors of the community to conduct a variety of Putonghua activities, thereby creating a diversified Putonghua learning environment for students outside the classroom. Since the 2019/20 school year, a total grant of over \$60 million has been approved by the SCOLAR to fund projects initiated by different organisations for the promotion of Putonghua, including interactive theatres, radio dramas, video production, quiz competitions, public speaking contests and community exploration activities, and the attendance of beneficiary students has exceeded 400 000. According to the feedback gathered by the organisers and the observations by the SCOLAR Secretariat, participating students were able to speak Putonghua with enthusiasm and they demonstrated good Putonghua proficiency in general.

In addition, by means of the Sister School Scheme and Mainland exchange and study tours, students are provided with opportunities to practise Putonghua, enrich their vocabulary and enhance their communication skills in an authentic environment through interacting and exchanging with their Mainland counterparts, touring different visiting spots and participating in relevant learning activities, etc.

Professional training and development of teachers

The policy on Language Proficiency Requirement (LPR) has been implemented by the EDB since the 2000/01 school year. Under this policy, all teachers of the Putonghua subject holding a regular post in publicly-funded schools (Note) have to fulfil the language proficiency requirements. With the introduction of the enhanced LPR announced by the EDB recently, starting from the 2024/25 school year, all new or newly deployed teachers of the Putonghua subject holding a regular post should attain Grade A, Level 2 or above in the Test of Proficiency in Putonghua conducted by the SLC and obtain the attained result in the Classroom Language Assessment within the first year of taking up teaching the subject.

To further encourage teachers to enhance their mastery of Putonghua, this year the EDB launches the Sponsorship Scheme for Teachers Taking the National Putonghua Proficiency Test, under which all serving and prospective teachers (including but not limited to teachers teaching Chinese Language and Putonghua subjects) employed in publicly-funded primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong will be fully sponsored by the Language Fund to take the

Putonghua Proficiency Test once. The aim is to reinforce the atmosphere for using Putonghua in school.

Other than these, the EDB provides in-service training on different themes for Putonghua teachers every year, which includes curriculum interpretation, teaching of listening and speaking, teaching of Pinyin, tackling learning difficulties, learning assessment and creating an environment conducive to language learning. These training courses aim to enhance the teaching quality and skills of in-service teachers with contents further expanded to include performing arts, pragmatics, as well as communication and application of Putonghua to enhance their linguistic competence. In addition, the EDB encourages teachers to enrol in the online programme on Capacity Building Relating to the Teaching and Promotion of Putonghua for Teachers of Primary and Secondary Schools in Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao offered by the Ministry of Education. Literary and cultural study trips to the Mainland have also been organised for teachers to promote exchanges, broaden their horizon and enhance their teaching abilities.

The EDB and the Department of Education of Guangdong Province co-organise the Advanced Course on Teaching of Putonghua every year to uplift the professional standards of Putonghua teachers through immersive training courses and lesson observation activities. So far, 612 Putonghua teachers have completed the course since its first launch in 1999.

Effectiveness evaluation

The EDB has been using different channels such as curriculum development visits and inspections to understand the work of schools in uplifting students' language proficiency (including the promotion of Putonghua education) and will make recommendations on improvement as necessary. Following the introduction of the enhanced School Development and Accountability framework in the 2022/23 school year, schools have to focus more on the seven learning goals (including language proficiency of students) in conducting the annual school self-evaluation (SSE). During the process, schools will collect the SSE information and data for integrative use to evaluate their effectiveness in related work. As observed from school inspections, schools would take into account their school-based circumstances and adopt diversified approaches to encourage students' learning of Putonghua through application. For example, they would create a rich Putonghua learning environment within the schools and arrange students to participate in Putonghua-related activities held inside and outside their schools so as to increase students' ability and interest in the use of Putonghua.

According to the results of the 2021 Thematic Household Survey published by the Census and Statistics Department, 85.7 per cent of the responding students perceived their language competence in Putonghua for daily use as totally sufficient, sufficient or average. The percentage has been rising steadily over the past ten years.

The EDB will continue to create more opportunities for teachers and students to practise Putonghua and enrich the Putonghua learning environment

to enhance the Putonghua proficiency of teachers and students in Hong Kong.

(3) Having consulted the Civil Service Bureau, response to part (3) of the question is set out below:

Chinese and English are both the official languages of Hong Kong. It is the Government's policy to maintain a fully biliterate and trilingual civil service to ensure effective communication with the public in discharging their official duties.

Heads of Department/Grade would, having regard to the job requirements of the grades under their purview, specify appropriate language proficiency requirements as part of the entry requirements of the grades concerned. In assessing whether candidates meet the Putonghua proficiency required by the grade concerned, the recruiting department/grade may, having regard to its operational needs, decide on the appropriate assessment method(s), such as requiring candidates to answer questions in Putonghua during selection interviews, or requiring candidates to attain specific results in designated Putonghua proficiency tests.

While maintaining the standard of public services, the Government will from time to time review the language proficiency requirements of various civil service grades to ensure that they commensurate with the job requirements and allow people of different backgrounds to join the civil service. The Civil Service Bureau is also dedicated to strengthening Putonghua training through arranging courses and web resources for civil servants. The contents include Putonghua for conducting exchange at work, methods to learn and better communicate in Putonghua, with a view to enhancing the overall ability of the civil service in using Putonghua.

Note: These include all teachers of Putonghua holding a regular post in aided schools, as well as teachers of Putonghua in government schools, caput schools, Direct Subsidy Scheme schools and private primary/secondary day schools offering a formal curriculum who are comparable to teachers holding a regular post in aided schools.