

LCQ16: Public's Putonghua standard

Following is a question by the Hon Starry Lee and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung, in the Legislative Council today (August 18):

Question:

There are views that proficiency in Putonghua helps young people integrate into the overall development of our country and seize the opportunities arising from the development of our country and the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. In order to upgrade young people's Putonghua standard, there is a need for the Government to emphasise the importance of Putonghua at schools, as well as enhance the standard of Putonghua teaching and the atmosphere for learning Putonghua, so as to encourage more young people to learn Putonghua and upgrade their Putonghua standard. On upgrading the public's Putonghua standard, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that persons aspiring to be teachers of Putonghua are required to participate in the Language Proficiency Assessment for Teachers held by the authorities and attain a result of Level 3 or above in all papers of the assessment in order to meet the language proficiency requirement for teaching Putonghua, whether the Education Bureau will consider adding the following requirement: attaining a result of Grade 1 Level B or above in the Putonghua Shuiping Ceshi conducted by the State Language Work Committee; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) given that there were only 16.4 per cent and 2.5 per cent of primary and secondary schools respectively which fully used Putonghua to teach the Chinese Language subject in the 2015-2016 school year, whether the Government will encourage schools to use Putonghua to teach other subjects and provide more occasions for using Putonghua on campus, so that students can have more opportunities to use Putonghua and master a wider Putonghua vocabulary; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) whether it will include Putonghua proficiency tests in civil service recruitment examinations; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Hong Kong is a special administrative region and also an international city. To maintain our competitive edge and embrace the opportunities brought by the Mainland and all over the world, Hong Kong's policy on language education is to enhance the biliterate (Chinese and English) and trilingual (Cantonese, Putonghua and English) abilities of our students.

Regarding the question of the Hon Starry Lee, having consulted the Civil Service Bureau, a reply is as follows:

(1) The Education Bureau (EDB) has implemented the Language Proficiency Requirement (LPR) policy for English Language subject and Putonghua subject since 2000. For Putonghua subject, the Language Proficiency Assessment for Teachers (LPAT) comprises the papers of Listening and Recognition (Paper 1), Pinyin (Paper 2), Speaking (Paper 3) and Classroom Language Assessment (CLA) (Paper 4). All new teachers or newly deployed teachers of Putonghua holding a regular post should have met the LPR (Level 3 or above) in Papers 1 to 3 before taking up the teaching of the relevant subject. They are also required to pass the CLA within the first year upon taking up the posts. Holders of the Certificate for the Test of Proficiency in Putonghua (Grade B, Level 2 or above) awarded by the State Language Commission (SLC) will be exempted from the Speaking paper in the LPAT (Putonghua). This arrangement is well accepted by the sector. As far as we understand, in the Mainland, one of the basic requirements for teachers applying for qualification accreditation is to attain Grade B, Level 2 or above in the Test of Proficiency in Putonghua conducted by the SLC; and Grade A, Level 2 or above for Language teachers. Regarding the need to raise the grade requirement for Putonghua subject in Hong Kong, we keep an open mind and will review the related arrangements on an ongoing basis.

(2) Hong Kong's policy on language education is to enhance our students' biliterate and trilingual abilities, including the communication skills in Putonghua. Since 1998, Putonghua has become one of the compulsory subjects at the primary and junior secondary levels. It is stipulated that the subject should be taught by teachers who meet the Putonghua language proficiency requirements, and that the Putonghua curriculum guide be provided for teachers offering them guidelines on the curriculum framework, curriculum planning, learning and teaching strategies, assessment, as well as learning and teaching resources, etc.

The learning of Putonghua is not limited to the subject of Putonghua and the use of Putonghua as the medium of instruction for teaching the Chinese Language subject (PMIC). The application of Putonghua is flexible and not confined to the classroom. The EDB has all along been encouraging schools to organise multifarious Putonghua activities to give students more opportunities to use Putonghua on and off campus. The EDB also collaborates with schools, academic organisations and social organisations to organise various kinds of Putonghua activities for students. The Standing Committee on Language Education and Research has been encouraging and providing funds, through the Language Fund, for community partners to conduct various Putonghua activities, such as public speaking competitions, interactive theatres, radio dramas and exchange programmes, to create a diversified Putonghua learning environment for students outside the classroom. The funding incurred in the 2019/20 and 2020/21 school years amounted to around \$10 million and the number of beneficiary students reached around 100 000. The students who participated in the activities showed good Putonghua standard. This is the positive outcome of the implementation of Putonghua

learning in schools. In addition, by means of the Sister School Scheme and the Mainland Exchange Programme, through visits and exchanges, not only are students' horizons broadened, but they are also provided with more opportunities to learn and practise Putonghua and enrich their Putonghua vocabulary. With the development of information technology, different types of audiovisual materials (such as the learning and teaching materials developed by the EDB), websites (such as the "Tong Da Xue Pu" website developed by the EDB), apps, learning software, etc. have become the learning and teaching aids of Putonghua for students and teachers. These resource materials enable students to gain exposure to Putonghua anytime and anywhere to extend the classroom learning.

Whether to adopt PMIC, schools should consider their own contexts, such as readiness of teachers, Putonghua standards of students, language environment of the school, curriculum planning, and learning and teaching support, before making a decision. Currently, some schools attempt to adopt PMIC to different extents; other schools may refer to their trial experience. As for using Putonghua to teach other subjects, apart from taking into account the above-mentioned criteria, schools must consider the learning of the subject itself. The learning effectiveness of the subject should not be compromised by the learning of Putonghua. All in all, the EDB will continue reviewing the policy and support according to school needs, thereby enabling students to continue improving their Putonghua communication skills.

(3) The Government's policy is to maintain a biliterate and trilingual civil service. Under the prevailing practice, Heads of Department/Heads of Grade, having regard to the job requirements of the civil service grades under their purview, would specify appropriate Chinese and English language proficiency requirements as part of the entry requirements. In assessing whether the candidates can meet the Putonghua proficiency required by the grade concerned, the recruiting department/grade may decide on the appropriate assessment method(s). Such prevailing arrangement has been working effectively. The Civil Service Bureau has no plan to introduce a standardised Putonghua proficiency assessment in the civil service recruitment process.

In addition, the Civil Service Training and Development Institute will continue its endeavours to provide appropriate Putonghua training to civil servants to meet their needs of communicating in Putonghua in their workplace.