

Comparative Study on Language Education Policies to Support Second Language Learners from K1 to P3

支援幼小階段
第二語言學習
者之語言教育
政策比較研究

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Right Start for Ethnic Minority Children – Promoting Inclusive Language Education Policies in
Mainstream Schools

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Second Language Learners from K1 to P3**

Executive Summary

Education equity is more than fairness. Every child, regardless of race and ethnicity, has the right to access free education. They may be subjected to educational models, programmes, and strategies that are considered equal, but not necessarily equitable. The public education system in Hong Kong is a case in point. Discrepancy in Chinese proficiency between non-Chinese and Chinese students is an outcome of the inequities in the education system. Many schools in the public sector use Cantonese as the medium of instruction but without adequate support to students whose mother tongue is not Chinese. The absence of a comprehensive second-language learning policy renders the Chinese proficiency of most ethnic minority students at the level of mainstream primary two level after twelve years of primary and secondary education. Hong Kong has failed to give ethnic minority children the chance to fulfil their potential in education. The purpose of this paper is to review the language education policy in three countries with the aim to collate some good practices and consider possible directions for a language education policy in Hong Kong and to support ethnic minority children to learn the language of instruction in school at an early age.

1. Objectives of the study

- 1.1 To explore and analyze (early childhood) language education policies in three countries – Ontario Canada, Finland and Germany.
- 1.2 To present commonalities in language education policies and procedures in the above three countries, that promote academic achievement among second language learners to the level expected of all learners.
- 1.3 To suggest a Chinese language learner policy for non-Chinese speaking students to the Hong Kong government drawing good practices and lessons across the studied countries.

2. Commonalities in language education policies and procedures

2.1 Legislation

All three studied countries have education and relevant legislation to ensure full participation in society in their respective national languages and to assist individuals overcome and eliminate discrimination in education.

2.2 Policies and strategies

All three studied countries have policies and procedures in place for the development and implementation of programmes and supports for second language learners in early childhood. In Ontario, the Ministry of Education has developed and updated practical guides and curriculum resources guides for English language learners from Kindergarten to Grade 12 to “help all English language learners in the province by engaging them in learning that enables them to develop their talents, meet their goals, and acquire the knowledge and skills they will need to achieve personal success and to participate in and contribute to Ontario society” (Ministry of Education, 2007). Both Finland and Germany made references to the European Commission’s *Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care* (2014) and the *Action Plan on the Integration of Third-country Nationals* (2016) to ensure early integration of immigrant children into mainstream education structures to prevent underachievement among migrants and social exclusion. In Finland, the goals of the federal policies for pre-primary immigrant children are to safeguard an equitable early childhood education and the development of uniform pre-primary education instruction to ensure that all children have equal prerequisites.

2.3 Reception and orientation

Orientation procedures are important for the welcoming of second-language-learners and their families in early childhood education. In Ontario, school boards are obligatory to develop protocols to define inclusive and non-discriminatory welcoming and orientation procedures and practices. In Finland, top-level regulations are in place to ensure schools keep parents informed and actively engage them in the education process, e.g. training programmes for parents and regularly informing parents about the coverage of the school curriculum so that they are more aware and in a better position to guide and support their children. In Germany, the federal programme *Early-Years Language Learning: Because Language is the Key to the World* supports development of language skills in daycare centers and kindergartens. In Bavaria, parents are invited to join their children at the pre-school language-promotion programmes to understand the pedagogy and provide support at home. Like Ontario and Finland, parents are regularly informed on the language development of their children.

2.4 Assessment and placement

Kindergarten teachers should be culturally sensitive; assessment tools and strategies on oral communication skills, reading comprehension and writing should align with the linguistic and characteristics of the children. In Ontario, English proficiency does not influence the choice of grade placement and final decisions regarding placement are made in consultation with the student, staff,

and parents. In Finland, the *National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care* (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2018), stipulates that in circumstances where students reading and writing skills are not sufficient to partake in basic education, adequate time should be reserved for acquisition and consolidation with appropriate support measures to enhance the progress of students' studies. In addition to the language of instruction and prior learning, Finland is the only country studied which assesses students' social and emotional well-being. In Germany, children are expected to converse in German and follow or read a story in German by the time they reach primary school age. Children whose knowledge of German is not sufficient must either continue to join a language-promotion group at the local kindergarten or at the local primary school during the months between registration and school attendance. Immigrant kindergarten children can usually integrate into mainstream education within a period of six months to two years.

2.5 Curriculum

In Ontario, school boards are required to develop curriculum and services to enable English language learners continue their education while learning English and the curriculum should be reflective of the changing needs of the students. In Finland, the *National Core Curriculum for Pre-Primary Education* (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2014) defines the criteria for pre-primary curriculum with a focus in the development of the Finnish or Swedish language for immigrant children. While municipalities may adopt school-specific policies, the majority of students follow a roughly equivalent programmes of instruction (Holm and Londen 2010) which aims to integrate immigrants in education. In Germany, the curriculum of preparatory class for early childhood immigrant students aims to enhance their German proficiency since German as a second language is only available in elementary school; secondary schools in most Länders use German as the medium of instruction.

2.6 Monitoring, evaluation and reporting

In Ontario, information on each English language learner's level of English language acquisition is summarized and included in the Ontario Student Record at least once in each school year for tracking student progress, monitoring the academic achievement, and supporting public accountability. The Ontario Ministry of Education uses the information to set benchmarks for English language learners in Ontario. In Finland, the *Act on Early Childhood Education and Care* (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2018) stipulates inspection, monitoring, evaluation and data repository and teachers are provided with monitoring support such as continuous assessment tools developed specifically for assessing students' language knowledge and skills, and performance and progress.

3. Discussion

3.1 Briefing and engaging ethnic minority parents

In Hong Kong, since the 2017/18 school year, the Education Bureau (EDB) in collaboration with NGOs, runs about six to seven seminars every year to brief parents on admission arrangements for nursery (K1) classes. These sessions are conducted in English with simultaneous interpretation services in Urdu, Hindi, and Nepali to inform parents on kindergarten application and admission procedures; but total participation rate is usually less than 2.5% of all K1 non-Chinese speaking student (NCS) population. Information such as what to expect in kindergartens, and how kindergartens support their children however, is only available in pamphlets and videos. According to a survey by Hong Kong Unison (2019), 73% of the interviewed parents were not aware of leaflets published by the EDB or the Equal Opportunities Commission on kindergarten support measures for non-Chinese speaking children. Pamphlets and videos are certainly not as effective as face-to-face briefings and meetings.

Starting from the 2020/21 school year, the EDB provides a series of parent education programmes for parents of NCS students, including parent education talks cum exhibitions and community activities, supposedly to help them support their children's learning, encourage their children to master the Chinese language, and enable them to have a more comprehensive understanding of the multiple pathways available to their children. The effectiveness of the programme is yet to be seen.

3.2 Early immersion and preparatory teaching

As noted in the EDB Kindergarten Curriculum Guide (2017), “the opportunity for non-Chinese speaking children to be exposed to the Chinese Language before admission to kindergarten or outside the classroom is relatively limited.” Yet, there is no pre-kindergarten government supported Chinese learning programmes for NCS children; nor does every kindergarten that receive the NCS Grant actually provide Chinese learning support. In fact, the Director of Audit's Report (2021) found that in 2018/19, 3% of the kindergartens utilized less than half of the Grant provided and 15% utilized less than 70% of the Grant provided. The Report urged the EDB to improve the timeliness of supervisory visits to monitor kindergartens' use of the Grant.

The EDB runs an “Initiation Programme” for newly arrived children prior to enrolling in primary and secondary schools. It is a six-month programme that commences in September and March each year. The Programme includes both academic and non-academic elements such as English and Chinese languages, learning / study skills, personal development, social adaptation, and cultural subjects with the aim to help children integrate into the local education system and community. The “Induction Programme” is a 60-hour Programme run by non-governmental organizations with a subsidy from

the EDB for children age 6 to 18 on personal development, social adaptation, basic learning skills, as well as Chinese learning. A four-week “Summer Bridging Programme” is available for NCS students progressing to Primary 1 to 4 on Chinese learning. But as reported by the Audit Commission, the participation rate has decreased continuously from 2013 to 2019. Unfortunately, there is no outcome evaluation to ascertain participants of the above programmes have acquire Chinese to a level which enable them to smoothly learn other subjects in Chinese, the medium of instruction in the majority primary schools.

3.3 Data collection and reporting

A kindergarten opinion study (Unison, 2019) revealed that 22% of the interviewed parents did not know about the Chinese level their children learn in school and 16.8% of them were not able to find out their children’s Chinese ability. More than half of the parents indicated that they were not confident to put their children in mainstream primary school because they “perceived” their children’s Chinese ability is not adequate for a smooth transition in a mainstream primary school. This situation is unsatisfactory given the fact that kindergartens are required to submit to the EDB an annual school report at the end of the school year (by August) on the deployment of the NCS Grant and the support measures, summarising the implementation and the evaluation on the effectiveness of the measures. Kindergartens should improve home-school communication as effective home-school communication not only help children adapt to and integrate into school life at an early stage, it enhances parents’ understanding of the school curriculum.

3.4 Goal of the language education policies for ethnic minority students

In Hong Kong, the language education policy for all students is “biliteracy and trilingualism” However, there is no clear policy on the medium of instruction for Chinese language subject in primary schools and most schools do not have an agreed approach or method for implementing trilingual education (Wang and Kirkpatrick, 2015). The Chinese language subject in is taught in Putonghua in some primary schools in some grades. Consistent approach is lacking; using Putonghua as a medium of instruction for teaching the Chinese language subject (PMIC) is a school-based decision. Many schools overlook the learning needs of ethnic minority children by adopting PMIC and using Cantonese to teach other subjects.

There is no dedicated education policy for ethnic minority immigrant students; “Chinese Learning for non-Chinese Speaking Children” of the *Kindergarten Education Curriculum Guide* (2017) and the *Chinese Language Curriculum Second Language Learning Framework* (2014) (the Learning Framework) for primary and secondary schools are likely the only guiding documents on Chinese learning for ethnic minority students. The implementation of the Learning Framework aims to help

non-Chinese speaking students overcome the difficulties of learning Chinese as a second language “with a view’ to enabling them to bridge over to mainstream Chinese Language classes and master the Chinese language”. However, in reality, most ethnic minority students do not bridge over to mainstream Chinese class and their Chinese ability regressed when they enter secondary school. The majority of ethnic minority students are only taught to the level of Chinese GCSE or IGCSE, which is equivalent to the mainstream Primary 2 level, despite spending 15 years of education in Hong Kong.

3.5 Multi-disciplinary approach and support

There is no particular psycho-social support to ethnic minority students in Hong Kong; however, language acquisition planning is multifaceted, and involves a continuum of issues from psychological to the societal (Siiner, Hult, and Kupisch, 2018). Currently, the teaching and learning of Chinese as a second language is not based on social justice and respect for human rights. Rather, many schools and teachers view it as a burden. From the experience of Hong Kong Unison, school social workers do not yet seem to be aware of the psycho-social needs of ethnic minority students.

3.6 Teacher professional development

In Hong Kong, teachers do not need relevant professional qualifications to teach ethnic minorities. According to the Director of Audit’s Report (2021), from 2014/15 to 2019/20, there were 13,794 teachers teaching Chinese Language at 988 schools. 9,986 teachers in 252 schools (157 of them had more than 230 NCS students) did not attend EDB’s training. Training hours attended by the 3,808 teachers were on the low side, 46% of whom attended 5 hours or less.

The Education Bureau offers professional development programmes and commission a local university to conduct teacher workshops for Chinese language teachers who teach ethnic minority students. However, these training courses were viewed to be too theoretical and most instructors delivering the courses did not have prior experience teaching ethnic minorities, hence would not understand the actual needs of teachers. Most programmes are limited to supporting teachers on the Chinese language subject only and are deemed not effective in improving teaching efficacy (Oxfam et al., 2020).

Although the Education Bureau has launched the "Professional Enhancement Grant Scheme for Chinese Language Teachers (Teaching Chinese as a Second Language)" since 2014/15 school year to encourage Chinese Language teachers to pursue part-time programmes on teaching Chinese to immigrant students (including the acquisition of the pedagogical knowledge and skills), the Direct Investigation Report on ‘Government’s support for non-Chinese speaking students’ (Office of The Ombudsman Hong Kong, 2019) pointed out that this Scheme was not well received by the teachers.

In the four school years 2014/15 to 2017/18, only 68 Chinese Language subject teachers had been approved the grant, and among them 24 of them has completed the programmes.

4. Policy Recommendations

Upon studying the legislation for immigrant students and the language education policies of Ontario (Canada), Finland and Germany, we realize inclusion and respect for diversity are obligatory conditions for an equitable education system. Unlike Ontario Canada, Finland, and Germany, there is currently no legal mandate on language education for ethnic minority students in Hong Kong. To improve the quality and equity of education for ethnic minority students, the government should consider adopting some good practices from other countries and provide an inclusive policy and procedure to enable positive and measurable differences in education outcomes and increased student achievement for ethnic minority children. It is not only about funding resources; some key components which are currently suggested in other jurisdictions, should be made mandatory in the policy:

4.1 Planning and orientation for ethnic minority families

The Education Bureau should require schools to brief ethnic minority parents on what to expect in kindergarten and primary education; how students' performance is generally assessed, evaluated, and reported; homework policies; and how parents can support their children's learning at home; with simultaneous interpretation if needed. As Chinese learning is a major concern for parents, support measures should be explained in detail so that they are able to choose schools that can best support their children's learning needs.

4.2 Preparatory classes

Research found that preparatory teaching can provide more time and space for the teaching and learning of the language of instruction than full integration into mainstream education right from the start (Koehler, 2017). The Education Bureau should consider extending the initiation program to pre-primary children and require kindergartens to organize preparatory classes for ethnic minority children whose Chinese language skills are not strong enough to follow mainstream teaching. To provide a head start in Chinese learning, the Education Bureau can take reference from Germany's "Early-Years Language Learning" programs in day-care centres for pre-kindergarten children whereby centre staff receive guidance, counselling and on the job training to provide language stimulation, linguistic and literacy education through play.

4.3 Welcoming procedures and reception

Welcoming process involves helping ethnic minority children adapt to their new school environment and ensuring that they make good progress in their learning. Every student should feel comfortable, well-taken care of, and valued in the classroom, as well as supported and inspired to succeed. Both home room teacher and the Chinese as a second language teacher should meet with parents. If parents cannot communicate well in Chinese or English, schools should arrange interpreters. The Education Bureau should allow more effective use of community resources to assist schools during the registration and the welcoming process.

4.4 Family engagement and community involvement

Family and community involvement play an important role in children's education process, especially in early childhood education. The policy should ensure that schools have put into place measures to keep ethnic minority parents informed about the school curriculum, their children's progress, and especially their children's ability in Chinese so that they can guide and support their children outside of school. The Education Bureau can reference Finland's parent training program to enhance their capacities to support their children. The training however, should not be limited to academic support only, but also on physical, cognitive, social and emotional development of their children. The Steering Committee of Ethnic Minority Affairs is encouraged to coordinate a multi-disciplinary team to work closely with schools and local organizations (such as NGOs, libraries, cultural and religious societies, etc.) to implement the parent training program.

To engage parental involvement in schools, the Education Bureau should encourage kindergartens to develop a rigorous home-school cooperation program, e.g. invite Chinese and ethnic minority parents to volunteer in the classrooms participate in parent sharing sessions. Involving family members in the classroom provides children with positive role models and affirms the connection between home and school.

4.5 Initial assessment and data collection

Initial assessment and data collection are crucial for understanding children's learning characteristics. Hence information such as first language, country of origin, birth place, number of years in Hong Kong, religion, socioeconomic status, and prior learning and/or program joined should be collected upon admission to kindergarten and primary school respectively. These elements do not only contribute to decisions on how to place the students, but also how to provide the appropriate learning support to meet their needs and bridge their gaps.

4.6 Curriculum

Chinese language acquisition programs must have long-term goals and continuity in the curriculum as students move up through the grade levels. Defining objectives and competence level is a necessary first step in raising the quality of second language teaching. The Education Bureau should define objectives and competence levels on Chinese language learning in kindergarten and primary education so that schools, parents, school advisors, inspectors and education policymakers can make objective judgments about the quality of teaching, adjust or optimize the curriculum and support measures, and refine performance benchmarks.

For children who have not caught up with the expected competencies, additional support should be provided through intensive and/or remedial program to ‘accelerate’ the student’s acquisition of proficiency in everyday and academic Chinese. Remedial classes should also be considered for children who lag behind in other subjects taught in Chinese.

4.7 Ongoing assessment, evaluation, and reporting to parents

To better understand what ethnic minority children are able to do with the Chinese language at specific points in their development, the Education Bureau should develop metrics to track their outcomes in Chinese language proficiency and literacy.

Parents should be informed about schools’ assessment and evaluation policies and practices. Information about the learning expectations and the student’s academic progress should be communicated to parents on a regular basis. Schools should encourage and welcome active participation of parents to discuss assessment results and program placement options for their children.

4.8 Initial teaching training and professional development for teachers

Teachers matter more than any other single factor in learning and in improving learners’ achievements. Teaching to satisfy standards and core learning content is no longer enough; cultural sensitivity should be enhanced. Teachers should have professional preparation in how to use appropriate curricular materials and teaching strategies to promote achievement of ethnic minority children. Teachers who specialize (either pre-service or in-service training) in second-language acquisition and cross-linguistic should be given professional recognition.

4.9 Addressing social and emotional needs

Students' academic development and potential cannot be fully realised without supporting their social and emotional needs (Krachman, LaRocca & Gabrieli, 2018), in particular to students from immigrant backgrounds who may face additional challenges, such as social and cultural obstacles, barriers to full participation in schools, segregation and/or hostility and bullying. In-house social workers are

encouraged to support ethnic minority children personal, social and emotional development while education staff focus on developing their language skills and learning in general.

Cultural competence should be included in the core competences for social workers and training in cultural awareness, sensitivity, and responsiveness should be made mandatory for pre-service and in-service social workers so that they can address the needs of ethnic minority children and their families.

4.10 Allocation of resources

Allocating resources to support ethnic minority children should be perceived as an investment rather than a cost as they also are the future of Hong Kong. The government should review the current funding mode and grant amount to determine whether funding is adequate to implement the support measures mandated by the policy. Resources need to be targeted on outcomes and the facilitation of learning.

4.11 Monitoring of the policy

Evaluation of the language education policy provides valuable information to monitor equity within the education system. Hence a rigorous monitoring and evaluation framework with transparent procedures on compliance monitoring, diagnostic monitoring, and performance monitoring must be developed.

1. Introduction

Education equity is more than fairness. Every child, regardless of race and ethnicity, has the right to access free education. They may be subjected to educational models, programs, and strategies that are considered equal, but not necessarily equitable. The public-education system in Hong Kong is a case in point. Discrepancies in educational performance and proficiency in Chinese language between non-Chinese and Chinese students is an outcome of the racial inequities in the education system.

The Education Bureau officially adopted the “mother-tongue medium of instruction (MOI)” policy in September 1998 (Tsui *et al.*, 1999) presenting logistical and linguistic challenges for racial minority children whose mother tongue is not Cantonese. Many schools in the public sector that previously used English as a medium of instruction switched to Cantonese teaching under the mother-tongue MOI policy, but without adequate support to students whose mother tongue is not Cantonese. The mother-tongue MOI policy and the assumption that racial minority children cannot learn Chinese create biased practices and de facto racial segregation in the education system.

The language education policy of Hong Kong post-1997 aims to promote students’ language proficiency to enable them to be bi-literate (in Chinese and English) and tri-lingual (in Cantonese, Putonghua and English). In the 1997 Policy Address, the Chief Executive of Hong Kong reiterated the goals for “secondary school graduates to be proficient in writing English and Chinese and able to communicate confidently in Cantonese, English and Putonghua.” (Tung, 1997) Perhaps this is only applicable to Chinese students. Most non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students (the term used by the Education Bureau to denote students whose home language is not Chinese) though locally born and raised in Hong Kong, cannot read and write Chinese nor communicate confidently in Cantonese upon secondary graduation. Although the government developed a “Chinese Language Curriculum Second Language Framework” in 2014 and since provided more than HK\$1.2 billion to schools with NCS students for implementation, their significant improved competence in Chinese is yet to be seen. Without a Chinese Language Learner Education Policy, ethnic minority students cannot access equal education opportunities. Achievement gaps between them and Chinese students will persist and they will continue to be marginalized.

2. Rationale of the study

Although Chinese and English are the official languages in Hong Kong, proficiency in Chinese has become increasingly important. A study (Unison, 2016) found if a job seeker could only read English and decided to apply for jobs that did not require or prefer written Chinese, spoken Cantonese, and/or

spoken Putonghua, then the job seeker essentially only could access 19% of the advertised job vacancies. The Hong Kong Poverty Situation Report on Ethnic Minorities (HKSARG, 2014) showed a correlation between language abilities and the poor population of South Asians – having lower language [Chinese] proficiency was one of the factors that hindered their employability, community integration into mainstream society and upward social mobility.

The “Chinese Language Curriculum Second Language Framework” was developed in 2014 with the goal to help NCS students overcome difficulties in learning Chinese and lay a solid foundation for them to bridge to mainstream Chinese Language classes as early as possible (EDB, 2019). Data from 2015/16¹ school year showed that only about 13.3% of all NCS students from 197 schools had bridged over to mainstream Chinese Language classes. Recent studies revealed that more than 80% of Chinese language teachers believed that the Learning Framework lacks support, and it is not helping NCS students integrate into mainstream Chinese language classes (Oxfam et al., 2020). The absence of a ‘complete’ second-language learning system in terms of curriculum, teaching and learning materials, teacher training, as well as examinations and assessments (EOC, 2019) renders the Chinese reading and writing proficiency of most NCS students at mainstream primary two level after twelve years of primary and secondary education. Hong Kong has failed to give all children the chance to fulfil their potential in education.

Proficiency in the language of instruction is necessary for students to access the school curriculum and to benefit from the learning opportunities offered by schools. School performance depends very much on students’ level of literacy in the language of instruction. This affects all learners, but particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, including immigrant students. (European Commission, 2017).

Note: *The term “immigrant” in Hong Kong education policy literature applies mostly to immigrants from China and is almost never applied to ethnic minorities in Hong Kong except when they are illegal, at which point they are then called illegal immigrants (Pike, 2015).*

Throughout this paper, ‘immigrant students/children’ refer to foreign-born students whose parents are foreign-born or students who were born in the host country but whose parents are foreign-born. Their usual home language is not the language of instruction in school. This in fact, is a fitting

¹ Since 2014, 2015/16 was the only school year which the Education Bureau provided figures of NCS students who bridged over to mainstream Chinese language classes despite continuous enquiries.

description of the ethnic minority children of Hong Kong. In this paper, we do not delineate whether their background is immigrant, migrant or refugee as all children regardless of their backgrounds have equal right to quality education.

It is no doubt the teaching of the language of instruction to immigrant students pose particular challenges as this language is often a second or additional language which needs to be learnt and mastered to a sufficiently high level in order to learn other subjects. However, besides being able to access mainstream curriculum, proficiency in the language of instruction facilitates the socialization process in schools and research shows that advanced literacy is one of the keys to successful lives for students (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008). For these reasons, specific measures relating to the teaching of the language of instruction should be part of any comprehensive education policy that seeks to improve the way immigrant students are integrated into schools.

Oxfam Hong Kong (2014) conducted a study on “Second-language education policies abroad and in Hong Kong” in 2014 on 3 English speaking states: California, United States; British Columbia, Canada; New South Wales, Australia. Measures that could possibly be applied to Hong Kong included (i) clear goals in second language learner policies; (ii) curriculum and stage learning objectives; (iii) objective system of assessment; (iv) family engagement; (v) pull-out classes for [national] language subject; (vi) culturally responsive curricula; (vii) further language instructions and (viii) special arrangement for language exams at secondary graduation. To some extent, the Hong Kong Government have since adopted some proposed measures but by piecemeal approach. To date, a comprehensive Chinese language education policy that encompasses rules, regulations, procedures, guidelines, etc. to support ethnic minority students still does not exist. Nor is there an operation guide² on inclusive education for ethnic minority students.

“Mastery of language is of paramount importance to children’s learning and whole person development. World-wide studies show that children have enormous potential for language development and early childhood is the golden period for language learning. Language experiences at an early age bring tremendous influences on the language development of children” (SCOLAR). Hence, to promote the acquisition of Chinese and enhance the Chinese literacy of ethnic minority children effectively, particularly for those who are born in Hong Kong, overarching language

² The Education Bureau published the 3rd edition “Operation Guide on the Whole School Approach to Integrated Education” in 2014 to provide guiding principles and practicable strategies for schools to support students with special education needs. https://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/edu-system/special/support/wsa/ie%20guide_en.pdf

education policies must be in place at pre- and early primary levels of schooling. Early childhood education is an indispensable tool to enable successful integration into a new society for immigrant children. If implemented properly, they can have a long-lasting impact on children's lives and play a major role in building a more democratic and equitable society (European Council, 2019).

The purpose of this paper is to review the language education policy in three countries with the aim to collate best practices and consider possible directions for a local language education policy to support children to learn the language of instruction in school at an early age.

3. Objectives of the study

- 3.1 To explore and analyze (early childhood) language education policies in three countries including non-English speaking countries.
- 3.2 To present commonalities in language education policies and procedures that promote academic achievement among second language learners to the level expected of all learners.
- 3.3 To suggest a Chinese language learner policy to the Hong Kong government drawing best practices and lessons across countries.

4. Methodology

Studies have shown that early childhood of ages 3 to 6 is the best time to learn any language because children do not 'learn' the language; they acquire and the language gets imprinted in them if their environment contains the language they 'learn'. The selection of countries for this study is based on the availability of early childhood education policies for second language learners, the host language is the primary language of instruction in education, and the difficulty of the language as categorized by the Foreign Service Institute³ (FSI) for adult native English speakers. Canada, Finland and Germany are the countries selected for this study and the level of difficulty according to the FSI is as follows:

Language	Category	Time to attain general profession proficiency	Other languages categorized in the same category
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³ <https://www.state.gov/foreign-language-training/>

		in reading and speaking	
English	I	23-24 weeks (575-600 hours)	Danish, French, Italian, Spanish
German	II	36 weeks (900 hours)	Indonesian, Malay
Finnish	IV	44 weeks (1,100 hours)	Bengali, Hebrew, Nepali, Pashto, Urdu
Cantonese	V	88 weeks (2,200 hours)	Arabic, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin

Key publicly available documents related to language education policy in the three countries were gathered and presented individually. In addition, supplementary material in the form of academic articles was used, particularly where English information or available information was scant. Once the relevant documents were gathered, they were analysed for some key characteristics including:

- policy goals and strategies;
- initial assessment and placement;
- curriculum;
- ongoing assessment;
- engagement of parents;
- roles and responsibilities of teachers and administrators; and
- accountability, monitoring and evaluation.

The analyses of the individual national policies were then considered collectively to indicate any overall trends or themes that may have relevance and implications for the Hong Kong context.

5. Ontario, Canada

Ontario is one of the two provinces (the other is British Columbia) in Canada that are distinctly ahead of others with regard to education reform and change in the direction of multiculturalism (Ghosh, 2004). The Ontario government has made efforts at institutional level such as encouraging school boards on employment equity, hiring more teachers from ethno-cultural groups and visible minorities, and implementing prejudice-reduction strategies to further the acceptance of other racial minority groups into the mainstream framework.

5.1. Brief history

Canada was the first country to pass a national multiculturalism law. The *Canadian Multiculturalism Act*⁴ enacted in 1988 acknowledged multiculturalism as a fundamental characteristic of the Canadian society. It emphasized the right of all individuals to preserve and share their cultural heritage, sought to remove barriers preventing full participation in society, and promised to assist individuals in eliminating and overcoming discrimination.

The amendment of the *Education Act* in 1992 made it incumbent upon school-boards in the province to put into practice anti-racism and ethno-cultural equity policies. The response of the school-boards has been in the form of a variety of policies and programmes concerned with curriculum, such as race relations and heritage languages (63 languages in 1990 and 1991), school and community relations, student placement, and recruitment of teachers.

In 1993, the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training adopted guidelines⁵ for policy development and implementation on anti-racism and ethno-cultural equity in Ontario school boards. One of the provisions was that school curriculum is required to reflect a **racially and culturally diverse society** that is aligned with anti-racism policy objectives. These guidelines still remain in force.

5.2. Key policies and policy goals relevant to English language learners

Funding for education in Ontario is through provincial funding and much of it is tied to enrolment to provide equal educational opportunities for all students. Early childhood education refers to programs for children from birth to age 6; elementary school from kindergarten (age 4) to grade 8; and secondary education from grades 9 to 12 (Ministry of Education). The Ontario Ministry of Education (MOE) sets out policies and procedures for the development and implementation of programs and supports for English language learners in English elementary to secondary schools. The definition of English language learners (ELL) refers to “students in provincially funded English language schools whose first language is a language other than English, or is a variety of English that is significantly different from the variety used for instruction in Ontario’s schools, and who may require focused educational supports to assist them in attaining proficiency in English” (Ministry of Education, 2007).

⁴ Canadian Multiculturalism Act, 1988. <https://pier21.ca/research/immigration-history/canadian-multiculturalism-act-1988>

⁵ Anti-racism and Ethno-cultural Equity in School Boards; Guidelines for Policy Development and Implementation, Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 1993.
<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/curricul/antiraci/antire.pdf>

These students may be Canadian-born or recently arrived from other countries and they usually come from diverse backgrounds and school experiences, and have a wide variety of strengths and needs. There are two program models that enable English language learners to continue their education while learning English:

- English as a Second Language (ESL) program – For ELL who have had educational opportunities to develop age-appropriate first-language literacy skills.
- English Literacy Development (ELD) program – For ELL who arrived in Ontario schools with significant gaps in their education. They most often come from countries in which their access to education has been limited, and they have had limited opportunities to develop language and literacy skills in any language.

ESL and ELD programs are two distinct programs to meet the needs of very different groups of students. ESL programs serve students from kindergarten to grade 12. Since ELD programs serve students with significant educational gaps, it starts in Grade 3 to help students accelerate their learning of content and literacy skills appropriate to their age. They prepare students to transfer to ESL programs where students have age-appropriate literacy skills (Ministry of Education, 2008).

The Ontario MOE encourages the teaching of ESL and focuses on the elimination of bias in textbooks. Over the last 30 years, significant curriculum guidelines have evolved. Amongst the many provincial policies on curriculum and programme planning, the following policies and guides were rolled out particularly for English language learners:

- *Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1-8: English as Second Language and English Literacy Development – A Resource Guide*⁶ was introduced in 2001;
- *Supporting English Language Learners in Kindergarten – A practical guide for Ontario educators*⁷ in 2007;
- *Supporting English Language Learners – A practical guide for Ontario educators Grades 1 to 8*⁸ in 2008;

⁶ <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/curricul/esl18.pdf>

⁷ <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/kindergarten/kindergartenELL.pdf>

⁸ <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/esleldprograms/guide.pdf>

- *English as a Second Language and English Literacy Development – The Ontario Curriculum Grades 9 – 12*⁹ in 2007.

The mandated policy requirements to be met by all school boards and schools are outlined in the *English Language Learners ESL and ELD Programs and Services – Policies and Procedures for Ontario Elementary and Secondary Schools, Kindergarten to Grade 12*¹⁰ which aims to “result in a **consistent approach** to the education of English language learners across the province”, and to “help all English language learners in the province by engaging them in learning that enables them to **develop their talents, meet their goals, and acquire the knowledge and skills** they will need to achieve personal success and to participate in and contribute to Ontario society.”

In 2008, the Council of Ministers of Education of Canada recognizes that “integrating immigrant children into the existing education systems of the provinces and territories involves establishing **policies embodying the principles of diversity, equity, and multicultural education** as part of the daily classroom and school environment, as well as adapting the curriculum and providing teacher supports that address students’ real needs, especially for language learning” (Council of Ministers of Education, 2008). English language learners must receive appropriate program support to enable them to participate successfully, such specific supports have been included and updated in:

- *Learning for All: A Guide to Effective Assessment and Instruction for All Students, Kindergarten to Grade 12*¹¹ (2013);
- *Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools – Guidelines for Policy Development and Implementation*¹² (2014); and
- *Ontario Schools: Kindergarten to Grade 12 – Policy and Program Requirements*¹³ (2016).

5.3. Key components of the policies and procedures

5.3.1. Planning at School Board Level

- As part of the *Board Improvement Plan* and the *Student Success/Learning to 18 Action Plan*, all school boards (at municipal level) should include a section that addresses the

⁹ <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/secondary/esl912currb.pdf>

¹⁰ <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/esleldprograms/esleldprograms.pdf>

¹¹ <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/speced/LearningforAll2013.pdf>

¹² <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/inclusiveguide.pdf>

¹³ http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/policy/os/onschools_2016e.pdf

needs of ELL. Where a board already has in place a plan for ELL, this plan should be reviewed to confirm that it meets the requirements set out in the document. The Ministry will support school boards to develop the plan.

5.3.2. Reception and orientation of ELL and their families

- An inclusive registration is key to making the transition a smooth one for ELL. Schools should consider translating registration signs into main languages of the community and kindergarten teachers, administrators, interpreters and ESL teachers should be available to meet with families. Information provided should be free of jargon and written in clear language.
- Schools should respect and capitalize a student's culture e.g., experiences, understandings, values, and language, and bring to the classroom to enhance children's learning and sense of belonging.
- School boards should develop protocols to define procedures and practices for welcoming ELL and their families and providing them with appropriate orientation to the Ontario school system, in the first language of the students and their families whenever possible. The protocol should include procedures for the admission of students in all grades including kindergarten, regardless of level of English proficiency or prior schooling. It should also address the effective use of human resources including community resources and incorporate direction for the gathering of student information.
- Parents should be made aware of the goal of ESL and ELD programs in Ontario schools and how they are of benefit to students who are developing proficiency in English.

5.3.3. Initial assessment of ELL

- School boards should assign staff to assess the English language proficiency of all ELL. The assessment procedure should include: a structured interview to assess oral communication skills (i.e., listening and speaking); an assessment of reading comprehension; an assessment of student writing; an assessment of mathematical knowledge and skills.
- ELLs need time to adjust to the social, cognitive, and physical demands of a new classroom and school environment, it is important that kindergarten teachers consider the challenges faced by these learners. Their ability to acquire and demonstrate new knowledge may be influenced by an inability to understand or use the language of the

classroom. Great care should be given to aligning assessment tools and strategies with the cultural and linguistic characteristics of the children.

- Teachers should gather information about the child's literacy abilities in his or her first language if possible.
- If initial assessment indicates that an ELL has had limited prior schooling, the board should provide additional support to the student.
- School boards should also develop a protocol for identifying ELL who may also have special education needs.

5.3.4. Placement of ELL

- School boards should consider the educational background of all ELL in determining their placement and the number of credits that may be granted for prior learning (for elementary schools).
- A student's level of proficiency in English should not influence the choice of grade placement. In elementary schools, ELL should be placed with an age-appropriate group and a grade-level or subject-specific classroom for at least part of each day.
- Final decisions regarding placement made by the principal should be in consultation with the student, staff, and parents. The principal should communicate the placement decision and the rationale for the placement to the student and parents.

5.3.5. Programming for ELL

- School boards should implement programs, develop curriculum and services that enable ELL to continue their education while learning English and are reflective of the changing needs of the students.
- The MOE should integrate information about instruction for ELL in the Ontario curriculum and related resources.
- School boards should designate appropriately qualified personnel to coordinate programs and provide leadership at the system level.

5.3.6. Ongoing assessment, evaluation and reporting

- School boards should establish procedures for ensuring ongoing assessment of the development of proficiency in English and the academic progress of each ELL.

- Information on each ELL's level of English language acquisition should be summarized and included in the Ontario Student Record at least once in each school year for tracking student progress, monitoring the academic achievement, and supporting public accountability.
- The MOE shall use information gathered from assessments to set benchmarks for English language learners in Ontario.
- Progress should be reported to parents on a regular basis. It is important to engage parents particularly in their child's kindergarten education such as inviting parents to volunteer in the classroom. Communication (formal and informal) with families about children's progress, i.e. what and how children are learning, is a critical component of the kindergarten teacher's role. Interpreters should be available if necessary.
- When learning expectations are modified for ELL, evaluation should be based on the documented modified expectations and noted on the report card and explained to parents.
- When confidential information is being discussed, the interpreter should be a bilingual teacher, a professional interpreter, or an adult member of the student's family, to facilitate accuracy of translation.

5.3.7. Identification and involvement of ELL in large-scale assessments

- ELL should participate in the Grade 3 and Grade 6 provincial assessments in reading, writing, and mathematics, and in the Grade 9 provincial assessment in mathematics, as well as in national assessments when they have acquired the level of proficiency in English required for success.
- ELL should take the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test when they have acquired the level of proficiency in English required for success.

5.3.8. Discontinuation of ESL/ELD support

- English language learners should receive ESL/ELD program support until they have acquired the level of proficiency required to learn effectively in English with no ESL/ELD support.
- The Ontario Secondary School Literacy Course (OSSLC) is a full-credit course that fulfils the literacy requirement for graduation and can be counted as the compulsory

English credit in either Grade 11 or Grade 12. This course may be offered in special sections for ELL.

5.3.9. Appropriate allocation of resources to support ELL

- Funding provided under the ESL/ELD component of the Language Grant is expected to be used for programs and services that are designed to benefit ELL. Information about the use of ESL/ELD funding should be included in the financial statements submitted annually to the Ministry.

5.3.10. English as a second language teacher qualifications and professional development

- School boards should assign staff with the qualifications required by the MOE to teach ESL and ELD programs (see *Ontario Regulation 184/97*).
- School boards should provide appropriate professional development opportunities to administrators, ESL/ELD teachers, classroom teachers, and support staff to support the implementation of this policy.

6. Finland and Germany

Since the other two selected countries, Finland and Germany belong to the European Union, it is worth mentioning that their education policies have been influenced by the *European Commission's Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care*¹⁴. The European Commission has identified Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) as a policy priority – an acknowledgement that ECEC plays a crucial role in children's development as well as its potential to **lessen social and cultural inequalities**. All children should be viewed as “human capital” to ensure the future of Europe and every child regardless of social background should be given the **opportunity to reach his/her fullest potential** (Council of the European Union, 2010). “Early Language Learning can shape the way children develop their attitudes towards other languages and cultures by raising **awareness of diversity and of cultural variety, hence fostering understanding and respect.**” (European Commission, 2011)

¹⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/education/policy/strategic-framework/archive/documents/ecec-quality-framework_en.pdf

Education policies for children with immigrant background are also shaped by the *2016 Action Plan on the integration of third country nationals*¹⁵ and the *2017 Communication on the protection of children in migration*¹⁶. The former document highlights, amongst other things, that education and training is one of the most powerful tools for integration. Newly arrived migrants should be **integrated into mainstream education structures as early as possible to prevent underachievement among migrants and social exclusion**. The latter document sets out actions to reinforce the protection of all migrant children at all stages of the process, which include an assessment of the needs of each child as early as possible upon arrival and access to education without delay and regardless of their immigration status. Building on this, the 2018 Council Recommendation on promoting common values, inclusive education and the European dimension of teaching¹⁷ stress the importance of ensuring effective and equal access to quality inclusive education with the necessary support for all learners, including those from migrant backgrounds (Eurydice Brief, 2019).

7. Finland

7.1. Brief history

Since independence from Russia in 1917, Finland was made an officially bilingual country in the *1919 Constitution* and in the *1922 Language Act*. The goals of Finnish language policy have been to guarantee the rights of the Swedish-speaking minority to use their own language and to guarantee the rights of Finnish-speakers to use their language in Swedish-speaking areas. The medium of instruction in most publicly-funded schools is Finnish or Swedish. In 2018, about 88% of the total population speaks Finnish and 5% speaks Swedish (Statistics Finland, 2019). Other languages such as Sami, Karelian and Nordic languages are also spoken in northern parts of Finland.

The linguistic situation in Finland has changed quite dramatically during the past few decades. In the beginning of the 1990s, Finland received more refugees than before, and the collapse of the Soviet Union led to a rapid increase of immigration by former Soviet citizens. In 2003, the Finnish

¹⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/proposal-implementation-package/docs/20160607/communication_action_plan_integration_third-country_nationals_en.pdf

¹⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/20170412_communication_on_the_protection_of_children_in_migration_en.pdf

¹⁷ [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0607\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0607(01)&from=EN)

government asserted that “multiculturalism and the needs of different language groups will be taken into account” in the making of government policy.

More recently, the number of both asylum seekers and work-related immigrants has also increased notably. As a result, all levels of the Finnish educational system have been forced to accommodate the rapidly increasing pluri-lingualism among students (Latomaa and Suni, 2011). The aims of migrant education hence include equity, functional bilingualism and multiculturalism.

The Finnish National Board of Education (2010) is committed “to prepare immigrants for integration into the Finnish education system and society, to support their cultural identity and to provide them with as well-functioning bilingualism as possible so that, in addition to Finnish (or Swedish), they will also have a command of their own native language.” Finnish students’ success in international comparisons of student assessments (such as the OECD’s PISA) in the last decade has been celebrated at the national level and remained a topic of interest internationally. It was identified as the world’s ‘best’ education system in OECD 2004, 2008, 2010, and 2014. **Quality, efficiency, equity and internationalization** stand out as key terms in Finnish education policies (EDINA, 2016).

7.2. Key policies relevant to immigrant students

The Finnish education system consists of one year of voluntary pre-primary education (at six years old); nine years compulsory basic comprehensive school; three years of upper secondary education consisting of vocational and general education; and higher education provided by universities and polytechnics (Nuolijärvi, 2011). Education is regarded as a fundamental right and the Finnish education policy emphasizes equal opportunities for all. There is no tuition fee from pre-school education to higher education. The Finnish government defines and sets educational priorities while schools and day-care centers are principally maintained and supported by municipalities.

The National Education and Research Development Plan outlines education policy priorities every four years, and the government and the Ministry of Education and Culture prepares and implements education policies including legislation, national core curricula, financing and other forms of steering on all levels of education. The National Board of Education decides and reports to the Ministry of Education and Culture on the content and the general objectives of the pre-school education and the central principles for cooperation between the homes and schools as well as for the National Core Curriculum. While municipalities may adopt school-specific policies, the majority of students follow a roughly equivalent program of instruction (Holm and Londen 2010) which aims to integrate immigrants in education.

The Basic Education Act 1998 allows education to be carried out, wholly or in part, in the native language of the immigrant student or students with other backgrounds than Finnish or Swedish. Some local authorities have offered either bilingual or native-language education in Arabic, Somali, Russian, Vietnamese, and Estonian. A student whose mother tongue is other than Finnish or Swedish and his/her knowledge of Finnish or Swedish is estimated not to be at the level of his/her mother tongue, is assessed according to the syllabus of Finnish/Swedish as second language. Aid is granted to them to provide instruction in **Finnish or Swedish as a second language** and students' own native languages. Learning one's own native language encourages students learning skills and strengthens cultural identity. Many government-funded NGOs also contribute to working towards educational integration.

The Integration of Immigrants and the Reception of Asylum Seekers Act 1999 defines integration in Section 2(1) as “the personal development of immigrants, aimed at participation in work life and the functioning of society while preserving their language and culture”. The Act places responsibility for integration in the hands of local authorities (Multicultural Policy Index, 2012).

In the education of immigrant students, particular emphasis is given to the sufficient command of Finnish or Swedish. The immigrant students are usually put into a class that is in accordance to their age and knowledge. These students are also entitled to get instruction in Finnish/Swedish according to the syllabus Finnish or Swedish as a second language, instead of Finnish or Swedish as a mother tongue. In Helsinki, *Finnish as a second language and literature (S2)* syllabus can be taught in S2 lessons or separately during the *Finnish language and literature* lessons. The objectives and contents of the S2 syllabus are mainly the same as in the *Finnish language and literature* syllabus. However, the S2 studies do not add to the number of hours in the student's timetable. The student will study according to the S2 syllabus until they achieve sufficient skills to study according to the *Finnish language and literature* syllabus¹⁸.

The goals of the policies for pre-primary immigrant children are to safeguard an **equitable early childhood education development of uniform pre-primary education instruction** to ensure that all children have equal pre-requisites. Key steering documents are as follows:

- *National Core Curriculum for Instruction Preparing Immigrants for Basic Education (2009);*

¹⁸ Finnish as second language in the City of Helsinki. <https://www.hel.fi/helsinki/en/childhood-and-education/comprehensive/what-how/kielten/s2/s2>

- *Action Programme for Equal Opportunity in Education (2013);*
- *National Core Curriculum for Pre-Primary Education (2014);*
- *Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (540/2018);*
- *Government Decree on Early Childhood Education and Care (753/2018);*
- *National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care (2018) (the Curriculum).*

7.3. Key points in the policies and legislation

7.3.1. Reception and support to families

- Schools should ensure the environment is welcoming for students from diverse backgrounds and with different needs, and guarantee a safe space where all students feel secure, valued and able to learn.
- To strengthen links with parents of immigrant students and to capitalize on the positive effects of involving them in their children's education, top-level regulations/recommendations are in place to promote schools' efforts to keep parents informed, as well as to actively engage them in the education process, e.g. training program for parents of immigrant students that aims to enhance their capacities to support their children; informing parents about the coverage of the school curriculum so that they are more aware and in a better position to guide and support their children.

7.3.2. Initial assessment

- Children from first generation immigrants participating in pre-school education are distinguished from each other by language and culture, the reason for immigration and the duration of residence; hence children's background is taken into account while assessing students' competences in the language of instruction and/or prior learning. Top-level criteria are developed for the assessments.
- The background of the student and his/her improving command of Finnish/Swedish are taken into account in assessment of other subjects. Versatile and flexible methods of assessment are used to reduce the impact of possible deficiencies in the Finnish/Swedish language. Assessment of immigrant students may be verbal throughout basic education, with the exception of the final assessment.

- The initial assessment of the competences of migrant students in the language of instruction is not only used to make decisions on school placement, it also provides teachers with the necessary information to plan their lessons and provide the appropriate support for each student according to the language needs.
- The Curriculum stipulates that, in circumstances where students reading and writing skills are not sufficient to partake in basic education, adequate time should be reserved for acquisition and consolidation as well as appropriate support measures which leads to progress in the students' studies.
- Finland stipulates that in addition to the language of instruction and prior learning, the **students' social and emotional well-being** should also be assessed.

7.3.3. Placement

- According to the *Basic Education Act (1998)*, municipalities and other bodies authorized to provide education may arrange **preparatory teaching** for basic education. The objectives of the preparatory instructions are to facilitate learning that is appropriate to the children's age and skills level and to provide a transition to basic education and concentrates on Finnish culture, the various subjects of basic education, Finnish (or Swedish) as a second language and the mother tongue of the student (Eurydice, 2010).
- Preparatory teaching is limited to one or two years and cover other subjects in addition to the language of instruction (Eurydice Brief, 2019). The contents should be chosen in a way that supports students ability to **manage everyday situations and social integration** as well as to facilitate the development of students own identity.
- Once children from immigrant backgrounds are enrolled in the education system, they may be placed in different settings such as in mainstream classes for most lessons but take some lessons in separate groups; in separate groups for most of their lessons and join mainstream classes for some lessons (in general sports, arts and music, where they can establish contacts and participate in classes even with limited language skills); or placed in separate groups for all their lessons.
- Targeted language and/or learning support for immigrant students usually last longer than the preparatory classes, and continue into mainstream education according to the children's needs. Such support requires flexibility in the organisation of instruction, and

the law allows special arrangements for instruction in religion and the other national language as well as for student assessment.

- Students whose competences in the language of instruction are good enough to follow the normal curriculum are generally placed in mainstream classes for all lessons alongside their native-born peers.

7.3.4. Culturally supportive pre-school education

- According to *the National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care*, children 0 to 6 years belonging to cultural minorities should be provided with opportunities to grow up in a multicultural society as members of both their own cultural communities and Finnish society. The ‘endorsement of multiculturalism’ is identified as one of the underlying values of basic education, along with equality, democracy, human rights, diversity and the preservation of the environment. The curriculum is to be non-denominational and politically neutral and should “take into account the diversification of Finnish culture through the arrival of people from other cultures” (Holm and Londen 2010, 110).
- Immigrant children receive support for **social interactions** as well as to understand the essence of Finnish and European cultural identities, discover his or her own cultural identity and to develop capabilities for cross-cultural interaction and internationalism. The primary responsibility for retaining and developing the child’s own language and culture rests with the family.
- By law, in addition to providing free basic education, local authorities are obliged to provide learning materials, daily meals and school health care free of charge. **Special diets** should be arranged for reasons of personal conviction, religion, allergies, etc.

7.3.5. Programming

- There should be specific objectives for immigrant education, to be pursued within the limits of local resources and different approaches. *The National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (2004)* defines the criteria for preparatory instruction for basic education.
- Instruction should support the development of the Finnish/Swedish language and, where possible, also that of children’s own native language and the opportunity to grow into two cultures.

- In pre-school education, children should have the opportunity to study Finnish/Swedish both under guidance and in natural communication situations with Finnish/Swedish speaking adults and children. The objectives of children's native language should in turn include the development of thinking, the sound growth of self-esteem and personality, and the consolidation of language use skills.
- According to the *National Curriculum Guidelines on ECEC*, language immersion can be arranged in the second language (Swedish or Finnish) or in a minority language for children aged three years and above. The municipality should ensure that there is continuity between language immersion started in ECEC and primary education.
- Instruction follows the general educational and learning objectives of pre-primary education, while considering children's backgrounds. Early total immersion usually begins between the ages 3 and 6.

7.3.6. Graduation requirements

- At the end of the upper secondary general education and IB-education, students take the national matriculation examination or the IB examination. These include tests on many subjects but students can take tests to prove their language proficiency.
- Another type of proficiency test is the National Certificate of Language Proficiency, which is intended for adults in Finland. There are presently three main levels: the basic level test (1-2), the intermediate level test (3-4) and the advanced level test (5-6). The basic level test is suitable for adults who are in the early stages of learning a language. Basic level skills can constitute a target level for those who need the language for everyday purposes only.
- In order to acquire Finnish citizenship, one is required to complete the National Certificate of Language Proficiency test in Finnish or Swedish at the intermediate level.
- According to the *Government Decree on University Degrees 794/2004*, a student must demonstrate in lower or higher university education or otherwise that he/she has attained proficiency in Finnish and Swedish, which is required of civil servants in bilingual public agencies and organizations under Section 6(1) of the *Act on the Knowledge of Languages Required of Personnel in Public Bodies (424/2003)*.

7.3.7. Ongoing assessments, evaluation and reporting

- The *Act on ECEC (2018)* stipulates inspection, monitoring, evaluation, and data repository. In addition to basic data of providers and staff, such as contact information, languages, qualifications etc., mother tongue of children in ECEC is also collected and stored in the information repository.
- Teachers are provided with monitoring support such as continuous assessment tools or national tests specifically developed for assessing immigrant students' knowledge and skills, and performance and progress.
- The *Basic Education Act* entitles all students to **remedial instruction**. Extra funding is provided on remedial teaching in various subjects of immigrant students who have been in Finland for less than four years in their mother tongue. Those who have been in the country longer and students in pre-primary education may also participate, but no extra funding is granted. In basic education, government funded remedial teaching provides a maximum of one lesson per week per school and a half a lesson every two weeks for each student entitled to remedial teaching.

7.3.8. Teacher qualifications and professional development

- Finland did not have systematic initial or in-service training for pre-primary teachers to teach foreign/second languages or languages of instruction in the earlier days. Foreign/second languages were taught in pre-primary by native speakers of the languages of whom some are trained to teach the language as second language in their country of origin.
- In recent years, teachers in immersion kindergartens/preschools and teachers of immigrant students are offered in-service training on yearly basis. Content and Language Integrated Learning teachers are offered in-service training to some extent. Participation in this training is on voluntary basis.
- Teaching in diversity, multicultural classrooms are now included in the Initial Teacher Education Competence Framework and provided in the continuing professional development (CPD) activities. In fact, many CPD courses on intercultural competence, language awareness, and promoting the integration of migrants is available. In addition, the Ministry of Education provides a special subsidy for the organization of courses specifically targeting the integration of asylum seekers and migrants (European Commission, 2019).

- Specific training programs, networking activities and guidance materials are conducted to help school heads in integrating immigrant students.

7.3.9. Allocation of resources

- Government funding is based on the number of immigrant students needing language support and the unit cost per immigrant student set by the Government made available to education providers (municipal and private) for arranging preparatory instruction and elementary education.
- The Ministry of Education and Culture has a dedicated budget to support the integration of immigrant students and disadvantaged students. Local authorities may use their own revenue to support immigrant students further.

7.3.10. Psycho-social support

- Immigrant students may experience **social and emotional difficulties** (e.g. due to acculturation and/or resettlement stressors, experiences of bullying or hostility, or potential traumatic experiences, etc.). There may be an increased need for psycho-social support services in schools. Finland is one of the few countries in Europe that offer psycho-social support to immigrant students promoted by education authorities (either through specially trained teams/staff or specific information material) (European Commission, 2019).
- Besides supporting immigrant students on academic aspects, Finland also promotes the development of all students' social and emotional competences through their national curricula.

8. Germany

8.1. Brief history

Germany has not traditionally positioned itself as an immigration country and its immigration policy started shifting in the 1950s. The 2005 election of a coalition government composed of the Christian Democratic Union and Social Democratic Party can be considered a turning point in addressing the country's growing diversity. A new *Immigration Act* was passed in 2005, and a *National Integration Plan* was released in 2007 requiring an effort from everyone, Government and society in particular, to visibly demonstrate the belonging to Germany by learning the German language. The Government's primary legislative obligations with respect to immigrant integration are outlined in

section 43 of the *Residence Act* (2008) which stipulates that integration is a joint responsibility of the immigrant and the state, that foreigners must learn enough about German life to live without assistance, and that a basic package of integration courses will be offered to facilitate this. The Act also requires the Government to develop an integration plan (Multiculturalism Policies in Contemporary Democracies, Queen's University).

The Federal Government's 2012 report on the situation of foreigners in Germany found longstanding disparities between children and youth of immigrant and German backgrounds in the areas of education and access to vocational training. The Integration Minister believed societal change was necessary and attitude towards immigrants and integration should be directed away from a deficit orientation and towards a potential orientation. She stressed the necessity of the state setting a positive example with respect to establishing a welcome culture, through the opening up of public service. At the same time, Chancellor Merkel stated that policy must aim at enabling equal opportunities for education and advancement, personal development, participation in employment and society. In 2015, with Germany's decision to keep borders open to arriving refugees, issues of migration and integration intensified.

According to the Microcensus data released by the Federal Statistics Office in 2018¹⁹, approximately 25% of Germany's population of 83 million has a migrant background and most people with migrant backgrounds primarily speak German at home. In 63% of households that had at least one person with a migrant background, German was the most dominant language. A person has a migrant background if he or she or at least one parent did not acquire German citizenship by birth.

Germany is basically monolingual in German. It is used in schools, the media and other forms of communication, except in Saxony, bordering France, Poland, Czech Republic, and Serbia. Learning the German language is hence an important prerequisite for the integration of immigrants. Germany is a federal republic, i.e. that individual Länder (federal states) have cultural sovereignty including legislation in the field of culture and education. The Federal Government, the Länder and the municipalities fund a multitude of measures to promote language learning.

8.2. Key policies relevant to language education

The German education system includes preschool education which is optional for children up to six years old. Children are not assessed during preschool; but educators are **obliged to discuss with**

¹⁹ <https://www.dw.com/en/german-is-the-most-spoken-language-in-immigrant-households/a-50374819>

parents on the level of education they attained. Compulsory education starts at age six (grade one) until ages 15 or 16 (grade 9 or 10). If the child does not have the necessary skills for primary school, he/she can attend preparatory school, which can last up to two years.

To improve equity and boost participation and success of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, the *National Integration Plan (2007)* was created and, in collaboration with civil society stakeholders, transformed into the *National Action Plan on Integration (NAP-I) (2011)*. One of the main aspects was the integration of immigrant students into the education system and the labor market (OECD, 2018). The goals of NAP-I are (i) to secure and maintain **high-quality language education programs for immigrants**; and (ii) to continue developing the quality of integration courses to boost the success of the courses. Integration courses to immigrants is statutory. Immigrant students are defined as newly arrived/first generation, second generation or returning migrant children and young people but not those who have been living in Germany for more than two generations.

The Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ) is responsible for early childhood education and care (ECEC) for children from birth until primary school age (6 years old) in family day care and child day care settings in Germany. Compulsory education begins at age 6 until age 18. Curriculum frameworks for ECEC are developed at Länder level, covering ages 0 to 10 years (OECD, 2016). The BMFSFJ aims to provide same development opportunities and same access to education to all children regardless of their background and is particularly concerned on social inclusion in ECEC. With the *Act on Good Early Childhood Education and Care*, childcare fees are reduced or abolished in some Länder. The *Language Daycare Centers Program* provides **speech specialists and language tuition** at child daycare centers that have a higher-than-average proportion of children with special language development needs.

The *Childcare Funding Act 2008* grants all children aged 1 to 5 to have a legal right to education, early learning and care at a day nursery/preschool or with a childminder. **Verbal skills** are a central basis for success in schools. In line with NAP-I, the focus is placed on equal opportunities for all children through earlier access to learning, support and education especially on **quality language instruction** and **emergent literacy** that is integrated into daily activities²⁰. **Participation of parents** and **whole-child approach** (i.e. meeting social and emotional needs of children) were noted as marks of quality for early childhood education, which contribute to improving immigrant students' overall

²⁰ <https://www.bundesregierung.de/resource/blob/992814/477940/3858a6f1b6630dd6ed494d122db4dfe5/2012-01-31-flyer-nap-englisch-barrierefrei-data.pdf?download=1>

performance in primary and secondary school and minimizes the risk of low achievement and early school leaving.

The *Good Daycare Facilities Act* ensures financial support to daycares, from good staff-child ratio to linguistic education. The federal program “Early-Years Language Learning: Because Language is the Key to the World” supports development of language skills, helps children cope with diversity and strengthens cooperation with families in daycare centers and kindergartens; it is an important step towards ensuring equal opportunities. Other federal legislation which mentioned specific support for immigrant children include:

- *Child Promotion Act 2008* (promotion of children under the age of three in day care centers)
- *Quality and Participation Improvement Act 2018* (further development of quality and for participation in child day care)

Most ministries of education of the Länder have **pre-school language-promotion** programs for immigrants’ children whose knowledge of German is not sufficient to attend school. This support is directed to children of immigrant families who were born in Germany or entered Germany at a very early age on language development, to compensate for social disadvantages, and to prepare them for the German-language tests taken by all children – immigrant and non-immigrant alike at age 5. The Länder with basic legal regulations on ECEC include Bavaria (*Amendment Act 2019*), Berlin (*Child Day Care Reform Act*), and Thuringia (*Child Day Care Law*), etc.

8.3. Key components in education policies and measures for immigrant students

8.3.1. Initial assessment

- Almost all Länder have introduced diagnostic procedures for language status observation and assessment in early childhood education and in some cases have established obligatory language promotion measures (Eurydice, 2019).
- In Bavaria and some Länder, children who grow up with two languages from birth e.g. mother-tongue and German, are assessed on their knowledge of German as well as speech development. Children who learn German at the age of 3 is also assessed before they join kindergarten.

8.3.2. Pre-school language promotion programmes and preparatory classes

- The individual Länder is responsible for education policy. Schools do not always have the same curriculum and textbooks may differ as well. Language support in German is available in day cares (for children under 3 years old) in some Länder to strengthen the transition to kindergarten.
- In Thuringia, immigrant students have additional activities in German provided by specially-trained teachers. In Saarland, many kindergartens offer innovative and fun projects for the acquisition of German (conducted via a second language approach) in its “Early German Learning”. German language acquisition is considered a key and permanent task during kindergarten.
- Children are expected to take part in a conversation in German and follow or read a story in German by the time they reach primary school age. Children whose knowledge of German is not sufficient cannot attend regular school. They must either continue to join a language-promotion group at the local kindergarten or at the local primary school during the months between registration and school attendance. Immigrant children of school age who can take part in lessons without any serious language difficulty are allocated to classes according to their age and ability.
- Whole day separate/preparatory classes (vs half-day for mainstream primary schools) for all lessons or for most lessons are provided for immigrant students to enhance their German proficiency. The curriculum can be narrower or broader depending on the number of subjects and competences covered in the Länder. These classes are mostly attended by newly arrived immigrant students. Regulations on the amount of time students can spend in preparatory class vary between the Länder, but usually students transfer to become integrated into mainstream education within a period of six months to two years. Depending on the regulations in the specific *Bundesland* (city), or even the school, this can be followed by more assistance with German as a second language if their German proficiency still lags behind.
- In Bavaria, the preparatory German course in kindergarten is 240 hours to ensure children acquire sufficient knowledge of German before primary school starts; teaching is shared equally by both kindergarten and primary school trained teachers. Strengthening language skills is a priority for Bavaria. Parents are invited to join their children at the course to understand the pedagogy and provide support at home. Parents are regularly informed on the language development of their children.

8.3.3. Programming

- Second language support is available in elementary school up to age 10 or 12, depending on the Länder (Niemeyer, 2014). Regular second language instruction is absent in secondary education in Germany.
- Second language instruction is seen as additional to regular language instruction. The extent to which teaching and learning materials are used and the quality and number of hours of second language instruction differ from school to school and from teacher to teacher.

8.3.4. Graduation requirements

- After preparatory class, an immigrant student should be able to completely integrate into the standard class to complete primary, secondary or gymnasium school. However, if necessary, language support is provided. The aim is to individually promote German as the education language or in subjects which are important for graduating.

8.3.5 Teachers and School Heads

- Study methods and techniques for second language education and teacher training in second language education is insufficient in Germany. In some schools there is a separate German as a Second Language (GSL) teacher available; in others, school teachers are given additional training, but this training usually consists of one day only, hence it is these regular teachers with little training that provide additional second language instruction in the classroom. In 2016, six Länder made second language teacher training compulsory (Crul et al., 2019).
- In Brandenburg, competences related to teaching in diverse, multicultural classrooms are included in the initial teaching education competence frameworks and/or promoted through continuous professional development activities. To better prepared to address holistic needs of immigrant students, in-service training activities to raise teachers' awareness of both the academic and the social-emotional needs of immigrant are organized.

8.3.6. Monitoring and reporting

- Daycare centers and kindergartens are obliged to explain how quality assurance and development are guaranteed in their reporting (annual internal evaluation and external evaluations every five years) to the Youth Welfare Offices in the Länder. The Federal

Government's quality assurance initiative is accompanied by the Working Party of the Highest Youth and Family Authorities of the Länder in an advisory capacity, on behalf of the Conference of Ministers of Youth and Family Affairs.

- Service quality inspections in child day care centers apply a wide range of tools and instruments, such as observations, checklists, interviews, results of self-evaluations and parent and manager surveys, and analysis of internal documentation. This is often combined with internal tools, such as self-reported questionnaires, self-reflection reports, portfolios and checklists (OECD, 2016).
- The monitoring of staff quality focuses on various aspects, such as: staff qualifications; process quality, use of material; time management; curriculum implementation quality of instruction/caring, teamwork; communication and management.
- Direct assessments, narrative assessments, and/or observational tools are commonly used to monitor child learning and development. Aspects commonly monitored are: language and literacy skills; numeracy; practical skills; socio-emotional skills; motor development; autonomy and well-being.

8.3.7. Allocation of resource

- The BMFSFJ finances various programs for the development of quality kindergarten. The Federal Government has committed up to Euro 1 billion for the Early-Years Language Learning Programme (2016-2020). Kindertartens receive funding to employ an additional, specially qualified language-intervention professional for 19.5 hours a week to provide stimulus, contribute ideas and help establish projects promoting integrated language interventions, inclusion and cooperation with families. The 51 Early-Years Language Learning Centers (since 2016) also have access to the support of an additional education consultant for all issues relating to language and inclusion. These professionals are guided and trained by the Education and Quality Development Team.
- From 2013-2019, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research provided around Euro 23.8 million to support language promotion, language diagnostic, and reading promotion from primary to lower secondary level.

8.4 Limitations

Children with immigrant backgrounds (particularly refugees) continue to fare poorly in the German education system, as is consistently shown in their lower overall educational attainment and in various international rankings of student performance. The streaming of immigrant students into vocational versus academic secondary schools has been under criticism (Miera 2008). From 2014 to 2018, Germany granted about 3.2 million²¹ refugees from conflict countries like Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan asylum status – and was presented with formidable social challenges. Although the German government has made tremendous efforts in early childhood education to provide specific support measures for children who have reached compulsory school age but whose level of development does not yet allow them to cope with the challenges of primary school, refugees who arrive around the start of secondary school (between ages 10 to 14) have less access to equal education opportunities.

The strongly stratified German school system with early tracking makes it very difficult for refugee children to pursue an academic track which prepares for higher education. Most of the refugee children arriving at the end of elementary school (age 10) are placed in *Hauptschule* or *Realschule*, the two vocational tracks, seemingly the highest aim for many teachers and policymakers (Niemeyer, 2014). In fact, only a small proportion of students of German descent go to *Hauptschule*.

At age 16, and in some cases even a year earlier, *Hauptschule* and *Realschule* students should enter an apprenticeship track. However, second language difficulties often impede refugee children from finding an apprenticeship (Niemeyer, 2014). Employers generally favor those with a *Gymnasium* diploma over *Realschule* diploma and least with a *Hauptschule* diploma. Youth with language difficulties and lower formal qualifications may leave school without an apprenticeship and face great difficulties to enter the labor market and find a steady job (Crul et al., 2012).

9. Discussion

Children with ‘immigrant’ backgrounds are often disadvantaged if their usual home language is different from the language of instruction at school. Understanding the factors that influence the acquisition of a second or additional language, such as age, motivation, aptitude, cognitive ability, and personality, etc. (Khasinah, 2014), and developing policies to support their learning is conducive

²¹ Germany Refugee Statistics 1990-2020. <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/DEU/germany/refugee-statistics#:~:text=Germany%20refugee%20statistics%20for%202018,a%20111.78%25%20increase%20from%202015.>

to helping them achieve language proficiency which is functionally on par with native speakers. In the three countries studied, most ‘immigrant’ children who started learning the language of instruction at pre-school age can integrate into the respective societies smoothly and communicate (in both writing and speaking) in the language of the host countries without difficulties. Hong Kong should consider adopting some of the good practices to enable ethnic minority children attain Chinese proficiency to the level of their Chinese peers.

9.1. Briefing and engaging ‘immigrant’ parents

Briefing for immigrant parents to make them aware of the goal of second language learning and actively engaging them in the education process to keep them informed on the language development of their children are noted in all three countries studied. In particular, Finland recommends schools to conduct training programs for parents to enhance their capacities to support their children.

Progress of kindergarten immigrant children is reported to parents on a regular basis in Ontario; parents are regularly informed about the coverage of the pre-school curriculum in Finland; and educators are obliged to ‘discuss’ with parents on the level of pre-school education their children attained and inform them on the language development of their children.

In Hong Kong, the Education Bureau held one ‘official’ seminar in July 2019 and about 6 other seminars in NGOs in September to brief parents of ethnic minority children on admission arrangements for nursery (K1) classes for 2020/21 school year. The sessions were conducted in English (the lingua franca in Hong Kong) with simultaneous interpretation services in Urdu, Hindi, and Nepali to inform parents on kindergarten application and admission procedures. Information such as what to expect in kindergartens, and how kindergartens support their children however, is only available in pamphlet and video format. Parents are referred to the leaflets “Kindergarten Education Policy Support for non-Chinese Speaking Children”²² and the “Kindergarten Curriculum Guide”²³ for support for their children on Chinese learning. The pamphlet “Knowing More about Children’s Learning – Joyful Learning through Play Balanced Development All the Way”²⁴ explains

²² <https://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/edu-system/preprimary-kindergarten/kindergarten-k1-admission-arrangements/2019-NCS-support-leaflet-Eng.pdf>

²³ https://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/curriculum-development/major-level-of-edu/preprimary/ENG_KGECEG_2017.pdf

²⁴ https://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/curriculum-development/major-level-of-edu/preprimary/ParentPamphlet_EN.pdf

characteristics of children; core value and aims of the kindergarten education curriculum, personal qualities expected of the children, environment conducive to children's learning, what children learn in kindergartens, how children learn in kindergartens, and how parents can collaborate with kindergartens etc. However, according to a recent study by Hong Kong Unison on "Ethnic Minority Parents' Opinions on Existing Support Measures in the Kindergarten Education Scheme", 73% of interviewed parents were not aware of leaflets published by the EDB nor the Equal Opportunities Commission on kindergarten support measures for non-Chinese speaking children (Unison, 2019). Pamphlets and videos are certainly not as effective as face-to-face briefing and meetings.

The EDB is said start a 5-year initiative to provide a series of parent education programmes²⁵ for non-Chinese speaking parents starting from 2020/21 school year, to 'help them support children's learning, encourage children to master the Chinese language and help them to have comprehensive understanding of the multiple pathways. The outcome is yet to be seen.

9.2. Early immersion and preparatory teaching

Early immersion in Finnish or Finnish as a second language begins at age 3 in Finland and right to education starts at age 1 in Germany whereby speech specialists and language tuition are available at child daycare centers that have a higher-than-average proportion of children with special language development needs. Government funded "English Literacy Development" program in Ontario, Canada and preparatory teaching in Finland and Germany help immigrant children acquire the language of instruction and enable them to transition to primary education (with continued second language support if required). These classes are taught by teachers with additional qualifications, such as in teaching the language of instruction as a second or additional language. Preparatory teaching is limited to no more than two years as prolonged preparatory teaching may hinder integration by separating immigrant students from their native-born peers. In fact, a relationship with native-born peers can help immigrant children learn the language and culture faster, and feel more welcomed and integrated into society. Preparatory classes have included learning in other curriculum subjects other than acquisition of the language of instruction to ensure educational progress. (Nilsson & Bunar, 2016).

²⁵ Replies to initial written questions raised by Finance Committee Members in examining the Estimates of Expenditure 2020-21, Director of Bureau: Secretary for Education (EDB019 Question 4)

The Education Bureau in Hong Kong runs an “Initiation Program”²⁶ for newly arrived children prior to enrolling in primary and secondary schools. It is only a six-month program that commences in September and March each year. The programme includes both academic and non-academic elements such as English and Chinese languages, learning / study skills, personal development, social adaptation, and cultural subject with the aim to help children integrate into the local education system and community. The “Induction Program”²⁷ is a 60-hour program run by non-governmental organizations with a subsidy from the Education Bureau for children age 6 to 18 on personal development, social adaptation, basic learning skills, as well as Chinese learning. A four-week “Summer Bridging Programme”²⁸ is also available for ethnic minority students progressing to Primary 1, 2, 3 and 4 on Chinese learning and like Bavaria, Germany, parents of participating students are encouraged to join. However, there has not been any evaluation on whether the participants of the above programme can acquire the languages to a level which enable them to smoothly learn other subjects with a medium of instruction rather than their mother tongue in the mainstream schools. As noted in the EDB Kindergarten Curriculum Guide, “the opportunity for non-Chinese speaking children to be exposed to the Chinese Language before admission to kindergarten or outside the classroom is relatively limited.”

9.3. Data collection and reporting

In Ontario, Canada, to determine eligibility for Kindergarten English as a Second Language/ Literacy Development Funding, information such as country of birth and date of first entry into Canada is collected. Information on each English language learner’s level of English language acquisition is summarized and included in the Ontario Student Record at least once in each school year for tracking student progress, monitoring the academic achievement, and supporting public accountability. The Ministry of Education then uses information gathered from assessments to set benchmarks for English language learners in Ontario.

In Finland, the *Act on ECEC (2018)* stipulates inspection, monitoring, evaluation, and data repository. In addition to basic data of providers and staff, such as contact information, languages, qualifications etc., mother tongue of children in ECEC is also collected and stored in the information repository. In Germany, service quality inspections in child day care centers apply a wide range of tools and

²⁶ <https://www.edb.gov.hk/en/student-parents/newly-arrived-children/services/initiation-program/index1.html>

²⁷ <https://www.edb.gov.hk/en/student-parents/newly-arrived-children/services/induction-program/index.html>

²⁸ <https://www.edb.gov.hk/en/student-parents/ncs-students/support-to-school/summer-bridging-programme/summer-bridging-programme.html>

instruments, such as observations, checklists, interviews, results of self-evaluations and parent and manager surveys, analysis of internal documentation such as assessments results on language and literacy skills; numeracy; practical skills; socio-emotional skills; motor development; autonomy and well-being.

A kindergarten opinion study (Hong Kong Unison, 2019) revealed that 22% of the interviewed parents did not know about the Chinese level their children learn in school and 16.8% of them were not able to find out their children's Chinese ability. More than half of the parents indicated that they were not confident to put their children in mainstream primary school because they perceived their children's Chinese ability not enough to enable a smooth transition in a mainstream primary school.

9.4. Goal of the (language) education policies for immigrant students

In Ontario, Canada, both the ESL and the ELD programs aim to “result in a consistent approach to the education of English language learners across the province”, and to “help all English language learners to develop their talents, meet their goals, and acquire the knowledge and skills they will need to achieve personal success and to participate in and contribute to Ontario society.” For Finland, the national board of education is committed “to prepare immigrant [students] for integration into the Finnish education system and society, to support their cultural identity and to provide them with as well-functioning bilingualism as possible so that, in addition to Finnish (or Swedish), they will also have a command of their own native language.” In Germany, the goals of the language education policy are to enable equal opportunities for education and advancement, personal development; and participation in employment and society and Germany has implemented new measures at pre-primary to integrate immigrant children early into the system.

In Hong Kong, the language education policy for all students is “biliteracy and trilingualism” However, the official documents pertaining to the medium of instruction policies in Hong Kong, such as guidance on language policies in schools are mainly applicable to secondary schools²⁹ and there is no clear policy on the medium of instruction in primary schools and most schools do not have an agreed approach or method for implementing trilingual education (Wang and Kirkpatrick, 2015). The Chinese language subject in is taught in Putonghua in some primary schools in some grades. Consistent approach is lacking; using Putonghua as a medium of instruction for teaching the Chinese

²⁹ <https://www.edb.gov.hk/en/edu-system/primary-secondary/applicable-to-secondary/moi/support-and-resources-for-moi-policy/policy-support-measures/index-1.html>

language subject (PMIC) is a school-based decision. Many schools overlook the learning needs of immigrant children by adopting PMIC but using Cantonese to teach other subjects.

There is no dedicated education policy for immigrant students; Appendix 5 “Chinese Learning for non-Chinese Speaking Children” of the *Kindergarten Education Curriculum Guide*³⁰ (2017), the “Supplementary Guide to the Chinese Language Curriculum for non-Chinese Speaking Students”³¹ (2008) and the “Chinese Language Curriculum Second Language Learning Framework (the Learning Framework)”³² (2014) for primary and secondary schools are likely the only guiding documents on Chinese learning for immigrant students and it is noted in these documents that non-Chinese speaking students are ‘encouraged’ but not ‘obliged’ to learn Chinese. The implementation of the “Learning Framework” aims to help non-Chinese speaking students overcome the difficulties of learning Chinese as a second language ‘with a view’ to enabling them to bridge over to mainstream Chinese Language classes and master the Chinese language. However, in reality, most ethnic minority students do not bridge over to mainstream Chinese classes and their Chinese ability regressed when they enter secondary school.

Under the Joint University Programmes Admissions System (JUPAS), all University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded institutions has adopted the arrangement to accept alternative qualifications in Chinese Language in lieu of the general Chinese Language requirement in the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination (HKDSE), an exam which most of the mainstream students will sit in for their university admission, since 2008³³. Since then, the majority of non-Chinese speaking students are only taught to the lowest level of Chinese among the alternative qualifications despite locally born and raised, i.e. GCSE or IGCSE, which is only equivalent to the mainstream Primary 1-2 level, despite spending 15 years of education in Hong Kong.

9.5. Multi-disciplinary approach and support

Language acquisition planning is multifaceted, and involves a continuum of issues from psychological to the societal (Siiner, Hult, and Kupisch, 2018). Hence, language policy requires a

³⁰ https://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/curriculum-development/major-level-of-edu/preprimary/ENG_KGECG_2017.pdf

³¹ <https://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/tc/student-parents/ncs-students/support-to-teacher/sg%20to%20chi%20lang%20curr%20ncs%20proper%20eng%20upload.pdf>

³² <https://www.edb.gov.hk/tc/curriculum-development/kla/chi-edu/second-lang/sch-plan.html>

³³ <https://www.edb.gov.hk/en/student-parents/ncs-students/about-ncs-students/jupas-admission.html>

multi-disciplinary approach. Finland offers psycho-social support to immigrant students; the German federal government has increased funding to all state education systems for schools to hire translators, psychologists, and social workers.

Ontario, Canada adopts a holistic approach on second language teaching and assessment. The teaching and learning is based on a global view of education and respect for human rights. As they believe **cultural competence** and **respect for diversity** are key components for language learners to integrate in mainstream classrooms. Assessments are conducted to allow language learners to demonstrate what they can do with limited or no English and assessors take a ‘whole child’ approach, not only assessing the child’s ability to acquire the language but also the entire context of the child’s development.

9.6. Teacher professional development

Teachers are at the forefront when it comes to supporting the integration of immigrant students. However, research literature shows that teachers (including those in Germany) often feel unprepared and insecure when confronted in the same classroom with students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds and they feel they lack competences and confidence to work in diverse and multicultural classrooms (Eurydice, 2015; Trasberg & Kond, 2017). This finding concurs with “A Study on the Challenges Faced by Mainstream Schools in Educating Ethnic Minorities in Hong Kong” (Oxfam et al., 2020) that many teachers encounter greater difficulties “in catering for the learning differences between Chinese and non-Chinese speaking students at the same time” and they expressed they do not have “much confidence in teaching non-Chinese speaking students to achieve a similar level of the Chinese speaking students”.

In Ontario, Canada, the Ministry of Education regulates teacher qualifications to teach ESL and ELD programs and school boards provide professional development opportunities not only to educators, but administrators and support staff. In Finland, teaching in diversity and multicultural classrooms is included in the competence framework in teacher training programs and training is offered through professional development activities. Whereas in Germany, some Länder has made second language teacher training compulsory.

In Hong Kong, teachers do not need relevant professional qualifications to teach ethnic minorities. The Education Bureau offers professional development programs and commission a local university to conduct teacher workshops for Chinese language teachers who teach ethnic minority students. However, these training courses were viewed to be too theoretical and most instructors delivering the

courses did not have prior experience teaching ethnic minorities, hence would not understand the actual needs of teachers. Most programs are limited to supporting teachers on the Chinese language subject only and are deemed not effective in improving teaching efficacy (Oxfam et al., 2020).

Although the Education Bureau has launched the "Professional Enhancement Grant Scheme for Chinese Language Teachers (Teaching Chinese as a Second Language)"³⁴ since 2014/15 school year to encourage Chinese Language teachers to pursue part-time programmes on teaching Chinese to immigrant students (including the acquisition of the pedagogical knowledge and skills), the Direct Investigation Report on 'Government's support for non-Chinese speaking students' (Office of The Ombudsman Hong Kong, 2019) pointed out that this Scheme was not well received by the teachers. In the four school years 2014/15 to 2017/18, only 68 Chinese Language subject teachers had been approved the grant, and among them 24 of them has completed the programmes.

10. Recommendations

In Hong Kong, insofar as support in ethnic minority (early childhood) education is concerned, the focus is mainly on Chinese language learning. This is evident from the funding allocation, the "Learning Framework", and the emphasis in teacher training. Compared to the three countries in this study, this is far from being a policy to enable and/or integrate ethnic minority children into the existing mainstream education system. Language education policy for minority language children is not a one-size-fits-all approach as a sound policy takes into consideration the historical, political, social and cultural context. Unlike the Canada, Finland, and Germany, there is currently no legal mandate on education for non-Chinese speaking (NCS)³⁵ students in Hong Kong. To improve the quality and equity of education for NCS students, however, the government should consider adopting some good practices from other countries and provide an inclusive policy and procedure to enable positive and measurable differences in education outcomes, such as increased student achievement for ethnic minority children.

A language education policy is necessary to provide schools with 'top-down directions' and support in meeting the learning needs of NCS students that is necessary for success in school. It is not only

³⁴ <https://scolarhk.edb.hkedcity.net/en/project/professional-enhancement-grant-scheme-chinese-teachers-teaching-chinese-second-language?menu=main-menu&mlid=750>

³⁵ Non-Chinese speaking students are defined as students, regardless of ethnicities, whose spoken language at home is not Chinese.

about funding resources; and some key components (listed below) which are currently suggested in education guides, should be made mandatory in the policy. Developing a policy for NCS children in early childhood education (kindergarten and junior primary school) should be the priority as children's early years greatly influence individuals' prospects concerning education, employment and social integration later in life. Early childhood education and care lays the foundation for further learning and is an effective investment in education and training. Without this investment, these children will not be able to reach their full potential (Council of European Union, 2019).

10.1. Planning and orientation for NCS families

Many parents of NCS students are not familiar with the local education system because they are either not locally born and have not experienced Hong Kong education or they studied in former designated schools and are not familiar in the mainstream system. Parent briefings on respective kindergarten and primary education hence are very important before their child starts schooling and should be made available in every district before the school application period begins. Briefings should include explanation of the kind of schools³⁶ in the public sector and the respective medium of instruction. Because of cultural, linguistic, socio-economic, and educational differences, NCS parents may have difficulty accessing local information on child-caring. Thus, besides application procedure and information on admission, the Education Bureau should provide talks on parenting and children's development as well as invite teachers and administrators of mainstream schools to talk about what to expect in kindergarten and primary education respectively; how students' performance is generally assessed and evaluated, and reported; homework policies; and how parents can support their children's development at home; with simultaneous interpretation in major minority languages. As Chinese learning is a major concern for parents, support measures in kindergarten and primary schools should be explained respectively in details so that they are able to choose schools that can best support their children's learning needs.

10.2. Preparatory classes

The Education Bureau should evaluate the mode and effectiveness of the initiation program and ensure that students acquire Chinese and/or English skills before they enter mainstream education. However, initiation program should not last more than two years and should cover other subjects in addition to the language of instruction. Parents should be briefed before their child joins the initiation program, on its language of instruction and goals. The contents should be chosen in a way that

³⁶ Government, Aided, and Direct Subsidy Scheme schools for primary education

supports students' ability to manage everyday situations and social integration as well as to facilitate the development of students' own identity (Eurydice Brief, 2019).

Research found that preparatory teaching may provide more time and space for the teaching and learning of the language of instruction than full integration into mainstream education right from the start (Koehler, 2017). The Bureau should also consider extending the initiation program to pre-primary children and require kindergartens to organize preparatory classes for NCS children whose Chinese language skills are not strong enough to follow mainstream teaching. The preparatory class can be arranged in which NCS children are placed in mainstream classes for most lessons but take some lessons in separate groups to focus on language learning; or they are placed in separate groups for most of their lessons and join mainstream classes in non-academic lessons such as sports, arts, and music.

To provide a head start for NCS children in Chinese learning, the Education Bureau can take reference from Germany's "Early-Years Language Learning" programs in day-care centres for pre-kindergarten children whereby centre staff receive specialist guidance, counselling and on the job training to provide language stimulation, linguistic and literacy education through play.

10.3. Welcoming procedures and reception

Welcoming process involves helping NCS children adapt to their new school environment and ensuring that they make good progress in their learning. Schools should develop welcome procedures to provide warm welcome for ethnic minority children and an environment where children, parents and other members of the school community feel respected. Every student should feel comfortable, well-taken care of, and valued in the classroom, as well as supported and inspired to succeed.

During registration, parents should be well informed on how the child will be supported and kindergarten teacher and the Chinese as a second language teacher should meet the parents. If parents cannot communicate well in Chinese or English, schools should take into account the need for interpreters. The Education Bureau should allow more effective use of community resources to assist schools during the registration and welcoming process.

10.4. Family engagement and community involvement

Family and community involvement play an important role in children's education process, especially in early childhood education. The policy should ensure that schools have put into place measures to

keep NCS parents informed about the school curriculum, their children's progress, and especially their children's ability in Chinese (as compared to their Chinese peers) so that they can guide and support their children outside of school. Since many NCS parents are not educated in Hong Kong nor been in mainstream education, the Education Bureau can reference Finland's parent training program to enhance their capacities to support their children. The training however, should not be limited to academic support only, but also on physical, cognitive, social and emotional development of their children. The Steering Committee of Ethnic Minority Affairs is encouraged to coordinate a multi-disciplinary team to work closely with schools and local organizations (such as NGOs, libraries, cultural and religious societies, etc.) to implement the parent training program.

To engage NCS parental involvement in schools, the Education Bureau should encourage kindergartens to develop a rigorous home-school cooperation program, e.g. invite parents (Chinese and NCS at the same time) to volunteer in the classrooms and class visits as well as participate in classroom and parent sharing sessions. Involving family members in the classroom provides children with positive role models and affirms the connection between home and school.

10.5. Initial assessment and data collection

Initial assessment and data collection is crucial for understanding children's learning characteristics which can be influenced by their socio-economic background, health, place of residence, cultural and religious background and prior knowledge. Hence information such as first language, country of origin, birth place, number of years in Hong Kong, religion, socioeconomic status, and prior learning and/or program joined should be collected upon admission to kindergarten and primary school respectively. These elements do not only contribute to decisions on how to place the students, but also how to provide the appropriate learning support to meet their needs and bridge their gaps. The Education Bureau should specify (standard) criteria for assessing competencies in the language of instruction in all schools.

10.6. Curriculum

Chinese language acquisition programs must have **long-term goals and continuity** in the curriculum as students move up through the grade levels. Defining objectives and competence level is a **necessary** first step in raising the quality of second language teaching. Unless what one seeks to achieve is clear, it is virtually impossible to decide on teaching methods and pedagogy. Once the objectives are clear, educators know what is to be learnt and can decide on how that learning is to be stimulated (Council of Europe, 2009). Although the objective of the additional funding for

implementing the Chinese Language Curriculum Second Language Learning Framework is to merge NCS students to mainstream Chinese level, stage learning objectives are not in place and there is no curriculum for Chinese as a second language. The Education Bureau should define objectives and competence levels on Chinese language learning in kindergarten and primary education so that schools, parents, school advisors, inspectors and educational policymakers can make objective judgments about the quality of teaching, adjust or optimize the curriculum and support measures, and refine performance benchmarks.

NCS students should be placed in appropriate Chinese class after initial assessment but their learning in other subjects should not be segregated from Chinese students in the school. They should be placed in mainstream classes for most lessons but take some lessons in separate groups to focus on Chinese language learning. If students have great difficulty understanding the teaching language, i.e. Chinese, they should be placed in separate groups for most of their lessons and join mainstream classes in non-academic lessons such as sports, arts, and music.

For children who have not caught up with the expected competencies, additional support should be provided through intensive and/or remedial program to ‘accelerate’ the student’s acquisition of proficiency in everyday and academic Chinese. Remedial classes should also be considered for children who lag behind in other subjects taught in Chinese.

10.7. Ongoing assessment, evaluation, and reporting to parents

To better understand what NCS children are able to do with the Chinese language at specific points in their development, the Education Bureau should develop metrics to track the outcomes of NCS children in Chinese language proficiency, literacy, and content-area learning including preparatory classes, Initiation Program, and Summer Bridging Program. Continuous assessment on the language skills is not only to measure the effectiveness of education, but to understand how far behind students have fallen, the steps that have been taken in the past and those that need to be taken in the future, in order to narrow achievement gaps between Chinese and non-Chinese speaking students.

Assessment should be an ongoing process with the aim of supporting students to make progress in Chinese learning. responsible for their own education systems have been trying to address such problems by introducing changes in curricula and their delivery. However, the task of pursuing meaningful curriculum reform is a complex undertaking, particularly in environments where context, aspirations and expectations are evolving rapidly

Parents should be informed about schools' assessment and evaluation policies and practices. Information about the learning expectations and the student's academic progress should be communicated to parents on a regular basis. Schools should encourage and welcome active participation of parents to discuss assessment results and program placement options for their children.

10.8. Initial teaching training and professional development for teachers

Frontlines social workers always receive complaints and enquiry from the ethnic minority parents that many schools do not welcome ethnic minorities in their classes because of language/cultural misunderstandings and their perception that students lack knowledge. Educators need to change their mindset. It is their responsibility to “challenge fundamental societal structures of inequity by equipping students with basic skills which will help them be facilitators for social change”³⁷(James Banks, 2012). Teaching to satisfy standards and core learning content is no longer enough; cultural sensitivity should be enhanced and effective teachers need to learn more about the family units of the students they are teaching.

Teachers matter more than any other single factor in learning and in improving learners' achievements. Teachers must have ample professional preparation in how to use appropriate curricular materials and teaching strategies to promote achievement of NCS children. Teachers who specialize (either pre-service or in-service training) in second-language acquisition and cross-linguistic should be given professional recognition. Cultural sensitivity and culturally responsive and inclusive pedagogy and practice should be included as core curriculum in initial teacher training and mandatory in professional development as all teachers, not only Chinese language teachers, are expected to meet the specific needs of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

10.9. Addressing social and emotional needs

According to the research literature, students' academic development and potential cannot be fully realised without supporting their social and emotional needs (Krachman, LaRocca & Gabrieli, 2018). This applies to all students, but in particular to students from immigrant backgrounds who may face additional challenges, such as social and cultural obstacles, barriers to full participation in schools, segregation and/or hostility and bullying within the host society (European Commission, 2019). Thus to create an optimal environment for learning, with the government schemes of social work service for pre-primary and primary institutions, in-school social workers can help support NCS children

³⁷ <https://educ533group3equitypedagogy.weebly.com/>

personal, social and emotional development while education staff focus on developing their language skills and learning in general.

Cultural competence should be included in the core competences for social workers and training in cultural awareness, sensitivity, and responsiveness should be made mandatory for pre-service and in-service social workers so that they can address the needs of NCS children and their families.

10.10. Allocation of resources

Allocating resources to support NCS children should be perceived as an investment rather than a cost as they also are the future of Hong Kong. To provide an equitable education for all children, it is necessary to 'go an extra mile' for NCS children especially in early childhood education. More manpower will be needed to provide briefings to NCS parents. Funding for interpretation services and support for home-school cooperation with NCS parents needs to be stepped up for improved engagement and communication. Other funding concerns include arranging effective remedial instruction, training for teachers and social workers, supporting students on other subjects taught in Chinese, whether to appoint a specific staff to oversee matters of NCS children (Oxfam, 2020), etc. The government should review the current funding mode and grant amount to determine whether funding is adequate to implement the support measures mandated by the policy.

10.11 Monitoring of the policy

Policy monitoring and evaluation plays a critical role in the design, implementation and delivery of public policies and services. An effective monitoring and evaluation framework is important for:

- supporting strategic planning and policy making by improving the links between policy interventions and their outcomes and impact;
- enhancing accountability and providing legitimacy for the use of public funds and resources; and;
- promoting learning and enhancing policies' efficiency and effectiveness.

In particular, evaluation of the language education policy provides valuable information to monitor **equity** within the education system and to help stakeholders focus on the major goals and challenges in the education system as a whole (OECD, 2013). Hence, before the policy is implemented, a rigorous monitoring and evaluation framework with transparent procedures on compliance monitoring, diagnostic monitoring, and performance monitoring must be developed.

11. Conclusion

Ethnic minority students in Hong Kong share a common goal like their Chinese counterparts: maximal proficiency in English and Chinese. Without sufficient levels of Chinese, these students are at a disadvantage when applying for jobs and higher education in Hong Kong. However, aside from Cantonese language proficiency, these students are further disadvantaged by institutional factors, such as *de facto* racial segregation in schools and classrooms. It is well documented that students who are well-integrated into the education system both academically and socially has more chance of reaching their potential. Language should not be a barrier, especially in early childhood education, as various research found that young children are better at second language acquisition than later starters and if input conditions are favorable, there are strong grounds for children to learn two or more languages in tandem from an early age. Rather than letting children whose home language is different from the teaching language ‘sink or swim’ in a classroom, a comprehensive, inclusive and learner-centered language education policy could provide more equity and support to enable them to thrive in classrooms and achieve academic success.

Upon studying the legislation for immigrant students and the language education policies of Ontario (Canada), Finland and Germany, we realize inclusion and respect for diversity are obligatory conditions for an equitable education system. Below is a summary of recommendations of the necessary components and mandatory requirements for a language policy for NCS children in the context of Hong Kong.

Curriculum

11.1 A K-12 Chinese as a Second Language Curriculum (CSLC) needs to be developed as a matter of priority. It is the only way to ensure equity for ethnic minority students.

Initiation

11.2 Initiation procedures (for reception, orientation, placement, and programming for NCS children need to be reviewed with a focus on the development of Chinese language competencies. This needs to be linked to the CSLC so that student levels can be assessed and relevant support provided.

Assessment

- 11.3 Assessment tools need to be developed to assist in the monitoring of ethnic minority Chinese language learning. These tools need to be linked to the CSLC.

Professional Development

- 11.4 Universities and NGOs should be supported to provide professional development for teachers and administrators that will enable them to support ethnic minority students.
- 11.5 Roles and responsibilities of school social workers in the context of NCS students must be clarified and opportunities must be provided to develop skills on cultural awareness, sensitivity and responsiveness.

Home-school Cooperation

- 11.6 Home-school cooperation strategies need to be developed to involve NCS parents in the education of their children. This should include the development of materials written in multiple languages to facilitate communication.

Financial Resources

- 11.7 There needs to be a review of financial resources available to implement public services and support for NCS students. Resources need to be targeted on outcomes and the facilitation of learning.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting

- 11.8 A sound monitoring and evaluation framework must be in to support public accountability, enhance policy effectiveness and efficiency, and promote learning to inform strategic planning on Chinese language acquisition program for NCS children.

An equitable, inclusive education system is one in which all students, parents, and other members of the school community are welcomed and **respected**, and every student is supported and inspired to succeed in a culture of high expectations for learning. Being biliterate and trilingual is the goal of the Hong Kong education language policy. As Hongkongers, ethnic minority students should also be supported to reach the same education goal regardless of their race. It is the obligation of the Education Bureau to set up a Chinese as a second language (CSL) policy complete with a CSL curriculum, appropriate assessments and effective home-school cooperation to help ethnic minority

students successfully acquire the Chinese language and enjoy equal opportunities as their Chinese peers

References (TBA)

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