

Submission to Subcommittee to study the formulation of long-term youth policy and development blueprint

From: **Hong Kong Unison**

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Upward Mobility for Ethnic Minority Youth

1. Hong Kong Unison is a non-governmental organization that focuses on the education rights of local ethnic minorities and issues pertaining to Chinese language learning. In Hong Kong, there are about 26,000 non-Chinese speaking students (enrolled from kindergarten to secondary schools) or 3.4% of the student population. Ethnic minority (EM) youth, particularly those from low-socioeconomic status, face daunting systemic barriers to educational attainment, which, in turn, severely restricting their life chances and social mobility. The first part of this submission focuses on obstacles which EM youth encountered in Hong Kong, such as limited opportunities to study in inclusive schools, a lack of qualified teachers in Chinese-as-a-second Language, insufficient life planning programs and limited technological support. The second part deals with ways of overcoming these difficulties so that upward mobility is more attainable for EM youth in Hong Kong.
2. Although the government-subsidized “designated schools” were abolished in name in 2014, there is still an over-concentration of EM students in certain schools. In the 2019/20 school year, about 50% of EM students were concentrated in 29 out of 926 primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong. Given that schools tend to be the only opportunity for ethnic minority students to immerse themselves into a Chinese language environment, these EM students are deprived of equitable education opportunities in these former “designated schools”. The over-concentration of EM students is not conducive to learning Chinese and ethnic minority students’ insufficiency in the Chinese language has become a barrier to upward mobility. This is reflected in the under-representation of minority students in tertiary education. Therefore, the only way for ethnic minority youth to have upward mobility is education in general and learning Chinese language in particular.
3. Though the almost-completed Chinese as a second language curriculum is a step in the right direction, the curriculum is loosely written and without a detailed syllabus. This makes it difficult for teachers to translate the curriculum into practice (lesson plans). In addition, most teachers do not have the basic training in teaching Chinese as a second language. Hence, many EM students are not receiving quality education, especially in Chinese learning, that can help enhance their chance of upward mobility.

According to the Director of Audit's Report (2021)¹, out of 13,794 teachers teaching Chinese Language, 9,986 (72%) did not attend EDB's training on teaching non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students Chinese as a second language (CSL) during the period (2014/15 to 2019/20). In other words, many Chinese Language teachers may not even have the minimum or basic training or qualifications in teaching CSL. When we required instructors in driving schools to attain proper qualifications in driving, why would we demand less for teachers teaching Chinese to EM students? Among the remaining 3,808 teachers who attended training, 1,744 (46%) attended training for 5 hours or less. Attending such short courses is inadequate to improve the ability of teachers to a sufficiently high level in teaching CSL.

4. In Hong Kong, teachers have been provided opportunities to develop competence in teaching CSL. Though the Professional Enhancement Grant Scheme for Chinese Language Teachers was launched from 2014/15 to 2021/22 to help teachers acquire relevant qualifications to teach Chinese to NCS students, only 89 teachers (20%) of the 450 places had been approved. Due to the nature of the part-time programs, the time required to complete the program and insufficient funding support for the tuition fees, the scheme received only "lukewarm" response from teachers.
5. In a survey carried out by Hong Kong Unison between March and mid-April 2022, out of more than 900 EM respondents, 43.4% indicated the need for "Chinese learning support". Though the survey was not a randomized, representative sample type of research, the results showed that many EM students needed more help. Since the 2020/21 school year, the EDB has been providing all schools that admit non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students additional funding from HK\$151,050 to HK\$1.5 million to enhance the support for NCS students' learning of Chinese; additionally the EDB has set up Chinese Language Learning Support Centres to offer remedial programs after school hours. Despite such measures, parents mentioned that due to parents' lack of information, they were unable to receive the relevant services. School principals, teachers and social workers have to make sure that EM parents have access to such information.
6. Despite the barriers and discrimination, many EM youth have successfully integrated and are able to find gainful employment. However, a significant number of EM youth may consider it problematic finding a life goal, navigating the career path and overcoming prejudice and discrimination in the open job market. The lack of life choices and career options for EM youth is evident and there should be much more career choices beyond mere food delivery. However, a survey² shows that 68% of EM

¹ Director of Audit. (2021). *Report No. 76: Education Bureau: Education support measures for non-Chinese speaking students. (Chapter 2)*. Hong Kong.

² Leung, L. & DPCW-KIn (2018). Report on job seeking practices of ethnic minority youths in Hong Kong

youth have never received any career guidance, implying that EM youth lack counsel and attention concerning their life-planning. In fact, Director of Audit (2021) pointed out that the demand from schools for support services on life planning education was “high” and the numbers of NCS students applying for the services have consistently increased. Taken these findings together, there is a need to provide more life planning education for EM youth in Hong Kong.

7. In the abovementioned survey carried out by Hong Kong Unison, almost 80% of the respondent families requested and online device and/or internet connection to cope with online learning. Ethnic minority children living in conditions of poverty commonly do not have their own device, since there is no subsidy for kindergartens to provide mobile computer devices and internet services. Moreover, many families with children in primary and secondary schools were not aware of the support for e-learning under the Community Care Fund Assistance Programme and Quality Education Fund and they did not know where to ask for such support. Such children frequently relied on their mother’s mobile phone or the device of an older sibling. In an information and technology age, when ethnic minority students do not have access to online device and wifi, it is disturbing.

Recommendations:

In order to enhance the life chances and social mobility of EM youth, Hong Kong Unison recommends the following measures to be implemented as soon as possible.

1. In order to overcome the problem of over-concentration of EM students in certain schools, which is not conducive to learning Chinese, it is recommended to fully implement the inclusive school policy, where there is social inclusion and that EM students receive high-quality instruction and support for diverse needs that enable them to meet success and learn with their Chinese speaking peers.
2. Given the fact that a majority of teachers do not even have the minimum amount of CSL training, Hong Kong Unison recommends adopting and applying the “Framework for Teachers’ Professional Development on Integrated Education” in the field of CSL. The Education Bureau (EDB) has been offering structured training courses aimed at the basic, advanced and thematic levels, in order to further enhance the professional development of teachers in catering for students with special educational needs (SEN). This framework for teachers’ professional development is applicable to teaching CSL.
(1) Basic Course on catering for CSL: This is a 30-hour online training program to be completed within three months. (2) Advanced Course on catering for CSL: Consists of 72-hour training program. (3) Thematic Course on supporting Non-Chinese Speaking (NCS) students: These training programs provide in-depth training for teachers to help

-Evaluation of employment support services. Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong Diocesan Pastoral Centre for Workers - Kowloon (DPCWKIn). Retrieved from: http://dpcwkln.hkcla.org.hk/document/I08_10.pdf

them grasp the specific knowledge and skills to cater for NCS students. Three courses on NCS will be offered with a duration of 72 hours each.

3. To encourage more teachers to receive formal training through the Professional Enhancement Grant Scheme for Chinese Language Teachers, it is recommended that (1) among the schools receiving Non-Chinese Speaking grant, each school is required to meet a quota, that is, at least 1 teacher from each school should be assigned to receive formal qualification training in CSL. (2) The Professional Enhancement Grant Scheme should cover one-year full-time programs with tuition fees fully subsidized and teachers be on paid-leave. Supply teachers are to be provided. (3) Two incremental points for qualified CSL teachers i.e. having Postgraduate Certificate in CSL, or having completed Basic Course, Advanced Course and Thematic Course on catering for CSL. This had been a motivational practice in the field of special education.
4. Even though EDB provides a range of services such as school-based support services, Student Support Program for NCS students, and Summer Bridging Program to EM students, many schools, teachers and NCS students are reluctant to participate. It is recommended that in order to encourage active participation, the post of NCS coordinator be set up in schools as merits for job promotion.
5. In view of the lack of life planning education for EM youth, Hong Kong Unison recommended that a “Life Planning Centre for Ethnic Minority Youth” be established. Comprehensive services should be provided in order to increase their understanding on life planning, improve their career-related skills (e.g., Chinese language proficiency) and enhance their readiness--from assessment of personal interests to job searching skills, and from understanding the job market to preparing for interview skills. The strategy is to expose EM students with the relevant resources in order to enable them to find their career interests, prepare for recruitment, and navigate the workplace. As a result, their integration to society can be smoother, and Hong Kong’s work environment can become more diverse.
6. In view of the limited technological support for EM youth, it is recommended that the government takes urgent measures to rectify the situations, ensuring that ethnic minority students (not just those on CSSA) have the necessary means to receiving online education and access to the internet. Policymakers, teachers and social workers should not assume that when ethnic minority families are offered initiatives (e.g., Ipad), they would be automatically aware of the offers. Very often flaws with information dissemination may undermine the success of these initiatives.
7. EM youth need a level playing field and equal education opportunities in order to move up the social mobility ladder.

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