



Total number of document(s): 1

South China Morning Post

2013-07-07

EDT6| EDT| Education| By Jennifer Ngo

Minority pupils ‘being set up to fail’

Teachers and rights activists say a new curriculum and resources are needed to ensure children have access to Chinese language skills

Tens of thousands of local **ethnic minority** pupils in the city’s public schools are being set up to fail through being denied the one skill they need to prosper: proficiency in Chinese, teachers and rights activists say.

Without having a curriculum geared towards non-native Chinese speakers, they are being condemned to menial jobs, continuing poverty and even crime, according to the groups.

Chinese teacher Chung Lai-ming says she was rendered speechless when she stepped into a secondary school class, only to find the language abilities of her students were equivalent to that of seven-year-old natives.

“I wondered what they actually learned in six years of Chinese classes – some of them in mainstream local schools,” she said.

Fermi Wong Wai-fun of **minority** rights advocacy group Unison, said: “If you don’t deal with the problem [of teaching **ethnic** minorities Chinese], you won’t have social harmony. You are creating an outcast group.”

She added: “We are not talking about new immigrants. These are third- or fourth-generation Hongkongers.”

In the past 10 years, Chung has tried everything she could, from writing songs and poems to publishing her own teaching material, to teach children.

With no guidance and support from the government, schools are left to fend for themselves, which ultimately means it comes down to how much work and heart a teacher puts into his or her classes, said Chung.

She has spent most of her years teaching in designated schools for **ethnic** minorities.

Chung said that while some found it almost impossible to speak Chinese, for most the biggest hurdle was learning how to read and write in the language, given Chinese is so different from their home languages and most of the children lack the supportive family environment native Chinese learners enjoy.

Their problems are sometimes worsened by the fact that subjects such as maths and history may also be taught in Chinese.

“There needs to be not just a curriculum specially geared to teaching these children, but also classes in university where teachers-to-be can be given some kind of help so they can effectively teach these children,” Chung said.

“Ultimately, the Education Bureau needs to provide resources and a curriculum for teaching Chinese to non-Chinese speaking children. If we provide them with a suitable curriculum, they can learn.”

The Education Bureau said yesterday that it had conducted a comprehensive review of the education support measures provided to non-Chinese speaking students, and would report its findings soon.

Wong said knowing Chinese is essential to make a living in Hong Kong if you are working-class.

Without it, a pupil’s chances of getting a good job, let alone of getting into university, are very low, whatever their grades in other subjects. The problem can only get worse, she said.

There are nearly 15,000 non-Chinese students in the public school system, and over 12,000 more in kindergartens, according to Education Bureau figures.

Ethnic minority families also tend to have more children than Chinese ones.

“In the past five years, the local Pakistani community alone has grown by 65 per cent, with most of them being locally born children,” Wong said.

Wong said the Pakistani families involved in Unison have an average of four to seven children per family, while Nepalese and Indian families have one to three children per family.

She has long been calling for a Chinese-language curriculum for children for whom it is not their first language.

“The biggest issue is that the government does not count ***ethnic minority*** children as part of the Hong Kong community and our society’s future,” said Wong.

“So even if we pour a lot of money into education, it doesn’t go into solving the problems that ***ethnic minority*** children have.”

EDUCATION

MINORITY PUPILS 'BEING SET UP TO FAIL'

Teachers and rights activists say a new curriculum and resources are needed to ensure children have access to Chinese language skills

Jennifer Ngo
jennifer.ngo@scmp.com

Tens of thousands of local ethnic minority pupils in the city's public schools are being set up to fail through being denied the one skill they need to prosper – proficiency in Chinese – teachers and rights activists say.

Without having a curriculum geared towards non-native Chinese speakers, they are being condemned to menial jobs, continuing poverty and even crime, according to the groups.

Chinese teacher Chung Lai-ming says she was rendered speechless when she stepped into a secondary school class, only to find the language abilities of her students were equivalent to that of seven-year-old natives.

"I wondered what they actually learned in six years of Chinese classes – some of them in mainstream local schools," she said.

Ferni Wong Wai-fun of minority rights advocacy group Unison, said: "If you don't deal with the problem [of teaching ethnic minorities Chinese], you won't have social harmony. You are creating an outcast group."

She added: "We are not talking about new immigrants. These are third- or fourth-generation Hongkongers."

In the past 10 years, Chung has tried everything she could, from writing songs and poems to publishing her own teaching material, to teach children.

With no guidance or support from the government, schools are left to fend for themselves, which ultimately means it comes down to how much work and heart a teacher puts into his or her classes, said Chung.

She has spent most of her years teaching in designated schools for ethnic minorities.

Chung said that while some found it almost impossible to speak Chinese, for most the biggest hurdle was learning how to read and write in the language, given Chinese is so different from their home languages and most of the children lack the supportive family environment native Chinese learners enjoy.

Their problems are sometimes worsened by the fact that subjects such as maths and history may also be taught in Chinese.

There needs to be not just a curriculum specially geared to teaching these children, but also classes in university where teachers-to-be can be given

some kind of help so they can effectively teach these children," Chung said.

"Ultimately, the Education Bureau needs to provide resources and a curriculum for teaching Chinese to non-Chinese speaking children. If we provide them with a suitable curriculum, they can learn."

The Education Bureau said yesterday that it had conducted a comprehensive review of the education support measures provided to non-Chinese speaking students, and would report its findings soon.

Wong said knowing Chinese is essential to make a living in Hong Kong if you are working-class.

Without it, a pupil's chances of getting a good job, let alone of getting into university, are very



If we can provide [children] with a suitable curriculum, they can learn

TEACHER CHUNG LAI-MING

low, whatever their grades in other subjects. The problem can only get worse, she said.

There are nearly 15,000 non-Chinese students in the public school system, and over 12,000 more in kindergartens, according to Education Bureau figures.

Ethnic minority families also tend to have more children than Chinese ones.

"In the past five years, the local Pakistani community alone has grown by 65 per cent, with most of them being locally born children," Wong said.

Wong said the Pakistani families involved in Unison have an average of four to seven children per family, while Nepalese and Indian families have one to three children per family.

She has long been calling for a Chinese-language curriculum for children for whom it is not their first language.

"The biggest issue is that the government does not count ethnic minority children as part of the Hong Kong community and our society's future," said Wong.

"So even if we pour a lot of money into education, it doesn't go into solving the problems that ethnic minority children have."

DOCUMENT ID: 201307075318953

Source: Wisers electronic service. This content, the trademarks and logos belong to Wisers, the relevant organizations or copyright owners. All rights reserved. Any content provided by user is the responsibility of the user and Wisers is not responsible for such content, copyright clearance or any damage/loss suffered as a result.