

# Long-term policies needed to help ethnic minorities learn Chinese, says NGO Hong Kong Unison

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unison/  
Kris Cheng

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An NGO has said there should be a long-term policy on helping ethnic minorities and non-Chinese speaking students learn Chinese as a secondary language, after reviewing documents from the past decade on the issue.

Hong Kong Unison reviewed more than 130 books, academic articles, thematic reports and teachers' handbooks published between 2006 and 2016 on the issue and compiled a report. It found that the current learning structure lacked clear and specific teaching and learning goals, as well as systematic teaching materials and teacher training.

The report came after a new steering committee headed by the chief secretary was established to enhance collaboration within the government on support for ethnic minorities, for which HK\$500 million has been allocated. But Unison Executive Director Phyllis Cheung said the government should not stop at allocating funding to schools.



Photo: Screenshot.

“It is useless since there are no learning goals... there are no teaching and assessment guidelines for teachers to follow,” Cheung said.

Cheung also suggested that the government conduct longitudinal research on ethnic minority students who are learning Chinese.

Huma, a secondary six student, said she obtained good Chinese skills while studying at

a mainstream primary school since she was constantly using the language.

But as she did not have many local Chinese classmates in secondary school, she did not have opportunities to practice speaking: “I believe my Chinese has worsened.”

She said the British GCSE Chinese curriculum that she was required to study in school – because there were no other alternatives – was too easy.

“In secondary one, it was still at a baby level, we learned about colours and the weather – even babies can learn those,” she said, adding that the curriculum was still very easy in secondary four.

She said it would be better for the school to choose a more difficult curriculum for secondary students to prepare them for the GCE advanced level exams.



Carrie Lam meeting with ethnic minorities in 2017. File Photo: Hong Kong Unison.

Education lawmaker Ip Kin-yuen also said more training and teaching materials for teachers are needed, rather than a small amount of funding for schools. Schools that enrol fewer than ten non-Chinese students can apply for HK\$50,000 from the government.

Ip said policies for ethnic minorities learning Cantonese should extend to kindergarten and pre-kindergarten students, since many of them were born in Hong Kong.

“I believe if those who are locally born can assimilate into the environment earlier, it will be much better for them to learn,” he said.

### Teaching experience

Mr Kwong, who teaches Chinese to ethnic minorities at a secondary school, said many experienced teachers do not have experience teaching ethnic minorities.

“Half of the curriculum is about classical Chinese – it is impossible [for ethnic minorities to learn],” Kwong said.



Photo: Hong Kong Unison.

He said some students – particularly those who were new to Hong Kong – were not proficient in either Chinese or English: “Where do we start for them? We need some directions.”

Kwong said teachers also need training to communicate with parents and arrange appropriate learning goals.

### **Mandarin teaching**

Lawmaker Claudia Mo said some ethnic minority students she knows have good Cantonese listening and speaking skills, but do not have enough reading and writing skills.

“They are studying the same material in their secondary two year and primary four year,” she said.

Mo also said that teachers, parents and students raised concerns at the legislature’s public hearings on schools teaching Chinese in Mandarin.

“It is completely separated from their usual Cantonese environment,” she said.



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