Abstract on

Development of Support Measures for

Student Adaptation in English-medium Schools

Objectives of the Study

The project Development of Support Measures for Student Adaptation in English-medium Schools was commissioned to the Chinese University of Hong Kong in July 2001 and was completed in November 2004. The project aimed at developing a support programme to help Secondary 1 (S1) students adapt to the English learning environment in English-medium (EMI) schools. Five EMI schools participated in the project.

The Support Measures

In the project, the research team led by Dr Evelyn Man developed a range of support measures with multiple focuses based on a Language-across-the-Curriculum (LAC) content-based approach that integrated language and content to enable S1 students to adapt better to English-medium instruction. An LAC content-based approach was considered as beneficial to English-medium learning as it provided an important platform for the integration of language and content. While language could be presented directly in the English subject, the research team believed that it could also be introduced via the content of other subjects.

In conducting the study, the research team developed support measures from the perspectives of the school, the teacher and the students. First, *schools* were to help to create a language-rich environment for students to use English, not just in the classroom, but also through establishing an English culture in school. Second, *teachers* were to provide materials and strategies to enhance their professional competence in English medium teaching. Third, *students* were to be given additional help such as summer bridging programme materials or independent learning materials so as to enable them to learn effectively in the medium of English. Different sets of materials catering to the school, the teachers and the students were

therefore produced.

Main Features of the Support Programme

While many schools tended to focus simply on a short bridging programme for S1 students as a support measure, which was delivered as an isolated attempt to help students cope with EMI, the project was designed as a more comprehensive support programme – albeit a long term one – with ongoing language enrichment and support measures that entailed the collaboration of both English teachers and content subject teachers.   The purpose was to help students acquire language skills, collaborate in activities in the English medium, gain confidence in actively using English and develop an interest in the language.

The project was envisaged as a materials development project right from the beginning to provide teaching and learning support.   Much time and effort was spent on developing the materials.   The idea was to introduce teachers to ideas and strategies based on an LAC approach rather than develop ready-made specific lesson units.   A major focus of the project was to strengthen teachers' language awareness, and develop or change their mindset on the role of language in EMI learning in order to give them a better understanding of what was involved in integrating language and content.

Findings of the Study

The research team concluded the project with some observations for the successful implementation and adoption of support measures in EMI schools:

(a) In order to implement EMI support measures successfully, a whole-school approach was necessary.   Piecemeal strategies involving a handful of teachers without the support of the whole school would be less effective than an LAC approach involving all stakeholders.   All teachers needed to recognize that they were also language teachers, and measures that involved the whole school were bound to be more successful;

(b) There should be administrative arrangements to facilitate effective integration of language and content.   Time and opportunity for language teachers and content teachers to interact and discuss and improve pedagogical practices should be provided.   Also, professional development of teachers was needed to help them

develop language awareness and an understanding of the strategies that integrated content and language;

(c) There should be a clear language policy in school and made known to teachers, students and parents, covering the use of language in the school, in the classroom, in assemblies, in the corridors and so on. Bottom-lines should be strictly observed. In implementing the language policy, it required a strong leadership and willing teachers. Consistency, insistence and persistence should be observed at all times to create an English environment within the classroom and in school;

(d) Students should be provided with varied learning experiences that involved the use of English in both formal and informal situations, i.e. they should be helped to use both 'conversational' and 'academic' English to ensure a language-rich environment. Teachers should promote students' self-autonomy to improve their English through various means;

(e) Good practices were identified in a number of schools, and it was imperative that means be found to disseminate the good practices;

(f) Schools that were struggling with their support measures needed assistance. It had to be recognized that the student intake quality, the students' socio-economic status, the teachers' quality and the school environment all had an impact on EMI success; and

(g) As schools were so different, a number of factors that directly impacted on the success of student adaptation measures or an LAC approach needed to be borne in mind. Such factors include, inter alia, the English language proficiency of subject teachers, the attitude of subject teachers towards the relationship between subject content knowledge and English, issues of teaching methodology, curriculum integration from primary to secondary English relevant to EMI needs, the quality of student intake, the degree of parental support, the English culture of a school and so on. It was only through the concerted efforts of all stakeholders that the aim of helping students to learn English and learn effectively in English could be achieved.

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