

Chinese Reading and Writing Performance of Non-Chinese Speaking Students

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Chinese learning for non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students is an area of concern in language education. In recent years, the Government has strengthened the support for Chinese learning of NCS students through, among others, implementation of the “Chinese Language Curriculum Second Language Learning Framework” (“Learning Framework”) in primary and secondary schools and provision of an additional funding ranging from \$800,000 to \$1,500,000 per year for primary and secondary schools admitting 10 or more NCS students to support NCS students’ learning of Chinese and create an inclusive learning environment in schools.

To understand the performance of NCS students in Chinese learning, the Education Bureau has, since the 2013/14 school year, commissioned the University of Hong Kong to analyse the overall learning performance of NCS students in Chinese reading and writing. Data has been collected from all local primary and secondary schools admitting 10 or more NCS students by proportionate sampling. It is noted that with the Government’s enhanced support and promotion, there has been a continuous increase in the number of public sector schools admitting NCS students over the past few years. The number of primary and secondary schools covered in the above analysis has also increased from 151 in the 2013/14 school year to 228 in the 2017/18 school year. Samples were taken from each school according to the number of NCS students admitted, and around 2 000 to 4 000 samples were obtained each year. The summary analysis of the past five school years is encouraging, indicating a gradual improvement in the NCS students’ overall performance in Chinese reading and writing.

Junior primary students showing improvement in reading and writing

As observed, NCS students at junior primary levels have laid a solid foundation of language learning in recent years. Not only could they read, but they could also write Chinese words commonly used in daily life, including school life and family life. In terms of basic language proficiency, the disparity between NCS students and their Chinese-speaking counterparts at junior primary levels has been gradually narrowed in the 2017/18 school year. Compared with the 2013/14 school year, Primary 3 students showed improvement in both reading and writing. Students with relatively higher ability were able to comment on the passages they read and the characters

portrayed, and express their ideas in paragraphs with the use of conjunctions. These are the language abilities required before students enter the next learning stage. Primary 4 and 5 students have also demonstrated good progress in reading.

The data reveals that it is of great importance to facilitate the transition of NCS students from Primary 3 to Primary 4 if their language proficiency is to be further enhanced. In this regard, the University of Hong Kong was commissioned by the Education Bureau last year to collaborate with primary schools in developing systematic learning and teaching materials with reference to Levels 2 and 3 of the “Learning Framework” so as to help students overcome their reading and writing difficulties.

At the secondary levels, with the enhanced support provided by schools, students’ overall performance in reading was pleasing. Yet, their improvement was not as remarkable as that at the primary levels. Among secondary students, the improvement of those at junior levels was more notable and the percentage of the total marks they scored has been on the rise in recent years. Junior secondary students also showed improvement in writing. Some of the students with higher ability could narrate and describe events in greater detail and their writings were coherent and organised. Some senior secondary students with relatively higher ability could fully express their feelings and give careful thought to the organisation of their writings although they were considerably less proficient than their Chinese-speaking counterparts of the same grade.

Parents’ role in providing a conducive Chinese language learning environment

According to our analysis of the samples collected over the past five school years, NCS students (including those studying in schools with a greater intake of NCS students) have made gradual improvement in reading and writing since the 2013/14 school year through their hard work and with the support from the Government and their schools. It is apparent that as long as appropriate support is provided, NCS students are also able to master Chinese and overcome the difficulties in learning Chinese as a second language.

Our observation also affirms the importance of parental support in further enhancing NCS students’ learning performance in Chinese, in addition to close cooperation among the Government, schools and teachers. Parents who do not speak Chinese can also play a facilitating role by consciously encouraging their children to learn

Chinese. They may also arrange their children to study in a kindergarten or a school that provides an immersed Chinese language environment as early as possible so that their children will be better motivated to learn Chinese.

Motivation to learn, conducive language environment, effective learning strategies, time invested and determination are all essential elements of effective language learning. We are keen to see all stakeholders, with concerted efforts, working hand in hand to help NCS students learn Chinese and achieve the best results.

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