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AN INVESTIGATION OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF VARIOUS
LANGUAGE MODES OF PRESENTATION, SPOKEN AND WRITTEN,
IN FORM III IN HONG KONG ANGLO-CHINESE SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

This research was conducted jointly by the Educational Research Establishment of the Education Department, and the Department of Education, University of Hong Kong. It was designed to investigate the performance and opinions of Form III students in Anglo-Chinese schools in relation to various oral and written modes of instruction.

Three modes of oral (videotaped) presentation were used in the Video Study : English, Cantonese and Bilingual; and five modes of print presentation in the Print Study : two monolingual texts, English and Chinese; two bilingual texts, English with Chinese gloss and Chinese with English gloss; and a duolingual presentation consisting of both monolingual texts. Questions were prepared in English and Chinese.

The research into opinions elicited from students the relative difficulty they experienced in answering questions asked in English and Chinese; and their preferences if they had been given a choice regarding mode of presentation.

The content of all presentations and of the English and Chinese questions was identical. The topic was bean curd, its nutritional value, attitudes towards it in the East and West, and modern and traditional methods of manufacture.

A total of 692 students participated in the Video Study and 604 in the Print Study. Schools were selected to provide a broad range of academic ability at Form III level.

All students sat graded English and Chinese language proficiency tests, so that the effects of language proficiency on test performance and opinion could be assessed.

Overall the major findings of the Video and Print Studies were consistent with each other, and are as follows:

1. There is a substantial proportion (30-40%) of the sample who, with high language proficiency scores, demonstrated in this study a high level of performance in both the English and Chinese versions of the experimental test.
2. There is a substantial proportion (again 30-40%) of the sample who, with low English proficiency scores, were incapable of performing effectively through the medium of English. Furthermore, in terms of preferences expressed in this study, these subjects did not want bilingual education. They wished to study through the oral medium of Cantonese and the written medium of Chinese. In these modes they demonstrated that they could perform effectively.
3. There remains a third group of the sample, in the middle of the English language proficiency range, whose performance was less easy to categorize. Their performance was significantly worse than that of the 'high' group when English was the medium, but they demonstrated some capacity to function through this medium, in contrast to the 'low' proficiency group.
4. Subjects in this study overwhelmingly rejected English as a monolingual mode of oral or written instruction. Only a tiny minority (2-3%) opted for this mode in the Video and Print Studies. Almost half of the subjects indicated a preference for monolingual Cantonese oral presentation, and a third for monolingual Chinese print presentation. The remaining subjects preferred bilingual modes of spoken or written instruction.