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STUDIES ON THE MODES OF LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION
AT JUNIOR SECONDARY LEVELS
IN ANGLO-CHINESE SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

THE STUDY

1. The study was conducted in 15 Anglo-Chinese secondary schools involving 7500 students in Form 1 to Form 3. The survey period lasted for two years. During these two years, tests were administered to the students to measure their proficiency in English and Chinese

- (i) at the beginning of the study,
- (ii) at the end of the first year,
- (iii) at the end of the second year;

and to measure their attainments in Mathematics, Science and History (papers in 3 versions, namely, Chinese, English and bilingual)

- (i) at the end of the first year,
- (ii) at the end of the second year.

Questionnaires were administered at the end of each school year asking students about each of the four subjects: English, Mathematics, Science, and History, regarding

- (i) what language mode their teachers used,
- (ii) whether they understood their teachers' oral instruction,
- (iii) whether they wanted their teachers to speak more Cantonese, and
- (iv) whether they had difficulties with their textbooks.

The teachers were asked to fill in questionnaires about the language modes they used for each class and for each subject they taught.

FINDINGS

2. After all the data had been collected and analysed, the following were the important findings obtained:

- (i) In recent years, it was evident that teachers were using more spoken Cantonese in class.
- (ii) An increasing amount of spoken Cantonese was used in the four subjects in the following order :
 - (a) English (least Cantonese spoken)
 - (b) History
 - (c) Science
 - (d) Mathematics (most Cantonese spoken)
- (iii) Students with a low proficiency in English reported that they understood less than half of their teachers' oral instruction in class, and they wished their teachers to speak more Cantonese. They also had difficulties with their textbooks.
- (iv) An English proficiency scale of 14 grades (Grade 1 = the highest grade; Grade 14 = the lowest grade) was constructed for this study. It was found that teachers seldom used exclusively English to teach students whose English proficiency was grade 5 or below.
- (v) Test papers of Mathematics, Science and History in English version, Chinese version and bilingual version were administered to students in Form 2 and Form 3. Students with high English proficiency performed equally well in the English version and in the bilingual version but not so well in the Chinese version. Students with low English proficiency had poorer results, and the lowest results were with the English version. For these students, there was no significant difference between the results of the Chinese version and the bilingual version.
- (vi) Students from English primary schools were among the best in English in the sample. When these students were compared with a group of students with comparable general ability, they performed better in English and slightly better in History. They performed worse in Chinese and Science in Form 1; but, they were able to catch up by the end of Form 3. In Mathematics, there was no difference. It was also found that they were able to handle a greater amount of English in class at each form level as the teaching medium and they had comparatively less difficulties with textbooks in English.