

**A Study on  
The Relation Between  
Initial Language Proficiency at S1 Level  
and Subsequent HKCEE Performance  
for Medium-of-Instruction Grouping**

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## **Abstract**

### **The Study**

The study was carried out in response to Education Commission Report No.4. The objectives are, first, to identify the cut-off points of English and Chinese in percentile terms by which Secondary 1 entrants can be grouped into English-medium classes or Chinese-medium classes and second, to find out the effect of various modes of language medium on students' rate of success in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE).

Using a back-tracking approach, this ex-post facto study traces a cohort of Secondary 5 students sitting the 1990 HKCEE, relating their initial P.6 language proficiency in 1985 to their HKCEE performance. The students' primary schools were tracked down and their internal assessment results in the subjects of English and Chinese required for the purpose of Secondary School Places Allocation (SSPA) were retrieved. These results, scaled by the Academic Aptitude Test (AAT) and expressed in percentiles, together with a criterion of either 8 points and above, or 14 points and above in HKCEE, were used to categorize the students for analyzing their rate of success in HKCEE. The rate of success is defined as the number of successful students in HKCEE at or above a specified SSPA language percentile, over the initial total number of S1 entrants who were at or above the specified SSPA language percentile. In addition to this "hit and miss" method, the ANCOVA approach was also attempted.

There were four groups of students in the study: the target group of 676 from 14 Anglo-Chinese schools that used English as the sole medium of instruction, 390 from 13 Chinese Middle schools using Chinese as the sole medium of instruction, 4983 from 336 Anglo-Chinese schools where English is not the sole medium of instruction, and 247 from 25 Chinese Middle schools where Chinese is not the sole medium of instruction.

### **The Findings**

1. There is a significant correlation between SSPA scaled scores in the two languages and the students' results in HKCEE, with respect to both language-loaded subjects (coefficients ranging from 0.39 to 0.50) and less language-loaded subjects (coefficients ranging from 0.36 to 0.43).

2. There is no significant difference in terms of the rates of success in HKCEE in the same group of students, between using initial English proficiency at a specified percentile as a criterion and using initial Chinese proficiency at same percentile.

3. For students in Anglo-Chinese schools that used English as the sole medium of instruction, the cut-off point at or above which they could have a higher rate of success in the HKCEE is identified to be the 60th percentile in English and 60th percentile in Chinese. Of this group, 54.2% of the students would be expected to succeed, and 45.8% would fail to get 14 or more points in HKCEE. By applying this cut-off point to the S1 student population over the past three years (1988/89 - 1990/91\_, it was estimated that, if 32% of S1 entrants could be placed in the sole English-medium schools, slightly more than half of them would achieve 14 or more points in HKCEE results.

4. In the Hong Kong bilingual context, students in the same the type of schools (Anglo-Chinese or Chinese Middle) but taught solely through one language (either English or Chinese) have a higher rate of success in HKCE than their counterparts in the same type of schools but taught through a mixed code of English and Chinese.

### **Recommendation**

For the sake of parity of treatment for both languages and taking cross-lingual transfer into consideration, it is proposed that the language cut-off point for Secondary 1 entrants be set at the 60th percentile for both English and Chinese. One the other hand, to do justice to the students misclassified initially, it is recommended that schools be given discretion to transfer these students, should they give satisfactory performance in later years, to the English-medium classes within the same school during their course of secondary schooling.