



Challenges of Chinese Language Education in Multi-lingual Societies: Hong Kong and Singapore

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Abstract

This paper aims to study the current challenges of Chinese language education in the multilingual societies of Hong Kong and Singapore through policy documents. After the handover of Hong Kong to China in 1997, the role of *Putonghua* is far more important than before due to political and economic reasons. However, the medium of instruction for the Chinese Language subject in Hong Kong has long been Cantonese since the British colony days. A change in the medium of instruction from mother-tongue Cantonese to *Putonghua* is a shift from L1 to L2. This paper will discuss the feasibility of this long term policy of Hong Kong Education Bureau with reference to Singapore's experience. Currently, Singapore faces the problem of declining standard of reading and writing in *Huayu* (*Putonghua* in China) and this paper will investigate the reason for that and suggest possible remedies..

Keywords: Chinese language education, Hong Kong, Singapore, Multi-lingual societies, L2 learning

1. Hong Kong and Singapore as multilingual societies

Being the ex-colonies of British, Hong Kong and Singapore share very similar historical and social background but with significant variation in Chinese education. Hong Kong was a colony of the United Kingdom from 1842 until the handover of its sovereignty back to the People's Republic of China in 1997 and was then renamed Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. Beginning as a trading port in the 19th century, Hong Kong has developed into a leading financial centre in Asia. In 1963, Singapore left British and merged with Malaya, Sabah and Sarawak to form Malaysia and less than two years after that it became an independent republic on 9 August 1965. Under this historical association with Britain, both Hong Kong and Singapore share a lot of similarities in terms of social context: (1) multi-lingual societies with a high population of Chinese and some minorities; (2) bi-lingual or multi-lingual language education is implemented in schools; (3) both English and Chinese are adopted as official languages.

However, due to different political developments, the term "Chinese" bears different meanings in these two regions. In Hong Kong, the general term "Chinese" means: (1) Cantonese and *Putonghua*; (2) classical Chinese and modern standard written Chinese; (3) traditional and simplified characters. In the schools, the subjects *Putonghua* and Chinese Language are put under the Chinese Language Education Key Learning Area. The subject *Putonghua* positioned as L2 only deals with listening and speaking of *Putonghua* but the subject Chinese Language positioned as L1 offers listening and speaking skills in Cantonese and reading and writing skills in modern standard Chinese (written form of *Putonghua*) to students. In contrast, Singapore government has officially adopted the *Putonghua* of China as "Chinese" (*Huayu* or *Huawen*) in Singapore.

1.1 Language context and Chinese Language Education in Hong Kong

In Hong Kong, English is the main official language since the coming of British rule in 1842. After the handover in 1997, Hong Kong is now a special administrative region under the “one country, two system” arrangement. According to this system, Hong Kong is able to have autonomy in all matters other than foreign affairs and defense. With 98% of its population in the Chinese ethnic group, Chinese has been the co-official language besides English since the declaration of the Official Languages Ordinance of 1974. The term “Chinese” was not defined in the Ordinance. That might be a political decision as Hong Kong was still under the rule of British and China was undergoing “cultural revolution” at that time. A strict definition of “Chinese” might lead to political problems. In addition, as a British colony, English was the supreme language in the government and commercial sectors, very few people were concerned about the definition of “Chinese” in Hong Kong at that time. Although English maintains its supreme language in Hong Kong even after 1997, there is still “no social or cultural role for English among the Hong Kong Chinese.” (Johnson, 1994: p.182). It is very strange to hear the Chinese people of Hong Kong speak English among themselves but if there is an English speaking person in the group they are willing to communicate in English.

The new 3-3-4 education system will be implemented at Secondary 4 in September 2009. Chinese Language, English Language, Mathematics and Liberal Studies are four core subjects for all local secondary schools in Hong Kong. By then, students can enjoy free education from primary 1 to secondary 6. University education will also be changed from three years to four years for most undergraduate degree programmes in 2012. Regarding the medium of instruction (MoI) in Hong Kong, Cantonese is commonly used in most primary schools even though there are a few primary schools using *Putonghua* or English as MoI. In the secondary sector, currently only 114 secondary schools are permitted to use English as MoI although there are more than four hundred secondary schools in Hong Kong. However, in March 2008, the Secretary of the Education Bureau announced the review of the MoI policy and tried to set guidelines for schools to choose their own MoI according to the need and ability of their students.

The MoI for the Chinese Language subject has also been a hotly debated topic in Hong Kong since 1997. Facing the growing political and economic importance of *Putonghua* and low birth rate, many primary schools have already used *Putonghua* as MoI in the Chinese Language subject as a measure to attract students to keep the schools alive. In October 2007, when research findings showed that the use of *Putonghua* to learn Chinese could develop better writing skills, the Standing Committee on Language Education Research (SCOLAR) of Hong Kong allocated a budget of HK\$200 million to encourage schools to develop *Putonghua* as MoI for the Chinese Language subject. The relationship between the Chinese Language subject and *Putonghua* in the school curriculum will definitely be a debated language education issue in the coming years. It is obvious that English is considered a L2 in Hong Kong and that raises the question on the status of *Putonghua*. Auyang (1998) argues that *Putonghua* should be positioned between L1 and L2 as Chinese people in Hong Kong all read and write Modern Standard Chinese (written mode of *Putonghua*) and speak Cantonese (a dialect).

In terms of pedagogy, teachers are trained to apply L1 methods in teaching the Chinese Language subject even though its written form is *Putonghua*. However, for the *Putonghua* subject that focuses only on listening and speaking, most teachers are trained to apply L2 teaching strategies in their teaching (Ho 2005). In the long run, if the *Putonghua* subject is merged with the Chinese Language subject, the role of the latter had to be adjusted to L2 accordingly. If this is the trend, then what should Chinese Language teachers do during this transitional period? The teaching of *Putonghua* and the teaching of Chinese Language in *Putonghua* are two independent but related topics. The former is a training of L2 listening and speaking skills while the latter is really an academic subject on Chinese. Ho (2002) comments that due to the rich linguistic experience in *Putonghua*, students learning Chinese in *Putonghua* will enhance their *Putonghua* competency, particularly listening competency. However, if you apply *Putonghua* as MoI to school subjects other than the Chinese Language, the *Putonghua* standard in students can also be improved. As the nature of the two subjects, Chinese Language and *Putonghua* is different, teachers of these two subjects need to have two different sets of academic knowledge and professional skills. Moreover, a qualified *Putonghua* teacher may not be qualified to teach Chinese in Hong Kong. According to the *Action Plan to raise Language Standards in Hong Kong* published by the SCOLAR in 2003, all new teachers of Chinese subject must have a Bachelor of Education (BEd) degree with a major in Chinese or a Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree plus a Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) all majoring in Chinese or equivalent. Those who want to teach the Chinese Language subject in *Putonghua* must pass the proficiency test on “classroom language usage” in the *Putonghua* Language Proficiency Assessment Test or achieve “class two level two” in the State *Putonghua* Proficiency Test.

1.2 Language context and Chinese Language Education in Singapore

With a population of 4.48 million in 2006, Singapore is formed by three major ethnic groups: Chinese (75.2%), Malay (13.6%), Indian (8.8%) (Department of Statistics, Singapore 2007). However, the above figures do not reflect the complexity of linguistic situation in Singapore as the Chinese, Malays and Indians speak a variety of languages or dialects. English is used for inter-ethnic communication. Ho and Wong (2004, 21) suggest that Singapore’s language

policy may be described as one of “pragmatic multilingualism” as there are four official languages in Singapore: English, Malay, Mandarin (*Huayu* or *Putonghua*) and Tamil. English is recognized as the country's master language of administration because of political, economic, legal and historical reasons. The use of English became widespread in Singapore after it was implemented as a key MoI for major content subjects in the current unified educational system. Major public signs and government publications are in English with some translated versions in other official languages. The functions of the three other official languages are mainly for communication within ethnical communities and transmission of ethnical cultures. All the four official languages are taught in the schools. Ho and Wong (2004) claim that as the ethnic “mother tongues” are used to teach moral education in primary schools, bilingual education in Singapore conforms to the classic model.

The early Chinese migrants in Singapore were mainly from the southern China provinces and most of them could only communicate amongst themselves via their own dialects such as Hokkien, Teochew, Cantonese, Hakka and Hainanese. In order to facilitate communication within the Chinese group, the Singapore government launched the “Speak Mandarin Campaign” in 1979. The campaign encourages Chinese to speak Mandarin instead of Chinese dialects which brings a drastic language shift in the Chinese group. From 1979 to 1989, the aim of the campaign was to make Mandarin a lingua franca among Chinese but after 1989, its nature changed from a functional approach to a cultural transmission approach. With reference to Leow's statistical report, the Chinese families which mainly speak dialects at home dropped from 81.4% in 1980 to 50.6% in 1990 and then to 30.7% in 2000 (Department of Statistics, Singapore 1993; Leow 2001). This rapid and sharp decrease of dialect-speaking Chinese family situation is also accompanied by a drastic increase of Mandarin-speaking Chinese family. The ratio of Mandarin-speaking Chinese family increases from the 10.2% in 1980 to 29.8% in 1990 and then to 45.1% in 2000 (Department of Statistics, Singapore 1993; Leow 2001). This is clear that the trend of deserting dialects for Mandarin has already been established. Mandarin has become the lingua franca of Chinese ethnic group in Singapore. The term “*Huayu*” in Singapore carries similar meaning of “*Hanyu*” which is also known as *Putonghua* or Mandarin. *Putonghua* is the national language in China which is written in simplified Chinese characters and the Chinese phonetic transcription called *Hanyu pinyin*.

Pakir (2004, 286) summarizes Singapore's history of education into three stages: (1) survival-driven education (1965-78); (2) efficiency-driven education system (1979-91); (3) ability-driven education system (1992 to date). She also points out that the aim of current education system is to “nurture talent and develop individual potential to the fullest” as well as to “include flexibility to allow children of different abilities the opportunity to develop themselves fully” (Pakir 2004, 286). Yip and Sim (1990) claim that there are three foci which have remained constant in the Singapore education system: (1) to provide the best form of education to her people; (2) to ensure that education served the purpose of national cohesion; (3) to ensure that schooling population is given the opportunity to become bilingual in English and a mother tongue. Therefore “language in education beliefs and practices are often taken for granted in a schooling system that emphasizes a national bilingual policy” (Pakar 2004).

Since 1987, Singapore has offered an unified national education by using English as key medium of instruction (EMI). Three “mother tongues” are also available in the regular curriculum. However, there are a small number of Special Assistance Programme (SAP) schools offering Chinese at higher level. According to the census records in year 2000, distribution of most frequently spoken family languages (aged 5 years and over) is: English (23%), Mandarin (35%), Chinese dialects (23.8%), Malay (14.1%), Tamil (3.2%), others (0.9%). Leow (2001) highlights the following language phenomenon in Singapore: (1) the proportion literate in two or more languages increased from 45% in 1990 to 56% in 2000; (2) a high proportion of 71% was literate in English in 2000, compared with 63% in 1990; (3) English as family language increased from 19% in 1990 to 23% in 2000; (4) more Chinese residents spoke Mandarin instead of dialects at home. This is the outcome of the bilingual language education in the schools and government's encouragement to speak Mandarin in the Chinese community.

The leading position of Chinese language in the Chinese community was challenged by English language recently. Starting from 1965, English has been the master and dominant language in Singapore and therefore more and more Chinese families speak English at home. The figure increases from 7.9% in 1980 to 19.2% in 1990 and then to 23.9% in 2000 (Department of Statistics, Singapore 1993; Leow 2001). However a recent survey conducted by the Ministry of Education finds that the population ratio of primary one Chinese children who speak Chinese at home increases from 25.9% in 1980 to 67.9% in 1990 but drops to 45.4% in 2000 and then further drops to 43.6% in 2004 (Ministry of Education, Singapore 2004b). On the other hand, the population ratio of primary one Chinese children who speak English at home increases steadily from 9.3% in 1980 to 26.3% in 1990, then to 40.3% in 2000 and even reaches 47.3% in 2004 (Ministry of Education, Singapore 2004), a figure higher than Chinese. In fact, English has become a dominant language in the age group of primary one Chinese children. Moreover, according to Leow's report, 35.8% of the age group 5-14 Chinese children speak English at home although only 21.5% of the age group 15-24 Chinese youth speak English at home (Ministry of Education, Singapore 2004b). If the trend continues, English will become the acquired “mother tongue” of Singaporean Chinese and Chinese will only be a foreign language learned in the classroom in 10 to 20 years' time. The byproduct of this phenomenon is the declining of Chinese standard in young Singaporean

Chinese. Is the high status of English the only factor for declining Chinese standard? Are there any other learning and teaching factors that lead to the fall of Chinese standard even set at L2 level?

2. Challenges of Chinese Language Education in Hong Kong: integration of *Putonghua* to Chinese Language

2.1 *The position of Putonghua in the curriculum*

As Hong Kong is an international city, in order to facilitate communication with global societies and Mainland people, a “biliterate trilingual” language education policy was first proposed in the *Education Commission Report* (1996) and announced by the Chief Executive Tung Chee Hwa in the first policy address in October 1997. “Biliterate trilingual” refers to two written languages (Modern Standard Chinese and English) and three spoken languages (Cantonese, *Putonghua* and English). School graduates are expected to have biliterate trilingual proficiency. Although *Putonghua* has been an independent subject since 1940s, it is not a major language subject in Hong Kong.

From 1980s, there was a high demand for *Putonghua* from the workforce and both employers and employees anticipated to have publicly recognized certificates on the standard of *Putonghua* for job placement. The Hong Kong Examination Authority (now The Hong Kong Examination and Assessment Authority) implemented the first *Putonghua Proficiency Test* in 1988 followed by the *Advanced Putonghua Proficiency Test*. These two standard-referencing public examinations were designed for all sectors and people whose L1 is Cantonese. The main testing areas were listening and speaking skills as well as the Chinese phonetic transcription. In the 1990s, as Hong Kong had to face the handover of sovereignty in 1997 and frequent trade activities with China, more and more people learned *Putonghua*. The current hotly debated issue of using *Putonghua* to teach Chinese was also raised in that period. The Hong Kong government has been very active in promoting *Putonghua* in schools and communities since then. In 1993, the Language Fund was established with the aim to raise the standard of Chinese (including *Putonghua*) and English of the people in Hong Kong. This fund has supported a series of projects related to the teaching, learning and promotion of *Putonghua*. In 1996, the *Education Commission No.6 – Enhancing Language Proficiency: a Comprehensive Strategy* was published by Education Commission. In the report, it is suggested that: (1) *Putonghua* should be offered as a core subject in primary and secondary schools in 1998; (2) *Putonghua* should be an independent subject in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination in 2000; (3) all Chinese Language teachers should be trained to be able to teach *Putonghua* as well in the long term. The government has endorsed the suggestion and *Putonghua* has become a core subject in primary and secondary school level since then. The *Syllabus for Putonghua (Primary 1 to 6) 1997* and *Syllabus for Putonghua (Secondary 1 to 5) 1997* state clearly that the main aim of the subject is to develop the listening and speaking competency of *Putonghua* in students while the development of their competency on reading aloud and transcription, enrichment of linguistic and cultural knowledge are only complimentary aims (Curriculum Development Council 1997a, Curriculum Development Council 1997b). The role of *Putonghua* in the Chinese language education learning area is just a proficiency-based subject in supplement to the Chinese Language subject. Regarding the qualification of the *Putonghua* teacher, *The Education Commission No.6 – Enhancing Language Proficiency: a Comprehensive Strategy* introduced the requirements on *Putonghua* teachers and received support from the Advisory Committee on Teacher Education and Qualification (Education Commission 1996). A consultancy group was established to conduct research into the standards of *Putonghua* for teachers. According to the recommendation of the group, the Education and Manpower Bureau co-organized the first Language Proficiency Assessment Test for Teachers (*Putonghua*) in March 2001. This test still continues to date. There are altogether four papers in the test comprising of (1) listening and transcription; (2) phonetic skills; (3) oral competency; (4) classroom language and usage. The passing standard is set at level three (level one is the lowest and level five is the highest).

Since 1998, as students in Hong Kong are required to learn *Putonghua* from primary 1 to secondary 3, Ho (2005) believes that after nine-year’s training of *Putonghua*, students should have acquired the competency for further study and work in the society. I strongly support his point. In 1997, Ho predicted that after 2010 the Chinese Language subject in Hong Kong would be taught in *Putonghua* and the *Putonghua* subject would finally merge to the Chinese Language subject (Ho 1997). According to the new secondary school curriculum, secondary 3 students will be required to sit for a public examination on *Putonghua* proficiency by 2012 and the *Putonghua* subject will be merged to the Chinese Language subject as elective modules.

2.2 *The challenges and the ways forward*

The key challenge of *Putonghua* education in Hong Kong is its unresolved relation with the Chinese Language. It seems that the Chinese Language subject under the 2009 new senior secondary curriculum, to some extent, may resolve the problem. The *Putonghua* will be an independent subject from primary 1 to secondary 3 and then merged to the Chinese Language subject as elective modules (Curriculum Development Council & The Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority 2007). That means that schools have the choice to select Cantonese or *Putonghua* as their MoI for the Chinese Language subject.

However, since the policy documents have already announced that the Chinese Language subject will be taught in

Putonghua in future, some pro-active schools have already started to make *Putonghua* as MoI for the Chinese Language subject. The change is either for the purpose of image-building or to enhance the learning outcome in students. Moreover, as supported by HK\$200 million funding from the SCOLAR, more and more schools will use *Putonghua* as MoI in the Chinese Language subject. The policy and funding support will eventually facilitate the merging of the two subjects to form a new Chinese Language subject.

This new Chinese subject in Hong Kong will be quite similar to the Chinese courses which are positioned as L2 in Singapore. The Chinese courses like “Chinese”, “Basic Chinese” and “Special Chinese” are taught in L1 methods instead of L2 pedagogies. Eventually, the overall Chinese standard of Singaporean Chinese is far behind other Chinese speaking regions like China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. Scholars in Singapore are now exploring L2 pedagogies such as the feasibility of using English (L1) as a supplementary tool to help students learn Chinese (L2), particularly those who come from English-speaking home. Singapore’s experience is a good reference to Hong Kong as a shift from L1 to L2 position of the Chinese Language subject, leading to adjustment in teachers’ training, pedagogy and learning and teaching materials. This adjustment may take some time. To make the story more complicated is the new L2 Chinese syllabus developed in response to the request from non-Chinese ethnic groups in 2008 (Curriculum Development Council 2008). In this syllabus, non-Chinese ethnic groups are expected to achieve the L1 standard of Chinese eventually. Should these non-Chinese ethnic groups learn Cantonese or *Putonghua*? Can they also learn English, *Putonghua* and Cantonese in addition to their ethnic mother-tongues?

Chew (2007) predicts that Hong Kong will be forced to revise the “biliterate trilingual” language education policy due to the pressure of globalization and the fact that only very few people can really be “biliterate trilingual” according to Singapore’s experience. However, since Hong Kong students have already got used to learning Chinese via Cantonese, one more spoken language with the same written form may not be too difficult for them. Therefore, the real challenge for Hong Kong will be on the promotion of *Putonghua* as L2 in schools and communities and the review of the MoI policy for secondary schools.

In Hong Kong, *Putonghua* is taught as a spoken language in L2 mode. The L2 methods like grammar-translation method, direct method, audio-lingual method and communicative approach are commonly used by *Putonghua* teachers in Hong Kong (Guo 2005). Currently academics in Hong Kong are debating on the negative effect of CMI schools on the standard of English of secondary school students. The story will repeat itself on the standard of Chinese again for over emphasis on the role of *Putonghua* on the Chinese Language subject in Hong Kong. As *Putonghua* is just a L2 in Hong Kong, some frontline teachers who are required to teach the Chinese Language subject in *Putonghua* confirm that they have to sacrifice their class time to teach *Putonghua* pronunciation instead of the subject knowledge of Chinese Language. The nine-year *Putonghua* education plus twelve-year Chinese Language education in the new curriculum may be able to produce school graduates who are bilingual in Cantonese and *Putonghua*. Can students learn the Chinese Language subject well in *Putonghua*? Why is the next generation discouraged from learning the Chinese Language in Cantonese, their mother tongue? Should we not let regional culture and dialects co-exist with the common language and culture? In Hong Kong, *Putonghua* is learned as a spoken language only since people have already acquired basic language proficiency of Chinese in Cantonese. What the people of Hong Kong need is the phonetic transcription of *Putonghua* and skills in converting Cantonese into *Putonghua*.

3. Challenges of Chinese Language Education in Singapore: declining Chinese standard

3.1 The position of Chinese courses in the school curriculum

There are three Primary and five Secondary Chinese courses listed in Table 1 and Table 2. The primary Chinese courses aim to guide students to develop good human quality, language competency (listening, speaking, reading and writing) and common ability (Curriculum and Planning Division 2006a). The curriculum is structured as follows: core module (70-80%) and bridging modules or school-based modules or enrichment modules (20-30%).

At secondary level, the two main aims of Chinese language education at secondary level are: (1) to develop students’ language competency through the learning of listening, speaking, reading and writing skills of Chinese language; (2) to transmit Chinese culture and cultivate traditional values to students through the learning of Chinese language (Curriculum and Planning Division 2002).

The “Higher Chinese”, “Chinese”, “Basic Chinese” and “Chinese B” are listed in the 2002 Chinese Language Syllabus at secondary level (Curriculum and Planning Division 2002). However, the “Chinese Special” that was launched in 2004 was revised to be a L3 programme for students whose mother tongue is not Chinese in 2006 (Curriculum and Planning Division 2006b). The “Higher Chinese” course is offered to students with very good results in Chinese, English and Mathematics in their primary education. It adopts an integrated approach to develop the students’ listening, speaking, reading and writing competency with priority given to reading and writing. The “Chinese” course is offered to students with average performance. It also adopts an integrated approach to develop the students’ four language skills and priority is also given to reading and writing. The “Chinese B” course is offered to secondary 3 to secondary 4/5

students with poor performance in the Chinese course with priority on developing the students' listening, speaking and reading skills. In addition to the above four courses, a less demanding course, the "Basic Chinese" is offered to students of the technical stream. All the above Chinese courses are positioned at L2 in terms of language acquisition in Singapore's special multilingual context.

3.2 The challenges and the ways forward

The overall Chinese standard of Singaporean Chinese is far behind other Chinese speaking regions like China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. Currently, the position of Chinese in Singapore is still controversial as frontline teachers have different interpretation on the position of the "Higher Chinese" course. In 1992, in order to raise the standard of Chinese in Chinese students, the Singapore Ministry of Education changed the course titles of "Chinese as second language" to "Chinese" and "Chinese as first Language" to "Higher Chinese" so as to release the uneasy feeling in parents on the term "second language". However, the change of course titles did not change the mindset of frontline teachers since some or most of them still take the "Higher Chinese" as L1. They teach the "Higher Chinese" via L1 pedagogy although the Chinese subjects should only be regarded as L2 in terms of curriculum design in the education system in Singapore. Hence, the inappropriate conception of Chinese courses and misuse of L1 pedagogies lead to the current poor reading and writing standard of Chinese amongst young Singaporean Chinese.

In western countries, over the last several decades, scholars such as Bloomfield (1942), Krashen (1982), Leech and Svartvik (1994), Ellis (1985, 1997, 1999), Prabhu (1987), Cui (1993), Lantolf (2000), Kumaravadivelu (2003), Xing (2006) have generated grammar-translation, audio-lingual, communicative, functional-notional, proficiency and layering- stratification approaches on learning and teaching Chinese as foreign language (CFL). The introduction of pedagogical grammar of Chinese (PGC) to the communicative approach makes it the most popular method on CFL in recent years (Little 1994). Regarding the content of PGC, Xing (2006, 30) proposes:

The scope of PGC includes, but not be limited to, the rules teaching and learning the five major areas: pronunciation, characters and words, sentences, discourse- pragmatic and culture. The first two areas are set for foundational skills; without them, students cannot speak, understand, read or write. The last three areas are instrumental for students to be successful in communicating with the language.

From the perspective of instructors, Xing further suggests that CFL teachers have to integrate the following eight learning factors of PGC well in curriculum design: sequencing factor, autonomy and simplification factor, accumulation factor, discourse and pragmatic factor, cultural factor, psychological factor, motivational factor and learning environment factor (Xing 2006, 61-63). Xing (2006) has developed a layering-stratification approach towards teaching CFL to students from kindergarten to college in the United States based on the above learning factors of PGC. However, Xing's eight learning factors can be re-grouped into five factors according to their nature in Table 3.

The pedagogical rationales of "sequencing and accumulation" are principles for curriculum design while "autonomy and simplification" is talking about instructors' training on PGC. The factors "discourse and pragmatic" and "cultural elements" are strategies of teaching and learning on PGC. The different psychological and motivational status of learners reflects the importance of the quality of the learner on designing teaching strategies and learning materials.

Last but not least, language development is most effective in authentic context. As Xing's approach is developed from the perspective of instructors, how about research trends on the learners' side? To western learners, Chinese is considered to be: (1) a logographic script, where each character represents a word or morpheme (Everson 2002); (2) learned effectively through strategies like memorizing and continually practicing the writing of characters (Ke 1998). Everson (2002) has summarized some theoretical developments in the process of learning to read in CFL by Ke (1998), Lin (2000), Shen (2000), Mori and Nagy (1999), and proposed to expand the CFL research in three areas: (1) nature of processing words and text in orthographies qualitatively different from alphabetic systems; (2) nature of Chinese orthography and how it is learned; (3) effects of learners' belief system on learning outcome. Everson has set the path for research into reading but how about other areas like listening, speaking and writing? There is still a lot of room for development in the western world on CFL.

The L2 Chinese for Chinese students in Singapore is different from the CFL for non-Chinese students in western countries. Can Xing's approach and Everson's research frameworks validate the learning and teaching of L2/L3 Chinese in primary and secondary schools of Singapore? Singapore's current stage of catering for diversity in Chinese language education creates a very good opportunity for academics to work with schools to research into the above questions. The five areas listed in Table 5: curriculum design, quality of instructor, teaching and learning strategy, quality of learner and learning context, can be taken into consideration as Singapore faces the challenge of increasing number of English-speaking primary 1 Chinese students. How to improve the Chinese proficiency of these students? Should English be used to assist them to learn Chinese? Do they have a suitable L2 or bilingual learning materials? It is indeed a great opportunity for Singapore policy makers, academics, schools and teachers!

4. Conclusion

Academics have interpreted the term “globalization” in different ways (Albrow 1996; Giddens, 1990) and Tsui and Tollsfsen (2007) summarizes the connotation of “globalization” as “global village” featured with interconnectivity, intensity, simultaneity, and instantaneity of knowledge generation, information transmission, and interaction. Tsui and Tollsfsen (2007, 1) also argue that “globalization is effected by two inseparable mediational tools, technology and English; proficiencies in these tools have been referred to as global literacy skills”. Policy makers in Hong Kong and Singapore not only know the importance of English globalization but also the growing role of *Putonghua* as another global language after English. English is L1 in Singapore but a foreign language in Hong Kong. Regarding Chinese, Cantonese is L1 while *Putonghua* is L2 in Hong Kong. In Singapore, Chinese is L2 for Singaporean Chinese. The different position marks the different standard of proficiency levels between Hong Kong and Singapore. The Chinese standard of Singaporean Chinese can be enhanced by specific L2 pedagogies based on her unique multilingual context. The merge of *Putonghua* to the Chinese Language subject in Hong Kong is in fact a shift from L1 to L2. Does Hong Kong really need this long term policy if the new Chinese Language curriculum can achieve the “biliterate trilingual” expectation? Otherwise, a lot of work on research into L2 pedagogies, teacher training, learning material development must be completed to face the challenge of a new L2 Chinese Language subject. This will not be a short process.

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Table 1. Chinese Language Course at Primary Level

Course Title	Target
Chinese	Students with average performance
Higher Chinese	Students with high performance
Basic Chinese	Students with poor performance (from primary 5 to 6)

Table 2. Chinese Course at Secondary Level

Programme	Course Title
Special	Higher Chinese
Express	Higher Chinese Chinese
Normal (Academic)	Chinese
Normal (Technical)	Basic Chinese
All programmes	Chinese B (S3 to S4/S5)
	Chinese Special

Table 3. Revised version of Xing's Learning Factors of PGC

Nature	Factor	Pedagogical Rationale
Curriculum design	Sequencing and Accumulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ From most to least frequently used. ◆ From simple to complicated.
Quality of instructor	Autonomy and simplification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Instructors must be proficient in PGC.
Teaching and learning strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Discourse and pragmatic ◆ Culture elements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Let students know when and why it is used in communication. ◆ Keys for successful communication.
Quality of learner	Learner diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Select methodologies with reference to psychological status and motivation of students.
Learning context	Learning environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Authentic experience can facilitate language development.