

Chapter 1

Chinese Language Education in Singapore: Retrospect and Prospect



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Abstract Over the past half a century or so, Chinese Language as a subject in Singapore's curriculum has gone through several rounds of review and revision in response to the changing needs of the nation as a cohesive whole with multiplicity in language and culture. Singapore's language policy is a response to geo-politics and economic developments of the new nation. The revisions were necessary for the curriculum to be congruent with the nation's developmental needs as well as the changing student learning capability. This chapter provides a background of the Chinese Language curriculum and the changes made in it over the years.

Singapore has a rather special cultural background: a multi-ethnic population and a multi-lingual social environment. Singapore's transition from a multi-lingual and multi-lingual social environment to a relatively single bilingual education system has its base of racial assimilation, cultural identity, ethnic harmony, and social stability. Lee Kuan Yew pointed out that bilingual education policy is one of the cornerstones of the founding of the country (Lee, 2012). The bilingual policy can be traced back to the full internal self-government in 1959. The study of a second language was made compulsory in primary schools in 1960 and subsequently in secondary schools in 1966 (Ang, 2008). In Goh Keng Swee's Report, a bilingual education policy with English as the "first language" and the mother tongue language (particularly that of the three main ethnic groups: Mandarin for the Chinese, Malay for the Malay community and Tamil for the Indians) as the "second language" was implemented (Goh, 1979). Thereafter, the policy was intermittently reviewed and modified at about six-year interval.

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1.1 Bilingual Education Policy and Major Initiatives

Regarding the review, current situation and prospects of Chinese language education under the bilingual education policy, many scholars have successively discussed in different periods. This article first reviews the review reports and related research on the bilingual education policy and Chinese language education in the last century, which is followed by the review of bilingual policy and its impact on Chinese language education in the twenty-first century.

On the language policy in the multiethnic Singapore, Guo (2006) provides a comprehensive case study in his article *Mother Tongue Maintenance in a Multilingual Cultural context: A Singapore Case*. Language planning in Singapore has always played an important role in political, educational and social policies. Language planning is often influenced by government power, language concepts, language positioning, and the acceptance of users (Guo, 2006). The complexity and challenges of Singapore's language planning can be glimpsed from a few perspectives.

First, from the government perspective, Singapore's bilingual education policy adopts an instrumentalist stance, which advocates that language is a tool and should serve the national interests (Dixon, 2009). Bilingual education policy adopts a top-down strategy: English is the main official language and the working language of communication among ethnic groups. Although the mother tongues of the three ethnic groups are also the official languages, they are not as important as English (Goh, 1979). Goh Nguen Wah pointed out that such mother tongue learners are called "receptive bilingual" in linguistics. (Goh, 2000a) Under the "English-knowing Bilingualism Policy" (Pakir, 1991), students only need to learn the Mother Tongue as a second language, mainly mastering listening and speaking skills, and limited mastering writing and reading skills. Cavallaro Francesco, and Ng Bee Chin (Cavallaro & NG, 2014) believe that Singaporeans have transformed into "English-dominant bilinguals" after nearly 50 years of the bilingual policies.

Secondly, from the perspective of "language positioning", in addition to the above-mentioned instrumental consideration, the positioning of Chinese education also includes prescriptive and sociolinguistic considerations. The government does not look at the role of Chinese language in Singapore purely from the perspective of language pedagogy or linguistics, but considers it as part of the overall strategy for the survival and economic development (Goh, 2000b; Dixon, 2009). Goh Nguen Wah analyzed the five stages of bilingual students' Mandarin Chinese development in Singapore (Goh, 2010), which is close to the review and reform of bilingual education policies.

Thirdly, from the perspective of "the main user of language", the 1980 population census of Singapore is the first census that gathered detailed information on languages spoken at home. Since then, a population census has been carried out every 10 years. The 2010 Ministry of Education survey of the Chinese language of Primary One new entrant shows that the proportion of English- speakers at home has increased from 28% in 1991 to 59% in 2010 (Mother Tongue Review Committee, 2011).

A fourth perspective may be added—that of nation building and cultural ballast. As a young new nation with its population made up of people coming from diverse cultural backgrounds, there is a need to consolidate the cultures of the various ethnic groups and, also, to avoid excessive Westernization (Patrick, 2011) as well as to integrate them with the hope of the emergence of a culture of Singapore with its unique character. This can be effectively achieved through educating the younger generation. This is in fact reflected in the language curricula from preschool to secondary school level, although this goal takes a secondary place to the goal of language skills in the specification of instructional objectives.

1.2 Key Developments in Bilingual Education Policies

Since Singapore's independence in 1965, the PAP government has introduced a series of bilingual education policies to support national integration and nation-building. During the twentieth century, four important educational reviews and reforms were carried out, which have influenced the Chinese education.

According to the 1957 Census Report, the population composition of Chinese dialects in Singapore accounted for 80% of the total Chinese population (Chua, 1964; Kuo, 1980). The early Singaporean Chinese mainly came from South China. They were “immigrant Chinese” who moved south in the late Qing Dynasty. They spoke more than ten dialects, including Fujian, Chaozhou, Cantonese, Hakka, and Hainanese. After Independence, government legislation stipulated that English was the common language of the people, highlighting English as a government and business language. The 1966 Report (Singapore Education Inquiry Commission, 1966) adopted the first bilingual education policy: students in Chinese schools must study English as a second language; students in English schools must study Chinese as a second language; and English is used as the medium of instruction in Mathematics and Science in Chinese, Malay, and Indian schools. A series of initiatives was introduced including making second languages compulsory examinable subjects in the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) in 1966 and then in the Cambridge School Certificate examination—predecessor of the General Certificate of Education (GCE) examination—in 1969. These emphasized the learning and application of second language in bilingual education.

1.3 Establish a Bilingual Education Policy

The Goh Keng Swee Report was a milestone in Singapore's bilingual policy, which established a bilingual education policy with English as the mainstay and Mother Tongue as the supplement (Goh, 1979). This report has three major recommendations and measures: (1) *Ability-based streaming system*. According to the study team led by then Deputy Prime Minister Goh Keng Swee, students were unlikely

to achieve the same level of proficiency for both English and their mother tongue. The instructional time needs to be distributed based on students' language abilities. Under the streaming system, only 8% of students with the highest PSLE scores enter the bilingual Special Stream (with both English and Chinese as first languages), while the other 92% students study Chinese as a second language (Xu & Wei, 2007). (2) *Setting up Special Assistance Plan (SAP)*. The Special Assistance Plan (SAP) was introduced to preserve the best Chinese-stream schools so as to develop effectively bilingual students who were inculcated with traditional Chinese values. Nine Chinese-stream secondary schools were initially selected to serve as SAP schools. (3) *Launching Everyone Speak Chinese Mandarin Campaign*. For this, in 1982, the then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew advocated the replacement of dialects with Mandarin, and the subsequent Speak Mandarin Campaign also encouraged Chinese students to at least not speak Chinese dialects at school but only English and Mandarin. The Campaign has caused the proportion of the population of Chinese dialects as the main family language to decrease year by year, from 76% in 1980 to 19% in 2010 and only 5% of young people speak Chinese dialects. The proportion of Chinese Mandarin as a family language rose from 13% in 1980 to 48% in 2010 (Lee, 2014).

Regarding the disappearance of Chinese dialects consequent to the Campaign, some scholars expressed their reservations (Chew, 2006; Goh, 2005). However, on this, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong pointed out that “Chinese dialects have a complicated environment and they are mixed with other Singaporean languages. . . ., it is not possible to retain all dialects . . . The result is that people can learn dialects by learning a third language. You can sing dialect songs, learn operas, etc.” (Lee, 2014).

1.4 Chinese as a Second Language

Since the mother tongue language has become a supplement in 1979, the Chinese language learning environment has changed greatly. In 1976, about 17% of Primary One students enrolled in the Chinese-stream school, but by 1984 there was less than 1% (Mother Tongue Review Committee, 2011). The national stream was introduced in 1983 which required all schools—with the exception of the SAP schools—to offer English as a first language and mother tongue as a second language by 1987. At that time, Lee Kuan Yew repeatedly emphasized the original intention of the bilingual education policy. In the opening speech at the World Chinese Teaching Symposium in 1989, he said, “If we abandon the bilingual policy, we must be prepared to pay a huge price to reduce ourselves to a loss of ourselves. A nation without cultural characteristics . . . We will become a pseudo-Western society.” (World Chinese Language Teaching Symposium, 1990, P5.) This shows that the original purpose of bilingual policy is to preserve cultural values and identity through the Mother Tongue.

1.5 The First Formal Committee to Review Chinese Language

In 1992, Chinese Language Review Committee (1992) proposed two important suggestions and measures for Chinese Language. First, in primary school, MOE renamed the subject of Chinese as “Chinese Language” when it is a second language and as “Higher Chinese” when it is a first language, so as to correct the impression that Chinese was an unimportant subject. All students learned Chinese Language before Primary 4. Only 10% students took Higher Chinese in Primary 5 to 6 (EM1). 90% students entered EM2, or EM3 (mainly focusing on oral Chinese). In secondary school, the GCE N level examination was divided into two streams, normal academic (NA) or normal technical (NT) which is a four years course. Special and Express courses remain unchanged. MOE also allowed selected students beyond the SAP schools to take Higher Chinese and Chinese Literature in the GCE O-Level examination. Secondly, MOE revised the Chinese curriculum outline, cultivated four language skills and instilled Chinese culture with traditional values, as well as started to use the “Good Citizen” textbook. In the subject of Citizenship and Moral Education, Chinese was used as the medium of instruction (Bao, 2017).

1.6 The Second Formal Committee to Review Chinese Language

In 1999, Chinese Language Review Committee (1999) highlighted the difficulties in learning mother tongue faced by Chinese children from English-speaking homes. Therefore, the requirement of the Chinese language level was lowered. Nonetheless, the then Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong reiterated the importance of mother tongue in the Parliament: “English is a common working language and will continue to be so in the future. English is a global medium for business, trade and technology, but mother tongue constitutes our values, roots and it is an important part of our identity. Our mother tongue enables us to understand our own cultural traditions and gives us a more balanced world view that complements the English-speaking world. The teaching of Chinese is not only the teaching of listening, speaking, reading and writing, but also instilling Chinese culture and traditional values.” (Lianhe Zaobao, January 21, 1999).

In this Report there are three key changes: (1) giving more options to students with high Chinese scores to study Higher Chinese in primary school; (2) opening the tenth SAP School (Nan Hua Secondary School); and (3) introducing a simplified Chinese-language “B” syllabus in 2001 for secondary and junior college students struggling with the language.

The above are the major changes in bilingual education policy since Independence influencing the Chinese language education.

1.7 The Third and the Fourth Formal Committee to Review Chinese Language

The 2004 Report of Chinese Curriculum and Pedagogy Review Committee (2004, also known as *Wee Heng Tin Report*) is the third review of Chinese Language in Singapore. The Mother Tongue Languages Review Committee Report (2011) (*Nurturing Active Learners and Proficient Users*) (led by Former Director-General of Education Ho Peng) is the fourth comprehensive review of Chinese Language.

As the Chinese language education in Singapore has attracted international attention, many scholars have discussed the recent two reports covering a wide range of topics such as the reform in Singapore (Chen, 2013; Xie, 2006), reading reform from the perspective of teaching and testing (Sun, 2006), analysis of the characteristics of teaching models (Fan & Peng, 2008), analysis of teaching materials (Meng, 2009; Tan, 2006; Xu, 2011), analysis of curriculum standards and teaching materials (Hu, 2012), and comparative studies on curriculum standards, language planning, and textbooks (Chen, 2007; Lin, 2011; Liu, 2018).

Looking at the recent two reports of Chinese Language, both of them shift a teaching focus on the student-centered learning. They have put forward to the general direction for students to study Chinese seriously, enjoyably and willingly to study and use Chinese continually. This article further compares the recent two reports and uses primary schools as the main example to explore their impact on Chinese language curriculum and pedagogy (Table 1.1).

Looking at the recent two reports, there are the following major decisions and measures:

1. ***From “Teach Less, Learn More (TLLM)” to “Nurturing Active Learners and Proficient Users”***. In his speech of 2004 National Day Rally, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong stated that “We’ve got to teach less to our students so that they will learn more” (Lee, 2004) TLLM is not a call for “teacher to do less.” It is a call to educators to teach better, to engage our students and prepare them for life, rather than to teach for tests and examinations. According to the 2004 report, Ministry of Education made many changes, such as the requirement to pass the Chinese exam before entering the university was cancelled in 2005. After 2006, approximately 95% of students can take Higher Chinese based on their interests.
In the 2010 MOE Mother Tongue Review Committee Report (2011), it aims at “Nurturing Active Learning and Proficient Use”. It is believed that to learn mother tongues effectively, students must be willing to learn and often use them so that they can effectively communicate in a variety of real-life situations and make their mother tongue a living language. Moreover, making mother tongue learning vivid and interesting reduces the stress in learning.
2. ***From “Streaming System” to “Subject-Based Banding (SBB)”***. According to the two reports, the streaming system for primary and secondary schools was abolished. First, in the primary school, the then Minister of Education, Tharman Shanmugaratnam (尚达曼) announced in his speech of the 2006 MOE Work

Table 1.1 The 2004 and 2010 reports and their impact in primary school

	2004	2010
Background	50% of Chinese primary one students use English as their main family language	1. Changes in home language: Chinese primary one students with English as the main family language rose to 59% 2. With the rise of China, more and more people are willing to learn Chinese as a second language
Syllabus	2007 Syllabus Chinese language (Primary) (CPDD, 2007a) Syllabus 2011 Chinese language (Secondary) (CPDD, 2011)	2015 Syllabus Chinese language (Primary) (CPDD, 2015a)
Pedagogies	Teach less, learn more (TL2M)	Nurturing active learners and proficient users
Goals	To strengthen oral communication and reading skills training	3. Cs: Communication, Culture and Connection
Language Skills	Four skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing	Six skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing, oral interaction and written interaction
Curriculum	1. The streaming system of the primary school will be completely abolished 2. The curriculum structure will be based on teaching students in accordance with their aptitude (因材施教) (1) Setting up orientation phases in primary 5 and 6: higher Chinese, Chinese and basic Chinese (2) Streaming into higher Chinese, express Chinese, normal (Academic), normal (Technical), Chinese "B" in secondary school	1. The streaming system of the secondary school will be completely abolished in 2024 2. Launching new syllabuses and rewriting textbooks both in primary and secondary schools 3. Providing resources for students of different abilities to enhance learning, such as revising the mother tongue 'B' curriculum

(continued)

Table 1.1 (continued)

	2004	2010
Class hours/week	1. Primary 1-4: 8 h periods 2. Primary 5-6: 5.5 h	Adjusting teaching hours 1. Primary 1-2: 7 h 2. Primary 3-4: 5.5 h 3. Primary 5-6: 6.5 h
Compilation of textbooks	New textbooks: <i>Chinese Language for Primary Schools (CPDD, 2007b)</i> co-edited by the Singapore Ministry of Education and the people's education press in China 1. Reducing 20% content in textbooks 2. In addition to the five themes, schools can customize the theme as appropriate	New textbooks: <i>Happy Partners (欢乐伙伴 CPDD, 2015b)</i> , published by Marshall Cavendish Education SG
Modular system	Introducing a modular system based on the language levels for teaching Chinese in primary schools (1) Bridging modules. Students with little prior exposure to Chinese would take simpler bridging modules (focusing on listening and speaking skills) in primary one and two (2) Reinforcement modules. Students who need additional instructions would take reinforcement modules (focusing on reading skill) in primary 3 and 4 (3) Core modules. 70%-80% students would take core modules (4) Advance enrichment modules Students with a stronger ability and interest would take advance enrichment modules	Introducing a modular system including 1. "Listening and Speaking Theater" for learning oral communication and oral expression 2. "Read and Write Paradise" for learning literacy, reading and writing 3. "Use in life" for using Chinese in real life 4. Maintaining a modular system based on the language levels

(continued)

Table 1.1 (continued)

	2004	2010
Pedagogy	<p>1. Introducing student-centered and teaching students in accordance with their aptitude (因材施教) as well as adopting “Differentiated Approach”</p> <p>(1) Teaching method: recognition words before writing; listen more, speak more; effectively reading and writing; and making learning enjoyable</p> <p>(2) Bilingual teaching method: English as a medium of instruction in some primary schools</p> <p>(3) Comprehensive teaching method: adopting flexible and comprehensive teaching method</p> <p>(4) Use of information and communication technology</p>	<p>1. Adjusting teaching and assessment methods so that students can use their mother tongue effectively: (1) Continuing to adopt the student-centered (2004); (2) Introducing more interactive elements; (3) more use of information and communication technology</p> <p>2. Streaming into language and literary: first listening and speaking, and then reading and writing</p> <p>3. General teaching process: Introduction—Learning—Practice—Use—Evaluation</p> <p>4. Teaching method including situational teaching method, bilingual teaching method</p> <p>5. Reading teaching method: five reading steps</p> <p>6. Teaching according to aptitude: There are different teaching examples in the Teacher’s Book</p>
Evaluation	<p>To relieve the child’s test pressure, making the test questions more open, rather than simply learning by rote and mechanical memorizing</p> <p>1. Allowing using electronic dictionary for PSLE and elementary/general/higher composition questions since 2007</p> <p>2. Using integrative and communication approaches</p> <p>3. Formative assessment including portfolios of reading and writing</p> <p>4. Rubrics as an evaluation tool for active and independent learning</p>	<p>Testing methods are more interactive, emphasizing the use of language in real situations, and a timetable for the implementation of various reforms has been drawn up</p> <p>1. Formative Assessment: using effective classroom assessment strategies including effective questioning, regular and timely feedback, peer and self-assessment. In the section of “I can” of textbooks, Happy Partner, students can do peer and self-assessment for each learning point</p> <p>2. Adding new interactive question types to the school and national exams (e.g., 2017 PSLE): (1) Oral interaction: watching video clips instead of talking about pictures, interacting with the examiner on the topics in the videos. (Secondary Higher Chinese oral test has a two-minute presentation from 2016.) (2) Written interaction: adding the written interactive questions to the reading comprehension test</p> <p>3. Changing PSLE scoring methods (details below)</p>

(continued)

Table 1.1 (continued)

	2004	2010
Teaching Resources	<p>1. Establishing “Committee to Promote Chinese Language Learning”</p> <p>2. Establishing the “XueLe” platform</p>	<p>Creating an environment for students to learn and use the mother tongue, such as hosting language and cultural camps, immersion activities, and carrying out systematic reading activities (such as short play performances, book reviews, sharing sessions, storytelling weeks)</p> <p>1. Bi-weekly events of the mother tongue funded by MOE</p> <p>2. Establishing “iMTL/SLS” platforms: (1) designing task-based activities (such as dialogue and interviews) for oral learning; (2) conducting Human-Computer Interaction; (3) providing feedback, peer and self-assessment immediately. (4) Evaluating students’ reading aloud via Intelligent Voice Reading (智能语音朗读)</p> <p>3. Reducing 10% content in textbooks for Primary 3 to 4 for interactive skills training</p> <p>4. Using Big Books, Small Books, online resources, etc</p>
Teachers training and professional development	<p>1. Increasing the recruitment of Chinese teachers; strengthen pre- and in-service teachers training</p> <p>2. Establishing the Chinese language teaching excellence centers</p>	<p>1. Increasing 500 Mother Tongue Language teachers</p> <p>2. Providing teachers’ training to improve their language proficiency-oriented teaching and assessment (see below)</p>

Plan Seminar: “We will therefore put in place subject-based banding in our primary schools, starting from the 2008 Primary 5 cohort, replacing the current EM3 stream. Under subject-based banding, students will be able to choose a mixture of Standard and Foundation subjects, depending on their proficiency and aptitude in those subjects.” (Tharman, 2006) This announcement allows most students who are previously classified into EM3 can study the higher level in their strong subjects. Students who are previously classified into EM1 and EM2 can study the basic level based on their ability. Thus, the “Subject-Based Banding (SBB)” makes the education system more flexible. Secondly, in the secondary school, Subject-Based Banding (SBB) was first introduced in 12 prototype secondary schools in 2014. It aims to provide greater flexibility in subjects offered at the lower secondary levels to cater to the different learning needs of students. MOE will be rolling out Full Subject-Based Banding (Full SBB) to secondary schools by 2024. Ahead of this, 28 secondary schools will start piloting aspects of Full SBB from 2020 (MOE, 2019a). From 2024, Secondary 1 students will be able to offer subjects at three levels: G1/G2/G3 (G stands for General), mapped from today’s N(T), N(A) and Express standards respectively. Students can take a range of G1/G2/G3 subjects based on their abilities. MOE will remove the labels of Express/N(A)/N(T), to give all our students the experience of “One secondary education, many subject bands”. (MOE, 2019b).

3. ***New PSLE 2021 Scoring System and New National Examination.*** Under the new PSLE 2021 scoring system, students will be graded based on their Achievement Level (AL) instead of T-score. Students in the first band (26 points and above) will take G1 subject level (basic level, equivalent to NT). Students in the second band (23 to 24 points) will take G2 subject level (standard level, equivalent to NA). Students in the third band (4 to 20 points) will take G3 subject level (advanced level, equivalent to Express). Students with 21 to 22 points will take G2 or G3 subjects. Students with 25 points will take G1 or G2 subjects. For example, a student with a PSLE score of Achievement Level (AL) 23 or 24 will predominantly take a G2 suite of subjects but would be offered a G3 English in Sec 1 if he scores well for his English at PSLE. Students will continue to be posted to secondary schools using three PSLE scoring bands, so that they start with a suite of subjects at levels suitable to their pace of learning. Thereafter, they can take subjects at a level suited to their level of ability (MOE, 2019a).

When students reach Secondary 4 in 2027, they will sit for a common national examination (replacing the GCE N- and O-Level examinations); and receive a new national certification with subjects at G1, G2, or G3 levels.

A new post-secondary (e.g., the junior college, polytechnic and the Institute of Technical Education) pathway will also be rolled out in 2028 once the first batch sits for the new national examination, for example, G1/G2/G3 are equivalent to H1, H2, and H3 in the junior college.

4. ***Reducing Assessments in Schools to Allow More Time for Learning.*** Fewer exams, assessments in schools to reduce emphasis on academic results. The changes are implemented in stages, beginning with the removal of all weighted

assessments and exams for Primary 1 and 2 students from 2019. Weighted assessments can take various modes such as class tests, presentations or group projects. Secondary 1 students also no longer have a mid-year examination from 2019. From 2020 and 2021, this will also be removed for Primary 3, Primary 5 and Secondary 3 students. The removal of the mid-year exams will free up about three weeks of curriculum time every two years. Schools can use this time to pace out more hands-on learning or investigative lessons, and leverage engaging pedagogies to deepen understanding, and develop twenty-first century competencies in students.

The then Minister of Education Ong Yee Kang (Ong, 2019) pointed out that in 2019, almost half of the primary schools removed the mid-year exams for Primary 3 and 5 students, and more than 90% of the secondary schools removed the mid-exams for secondary 3 students. This has already exceeded the timetable prescribed by the Ministry of Education. The earlier removal shows that schools welcome this new policy.

As can be seen from the above, in the 21st Century, the recent two reports are a reflection and amendment to the education policy of the last Century.

1.8 Establishing Singapore Center for Chinese Language

The establishment of Singapore Centre for Chinese Language (SCCL) was announced by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong on 6 September 2008, and was opened by Founding Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew on 17 November 2009. The objective of SCCL is to enhance the effectiveness of teaching Chinese as a second language in a bilingual environment. The comprehensive training courses provided by SCCL cover the current Chinese curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and teaching literacy for K-12 in-service teachers. To date, more than 3,000 Chinese language teachers have completed their training. The courses include degrees programmes (Bachelor degree for pre-school CL teachers in collaboration with SUSS, and Master degree for CL teachers in collaboration with HKU), Traisi courses (OPAL 2.0 courses), Specialized courses, Specialist Diploma Course, and Professional Certificate in Teaching of Chinese as Second Language. SCCL also provides consultation services to schools as well as Professional Development Leave (PDL) Package for experienced teachers.

SCCL focuses on researching innovative teaching and learning strategies, hopes to develop unique and effective teaching methods. To meet the rising challenges in Chinese language teaching and learning in Singapore, SCCL applies its “Research-Validate-Train (RVT)” model in the development of innovative pedagogies and teaching toolkits.

NTU-SCCL Press has published many materials (journal) including Journal of Chinese Language Education (JCLE) which was officially included in the list of journals under the prestigious Chinese Social Sciences Citation Index (CSCSI) (Overseas) (2014–2015), reference tools, teaching toolkits, readers and story books. (see SCCL website).

SCCL has a great contribution to the local and regional teaching and research for Chinese as a second language.

1.9 Prospects for Chinese Language Education

The then Minister of Education Ong Yee Kang put forward the concept of “Make Language Learning a Lifelong Journey” at the Ninth National Teachers’ Seminar (Ong, 2019). He highlighted that nowadays education paid more attention to language, especially a passion to master and use his/her Mother Tongue language, strengthening bilingual advantages, and encouraging the third language learning. In order to make language learning more flexible, it will not be limited to a certain stage of education but will extend to lifelong learning in the workplace. He emphasized that language learning is not only for riding on the Asian economic growth. At the end of the speech, he concluded that “Languages develop our minds and character, strengthen our sense of identity, open new worlds, and create new understanding”.

The prospects of Chinese language education in Singapore can be explored from the following five aspects:

First, learning MTLs/Chinese down to the roots from kindergarten. Two major waves of preschool policy reviews were undertaken based on the recent two reports. The 2004 report recommended more systematic training in listening and speaking skills from early childhood (from infancy to early primary school). MOE has launched the NEL Curriculum resources to support early childhood educators in Singapore in creating and delivering quality learning experiences for children aged four to six years. In 2003, the MOE first launched a curriculum framework that emphasizes holistic development of children instead of academic readiness, which was refreshed in 2012 (currently called *Nurturing Early Learners: A Curriculum Framework for Kindergartens in Singapore* or the NEL Framework (MOE, 2012a) to promote consistent quality standards in the delivery of kindergarten programs across the sector. Aligned to the NEL Framework, the *NEL Framework for Mother Tongue Languages* (MTLs) articulates a broad set of vision, objectives, guiding principles and learning goals for MTL teaching and learning (MOE, 2013). In addition, the *Educators’ Guide for MTLs/Chinese* help teachers translate the NEL Framework for MTLs/Chinese into quality learning experiences for children (MOE, 2015).

Moreover, the Lee Kuan Yew Bilingual Foundation was founded. Lee Kuan Yew believed that only 15% and 10% of the total curriculum time was taught in primary and secondary schools, respectively, and it was not enough to learn a mother tongue at all for that amount of Language Exposure Time (LET) (Lee, 2012). Therefore, he announced the establishment of the Lee Kuan Yew Bilingual Foundation

to promote bilingual education and invested about 100 million Singapore dollars to design English and mother tongue textbooks suitable for children in preschool education (with the “start sooner the better” hypothesis), as well as upgrading teachers to provide preschool education. Educational institutions provide a more bilingual environment (“input hypothesis”), with the goal of equipping preschool children with the ability to listen and speak.

In 2012, the Prime Minister, Lee Hsien Loong, announced that government efforts to uplift the overall quality of preschool education (PSE) would be amplified by strengthening teacher training and curriculum leadership, establishing government kindergartens to catalyse quality improvements, enhancing affordability for financially disadvantaged families, and improving policy coordination and regulation of the early childhood sector by forming a new agency known as the Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA) (MSF, 2013). In this year, MOE announced that it would for the first time in history establish 15 MOE kindergartens between 2014 and 2016 to provide quality and affordable K1 and K2 programs (MOE, 2012b).

In 2017, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong announced that he would inject 1.7 billion Singapore dollars in preschool education within five years, and promote preschool education through three strategies: increasing school places, improving the quality of preschool education, and strengthening teacher training. First, 40,000 full-day places are added, bringing the total to 200,000. Secondly, the MOE kindergartens are increased from the current 15 to 50. Finally, the National Institute of Early Childhood Development (NIEC) was established to provide preschool teachers with a complete diploma and certificate programme as well as more opportunities for further education and development.

In 2019, the then Minister of Education Ong Yee Kang exemplified the specific plans of different kindergartens based on the early mother tongue learning. “In MOE kindergartens, language learning is the first priority. Young children receive 100 min of language teaching every day: one hour of mother tongue and 40 min English lessons. Teachers use stories, games, role-plays, songs and dances in the local context to bring the language to life.” (Ong, 2019) For another example, NTUC First Campus offers a one-hour native language lesson and 30 min per day Reading time in mother tongue. In the daily activities, children’s exposure to their mother tongue accounts for about 50% of children’s language lessons. Judging from the policies of the government in recent years and the adjustment of the time and proportion of mother tongue learning by the MOE kindergartens and other than MOE kindergartens (e.g., private ones), it is very forward-looking for mother tongue to take root in preschool Chinese language education.

Secondly, lifelong learning MTLs/Chinese through SkillsFuture Singapore (SSG). In 2016, the SkillsFuture was introduced to provide training subsidies to Singaporeans who have reached the age of 25. It is a national movement to provide Singaporeans with the opportunities to develop their fullest potential throughout life, regardless of their starting points. One of the four key objectives is “*Foster a culture that supports and celebrates lifelong learning.*” It promotes the habit of learning throughout life—for work as well as for personal development and interest. (SkillsFuture SG website) In 2019, the then Minister of Education Ong Ye Kung (Ong, 2019)

further promotes SkillsFuture courses of conversational language training. Therefore, business conversations and cultural courses were held in 20 training centers across the island, providing more language learning channels for Chinese. In addition, for making it easier to enroll in language courses, it simplified the way of enrollment through online, shopping malls and people's clubs. Judging from the government encouragement of lifelong learning language and culture, adult Chinese education are very promising.

However, the research found that many studies collectively reached the conclusion that the English of young people aged 18–29 in Singapore were more comfortable in English (Cavallaro & NG, 2014). How to help adults learn Chinese for their daily working and socializing? Cheng (2005, pp. 24–26) provides a new triplization model that includes globalization, localization and individualization in education. Globalization refers to the transfer, adaptation and development of values, knowledge, technology, and behavioural norms across countries and societies in different parts of the world (e.g., curriculum content on cultural through internet, web-based teaching, video-conferencing, cross-cultural sharing, for example, the comparison between Singaporean Chinese culture and traditional Chinese). Localization refers to the transfer, adaptation, and development of related values, knowledge, technology, and behavioural norms from/to the local contexts (e.g., learning Singaporean Chinese culture). Individualization refers to the transfer, adaptation and development of related external values, knowledge, technology, and behavioural norms to meet the individual needs and characteristics (e.g., designing and using individualized learning targets, methods, and progress schedules, for example, self-lifelong learning). This “triplization model” focuses on the learner, and then expands to the community, as well as connects to the world. It would benefit for lifelong learning, especially learning Chinese language.

Thirdly, solving the dilemma of teaching Chinese. Goh Nguen Wah pointed out three main sticking points: (1) Chinese is only a single subject and the subject of the exam. (2) Chinese practical use is limited. English is the working language and high-level social language. (3) The economic value of Chinese language is not high. The socio-economic environment, a small demand and few users all affect the market value of Chinese. (Goh, 2005).

In view of the above dilemmas, what is urgent to solve is the problem of single subject in teaching and learning Chinese language. To solve this problem, Chew Cheng Hai proposed that some schools may shift their focus from Chinese as a second language to a first language (Chew, 2018). The call for the use of Chinese as the medium of instruction in certain subjects is also increasing. According to the linguistic interdependence hypothesis proposed by Jim Cummins in 1978, what a learner knows in the native language can positively transfer to the second language the learner is acquiring. Hence, if students are provided more opportunities to develop academic concepts and skills in Chinese language, they may achieve the best bilingualism development.

To solve the problem of Chinese language practical use, Wee Lionel stated that the functional separation between English and the ‘mother tongues’ in Singapore has been shaken within the wake of economic globalization, so that the utilitarian

value traditionally assigned exclusively to English has now also been extended to Mandarin Chinese. This shift in emphasis has been promoted by government policies and educational reforms (Wee, 2003). Recently, many scholars have argued that the rhetoric of language planning for Mandarin Chinese should be shifted from emphasizing its cultural value to stressing its economic value since China's economy is on the rise.

Fourthly, inheriting Chinese culture and Asian values. Lee Kuan Yew believed that “the greatest value of learning Chinese is the transmission of social norms and ethical behavioural norms.” (Goh, 1979, p. V) In the Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew, he mentioned that it is important to retain the advantages of the traditional Chinese schools and pass these virtues to new bilingual schools. (Lee, 2012) Therefore, under the initiative of Lee Kuan Yew, some special courses were launched including the Chinese Language Elective Course (CLEP) for high school students in junior colleges and Through-Train Programme (直通车) schools in 1990 which was expanded to the secondary schools for the first time in 2019.

In the 2004 report, the Committee recommends that students with strong language skills and interests should be encouraged and supported for the comprehensive mastery of various language skills. MOE also set up the “Chinese Culture and Thought” course to deepen students’ understanding of Chinese Language and Culture. In the 2010 report, “Culture” officially refers to as one of the three goals of Mother Tongue. Learning culture through mother tongue is one of the most effective ways to master a language (MOE, 2011). The then Minister of Education Ong Yee Kang also emphasized that “To understand culture, language must be learned.” (Ong, 2019).

Recently students are encouraged to learn the third language, including (1) another official mother tongue to learn about the language and culture of other Singaporean; (2) national languages of developed countries (e.g., French, German, Spanish, or Japanese); (3) Regional languages (e.g., Chinese, Vietnamese, Indonesian, and Thai). The third language learning mainly focuses on practical use. Its learning methods include online and offline to encourage more people to learn conversation. The third language won't be one of the subjects in any exams. (Ong, 2019) The introduction of the third language policy encourages more students to learn Chinese.

Finally, conducting in-depth research on the frequency and proficiency of learners. Since the first population census of Singapore in 1980, the census and survey data over the years only shows the use of home language, not the frequency of use and/or the levels of proficiency of learners (DOS, 2011). The 2010 report points out that a learner's language ability is mainly affected by the frequency of use (MOE, 2011). Since English is the main official language and the working language of communication among ethnic groups, it obviously is used more frequently than Chinese. But it is still necessary to understand the use of Chinese language in everyone's daily life (e.g., buying foods, taking a taxi). Therefore, the research on the frequency and proficiency of Chinese language is helpful to teaching and learning Chinese language.

1.10 Conclusion

Since 1960 when Chinese Language was made a compulsory subject in the school curriculum, several reviews have taken place to adjust the programmes according to the needs of students with varying abilities, Chinese Language in the Singapore schools have come a long way. The key revisions and relevant events are summarized in the Timeline (see Appendix).

By way of summary, over the past half a century or so, Chinese Language teaching in Singapore has different facets of changes in terms of expected standards, curricula programmes, and methodology. Such changes were made to better meet the changing needs of the multiethnic nature of Singapore society and the learning capability of students with diverse linguistic backgrounds. Basically, it changed from a monolithic curriculum for all to diversified programmes for multiple groups of Chinese Language learners to attain a level of Chinese Language commensurate to their ability and needs. In the meantime, the traditional teacher-centred approach to teaching was gradually replaced by a more learned-centred approach of learning in line with the development of second language teaching.

To sum up, under the circumstances that the current international situation is conducive to Chinese language education, the Singapore government also attaches great importance to mother tongue (Chinese) education. Not only has it introduced many major policies to support and encourage it, the government has also assembled non-governmental forces to work together. From the view of comprehensive, mother tongue (Chinese) learning from preschool education to lifelong learning covers almost the entire life journal of a person. From the view of breadth, from the mother tongue to the first language level, to the experimental field of the mother tongue as a second language, to the mother tongue as a regional language learning, mother tongue (Chinese) learning covers almost K-12 Education. From the view of depth, mother tongue (Chinese) is deeply embedded in real life, docking with cultural essence, language identification, and identity. It is shaped by multiple languages and cultures. This shows that Singapore has spared no effort in maintaining its advantages in bilingual education and can serve as a model for world language education.

Appendix

Timeline of Curriculum Revisions and Relevant Events

Year	Events
1960	Study of “second language” made compulsory
1965	Introduced a series of bilingual education policies to support national integration and nation-building

(continued)

(continued)

Year	Events
1979	Goh Keng Swee Report recommended: (1) English as the mainstay and Mother tongue as the supplement. (2) Setting up of Special Assistance Plan Schools. (3) Launching of Speak Chinese Mandarin Campaign
1992	Chinese Language Review Committee recommended: (1) “Chinese Language” as a second language and “Higher Chinese” as a first language. (2) Revise the Chinese curriculum outline, cultivated four language skills and instilled Chinese culture
1999	Chinese Language Review Committee recommended: (1) more options to students with high Chinese scores to study Higher Chinese in primary school; (2) opening the tenth SAP School; and (3) a simplified Chinese-language “B” syllabus for secondary and junior college students struggling with the language
2004	Chinese Curriculum and Pedagogy Review Committee (See Table 1.1 in the text for highlights of the Committee’s report)
2009	Opening of the Singapore Centre for Chinese Language
2011	<i>Nurturing Active Learners and Proficient Users</i> (See Table 1.1 in the text for highlights of the Committee’s report)

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