

English language  
education is critical  
for hong kong



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Hong Kong is a former British crown colony , and is currently a Special Administrative Region of the People’s Republic of China. Hong Kong had been a British crown colony for more than 100 years (“ Hong Kong”). Hong Kong’s legal system, financial system, educational system, and culture have been influenced by the British, and Hong Kong is now one of the important financial centres in Asia (Meyer 219). Hong Kong’s official language is mandated as Chinese and English according to the Basic Law (“ Hong Kong”). After the return of sovereignty to China, Hong Kong’s secondary education system shifted twice, in 1997 nearly eighty percent of the schools were forced to use Chinese as a “ medium of instruction” (Mol) known as the “ mother-tongue education policy” (Choi 673-674). In 2008, the secondary schools were assigned their Mol with the reference to the admission grades of grade 6 students known as the “ fine-tuning policy” (Suen 1). Medium of Instruction is defined as a language variety which is used in educational settings for purposes of teaching and learning (“ Medium of Instruction”). There have been repercussions among the stakeholders of the educational system including parents, university professors, corporations, etc., as students’ English competency has been declined due to the education policy change (Flowerdew Li and Miller). Thus, should English should be used as a Mol in hong Kong secondary and tertiar education? English should be used rather than Chinese in secondary and post-secondary education because it can foster economic development (Ng 1), it is beneficial for student career paths (Flowerdew, Li and Miller 206), and it is an international language (Shen 112).

Hong Kong language education policy has long been a political issue rather than an educational issue (Tsui et al. 200). Under the rule of the Great Britain, “ colonial educational policy” has been adopted (Flowerdew, Li, and Miller 204). This is used for educating a small group of local elites who act as the middleperson between the British officials and the local Hong Kong citizens (Flowerdew, Li, and Miller 205). For elementary education, schools are under the “ laissez-faire policy”, which the schools can pick and choose their own MoI (Lai and Byram 316). From secondary to post-secondary level, English is mostly used as the MoI. Flowerdew, Li , and Miller has indicated that during the 1980s, 90% of the secondary schools are used in English. At the same time, the colonial Hong Kong government had disagreed with the “ mixed-mode approach” on teaching, which is described as using Cantonese to explain terms and definitions, and using English on teaching and testing materials (Flowerdew, Li, and Miller 205). In the early 1990s, the colonial government had increased the number of universities in order to meet the demand of the needs of the professionals in the flourishing economy (Flowerdew, Li, and Miller 206). The number of universities had increased from two to eight, and six out of eight are used English as MoI for lectures and tutorials. On 1997, Hong Kong became a part of the Chinese territory. On September, 1997, the “ mother-tongue education policy” had been enforced (Lee 13). Only 114 secondary schools are allowed to use English as MoI, and more than 300 secondary schools had to use Chinese as MoI (Lee 13). On 2008, “ fine-tuning policy” had been enforced, as the Hong Kong government tried to eliminate the negative labelling effect of the English and the Chinese schools (Suen 6).

Even though currently Hong Kong is a part of the Chinese territory, English should be used as the Mol in the secondary and post-secondary education system. First, English as Mol can boost the economic growth of Hong Kong. Hong Kong is one of the Asia's international financial centres, and English is commonly used as the medium of communication in Business, the local workforce has to be fluent in English to communicate with investors and clients (Lee 98). The future generation are exposed more to the English language environment because Mol is English. Because of this, the prospective international companies may consider Hong Kong as the regional headquarters which can strengthen economic development, and create more jobs . Besides, as China's economy is growing rapidly, many international corporations see Hong Kong as a gateway to China (Lee 98). China opens its door to the world in the mid-1980s, Hong Kong has firstly became as an entrepot, and now becomes the middleperson between China and the world. Entrepot is defined as a centre at which goods are received for subsequent distribution (" Entrepot"). In order to keep the current position as the middleperson and the gateway of China, English is more important than ever. Moreover, using English as Mol can train students to think in the language and use as a lingua franca, so that they can easily adapt the western cultures and beliefs (Ng 5). Lingua franca is any form of language serving as a means of communication between speakers of different languages (" Lingua franca"). That can make international corporations to enter Hong Kong at ease because citizens are already exposed to the western cultures and thoughts.

Second, English as Mol is critical to student career prospective. In the competitive city like Hong Kong, higher foreign language ability, for example, English can ensure a secured employment and financial future for the students (Lee 25). As mentioned above, Hong Kong is an international city, and English is used as Mol in university, it is crucial for students to use English as Mol. When the “mother-tongue education” policy is compulsorily implemented, some parents broke into tears that their children cannot go to those English schools (Lee 26). Apart from that, university lecturers from the City University of Hong Kong also complained that students’ English ability is weak, sometimes the situation makes lecturers difficult to communicate with their fellow students and explore new ideas with their students (Flowerdew, Li, and Miller 213). As a whole, this can dampen the knowledge that students receive, and affect the creditability of the Hong Kong university graduates. Flowerdew, Li, and Miller quoted from different surveys that secondary school students, university students, and teaching professionals are prone to English as Mol (qtd. in Pennington and Yue; Hylan; Lin et al.; Richard, Tung, and Ng). Lau, a secondary school English department chair also indicated English is important for students’ future in the long-run. Therefore, Hong Kong government should use English as Mol in secondary and post-secondary education.

Third, English is an international language. International language is described as a language that can achieve a genuinely global status, when it develops a special role that is recognized in every country (Nunan 590). English is a lingua franca because it is widely used in world politics, telecommunications, business, mass media, technology, and education

(Shen 113). For international relations, there are 85 percent of the world organizations using English. For popular music, 99 percent of the work is in English (Shen 113). In order to broaden students' horizons, education in Hong Kong should be used in English as Mol. By broadening their horizons, students' learning can be enhanced.

On the contrary, there are challenges on using English as Mol. Although English as Mol benefits students, first language teaching is the most effective way to learn (Suen). First language is defined as the first language that an individual learns, also known as L1 ("First language"). On the other hand, using English as Mol will create the rising of "elitism" which refers to a description of attitudes that are ascribed to a higher social class, or to anyone in a superordinate position ("elitism"; Flowerdew, Li, and Miller). Hong Kong is well-known for its social strata gap. According to the Gini index, which is an index measures the degree of inequality in the distribution of family income in a country, Hong Kong has ranked in 17 among 135 countries, and Hong Kong has the highest rank among developed nations ("Distribution of family income- Gini index"). If English again has been enforced as the Mol, the gap between the rich and the poor will be widened, and the situation will create social unrest.

Despite the fact that English as Mol has its disadvantages, its benefits still outweigh the disadvantages. Hong Kong educational system should be used English as the Medium of Instruction not only in secondary and post-secondary schools, but also in elementary schools or even pre-schools. Hong Kong government should examine ways to develop English as the L1 for their citizens, and they should learn the experience from Singapore (Ng). Hong  
<https://assignbuster.com/english-language-education-is-critical-for-hong-kong/>

Hong Kong government should also maintain a consistent and sustainable education system. As I have said, Hong Kong has shifted its educational system at least twice over the past 10 years. In order to produce a knowledgeable workforce, a stable system should be used. Before making any changes to the educational system, Hong Kong government should examine the pros and cons of the changes to the educational system thoroughly and publish the policy in a more transparent way.

Format: MLA/ Word Count: 1484

## **Work Cited**

Ash, Robert. Hong Kong in Transition: One Country, Two Systems. Taylor & Francis, 2002. My Library. Web. 20 Nov. 2010

Choi, Po King. “‘The best students will learn English’: ultra-utilitarianism and linguistic imperialism in education in post-1997 Hong Kong.” *Journal of Education Policy* 18. 6 (2003): 673-694. Academic Search Complete. EBSCO. Web. 22 Nov. 2010.

“Distribution of family income – Gini index.” *CIA World Factbook*.

Washington: CIA, 2009. Credo Reference. Web. 06 Dec. 2010.

“elitism.” *The Blackwell Dictionary of Political Science*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999. Credo Reference. Web. 12 Dec. 2010.

“entrepot.” *The Penguin Dictionary of Economics*. London: Penguin, 2003. Credo Reference. Web. 12 Dec. 2010.

“ first language.” A Dictionary of Sociolinguistics. Edinburg: Edinburgh University Press, 2004. Credo Reference. Web. 12 Dec. 2010.

Flowerdew, John, David Li, and Lindsay Miller. “ Attitudes Towards English and Cantonese Among Hong Kong Chinese University Lecturers.” TESOL Quarterly 32. 2 (1998): 201-31. ERIC. EBSCO. Web. 22 Nov. 2010.

“ Distribution of family income – Gini index.” CIA World Factbook. Washington: CIA, 2009. Credo Reference. Web. 12 December 2010.

Gow, Lyn, and Others And. “ The Effects of English Language Ability on Approaches to Learning.” RELC Journal: A Journal of Language Teaching and Research in Southeast Asia 22. 1 (1991): 49-68. ERIC. EBSCO. Web. 22 Nov. 2010.

“ Hong Kong.” Encyclopaedia Britannica. Encyclopaedia Britannica 2009 Ultimate Reference Suite. Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2009.

Ingham, Michael. Hong Kong: A Cultural History. Oxford University Press USA, 2007. Web. 19 Nov. 2010.

“ Language (Hong Kong).” Encyclopedia of Post-Colonial Literatures in English. London: Routledge, 2005. Credo Reference. Web. 09 Dec. 2010.

Lau, Tony. My philosophy and reflections regarding English Language education KLA. Hong Kong: Tak Sun Secondary School, 2003. Web.



Lee, Tony Tung Kiu. The debate on change of medium of instruction in Hong Kong secondary schools. Diss. University of Toronto (Canada), 2003.

Dissertations & Theses: Full Text, ProQuest. Web. 12 Dec. 2010.

“lingua franca.” A Dictionary of Sociolinguistics. Edinburg: Edinburgh University Press, 2004. Credo Reference. Web. 12 Dec. 2010.

“medium of instruction (Moi).” A Dictionary of Sociolinguistics. Edinburg: Edinburgh University Press, 2004. Credo Reference. Web. 21 Nov. 2010.

Meyer, David R.. Hong Kong as a Global Metropolis. Cambridge Studies in Historical Geography. Cambridge University Press, 2000. My library. Web. 20 Nov. 2010.

Ng, Eng Hen. Ministry of Education, Singapore: Speeches. Singapore Government, 17 August 2008. Web. 20 Nov. 2010.

Nunan, David. “The Impact of English as a Global Language on Educational Policies and Practices in the Asia-Pacific Region.” TESOL Quarterly: A Journal for Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages and of Standard English as a Second Dialect 37. 4 (2003): 589-613. ERIC. EBSCO. Web. 9 Dec. 2010.

Shen, Qi. “Globalization of English and English Language Policies in East Asia: a Comparative perspective.” Canadian Social Science 5. 3 (2009): 111-120. Canadian Reference Centre. EBSCO. Web. 22 Nov. 2010.

Suen, Michael. EDB- Speeches and Articles by Security for Education. The Government of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region , 16 Feb. 2009. Web. 21 Nov. 2010.

Tsang, Steve. A Modern History of Hong Kong. London ; New York : I. B. Tauris, 2003. Net Library. Web. 21 Nov. 2010.

Tsui, Amy B. M., et al. " Which Agenda? Medium of Instruction Policy in Post-1997 Hong Kong." Language, Culture, and Curriculum 12. 3 (1999): 196-214. MLA International Bibliography. EBSCO. Web. 12 Dec. 2010.

Yau, Elaine. " HKIEd tunes in to the fine-tuning of English language presentation." South China Morning Post 17 Jan. 2009. General OneFile. Web. 21 Nov. 2010.