

# The Influence of Hong Kong Educational Language Policy on China's Modern State Integration in Hong Kong

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**Abstract:** In recent years, a series of social movements and political events in Hong Kong have attracted the attention of the world. Among them, the controversy caused by the Hong Kong language policy, especially the educational language policy, has become one of the increasingly prominent social contradictions in Hong Kong. The controversy revolves around the impact of educational language policy on modern state integration. Through the qualitative analysis of the relevant phenomena, the author hopes to reveal the complex nature of this problem and make an academic attempt to solve this problem.

**Keywords:** Education Language Policy, Hong Kong, Modern State Integration, Spolsky, Qualitative, NVivo11.

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## 1. Introduction

The process of China's modern state integration in Hong Kong is also more tortuous due to the influence of educational language policy (Yao Min, 2017). In 2016, the former Financial Secretary of Hong Kong, Leung Kam-song, suggested that Putonghua should be the only language of education in Hong Kong. He reasoned that Cantonese is not the mother tongue of everyone in Hong Kong (Ejinsight, 2016). Those who opposed him pointed out that according to this logic, Hong Kong should actually use English as the only language of education, because there are many more people who use English than Putonghua (Tao Huiyi, 2019). Zhou Lei (2019) pointed out, since the second half of the last century, Hong Kong's educational language policy has been a hotly debated public issue and even an important clue of Hong Kong's social movement.

Nowadays, the educational language policy is even one of the important factors causing political opposition and social division in Hong Kong. Cheng Yu-shek (2017) pointed out that people's feedback on language policies reflected how they defined themselves, how they defined the state, and how they defined the relationship between individuals and the state. It represents identity and national consciousness, and reflects the state of modern state integration. Although the four social movements that occurred in the past due to Hong Kong's language policy all sought to enhance and maintain the status of mother tongue, the national consciousness and identity reflected in the movements were different. It reflects that different educational language policies have different effects on the modern state integration. Lu Yongqian (2017) pointed out how the evolution of Hong Kong's educational language policy has had an effect on the integration of the modern country so far is not only an important ideological issue concerning the future of Hong Kong, but also an academic issue worthy of in-depth study.

Yan Xiaojun (2019) pointed out that since the British handed over the sovereignty of Hong Kong to the central government of the People's Republic of China in 1997, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region government has carried out two important educational language policy

reforms. Promoting China's modern state integration in Hong Kong is the most important goal of these two reforms. However, the two reforms failed to advance toward the expected goals, and not only were there many obstacles and even played the opposite role. At present, Hong Kong people's demands to use Chinese as the language of education before the return of Hong Kong is no longer the mainstream of social opinions. More and more Hong Kong residents, especially young people receiving education, are skeptical, rejected and even hostile towards the government's promotion of the educational language policy of using Chinese as the only educational language, especially Mandarin as the spoken language of instruction. It should be recognized that this is not only an opposition to the reform of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government's educational language policy, but also a resistance to the control and influence of the Chinese central government, and an exclusion of China's modern state integration in Hong Kong.

In addition, Liu Zhaojia (2016) believed that Hong Kong people's dissatisfaction with the educational language reform carried out by the SAR government after the handover is essentially different from the dissatisfaction with the British Hong Kong government's educational language policy before the handover. Before the reunification, dissatisfaction originated from a nationalistic patriotic sentiment; after the reunification, the dissatisfaction was because the reform of the educational language policy did not conform to the specific interests of the Hong Kong people, including not only economic interests, cultural rights, but also a sense of psychological security. However, it should be noted that the implementation of the policies of the SAR government detrimental to the specific interests of Hong Kong residents will arouse their dislike of the central government and even the mainland of China, and will hinder China's modern state integration in Hong Kong. Therefore, how to formulate an educational language policy that conforms to the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of Hong Kong people is a research issue of great practical significance.

## 2. Literature Review

Currently, Bernard Spolsky's sociolinguistic language

policy research theory is the latest language policy research theoretical system recognized by the academic community. Li Yuming (2018) pointed out that this theoretical system is sufficient to guide the most cutting-edge hot issues in the current world language policy research, especially to provide a new and solid theoretical foundation for the research of educational language policy. The author summarized Bernard Spolsky's theoretical system of language policy research, which is mainly composed of three parts.

First, Bernard Spolsky (2018) revealed four driving forces driving language policy: the first driving force is the social language environment, which includes the number and types of languages in a country, the number and composition of the population of each language user, and the language of each language Communicative value inside and outside the community; the second motivation is related to the operation of national identity or other identities. In modern nation-states, the symbolic value of the national language has become increasingly prominent; the third power is globalization and the subsequent wave of English; the fourth power is the deepening of human rights awareness and civil rights awareness. Modern citizens gradually realize that language choice is an important part of human rights and civil rights. Although other factors may appear from time to time in the formulation of language policy, the author believes that these factors can generally be classified into one of the four major motivations mentioned above. For example, when language policy is driven by economic development factors, it generally belongs to the first situation; similarly, when language policy is driven by specific word resource factors, it is also the first condition above; when language is needed due to some kind of fear When it comes to policy, it may fall into the second or third situation mentioned above, depending on the nature of the fear. If the fear comes from within (such as the purity of the language and the standard is threatened), it belongs to the former; if the fear comes from the outside (such as the threat of globalization to the language of the country), it belongs to the latter.

Second, Bernard Spolsky discussed the effectiveness of language policies and the likelihood of policy success. Bernard Spolsky (2018) pointed out that the current situation of language management makes people think: even those who claim to be language managers recognize that there is a certain contradiction between ideal and reality in language policy. Most countries may have constant tensions due to language choice issues, and for those who want to change the language practice of others, they have also been under constant pressure. If language management is not simply to record the current language situation or some idealized language situations that are difficult to achieve, then language management should be reformed in both ideology and practice. Researchers of language policy can be naturally divided into two groups: optimistic and pessimistic. Optimists believe that language management is feasible, while pessimists believe that language is uncontrollable. Experience has shown that the facts seem to be more inclined to the latter, because few language cases can prove that language management has produced ideal results. On the contrary, examples of obvious failures in language management abound. For example, the activities of reversing language conversion basically cannot stop the continuous language loss unless there is joint management of government power and ideological power.

Third, Bernard Spolsky provided a feasible method for

studying language policy. Bernard Spolsky (2018) pointed out that when we observing the language policy of a country or region, first of all, we must strive to understand the complex language situation of the country or region, including analysis of the current status of the language variants used in these countries or regions, the nature of language variants and The population structure, territorial domain and functional distribution of language variants in language use. The ecological approach of language policy research requires us to expand the scope of language policy research beyond language itself when studying language policy, that is to say, we must study the social, political, ethnic, religious aspects of these national institutions, Economic and cultural factors, we also need to study the ways in which these factors have a constructive effect on language. After a preliminary analysis of the above factors, we will find that each language variant has its communicative value. Secondly, we must quantitatively understand the language beliefs related to the potential values, symbolic values and pragmatic values of these language variants. With this knowledge, we can look for specific decisions about language management and language planning made by these countries or institutions, and we can question whether these decisions have affected language beliefs or language practice.

On the whole, this study will take the theory of Spolsky as the fundamental reference when analyzing the influence of Hong Kong educational language policy on China's modern state integration in Hong Kong qualitatively.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1. The Qualitative Paradigm**

This study regards understanding as an epistemological principle, and aims to provide an explanatory understanding of the phenomenon that the educational language policy affects the integration of modern countries in the historical development of Hong Kong. That is to understand the viewpoint and social situation of the researched person, and then understand the social laws related to the social situation. Only by understanding the thoughts, feelings and values of the researched can we understand their interpretation of their own behavior and environment, and then can understand their explicit behavior.

This study emphasizes holism and contextualism. In this study, the influence of educational language policy on modern state integration tends to be investigated in the specific scene or social network, and an overall understanding of the cause process and result of the event is attempted. The purpose of holism and situationism is to explain phenomena with the help of understanding the whole background of phenomena. The information collected in this study can only be meaningful and understandable in social and historical contexts.

This study focuses on the individual experience of the research object. This is not only because each research object is unique, and the results of the research cannot be copied or further inferred to objects in similar situations, but also because the understanding of social reality must be based on the special experiences and feelings of the individuals living in it. Although the author can explain the social reality, only by mastering the personal explanation of the research object, can we really figure out the motivation of the research subject. If the author is unable to determine the significance of the cognitive event to the research object, then the social reality

he describes is a fictional world that has nothing to do with the research object but is imposed on the research object.

To sum up, the characteristics of axiology, ontology and epistemology of this study require qualitative methods to solve the research problems.

### 3.2. The Research Design

According to Ge Jun (2017), only through in-depth analysis of historical and practical phenomena can we truly understand the internal theoretical logic and practical path of the educational language policy affecting the integration of modern state. Liu Zehai (2018) believes that to analyze the influence of educational language policies at several levels (state, community, and individual), we must grasp the essence through phenomena. It is best to use qualitative research methods, specifically the phenomenology method.

The research design of this study used the phenomenology path in qualitative research methods. This research emphasize the subjective experience of the researched object and its interpretation, that is, the meaning of these subjective experiences. Combine historical data for interview data searched for significant statements that capture essence of participants' perceptions and experiences is the specific approach of this study. The results of this research present rich narrative allowing readers to vicariously experience phenomenon through eyes participants.

### 3.3. Participants and Sampling

This study adopt a non-probability purposive sampling method to select participants. The author selects participants with higher information density and intensity based on the subject of this research. At the same time, sampling take into account both heterogeneity and homogeneity to ensure that

the research results produced by the selected participants in the interview cover the various situations in the research phenomenon to the greatest extent, and some aspects of them can be studied in depth. In the process of sampling participants, the author may also use snowball sampling. Based on the above principles, take educational language background, national identity, observation of educational language policy phenomenon, opinions on educational language policy especially how much Hong Kong youth trust the group they represent as selection criteria. This research select 12 people as participants and conduct in-depth interviews with them.

As shown in Table 1, Hong Kong youth have a high degree of trust in district councilors, social movement leaders, experts and scholars, teachers, parents, and friends. They usually think that these groups can represent their interests and reflect their demands (Liu Zhaojia, 2016). Therefore, the participants in this study focused on selecting representatives who continue to care about the reform of Hong Kong's educational language policy from the above groups, and fully considered their own differences in educational language background and different attitudes towards China's modern state integration in Hong Kong. Through in-depth interviews with these participants, it is possible to complete the qualitative analysis and judgment of the influence of Hong Kong educational language policy on China's modern state integration in Hong Kong. In terms of sample size, 12 participants are in line with the practice put forward by Wen Jun, an expert in Chinese qualitative research methodology, that is, it is sufficient to select 10-15 representative participants when conducting qualitative research on a specific policy (Wen Jun, 2020).

**Table 1.** The Level of Trust Among Hong Kong Youths in Various Authoritative Main Body (unit:%)

	Trust	General Trust	Distrust	Do Not Know	Refuse to Answer
Chief Executive	8.6	8.1	58.5	12.8	12
SAR Government	11.9	23.8	44.9	15.7	3.7
Member of the Legislative Council	28.3	25.9	35.2	6.8	3.8
District Councillor	45.9	33.9	10	5.7	4.4
Establishment Parties	13	16.3	47.1	16.2	7.4
Democratic Parties	35.3	31.9	18.6	6.3	7.8
Social Movement Leader	44.6	44.1	6.6	1.5	3.1
Experts and Scholars	35	52.7	5	5.3	2.1
Business Leaders	19.9	9.3	58.6	10.3	1.9
Religious Leader	29.6	38.5	11.2	10.2	10.5
Mass Media	22	44.8	13.6	14.7	4.9
Labor Union	25.4	22.2	37.1	10.8	4.4
Pressure Groups	19.3	28.4	32.5	14.1	5.7
Parents	76.2	18.7	2.8	1.9	2.3
Teacher	56.2	38.7	2.8	1	1.4
Friend	46.7	36.6	11	3.1	2.6

### 3.4. Instruments

This study focus on the most important research issues through semistructured interviews with a few open ended questions. The specific approach consists of five aspects.

First, there is a pre-setting interview outline that includes the scope of the interview content, the direction of questions, and a number of main issues.

Second, with the exception of a few major issues set in advance, the other issues are not determined in advance, but

required in free conversation, problems form as participants talk.

Third, most questions are open, with the exception of a few questions that can be answered in advance in a definite way.

Fourth, the questioning method has sufficient mobility and flexibility, and questions can be added or removed at any time.

Fifth, ask different questions for different objects to stimulate them to think deeply.

## 4. Research Finding

By using the qualitative analysis software Nvivo11 to code the interview minutes of 12 interviewees (as shown in Table 2) and make an in-depth analysis, the author gives academic answers to the 5 Research Questions of this study one by one. The main conclusions are as follows:

(1) In Hong Kong, there is an inseparable relationship between citizens' educational language background and national identity. Educational language plays an important role in shaping a person's cultural identity and exerts a subtle influence on his national identity; in Hong Kong, citizens' national identity directly or indirectly affects their attitude towards China's modern state integration in Hong Kong; in Hong Kong, the use of educational language is guided or even regulated by educational language policy. Therefore, the reform of educational language is an important way to influence citizens' national identity, and it is also an important means to promote the modern state integration.

(2) There is a strong ideological motivation behind the educational language policy reform in Hong Kong, which comes from the PRC central government; the motivation of these ideologies is specified as assimilate Hong Kongese, strengthen Hong Kongese's cultural identity with China, strengthen the centralization of the Chinese Government over Hong Kong, strengthen the national identity of Hong Kongese and strengthen the patriotic feelings of Hong Kongese; these specific ideological motives are essentially to promote China's modern state integration in Hong Kong.

(3) A considerable proportion of Hong Kong people are dissatisfied with the current educational language policy, and the main reason for their dissatisfaction is that the current educational language policy destroy the freedom of educational language and divorced from the multilingual needs of Hong Kong students. In addition, the reasons for their dissatisfaction include the current educational language policy destroy the cultural diversity of Hong Kong, lack of public support and violate the law of education; their dissatisfaction is not a kind of political opposition from an ideological point of view, but different views on the policy-making process and implementation of the language of education in Hong Kong, as well as policy objectives and possible impact. It is a criticism and suggestion from citizens that deserves the attention of policy makers; people who are satisfied with the language of education policy in Hong Kong are mainly out of their support for the major policies of the Hong Kong SAR Government and the Chinese Central Government. They support Hong Kong's current education policy because they support the integration of Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay Area.

(4) The specific ways that Hong Kong's educational language policy affects China's modern state integration in Hong Kong is not a simple educational phenomenon that simply follows the theory of educational language policy. The specific ways that Hong Kong's educational language policy affects China's modern state integration in Hong Kong is also not formed as expected by policy makers. The specific ways that Hong Kong's educational language policy affects China's modern state integration in Hong Kong is a unique phenomenon influenced by many factors, such as politics, economy, society, culture and so on. It is different from the specific ways in which the educational language policy of the general nation-state affects the modern state integration. the specific way of Hong Kong's educational language policy

affects China's modern state integration in Hong Kong includes the following aspects: the reform of educational language policy will inevitably affect China's modern state integration in Hong Kong, which may be positive or negative. It is not based on the motives of policy makers; if the policy-making process is in line with democratic procedures and respects linguistic human rights, it is more likely to have a positive impact on China's modern state integration in Hong Kong, and vice versa; if the policy design is in line with the educational law, it is more likely to have a positive impact on China's modern state integration in Hong Kong, and vice versa; if the policy implementation process is gradual and flexible, it is more likely to have a positive impact on China's modern state integration in Hong Kong, and vice versa; if the result of policy implementation is conducive to Hong Kong's economic and social development, it is more likely to have a positive impact on China's modern state integration in Hong Kong, and vice versa.

(5) It is a common requirement of Hong Kong society to promote a new reform of Hong Kong's educational language policy. It is the fervent expectation of the overwhelming majority of Hong Kong people based on their fundamental interests. The principles in the The Comprehensive Review of Hong Kong's Education System report are in line with the fundamental interests of Hong Kong people in freely choosing the language of education, that is, the human rights of language. The government should have widely listened to the views of all sectors of Hong Kong society in the formulation of educational language policies when formulating the educational language policy; the policy formulation is led by the education sector to determine the applicable educational language according to the language proficiency and actual needs of different students; the educational language policy reform proposals such as Cantonese as the educational language for social science subjects, English as the educational language for natural science subjects, and Putonghua as a universal compulsory course are all based on the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of Hong Kong people. All have realistic rationality and maneuverability. At the same time, it is also beneficial to the Chinese Central Government and the Hong Kong SAR Government to promote China's modern state integration in Hong Kong.

## 5. Conclusion

### 5.1. The Driving Force of the Current Educational Language Reform in Hong Kong is Insufficient

Bernard Spolsky (2018) revealed four driving forces driving language policy: the first driving force is the social language environment, which includes the number and types of languages in a country, the number and composition of the population of each language user, and the language of each language Communicative value inside and outside the community; the second motivation is related to the operation of national identity or other identities. In modern nation-states, the symbolic value of the national language has become increasingly prominent; the third power is globalization and the subsequent wave of English; the fourth power is the deepening of human rights awareness and civil rights awareness.

**Table 2.** The Codebook of Research Finding

Name	Sources	References
National Identity	12	13
Chinese	4	4
Hong Kongese	4	4
Hong Kongese of China	4	5
Mother Tongue	12	15
Cantonese	9	9
English	2	2
Putonghua	4	4
Educational Language	12	23
Cantonese	8	8
English	6	8
Putonghua	6	7
Impact of Educational Language	12	12
Have an Impact on National Identity	4	4
Have not an impact on national identity	8	8
Attitude Towards the Modern State Integration	12	12
Not Support	5	5
Support	7	7
Reasons for Supporting the Modern State Integration	12	12
Non-political Reasons	5	5
Political Reasons	7	7
Ideological Motivation of Educational Language Policy Reform	12	12
Have	11	11
Assimilate Hong Kongese	3	3
Strengthen Hong Kongese's Cultural Identity with China	3	3
Strengthen the Centralization of the Chinese Government over Hong Kong	3	3
Strengthen the National Identity of Hong Kongese	2	2
Strengthen the Patriotic Feelings of Hong Kongese	2	2
Not Have	1	1
Attitude Towards the Current Educational Language Policy in Hong Kong	12	12
Not Satisfied	9	9
Destroy the Cultural Diversity of Hong Kong	2	2
Destroy the Freedom of Educational Language	4	4
Divorced From the Multilingual Needs of Hong Kong Students	3	3
Lack of Public Support	2	2
Violate the Law of Education	2	2
Satisfied	3	3
Conducive to Improving the Quality and Ability of Young People in Hong Kong	1	1
Conducive to the Integration of Hong Kong Youth into the National Development Strategy	2	2

Name	Sources	References
Have the Freedom of Educational Language	1	1
Attitude Towards the Feasibility of Promote China's Modern State Integration in Hong Kong by Reforming the Educational Language Policy	12	12
Consider It Desirable	4	4
Can Effectively Promote China's Modern State Integration in Hong Kong	3	3
Can Have a Positive Impact on China's Modern State Integration in Hong Kong	1	1
Consider It Undesirable	8	8
Have an Adverse Impact on China's Modern State Integration in Hong Kong	5	5
Invalid for Promoting China's Modern State Integration in Hong Kong	4	4
Lack of Legitimacy	1	1
Evaluation of Hong Kong's Educational Language Policy in Different Historical Periods	12	22
The Best Educational Language Policy in the History of Hong Kong	11	11
Reason	10	10
The Worst Educational Language Policy in Hong Kong's History	11	11
Reason	11	11
Position on the Need for Reform and Suggestions for Continued Reform	12	12
Need Reform	11	11
Suggestion for Reform	11	11
Not Need Reform	1	1
Suggestion for Reform	1	1

In the author's opinion, these four driving forces should be the joint force to promote the introduction of language policy, and none of them is indispensable. The second driving force is the main driving force of the current educational language policy reform in Hong Kong. At the same time, there is also a driving force similar to the third driving force, that is, regional economic integration is specifically the Putonghua wave brought about by Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay Area integration.

The first and fourth driving forces are obviously missing. This has led to a serious shortage of driving forces to promote the reform of the language of education policy in Hong Kong. In a sense, the first and fourth driving forces are more important for promoting the implementation of language policy. Because the implementation of a language policy must be adapted to the socio-linguistic environment. The social and linguistic environment of Hong Kong is very complicated. It is a serious violation of the law of language policy-making to implement a unified educational language policy divorced from the reality of the diversity of social language environment in Hong Kong. This is an important reason for the hindrance to the implementation of the current language of education policy in Hong Kong. At the same time, Hong Kong is one of the regions with the highest degree of civil freedom in the world under the capitalist democratic political system. Citizens generally have a high awareness of human rights and have an early awakening in the right consciousness of free choice of educational language. At present, the reform of the language of education restricts the right of Hong Kong people to freely choose the language of education, and ignores their language and human rights to a certain extent, which is

why it has aroused their opposition. Therefore, the next step of educational language policy reform in Hong Kong must fully make up for the lack of the first and fourth driving forces.

## 5.2. The Obstruction of the Current Educational Language Policy Reform in Hong Kong May Once Again Prove the Uncontrollability of Language

Spolsky (2018) pointed out that the current situation of language management makes people think: even those who claim to be language managers recognize that there is a certain contradiction between ideal and reality in language policy. Most countries may have constant tensions due to language choice issues, and for those who want to change the language practice of others, they have also been under constant pressure. If language management is not simply to record the current language situation or some idealized language situations that are difficult to achieve, then language management should be reformed in both ideology and practice. Researchers of language policy can be naturally divided into two groups: optimistic and pessimistic. Optimists believe that language management is feasible, while pessimists believe that language is uncontrollable. Experience has shown that the facts seem to be more inclined to the latter, because few language cases can prove that language management has produced ideal results.

The author believes that Spolsky's view is a regular conclusion summed up by observing a large number of language policy reform practices and through the general failure of the reform. From the author's point of view, the

social disputes caused by the educational language policy reform in Hong Kong, especially the tense relationship between citizens and the government, are highly consistent with the current situation of language management described by Spolsky. The educational language policy reform in Hong Kong has not achieved the effect that the reform promoters hope to achieve, which, in a sense, confirms the uncontrollability of language. The promoters of Hong Kong's educational language policy hope to gradually implement the educational language policy of Putonghua as the sole educational language in order to enhance Hong Kong people's national identity to China and ultimately promote China's modern state integration in Hong Kong. This is a typical language control behavior, which is different from the guiding educational language policy such as standardizing the use of pronunciation. Because this kind of language policy based on language control always goes against the language will of language users, it is often difficult to implement it successfully.

### **5.3. The Method of Multi-factor Comprehensive Analysis Can be Used as a Basic Method for Formulating a New Educational Language Policy in Hong Kong**

Spolsky (2018) pointed out that when we observing the language policy of a country or region, first of all, we must strive to understand the complex language situation of the country or region, including analysis of the current status of the language variants used in these countries or regions, the nature of language variants and The population structure, territorial domain and functional distribution of language variants in language use. The ecological approach of language policy research requires us to expand the scope of language policy research beyond language itself when studying language policy, that is to say, we must study the social, political, ethnic, religious aspects of these national institutions, Economic and cultural factors, we also need to study the ways in which these factors have a constructive effect on language. After a preliminary analysis of the above factors, we will find that each language variant has its communicative value. Secondly, we must qualitatively understand the language beliefs related to the potential values, symbolic values and pragmatic values of these language variants. With this knowledge, we can look for specific decisions about language management and language planning made by these countries or institutions, and we can question whether these decisions have affected language beliefs or

language practice.

The author believes that this method of multi-factor comprehensive analysis is not only a good way to study language policy, but also a good way to formulate language policy. For Hong Kong, where the language situation is complex and there is a profound mutual influence between political, economic and cultural factors and language policy, this method is highly applicable to the formulation, evaluation and implementation of language policy.

The author believes that in order to formulate a new educational language policy, Hong Kong must have a comprehensive understanding of the impact of the current educational language policy on politics, economy and culture; we must have an accurate understanding of the symbolic value of the educational language chosen by the current educational language policy, and we must have a full prediction of the possible impact, especially the social impact, after the introduction of the new educational language policy.

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