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Chinese or English Medium of Teaching?

AFTER WORLD WAR TWO, only about fifteen percent of the brightest Hong Kong children were given free education in Government secondary schools. The medium of teaching was English, and the purpose was to train Chinese students to serve in the British civil service. The standard of teaching in those schools was considered very high.

Any other children whose parents wanted them to study had pay fees, and most schools were run by either Catholic or other church organizations. No doubt those private church schools were set up to attract people to join their churches, but they had a high standard of education and many of their teachers were native English people.

It was considered in those days that education in English would give the students a good career, and generally speaking, that was true. However, when the government introduced universal free primary and secondary education in the 1970s, many teachers in the newly subsidized schools were not well-trained. Some were permitted to teach with only Form 7 qualifications, and the quality of education in all subjects, especially English, became much lower.

Parents who did not know any English, believed that if

their children attended schools using English as the medium of teaching, they would eventually go to university. After a few years it was realized that many students became bored because they sat through school lessons understanding very little of what was being taught, except in their Chinese lessons. Consequently, some children lost interest and misbehaved. Some found friends among triads, where they learned bad habits or even to commit crimes.

Finally, the Government decided to change to the Chinese medium, except for schools where the children were advanced in English. Some schools volunteered to change to Chinese, and many others were compelled to use Mother Tongue. Many parents objected to this change, and some students also believed that their future would be brighter if they studied in English. On the other hand, some students were happy that they could sit in class and understand all subjects, except English, in their own language. School life was no longer boring, and their conduct in class improved.

Personally, I have seen improvements in the examination results of children who study at schools where Chinese is the medium of teaching. Whether they use English after graduating from school depends upon what career they adopt, but it is useful in Hong Kong if students learn it as a second language.