

Attitudes and Improvement Strategies of Hong Kong Residents Towards Mandarin based on the Two-Language and Three-Language Policy

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Abstract. To explore the attitudes of different groups in Hong Kong towards Mandarin and their underlying causes, and to analyze the imbalance among Cantonese, English, and Mandarin in a trilingual environment, this study proposes strategies to promote the popularization of Mandarin and balance the three languages, thereby facilitating the linguistic and cultural integration between Hong Kong and the mainland. Focusing on the theme Attitudes of Hong Kong residents towards Mandarin under the two-script and three-language policy and improvement strategies, the study conducted a questionnaire survey primarily consisting of open-ended questions targeting Hong Kong residents. The survey focused on language usage attitudes and actual needs, as well as the application of language in daily life and work. Interviews were also conducted with students, parents, and teachers across all primary and secondary school grades. The data was analyzed using the three-stage coding procedure of grounded theory. The research findings indicate that Cantonese is the predominant language in Hong Kong, while Mandarin is used only in Chinese and general knowledge classes, with Cantonese even being used as an auxiliary tool in general knowledge classes. In Hong Kong, Cantonese is seen as the foundation of local culture, Mandarin is associated with national identity, and English symbolizes international competitiveness. Schools, teachers, and parents do not place enough emphasis on Mandarin education; schools and teachers focus more on teaching outcomes, while parents prioritize their childrens development. In Hong Kong, the ability to use both Cantonese and Mandarin is crucial for academic planning and career development, which is a major reason for the imbalance among the three languages. The two-script and three-language policy has increased attention to Mandarin. The degree has not changed the dominance of Cantonese and English. Although families and schools have tried to create a Mandarin-speaking environment, the results have been limited due to the need for improvement in parents language skills and the quality of school textbooks. Suggestions for improvement: The government should support enterprises and communities that use Mandarin to implement Mandarin corner activities; schools should develop new textbooks and conduct cross-regional language practice; parents and teachers should improve their Mandarin proficiency, with schools regularly assessing teachers Mandarin language skills, and teachers helping parents improve their Mandarin. This will form a chain to promote the widespread use of Mandarin throughout Hong Kong society.

Keywords: Two Languages; Three Languages; Hong Kong; Mandarin; Improvement Strategies.

1. Introduction

As a former British colony, Hong Kong saw the British language policy in China primarily using English. In that era, to have a promising future, one had to learn English, and the British intensified English education for Hong Kong residents. The Qing government mandated the use of Mandarin to better report local conditions to the emperor. However, British colonization led to an imbalance between English and Chinese. Additionally, as an autonomous international city, Cantonese and English were widely used in Hong Kong. To better integrate into the local environment, more and more people began learning Cantonese and English. These factors have significantly contributed to the current multilingual environment in Hong Kong. Current research focuses on the practical use of languages in Hong Kong and case studies in primary and secondary schools. This article will investigate the status, role, and attitudes of Mandarin in Hong Kong among students of different age groups, parents, teachers, and Hong Kong residents, analyzing and summarizing their attitudes

towards Mandarin as society evolves, and offering suggestions. Currently, Cantonese remains the primary language in Hong Kong's social language environment. The two-language policy has resolved historical issues, but the legal relationship between Cantonese and Mandarin remains unclear. What is the attitude towards Mandarin? What are the reasons behind this attitude, and how can it be improved? This article aims to investigate the attitudes of students, parents, teachers, and Hong Kong residents towards Mandarin through questionnaires and interviews, covering different age groups, and to offer practical suggestions. The research aims to contribute to the promotion of Mandarin in Hong Kong, further support the joint efforts of language development in Hong Kong and China's mainland, and propose improvements to balance the use of Cantonese, English, and Mandarin.

2. Literature Review

Since the implementation of the two-script and three-language policy, Hong Kong has adopted English and traditional Chinese as the written language, with English, Mandarin, and Cantonese as the spoken languages. However, the primary spoken languages in Hong Kong are currently English and Cantonese. Research on improvement strategies among local students in Hong Kong can be categorized into several areas: summarizing the current status and issues of language policies, understanding the identity of Hong Kong residents, the views of students and parents on the three languages, case studies of the three-language policy in schools, and content related to the input and output of the three languages, including English or Cantonese. Specifically, Evans, S. (2013) found that using Cantonese as the teaching language yields the best results [1]. However, after the implementation of the two-script and three-language policy, some schools taught in English while others taught in Chinese, without considering the significant differences in students' language abilities. Subsequent adjustments expanded the use of English as a teaching language, which led to Cantonese being influenced by English and Mandarin. Similarly, Jones, G. (2003) argued that Hong Kong promoted Mandarin teaching to enhance national identity but overlooked the impact of the teaching language on educational outcomes [2]. English schools and Chinese schools differentiated students' language capital, leading to political and educational conflicts, as well as the impact of global language tools on national identity. The conflict between language, local dialects, and Mandarin recognition. However, the reality is that Cantonese remains the primary daily language in Hong Kong. If Cantonese were to be the medium of instruction, how could Hong Kong, as an international city, connect with the global community without learning English? Not to mention, not learning Mandarin would be even more impractical. Li, D. C., & Li, D. C. (2017) noted that Cantonese is the predominant dialect in Hong Kong, and English and Mandarin are rarely used in daily communication, leading to a lack of a language learning environment [3]. Moreover, English and Chinese belong to different language families. The significant differences in phonetic systems between Mandarin and Cantonese make it challenging for students to learn. Furthermore, the separation of English classes from Chinese classes has raised concerns among parents and students about their future prospects. Additionally, the teaching outcomes have been unsatisfactory. Despite years of implementing mother tongue teaching strategies, there has been little improvement in students' English and Mandarin proficiency, and public exam results have not met expectations. However, English is crucial for job hunting in Hong Kong. Promoting Mandarin teaching also faces the challenge of a shortage of qualified teachers, which makes it difficult to meet the schools' teaching needs. Schools, in response to parental and student demands for English, are considering English instruction. Clearly, balancing the three languages is a critical issue; otherwise, the cycle will continue. Li, D. C. (2022) also noted that the differences among the three languages increase the difficulty of learning, and the classroom segregation policy leads to a labeling effect [4]. It also overlooks students' cognitive development stages and the limitations of classroom language, which hinder their understanding of subject content [5]. The author recommends strengthening early education, flexible language teaching, and optimizing the teaching staff. The government should balance language education and avoid over-reliance on administrative measures. This requires paying more attention to the attitudes of students and parents in other areas.

Wang, L., & Kirkpatrick, A. (2020) found from surveys conducted in three different primary schools that students prefer a trilingual model. Additionally, students native language background influences their choice of teaching language [6]. Parents generally prioritize the schools location and English, as they place greater emphasis on academic advancement and future career prospects. It is suggested that lower grades should primarily use Cantonese, gradually introducing English and Mandarin, and allowing higher-grade students to choose freely. Cantonese auxiliary courses should be offered to help non-Chinese-speaking students integrate better. In subjects like mathematics, English auxiliary teaching should be appropriately increased to aid understanding. Chan, K. L. R. (2018) studied an author whose native language is Cantonese, who is fluent in English and has a moderate level of Mandarin [7]. The study found that people do not use just one language; speaking only one language makes them seem more like mainlanders, while mixing languages is more convenient and practical, similar to how mainlanders incorporate internet slang into their daily conversations. In terms of language environment, international areas find it more convenient to use English, and the use of Mandarin in universities is increasing, but teaching still relies heavily on English. Chan, K. L. R. (2019) expanded on the 2018 study of college students, finding that less than one-third of college students believe that due to increased interaction with mainland students, they need to use Mandarin to supplement their recognition of the existence of trilingualism [8]. However, most people believe this weakens Hong Kongs identity, and everyone uses the conversion between Cantonese and English as a symbol of identity. About 60% believe that single-language use is only for reports, bilingualism is a symbol of identity, and trilingualism is often rejected by most people due to its involvement with Mandarin. Lixun, W., & Kirkpatrick, A. (2020) noted that in primary schools where Cantonese, English, and a small amount of mixed teaching are used, international schools tend to favor trilingual teaching, while locals are somewhat resistant to Mandarin. Parents support full English classes but are opposed to some Mandarin Chinese classes. In the teaching process, the principal opposes language conversion, but adjustments are allowed in practical teaching, with the requirement that language instruction must be monolingual [9]. Wang, L. (2020) conducted a study on secondary schools, which is similar to primary schools, except that both principals and teachers believe Cantonese aids in understanding Chinese content and increases student engagement [10]. Kirkpatrick, A. (2007) points out that there is an excessive focus on aligning English standards with those of European and American countries in Hong Kong, overlooking the fact that Cantonese is the native language of Hong Kong, which can undermine students confidence and affect their identity [11]. Lee, K. S., & Leung, W. M. (2012) noted that Cantonese is used more frequently than English and Mandarin in both work settings and daily life, yet its actual status is not clearly reflected in government documents, and the dual-language policy adds to students learning burden [12].

In summary, it is essential to find a balance among English, Cantonese, and Mandarin, with enhancing the sense of identity among Hong Kong residents being a crucial component. This requires collaboration from the government, schools, and families. For students, it is also important to consider the importance of both input and output. Mai, Z., & Yip, V. (2022) noted that early and high-quality language input positively impacts multilingual learning [13]. Cao, G. W., & Mok, P. (2023) highlighted the dual impact of language type and individual background on language output. It is evident that the family language environment is another critical factor to consider [14]. Previous scholars have investigated Hong Kongs language policies, environments, and case studies. This paper aims to understand through a questionnaire survey the views and attitudes of students, parents, teachers, and Hong Kong residents of different age groups towards the status, role, and attitudes of Mandarin in Hong Kong education. It seeks to address any conflicts between school language policies and actual teaching practices, assess students confidence in mastering three languages after graduation, and explore the practical language use issues faced by Hong Kong residents, and to propose recommendations.

3. Research Design

This study focuses on the theme of "Attitudes and Improvement Strategies of Hong Kong Residents towards Mandarin Based on the Two-Writing and Three-Language Policy." To minimize errors and subjective biases, a stratified sampling method was employed. The study involves conducting qualitative research through questionnaires among Hong Kong residents, interviews with students and parents of different grades about their attitudes towards Mandarin in Hong Kong, the difficulties they encounter in learning or working, and their actual language proficiency, as well as interviews with teachers regarding their teaching methods and perspectives. The details are as follows:

To explore the attitudes of Hong Kong residents towards language use and their actual needs and applications in daily life, work, or study in Hong Kong, the research questions are designed to be open-ended to ensure detailed and specific results. School students are categorized into primary education stages from Grade 1 to Grade 6, examining the language background, attitudes, and challenges at different educational levels. Parent groups are sampled based on their childrens school levels (e.g., primary school parents, secondary school parents, etc.), to understand the attitudes of parents at different stages. Educators differentiate between teaching levels (primary and secondary schools) and focus on observing the practical application of Mandarin in teaching scenarios. Based on a systematic analysis of 18 interview materials from students, parents, and teachers, and following the three-stage coding procedure of grounded theory, three core categories have been distilled: language practice, language ideology, and language management. This structure deeply reveals the operational logic, identity construction mechanisms, and governance adjustment paths of the three languages (Cantonese, Mandarin, English) in school, family, and community settings.

4. Research Results

1. The results of the questionnaire survey

A total of 165 questionnaires were collected in this questionnaire survey. The subjects of this study required that their ancestral home was Hong Kong and their mother tongue was Cantonese. Among them, 23 did not meet the requirements, so there were 142 valid questionnaires.

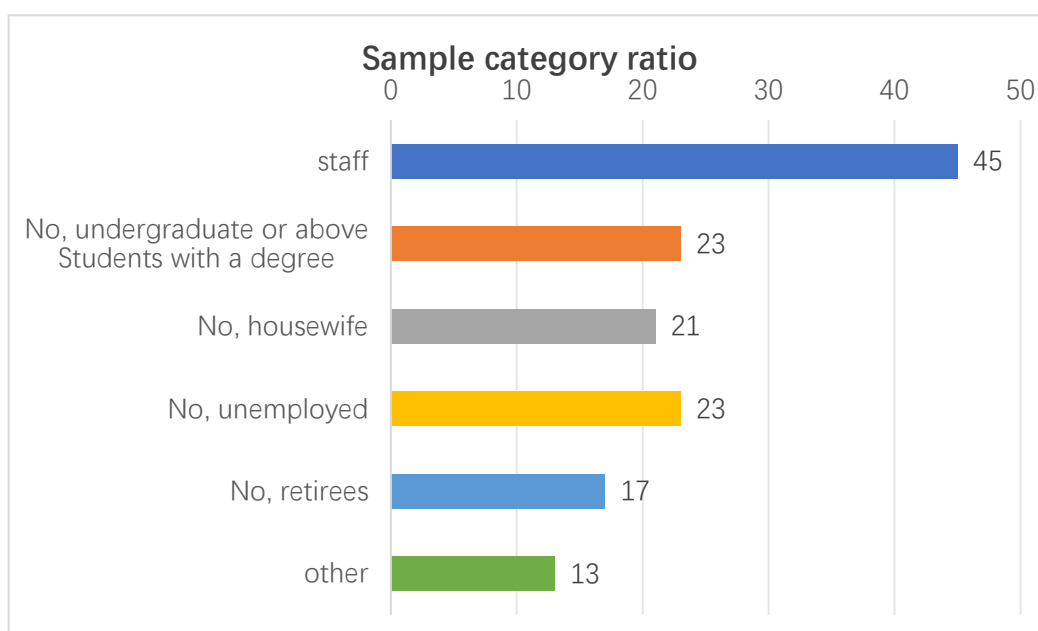


Figure 1. Sample category ratio

As shown in Figure 1, there are 45 staff members, 23 students with a bachelors degree or above, 21 housewives, 23 unemployed people, 17 retirees and 13 others.

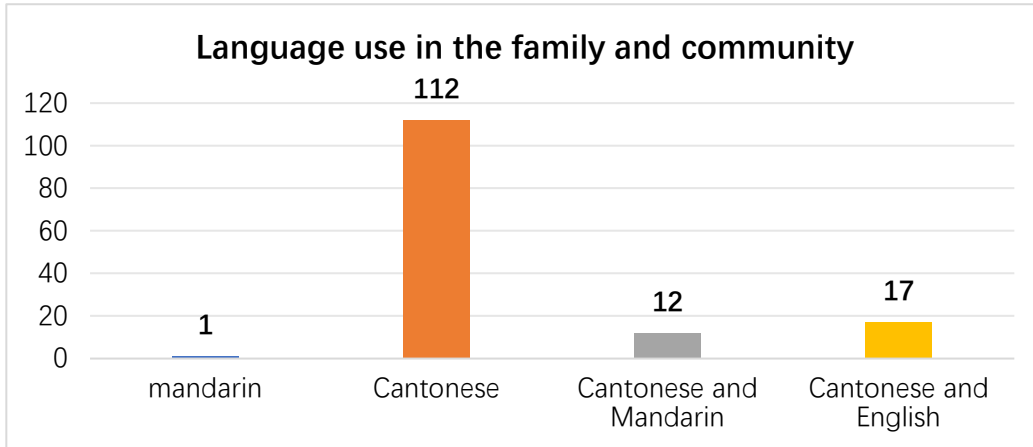


Figure 2. Language use in family communities

As shown in Figure 2, the majority of people (78.87%) prefer to use Cantonese when communicating with their parents, siblings, grandparents, friends, and neighbors. Only 0.7% of people choose to use Mandarin for these interactions. A smaller group (8.45% each) opt for mixed languages, such as Cantonese and Mandarin, or Cantonese and English. This indicates that in Hong Kong, Cantonese is predominantly used in family and community settings, while Mandarin is rarely used.

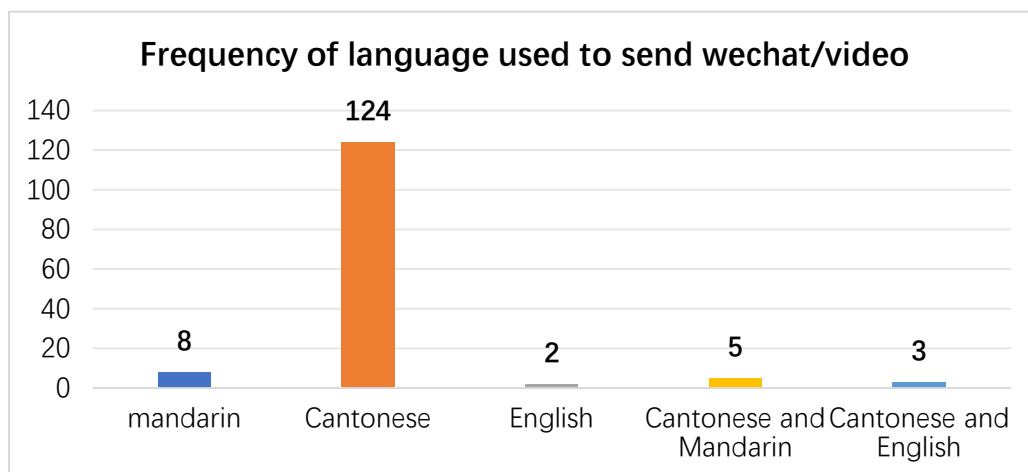


Figure 3. Frequency of language use when sending wechat or watching movies

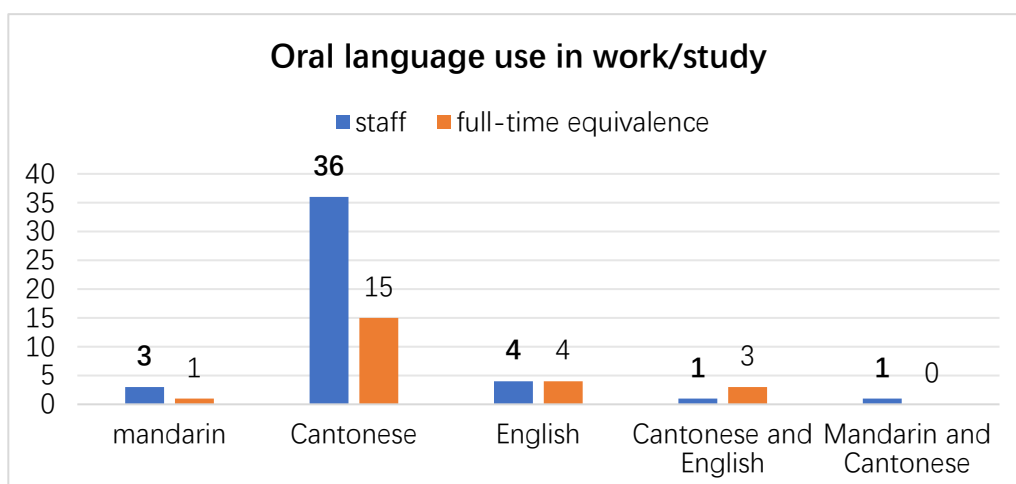


Figure 4. Oral language use for work or study

As can be seen from Figure 3, most people choose to use Cantonese to send wechat and watch movies, accounting for 87.32%, while those who use English, Cantonese or other mixed languages account for 12.68%. In Hong Kong, wechat voice or watching movies are basically used in Cantonese.

Figure 4 illustrates the oral language usage of staff from various professions working in Hong Kong and students with a bachelors degree or higher in their school settings. Both staff and students predominantly use Cantonese, with usage rates of 80% and 65.22%, respectively. Compared to other languages, the use of Mandarin is relatively low, at 6.67% and 4.35%.

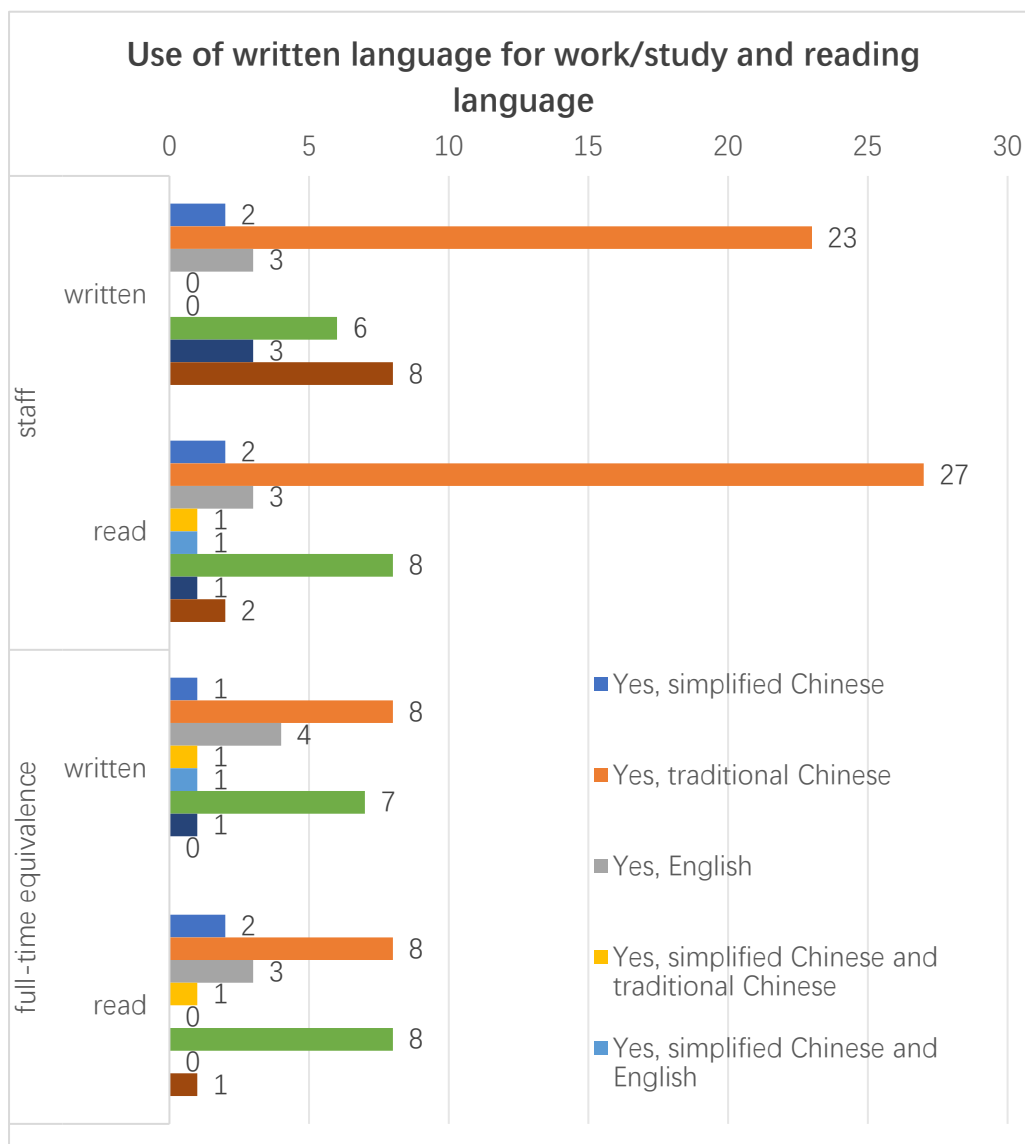


Figure 5. Use of written and reading language for work or study

In Figure 5, among the staff working in various professions in Hong Kong, those who write written letters, reports, notes, memos, emails, and read instructions, manuals, letters, reports, notes, and memos predominantly use Traditional Chinese, with a significant difference in usage compared to other languages, accounting for 51.11% and 60%, respectively. Similarly, students with a bachelors degree or higher who study in Hong Kong schools also predominantly use Traditional Chinese when writing or reading documents, each at 34.78%. However, the usage of both Traditional Chinese and English is similar, with 30.43% using Traditional Chinese and 34.78% using only Traditional Chinese.

According to the questionnaire survey, Cantonese is still the mainstream language in Hong Kong. In both life and work, most Hong Kong residents prefer to use Cantonese for communication, which

is a kind of culture and habit. In addition, English is more helpful for career development in Hong Kong, but the frequency of using Mandarin is not high, so it has little impact on career development.

2. Interview study results

Table 1. Spindle code

Core areas	fundamental category	category
C1 Language Practice	Language use by B1 teachers	A1 teaching language
		A2 family language
		A3 Community Language
	Language use by B2 parents	A4 school language
		A5 Family Language
		A6 Community Language
	Language use by B3 students	A7 School Language
		A8 Family Language
		A9 Community Language
C2 language ideology	B4 Language Policy	A10 Requirements for teaching language in schools
		A11 Teachers attitudes towards teaching language
		A12 Parents attitudes towards the language of teaching
		A13 Students attitudes towards the language of teaching
	B5 Language Assessment	A14 Teachers evaluation of students language
		A15 Parents evaluation of students language
		A16 Students evaluation of their own language
	B6 language expectations	A17 fluency
		A18 Application ability
	B7 recognition of the value of language	A19 Cultural understanding
		A20s value recognition of English
		A21s value recognition of Cantonese
		A22s recognition of the value of Mandarin
		A23 Cultural heritage
		A24 Identity
		A25 parent
	B8 Language learning	A26 teacher
		A27 student
		A28 teacher
A29 Encouragement approach		
B9 Strategies to promote the learning of Mandarin	A30 creates a language environment	
	A31 student	
B10 Difficulties and challenges	A32 lacks environment	
	A33 Understanding of knowledge	
B11 Learning Effect	A34 teaching effect	
	A35 Parental Views	
	Student perspective on A36	

This study employs the grounded theory method to systematically analyze the language use and attitudes of three groups: students, parents, and teachers. Through an open coding, axial coding, and selective coding process, it constructs the core structure of trilingual practices, language ideologies, and language management in the context of Hong Kongs basic education, revealing their internal logic and interactive mechanisms.

(1) Open coding

During the open coding phase, each sentence of the 18 interview texts (from 6 students, 6 parents, and 6 teachers) was analyzed to identify initial concepts that reflect language use and identity characteristics. These concepts were then categorized based on semantic similarity, resulting in 36 categories. This stage focused on the linguistic experience differences among different interview groups, ensuring the authenticity of the original language expressions while completing the initial abstraction.

(2) Main shaft coding

The main axis coding stage takes "inter-category axis logic" as the analysis basis, integrates 36 categories into 11 main axis categories, and further divides them into 3 core categories. The details are shown in Table 1.

(3) Selective coding

The selective coding stage focuses on the interaction mechanism among the three core categories, summarizes six typical relationship paths, and establishes a dynamic relationship model based on language practice, mediated by language ideology, and with language management as the strategic platform. These paths are revealed as follows (see Table 2):

Table 2. Selective coding

Typical relationship structure	The connotation of the relationship structure
C1 language practice to C2 language ideology	The pattern of daily language use (language practice of teachers, parents and students) affects the attitude and value recognition of language. For example, students who use Mandarin at home frequently usually support or adapt to Mandarin education in school.
C2 language ideology to C3 language management	Language value recognition and cultural attitudes guide specific teaching and family language intervention strategies, such as teachers encouraging Mandarin expression in class, parents creating a Mandarin environment, and schools formulating language class policies.
C3 language management to C1 language practice	In turn, educational policies, family teaching strategies and classroom incentive mechanisms shape language practice, change students language choices and frequencies in school, home and community, and promote the expansion of Mandarin in non-native environments.
C1 language practice to C3 language management	Real language use feedback leads to changes in management strategies, such as students being more effective in Cantonese in certain subjects, prompting teachers to use bilingual teaching strategies in the classroom, or parents to adjust language training methods according to students learning outcomes.
C2 language ideology ↔ C1 language practice	There is a cyclical effect: language practice shapes language ideology (such as identity), and language ideology feeds back to influence the way language practice is done (such as choosing to use Mandarin/Yue/English in certain situations).
C3 language management ↔ C2 language ideology	Educational strategies and sociolinguistic policies often reflect and reinforce dominant ideologies, but they can also lead to conflicts, such as when parents question the "Mandarin teaching" policy

Language practice is the starting point of a trilingual ecological structure, guiding students, teachers, and parents in their language use and interaction in various contexts, including school classrooms, daily family life, and community interactions. Research indicates that individual language behavior is heavily influenced by life experiences and social exposure: students and teachers predominantly use Cantonese in class, while Mandarin is mainly used in Chinese or general education classes. In general education classes, Cantonese is often used to aid understanding, and in other subjects, both Cantonese and English are used for better comprehension. In families and communities,

Cantonese is commonly used for emotional communication; parents often use Cantonese as the family language, some families use English for professional communication, and Mandarin serves as a functional communication language. The language ideology, which reflects deeper attitudes behind language choices, is evident in individuals' perceptions of language value, identity, and cultural belonging. Studies show that schools have fewer requirements for Mandarin, which is only emphasized in Chinese classes and Chinese culture topics in general education classes. Cantonese is generally seen as the foundation of local culture and an emotional carrier, while Mandarin is closely tied to national identity and cultural dissemination, and English is highly valued as a symbol of international competitiveness. There are differences in how different groups use language. Cultural Differences: Students are increasingly diverse in their identities, and Mandarin is more commonly used for cross-regional communication. Parents prioritize practicality and cultural balance, setting less stringent requirements for Mandarin compared to Cantonese and English. This is reflected in the teaching outcomes of teachers, where, apart from Chinese teachers, other teachers do not have high standards for Chinese. In terms of identity, the most fundamental aspect is being Hong Kong residents and Chinese people. Language management involves how families and schools strategically promote language development. Research indicates that hiring tutors or having one parent help create a Mandarin-speaking environment at home, as well as teachers using videos and short stories to familiarize students with Mandarin, and motivating students through role models to boost their enthusiasm. Despite parental accompaniment, incorrect pronunciation by parents can lead to students also making mistakes. Since students primarily speak Cantonese, they may experience slower cognitive processing when switching to Mandarin, especially when absorbing new knowledge. Teachers have noted this issue and believe that the textbooks' language conversion can cause difficulties in understanding.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

Through research and investigation, this article concludes that Cantonese is the predominant language in Hong Kong. In terms of career planning and academic advancement, Cantonese and English are more important than Mandarin. Mandarin is only used for communication with the mainland and has no practical use in Hong Kong. Schools and teachers focus more on teaching outcomes, so Mandarin is used in Chinese classes, but other subject teachers do not emphasize it. The schools' attention to Mandarin is insufficient, often just following policy requirements. While families organize activities related to Mandarin, these efforts lack professionalism and have not achieved significant results. Parents' interest in Mandarin is primarily for practicing with the mainland, but their main concern is the students' future plans, which are closely tied to academic and career prospects. However, to achieve better academic or career success, improving Cantonese and English skills is more crucial than enhancing Mandarin proficiency. Clearly, the bilingual and trilingual policy has increased the attention to Mandarin among Hong Kong residents, but due to the Cantonese environment and the impact of residents' personal or students' future plans, the ability to speak Cantonese and English has become more important, which is the primary reason for the imbalance among the three languages. The government should assist primary and secondary schools where Mandarin is the common language. The construction of enterprises in Hong Kong, either as independent entities or in close collaboration with China's mainland, should aim to increase the employment rate of Mandarin speakers. This can subtly influence the language environment by increasing Mandarin usage. Additionally, university student volunteers could be recruited to set up Mandarin corners in libraries and community centers, assisting in the development of a Cantonese-Mandarin bilingual learning platform. Schools should establish a department dedicated to textbook writing, producing materials that better align with the logic of Mandarin, which can help students shift their language thinking patterns and prevent cultural disconnection. Furthermore, schools can form teams to assist students in acquiring new knowledge through Mandarin. Other courses besides Chinese classes could be taught in Mandarin, and one-on-one cross-regional online pairing for

language practice could be introduced, where mainland and Hong Kong students teach each other Cantonese and Mandarin. This approach not only protects and promotes the spread of Cantonese but also enhances the Mandarin proficiency of students in Hong Kong, reducing resistance and boosting interest in learning. Parents and teachers should also improve their Mandarin skills. Schools should regularly test teachers language proficiency and use weekly class meetings to help parents improve their Mandarin, offering learning suggestions. In terms of classroom teaching, students should be grouped based on their Mandarin proficiency levels, without dividing them into separate classes. Although this article has identified the causes of the imbalance among the three languages and proposed suggestions, there are still areas for improvement, which can be addressed in the future. More detailed research, such as the language attitudes of people living, working or studying in Hong Kong from the mainland, the relationship and influence between different age groups of Hong Kong staff on working languages and career development, and the detailed writing plan of teaching materials.

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