



**German as a Foreign Language at Secondary School
Level in Hong Kong – A Case Study of a Pilot Scheme**

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This paper examines the teaching and learning of German as a foreign language at secondary school level in the distinct region of Hong Kong – a former British colony. Due to the dominance of English in and after the British colonial history and the increasing importance of Mandarin since the handover to Mainland China, none of the other foreign languages including German can be compared with English and Mandarin. While previous articles mainly draw attention to German programmes in tertiary institutions, the focus here is on secondary schools, a neglected research area of German as a Foreign Language in Hong Kong. The description of a pilot scheme for a German Programme in a local Chinese school in Hong Kong as a case study demonstrates the development, content and curriculum for German as a third language at secondary school level. The aim of this article is to provide an example of how German secured its position in the local school environment in Hong Kong.

1. German as a Foreign Language in Hong Kong

The language policy in Hong Kong has always been complicated compared to Mainland China and Taiwan, as well as to other countries in Southeast Asia, for instance, Korea and Japan (Ammon 2010: 1; Fluck 2007: 166; Gerbig 2007: 318). The linguistic situation in the territory can be described as a continuous competition of English and Chinese¹ (Chong 2012: 27; Eschenlohr 2003: 130; Hess 1996: 36; Wannagat 2003: 129). Due to British colonial influence and following the 156 years of Hong Kong's colonial history, English was not only dominant in the educational, legal and constitutional system in the colonial era,² but also had the status of an undisputed lingua franca in Hong Kong even 20 years after the handover to Mainland China in 1997. However, Mandarin has gained increasing weight since 1997 and is used in some of the schools as the medium of instruction in Chinese-related subjects including Chinese

¹ Chinese here refers to both Cantonese and Mandarin. Cantonese differs from Mandarin, the lingua franca in the PRC, mainly in the writing system.

² This fact is surprising as 99% of Hong Kong's population in the British colonial time consisted of Chinese.

Language, Chinese Literature and Chinese History.³ Moreover, Mandarin has become a necessary prerequisite for professional development in the job market in Hong Kong.

Being a bilingual environment and international city, foreign language learning generally enjoys popularity in Hong Kong. The question is which languages will be learned after English and Mandarin. Historically, students and adults in Hong Kong wishing to learn a facultative foreign language have learned towards Japanese, French, Spanish and now also Korean. The demand for learning German is limited, even with the outstanding promotional activities of the stalwart German institutions over the past 50 years in Hong Kong.

With regard to Japanese and Korean, both languages are easier to learn for Chinese speakers due to the similarities in the writing systems, and Japanese and Korean pop culture and idols are very popular in Hong Kong. In addition, numerous Japanese companies are located in Hong Kong and require Japanese language proficiency for their positions. Economic relations between Germany and Hong Kong are remarkable and several hundred German-speaking companies are represented in the territory. English is the corporate language in most of the German companies, hence German generally does not play an essential role for professional qualifications in the Hong Kong job market.

The fact that more people learn French than German in Hong Kong can again be traced back to the influence of Great Britain, where French historically has been the first foreign language (Kolinsky 1989: 303). Furthermore, the use of a language in the utilitarian society of Hong Kong is of great importance. Canada is a popular destination for immigration for many Hong Kong people. Since French is one of the official languages of Canada, French language skills are of great value for an application. Finally, the reason lies in the language itself. French is considered worldwide as a prestigious language, which is often combined with perfumes and other luxury products or famous brands. These represent the “high class” of living standards in Hong Kong and have greater public recognition than the large industrial products from Germany. This unconsciously creates a relationship with French, which may favour the learning of this language.

³ Before that Cantonese was the medium of instruction.

Similarly, like French, Spanish generally enjoys a positive image as the language of a country with a relaxed life style and people with a passionate character in the Hong Kong community. In addition, Spanish is counted as a global language, which is widespread and has official status in Latin America. Besides, it is also known as a relatively easier language to learn than German, which is often referred to as a very difficult language. There has been an increase in the number of Spanish learners worldwide. In Great Britain for instance, demand for Spanish learning continues to grow, while the number of A-levels taken in French and German has declined by half over the past two decades⁴.

Nazism, the traumatic shock of World War II and the Holocaust, and the shadows of Germany's history have deeply damaged the image of Germany overseas and its own post-war national identity. Historical consciousness and a guilt complex have caused a reluctance on the part of many Germans to identify positively with Germany, to show national pride and to use the German language in public (Chong et al. 2014: 71).

In view of all these unfavourable parameters, German as a foreign language⁵ is mainly located at tertiary level⁶ and is currently being taught as an official elective subject at only two local Chinese secondary schools in Hong Kong. The key to a successful German programme in Hong Kong at university level is excellence in teaching, research and learning. However, with the limited popularity of German, if the universities are to attract the best and brightest of students from secondary schools to learn and study German, it is necessary to promote German at secondary school level and to demonstrate society in general that the German language has importance and relevance in their daily lives and future career prospects.

⁴ www.1843magazine.com/content/ideas/robert-lane-greene/which-best-language-learn

⁵ According to the Federal Foreign Office there are approximately 4,000 German-speaking residents in Hong Kong. German is usually spoken as a mother tongue by diplomats and expat German-speaking experts as well as their children.

⁶ There are eight publically funded universities under the University Grants Committee in Hong Kong. Five universities offer German as Degree Courses: The University of Hong Kong, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, the Baptist University of Hong Kong, the City University of Hong Kong, and Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. German is offered as a major, minor or elective subject, as well as in combination with other study subjects.

The emphasis of this article is on the teaching and learning German as a foreign language at secondary school level in Hong Kong.

2. German and other Foreign Languages at Secondary School Level in Hong Kong: An Overview

The entire education of Hong Kong was based on the British model until 2012. The school system consisted of a four-year basic and a five-year secondary school. The nine-years of schooling ended with the examination for the Hong Kong Certificate of Education. The Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination, involving two-years of schooling, was optional and led to tertiary education. Under the New Academic Structure (NAS), all students are expected to complete three years of junior secondary education (F1-F3) followed by three years of senior secondary education (F4-F6). With respect to the university degree, a subdivision is made between undergraduate studies with a four-year Bachelor's degree and postgraduate studies with a two-year Master's degree.⁷

Education in Hong Kong is considered as a key to success. It is, therefore, the ultimate goal of parents to provide their children with good educational qualifications. This high-quality education, however, entails the disadvantage that children are under high performance and competitive pressure starting even from kindergarten. Pupils also have to undergo numerous examinations, which results in a highly exam-oriented curriculum and have become an intensifying issue.

A study by the University of Hong Kong shows that 58 percent of secondary school students in Hong Kong receive supplementary private tutoring to improve success in examinations. The costs impose a heavy financial burden on parents. For many students, this leads to a high-pressure learning process in their entire secondary school life (Kwo et al. 2011).

Despite the dominance of English in Hong Kong, it is positive to observe that there is an increased number of local schools believing that a third language is conducive to developing students' language capacity and creating more opportunities for them to interact with people from different parts of the world. In 2006, the "School of Modern

⁷ <http://www.edb.gov.hk/en/edu-system/list-page.html>;
<http://www.hkeaa.edu.hk/en/hkdse/introduction/>

Languages and Cultures” (SMLC) of the Faculty of Arts at The University of Hong Kong (HKU) created the Centre for the Promotion of Language Learning and launched a project “Foreign Language Courses offered by the University of Hong Kong to Local Secondary Schools”. Since then, numerous schools joined the programme and offer one or more foreign languages to students.

Schools	Spanish	French	Japanese	German
Heep Yunn School	35	58		
King’s College	14			
Kwun Tong Government Secondary School			48	
La Salle College	34			20
Maryknoll Convent School	45	65		
Queen’s College	10		5	
Belilios Public School	7	13	14	
Sacred Heart Canossian College	75			40
St. Paul’s Co-educational College	89	47		16
St. Paul’s College	31			
St. Paul’s Convent School	107	88		
St. Margaret’s Co-educational English Secondary and Primary School	156	164	132	90
Total	603	435	199	166

Table 1: Enrolment Figures of Secondary School Foreign Language Programmes 2016/2017

From the table, we can observe a dominance of Spanish and French compared to German in terms of student enrolment and number of schools. In the school year 2016/2017, Spanish was taught at eleven schools with 603 students, followed by French with 435 students in six schools. Despite similar enrolment numbers for Japanese in four schools with 199 students, the figures show an underrepresentation of German as a Foreign Language at the secondary level with 166 students in four schools.

Nonetheless, compelling reasons remain for learning German. Germany is Europe’s industrial powerhouse and the world’s second largest exporter; a country which is the centre of fiscal stability and responsibility in Europe. German is the most widely spoken mother tongue in the European Union with about 100 million native speakers, representing 18 % of the EU population. German is also an official language in financial sector economies such as Switzerland, Luxembourg and Liechtenstein – home to many banks and financial institutions, which have set up branches in Hong Kong.

Currently, German is taught as an official elective subject for academic pursuit in two local Chinese schools in Hong Kong: Sacred Heart Canossian College and St. Margaret's Co-educational English Secondary and Primary School. Two other local secondary schools offer German as an extracurricular activity: St. Paul's Co-educational College and La Salle College.

Since 2015, German has been offered at St. Paul's Co-educational College within the Language Hors d'oeuvre programme to students. In the school year of 2015-2016, there were two Year 1 German classes after school. The course consists of 18 hours in total throughout the school year. It exposed students to German culture through learning the basics of the German language. In the school year 2016/2017, there were two Year 1 German classes with eight students in each class.

At La Salle College 20 students learned German in a 15-hour course offered by the HKU's SMLC from February to May 2017. This was a German taster course, which aims to raise the interest of further German courses at La Salle College in the upcoming school year.

St. Margaret's Co-educational English Secondary and Primary School places emphasis on languages. The whole-school language policy states that the school's goal is to train students to be trilingual and quadrilingual. Starting from Primary 3 (P3), students must choose from French, German, Japanese or Spanish. Currently, German is offered as an elective within the regular school curriculum at ten levels, from P3 to Secondary 6 (S6)⁸. In 2016/2017, 90 students enrolled for German, 156 for Spanish, 164 for French and 132 for Japanese⁹.

At Sacred Heart Canossian College (SHCC), German courses were offered by HKU under a pilot scheme for a German programme in local secondary schools from 2006 to 2009, first for interest as an after school course. Since 2009, German has been chosen as an official elective subject. Every year, 22-25 new students enrol to learn German as their second foreign language.

⁸ In the school year 2016/2017, S4 and S5 German were not offered.

⁹ Regarding these figures, it has to be taken to account that German, being the most recently offered language, has the shortest history and also the smallest number of levels. In P.3-S.6, French has thirteen different classes, each with a different level, while German only has nine classes.

The following explores the objective, curriculum and cultural projects of the pilot scheme of German Programme at SHCC, the first local Chinese school to introduce German as an elective subject and the first PASCH¹⁰ school in Hong Kong.

3. A Pilot Scheme of German Programme at Sacred Heart Canossian College: Objective, Curriculum and Cultural Projects

Sacred Heart Canossian College was founded in 1860. It was the first Roman Catholic secondary school founded by the Canossian Missions in Hong Kong and Macau. Learning a second foreign language is, in the school's view, an extension of the pupils' language skills that creates new opportunities to come into contact with people from other parts of the world and enhances their global consciousness. For this reason, SHCC has been organizing German courses offered by HKU in addition to their regular subjects. In order to facilitate the learning of the second foreign language for the pupils, a German corner was set up in the school which offer students modern multimedia learning materials and German books.¹¹

3.1 Objective

Since the Centre for the Promotion of Language Learning of the SMLC at HKU was created in 2006, the German Programme at HKU has offered German courses as a school subject for all motivated and language-oriented pupils of all levels at SHCC under a pilot scheme, which was created, developed and organised for local secondary schools. The German Programme at SHCC leads to internationally recognised certificates including the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE)¹², the General Certificate of Education Advanced Subsidiary Level (GCE's AS-Level)¹³ and the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE)¹⁴.

¹⁰ PASCH is the initiative "Schulen: Partner der Zukunft" ('Schools: Partners for the Future').

¹¹ www.shcc.edu.hk/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&layout=item&id=33&Itemid=5

¹² The IGCSE is an international qualification and recognized by leading universities and employers worldwide. (<http://www.cie.org.uk/programmes-and-qualifications/cambridge-secondary-2/cambridge-igcse/>)

¹³ The General Certificate of Education Advanced Level/Advanced Subsidiary Level is a subject-based qualification, as well as a school leaving qualifications offered mainly by secondary schools and educational bodies in the United Kingdom and many international schools around the world. (<http://wenr.wes.org/2014/02/a-guide-to-the-gce-a-level>)

Apart from the German Swiss International School in Hong Kong, SHCC was the first Hong Kong local school to be admitted into the PASCH network in 2009, which also means a great step towards global learning.¹⁵ PASCH is a global network of more than 1,500 schools that place a high value on the German language and the dissemination of German culture. It was initiated by the Federal Foreign Office and is implemented jointly by the Central Office for Schools Abroad, the Goethe-Institut, the Pedagogical Exchange Service of the Conference of State Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs and the German Academic Exchange Service. The PASCH project also offers students and teaching staff various scholarships annually to take part in summer language courses or study linguistic pursuits in Germany.¹⁶

In line with the Common European Framework for modern languages, the German programme at SHCC adopts the modern communicative and action/task approach, allowing plenty of opportunities to practise new language skills through lively and interactive activities and role-plays. Emphasis is also placed upon acquiring language learning strategies for more effective learning. Up-to-date cultural events and input also enable students to gain further understanding of German and the societies and cultures of the German-speaking countries.

A student-centred approach with localized context is also part of the objective. Therefore, teaching and learning adapt to the context of Hong Kong and to the students' learning skills. Throughout the courses, students are encouraged to compare German and Chinese cultures in order to develop their awareness of cultural diversity and improve communication with speakers from German-speaking countries.

3.2 Curriculum

A detailed and creative curriculum was established to ensure a high standard of language acquisition. It was designed to give each class 100 teaching units¹⁷ of language tuition per term with a variety of textbooks and materials used for each particular level.

¹⁴ Upon completion of six-year secondary education, students will take the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination (HKDSE) as a school leaving qualification. For Category C Other Language subjects, including German, question papers of the Advanced Subsidiary (AS) level from Cambridge International Examinations (CIE) are used. (<http://www.edb.gov.hk/en/edu-system/list-page.html>)

¹⁵ Followed by St. Margaret's Co-educational English Secondary and Primary School in 2014.

¹⁶ <http://www.pasch-net.de/de/par/spo/asi/hgk/3346637.html>

¹⁷ Each teaching unit has 55 minutes.

Lessons focus on the development of writing, reading, speaking and listening skills as well as cultural events. The assessment takes place via written tests, a presentation each term and an oral examination at the end of each school year. German is taught in two-hour blocks twice a week in the afternoon.

The courses offer a balanced curriculum that caters for the interests, abilities and needs of the students. Different emphases are placed at different developmental stages of the students. The syllabus is divided into three levels for IGCSE and two levels for AS.

	Secondary Education Years	HK Public Examinations	London / Cambridge Examinations	Levels
3	S1 (12 yrs.)			Level I (100 units)
	S2 (13 yrs.)			Level II (100 units)
	S3 (14 yrs.) Junior Secondary		IGCSE	Level III (100 units)
3	S4 (15 yrs.)			AS Level I (100 units)
	S5 (16 yrs.)			AS Level II (100 units)
	S6 (17 yrs.) Senior Secondary	HKDSE	AS	
4	University			

Table 2: Syllabus of German Courses at SHCC

Level I is designed for S1 students who have no previous knowledge of German. Students are exposed to the fundamentals of linguistic and communicative skills in German in speaking, listening, reading, and writing. The focus is on listening and speaking skills, through regular practice using everyday expressions that provides them with a solid foundation in the language and a basic communicative ability.

Level II aims to build on the basic knowledge students have already acquired in Level I and to further develop skills and structures through the extensive use of writing, reading, audio and video materials. Students will be able to express their views on everyday topics and to use more complex linguistic structures and vocabulary.

Level III builds on the foundations laid in the two previous levels. Students acquire further syntax while consolidating their competencies for the IGCSE exam in listening comprehension, oral expression and communicative skills, reading and text analysis and composition. By the end of this level, students should have received adequate preparation to succeed in the IGCSE German.

The AS Level courses are the preparation for the AS exam. This is divided into two levels of 100 teaching units each over two years. The intention of this level is to build on the foundations laid in the IGCSE level while consolidating the students' competencies for the AS and HKDSE exam in speaking, reading and writing.

The first year of the AS course is of special importance since it provides the basis for students to develop a new way of learning based on textual analysis and argumentative conversation. Special attention is given to the further exploration of more complex and specialized linguistic structures and specific terminology to enable students to communicate at an advanced level in German both verbally and in writing. To achieve this, a wide range of texts are used for reading and discussions in class (press, literature, formal and informal correspondences etc.).

The second year of the AS course is a continuation of the previous year. It helps students to further develop their abilities to participate in a discussion and express their views on various concrete and abstract topics. The overall aim of the course is to give students adequate preparation for the AS and HKDSE exam.

Due to the limited contact that students in Hong Kong have with the culture of German-speaking countries, it is essential to provide them with a maximum of cultural exposure during these two years. The use of articles from the press is very important at this stage. With regard to support intellectual and personal development, students are trained and encouraged to read texts critically, to construct arguments based on their own ideas, i.e. to go beyond the basic understanding and summarizing of texts rather than simply making generalizations based on the information given. Students should be able to relate and compare information, think about examples in discussions and elaborate an opinion with both pros and cons. The success of the German programme at SHCC has enabled Hong Kong students from local schools (as opposed to only international schools) to achieve IGCSE, GCEs AS-Level German competency, offering them increased educational and career opportunities in today's increasingly global village and competitive job markets, whether locally or overseas.

The first German class's graduates at SHCC have successfully completed all German courses and students have achieved excellent results with numerous "A*" in IGCSE German and "A with distinction" in GCE's AS-Level and HKDSE German.

3.3 Cultural Projects

Besides language courses, various cultural events have been organized in order to motivate students in their language learning and stimulate their interests even further. For instance, students enjoy the Christmas Bazaar organised by German Swiss International School and HKU German students at the annual German cultural events.

For instance, students enjoy the Christmas Bazaar organised by German Swiss International School and the sharing sessions of the HKU German students at the annual German cultural events.

A Knowledge Exchange Project “Language and Cultural Project for Secondary School Students” has also been offered by the German Programme at HKU to 28 secondary schools including SHCC for three consecutive years running from 2014 to 2017. The project aims to enhance the interest within the general Hong Kong community in learning the German language and understanding the culture of the German-speaking countries. Staff and students of the German Programme at HKU initiated outreach programmes benefitting local secondary school students in Hong Kong by organizing various language and cultural workshops including:

Level 1:

- The German Alphabet and Short Phrases
- Introductory Cultural Briefing: The Major Cultural Facets of Germany
- Summer Courses and Exchange Programmes in German-speaking countries
- Studying and Living in German-speaking Countries

Level 2:

- Basic Pronunciation, Grammar and Daily Conversations
- German History and New Identity
- Germans’ Daily Lives and Cultural Differences between Germans and Chinese

The HKU Knowledge Exchange project offers a unique and valuable opportunity for local secondary students to learn the German language and understanding its culture. The workshops provide a platform for them to gain some preliminary insights about Germany beyond stereotypical impressions. The KE team with the KE Project Coordinator and HKU German Program students promoted authentic Germany as a modern, advanced society, enabling students to formulate realistic and positive perceptions of contemporary Germany.

4. Teaching Experience and Challenges at Sacred Heart Canossian College

Students at SHCC are encouraged to finish the German courses with the international IGCSE examination and at a higher level, the AS examination. The lessons aim to be interesting, fun and interactive for students. Despite the enthusiasm to learn a third language at secondary school level, both teachers and students need to overcome many challenges to reach these outcomes successfully.

Firstly, the German classes take place in the afternoon after a long day at school, therefore, teachers need to take into consideration that students may be tired. Secondly, some of the general conditions can make teaching a bit difficult. For instance, lessons are sometimes cancelled due to exam or other school activities, resulting in the need for revisions after a long break, which in turn can affect the learning progress. It is also important to point out that some students are influenced by parental pressure to study a third language and for that reason are not learning out of their own keen interest in the language (Fennell 2015: 260).

From an Asian students' perspective, the country of the target language is geographically far away and students are not exposed to German people, with the exception of their teacher. The curriculum of the German Programme at SHCC takes the intercultural component into account, and the curriculum includes the development of intercultural competence. Given these circumstances and taking the geographical distance to Germany and the pressure of being sufficiently prepared for the assessments all into consideration, it still became noticeable that the students were a bit aloof concerning the country and its people. That being said, all language learners bring to the classroom a variety of stereotypes about the target language country, the culture and its people. Against this background, a survey was developed with the aim of examining the students' impression of Germany and its people (Fennell 2015). The results indicate predominately positive attitudes towards the country. Students describe it as a beautiful country with fairytale castles and stunning landscapes. However, all commonly known stereotypes regarding German culture, cuisine and expertise in advanced technology were mentioned. The survey also reveals a positive picture about the Germans, and students outlined a variety of common stereotypes like being punctual and disciplined. Generally speaking, it is good to have a positive attitude towards the country one is studying. However, students still need to obtain a realistic view with the aim of operating adequately in the language. Therefore, the cultural events initiated by the

HKU and Goethe-Institut Hong Kong are essential and very popular amongst the students.

For the most part, the students are motivated and receptive to taking on German as a third language, which in turn creates a pleasant learning environment within the classroom.

5. Conclusion

The emphasis of this article was on German as a Foreign Language being taught at local secondary schools in Hong Kong with the focus on a case study of a pilot scheme at Sacred Heart Canossian College. As described above, the German Programme at SHCC has come a long way from its first introduction in 2006 and is now an elective subject for students at this secondary school. It has been emphasized that nowadays German is well established at the school with various levels offered and recognized assessments in place.

A well thought-out curriculum helps students to achieve the required language proficiency. Besides teaching, students at SHCC are invited to engage in different cultural events in order to be exposed to German culture outside the classroom. Nevertheless, the third language programmes at secondary schools would benefit future students with certain possible improvements in the following ways:

Firstly, third language programmes should have more emphasis placed on them by the secondary schools. Long breaks or cancellations due to other school activities should be minimized. It is not only disturbing to the learning process but also undermines the significance of German at the school. A good collaboration and communication between the initiators of the German Programmes and the schools is therefore essential.

Secondly, German classes should ideally be conducted during regular school hours and not during the late afternoon, which would not only avoid fatigue and exhaustion among the students, but also provide a strong appreciation for the subject and might attract more students to take on German as a third language.

In addition, students should be even more motivated to take part in cultural events. So far, students reacted very positively towards extra-curricular activities and it would be desirable to enhance this even further by visiting German companies in Hong Kong or inviting guest speakers to the school. Furthermore, exchange activities between local

schools and German schools should be organized, for instance, regular school exchanges with a partner school from Germany. The advantages for the students would be huge. It would benefit their language acquisition as well as their interest in German culture in the long term. Last, but not least, more public sector support for development from both Germany and Hong Kong would be desirable. For example, more scholarships for students to visit Germany should be established or book prizes awarded for outstanding performances. Students would benefit enormously from any extra incentive given to them. It would emphasize the purpose of taking on a third language and might be a motivation for more students to choose German. These suggestions might help to support German as a third language and make it more attractive for prospective students.

Living in a globalized world and an international city like Hong Kong means that foreign language capability is an asset in many ways. Foreign language competency opens up many opportunities, enhances the appreciation of a totally different culture and enriches lives in a whole new dimension. Simultaneously, this broadens the horizons, widens the perspectives, and cultivates one's own individual personal identities. Therefore, German and other foreign language programs at the secondary school level benefit young students across the spectrum throughout Hong Kong and should receive greater support from all participating sectors in the future.

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