**Hong Kong Baptist University**

**Language Education Under the New Curriculum Structure**

**Executive Summary**

Language education at HKBU primarily aims to elevate students’ proficiency in academic and professional communication and intercultural competence, essential for global engagement and career readiness. In light of the recent key university-wide developments, including the implementation of transdisciplinary education, GE curriculum reviews, the evolving role of Generative AI (GAI), and the imperative for demonstrable language proficiency, this Language Education Paper identifies critical language needs of HKBU students: effective disciplinary and transdisciplinary academic communication, professional adaptability, multilingual and cross-cultural competence, and proficient utilisation of GAI. To achieve the outlined objectives, this paper underscores the necessity of collaborative efforts among the Language Centre, academic units and programmes, and students, emphasising both contextualised and personalised learning as well as the strategic integration of technology. Commencing with the 2025/26 cohort, this comprehensive approach ensures that language education at HKBU aligns with contemporary pedagogical priorities and equips students for future challenges.

**1. Background**

1.1 Language education plays a vital role in meeting the university’s language requirements, but more importantly, it contributes to the overall educational attainment of HKBU students. In 2025, the Senate approved the new graduate attributes (GA) for undergraduates. The “Communication” GA, defined as the ability to “communicate in multiple languages and modalities effectively and empathetically”, clearly encompasses multilingualism and cross-cultural competence. To constructively align to this GA, language education, in addition to providing cognitive benefits, cultivates intercultural competence, which is an essential 21st-century skill for global engagement and future career prospects. Currently, structured provision of language courses in students’ first year, along with language enhancement activities in other years, form the primary drivers of these goals. However, new opportunities arising from HKBU’s recent curriculum review and Generative AI (GAI) need to be further explored to align language education with renewed pedagogical priorities.

1.2 This paper addresses four key university-wide developments: First, the increasing emphasis on transdisciplinary education entails nurturing students’ broad-based understanding alongside situated understanding of specific knowledge. Second, it responds to the recent review of university core requirements led by the General Education Office, which includes language education provisions at HKBU. Third, it aims to delineate the evolving role of language education in the age of GAI, wherein language education will be increasingly integrated with GAI’s affordances. Fourth, the demands for reporting demonstrable language proficiency (e.g., IELTS and Putonghua Shuiping Ceshi (PSC)) to the University Grants Committee (UGC) have made language education a concern of the university community, and accountability should be shared among the Language Centre, academic programmes, and students.

1.3 Following this, this paper outlines the mission of HKBU language education (LE) as a 21st-century skill set and defines the roles of various entities specified above in supporting students’ language learning. It specifies their possible mode of collaboration, outlines students’ role, and the integration of GAI’s across the curriculum.

**2. HKBU Students’ Language Needs**

2.1 Communicate Ideas Effectively in Academic Settings

Effective academic communication is widely recognised as a key factor for students’ success in higher education. With an average DSE English Language score of 3.63 in the 2024 intake of HKBU students, consistent and persistent language training is crucial to strengthen their ability to learn and sustain their motivation to use English in their studies. Academic literacy involves situated understanding of disciplines and meeting specific programme requirements. The development of academic literacy relies on close collaboration between the Language Centre and individual academic programmes to address distinct language needs.

2.2 Navigate Confidently in Transdisciplinary Environments

In 2022-23, HKBU launched four transdisciplinary four-year undergraduate programmes. According to the Planning Exercise Proposal (PEP) 2025-28, HKBU will launch one new four-year and two new senior year transdisciplinary programmes and seven new transdisciplinary second majors in 2025-26. To ensure the success of the transdisciplinary programmes at HKBU, students must be able to blend different subject areas and bridge methodological divides. Transdisciplinary communication entails perspective-taking, negotiating and framing of problems using different terminology, convergent and divergent thinking, and communicating solutions to address cross-disciplinary problems. Students’ ability to communicate effectively depends on close collaboration among multiple academic programmes of departments[[1]](#footnote-2).

2.3 Adapt Successfully to a Variety of Professional Contexts

HKBU advocates professional learning by immersing students in real-world, process-oriented contexts. This approach enables students to acquire professional and technical communication skills alongside essential work etiquette. Students’ language needs include active listening and critical reading to develop deep subject knowledge, effective verbal communication, report and proposal writing, and adapting communication styles based on audience awareness.

2.4 Acquire Multilingual Competence and Cross-Cultural Communication

Multilingualism and cross-cultural competence are key graduate attributes of HKBU under the umbrella of communication. In a globalised world, students are expected to embrace the opportunities presented by various exchange programmes and the diverse student body on campus. With the goal of enrolling 40% non-local students as requested by the UGC, cultivating global thinking through strengthening students’ cross-cultural communication skills has become crucial. There is also a need to prepare them to live and work in a diverse range of cultural settings after graduation.

2.5 Utilise AI Technology to Enhance Communication Outcomes

The emergence of GAI has presented tremendous opportunities to elevate communication and learning effectiveness. Students’ language needs include effective communication with multiple AI systems, using AI tools for writing assistance, sounding board, academic content learning, as well as, in terms of language education, learning new foreign languages. Collaborating with AI should emphasise students’ active engagement, preserving human thinking, as well as the ability to reset learning goals by leveraging the expanded autonomy and resources available.

**3. University-Wide Objectives of Language Education**

3.1 To meet the growing demand for versatile language communication skills, including demonstrable proficiency (e.g., course-specific gains, IELTS, and PSC), university-wide collaboration across different entities is essential. This collaborative approach to language education requires consistent methodologies that highlight the importance of communication within and across disciplines.

3.2 The following objectives for language development shall be achieved together by the Language Centre and all academic units:

1. To cultivate students’ abilities in articulating knowledge, perspectives, and scholarly outputs in disciplinary or transdisciplinary academic contexts;
2. To enable students to navigate in professional and creative contexts;
3. To prepare students to communicate proficiently in multiple languages and with cultural sensitivity;
4. To nurture students’ competence to utilise technologies, including Generative AI responsibly and critically to enhance communication outcomes.

3.3 While the Language Centre plays a key role in achieving these objectives, all academic units share the responsibility for emphasising the importance of effective academic and professional communication in their specific disciplines or transdisciplinary programmes among students.

**4. Four Pillars of Successful Language Learning**

4.1 Successful achievement of the above objectives requires seamless collaboration among the academic units and the Language Centre, active learning on the part of the students, and creative use of technologies to support language learning by all parties (Figure 1). Each entity plays a crucial role in students’ learning journey, with their intersections enhancing the overall experience and outcomes for students.

A diagram of different languages

AI-generated content may be incorrect.

Figure 1. Four Pillars of Successful Language Learning in Higher Education

4.2 Language Centre

The Language Centre is responsible for offering courses to nurture students’ proficiency in different languages. It offers support programmes and services, as well as resources and materials, for students to improve their language, communication and inter-cultural skills. It works closely with academic staff and departments to foster disciplinary and transdisciplinary communication competences in academic and professional settings. It organises staff development activities and provides support to subject teachers and faculty in language and communication education.

4.3 Academic Programmes

Academic programmes, under the supervision of the faculties[[2]](#footnote-3), integrate communication educational outcomes and assessment into the curriculum to ensure that such competences are developed and contextualised within the proper academic and professional settings. Including communication competences in the curriculum will incentivise students to more actively develop their language abilities as well as abilities to communicate in other modalities. Emphasising communicative competences is essential because they are fundamental to student success in both academic and professional contexts, enabling effective collaboration and clear expression of ideas. Students are expected to be not only “well versed in disciplinary and transdisciplinary knowledge” (the new GA in Knowledge) but also capable of communicating their knowledge and contributing meaningfully in diverse environments.

4.4 Students

Being “reflective, inquisitive independent learners” is an HKBU graduate attribute. Faced with an increasingly digitalised and rapidly-evolving world, students urgently need to develop independent learning skills, including self-regulation, critical thinking, reflective practices and effective use of available resources. Independent learning empowers students to take ownership of their academic studies and career development, leading to greater success in both areas. Ultimately, intrinsic motivation is the key to any learning success.

4.5 Technology

The pervasiveness of educational technologies, including AI, has significantly expanded available resources for teachers to provide individualised feedback, support students in writing and framing, support self-reflection in ideation, and enable other foreign language learning in self-paced or blended modes. Technology has the potential to promote an equitable learning environment by building upon individual students’ characteristics and bootstrapping their current skills. To ensure students receive adequate and consistent training in generative AI and other educational technologies, it is also essential to invest in professional development programmes for teachers.

**5. New Developments on the Language Education Landscape at HKBU**

5.1 To achieve the university-wide language learning outcomes, several key developments will be undertaken across the university community. **Recommended actions are highlighted in bold.**

5.2 University Language Requirements

5.2.1 The three foundational courses, University Chinese, University English I, and University English II, prepare students to meet university requirements as they pursue structured, transdisciplinary, or individualised pathways. Under the revised curriculum, **University English II will be offered in the second year to align with students’ gradual expansion of subject knowledge.**

5.2.2 **To ensure their academic success, an English proficiency enhancement course is compulsory for all undergraduate students who meet only the minimum English language requirements for entrance to undergraduate programmes, e.g., those with an HKDSE English Level 3, or an overall IELTS score of 6.0 or below.** For students who are admitted on the basis of other language qualifications, the Language Centre may use a screening test or other means to determine whether this course applies to them.

5.3 Language Support to Students in Year 3 and Beyond

This education paper aims to support personalised and systematic language and communication training for students enrolled in transdisciplinary programs and capstone projects. Achieving this goal requires not only close, human-centred teaching but also close collaboration between language teachers and faculty from diverse disciplines. Students will achieve content learning goals through academic courses, and discipline-specific communication proficiency through disciplinary teachers, with the support of language teachers as appropriate.

5.4 Other Support for Language Enhancement

The Language Centre currently offers a range of tailor-made workshops, creative language activities, competitions, and assessment-oriented workshops (IELTS, TOEFL, and PSC) to support out-of-class learning. The multiple services should be consolidated to improve visibility among students. Foreign language courses are also available in various languages, including French, German, Japanese, Korean, and Spanish, supporting the goal of creating a multilingual environment.

5.5 Academic Programmes’ roles in Language Education

In addition to the Language Centre, which keeps track of students’ language performance, **academic programmes of faculties also incorporate programme-specific communication proficiency into the assessment criteria and develop the rubrics accordingly.** Additionally, **faculties should monitor the communicative competence of their students.**

5.6 Learner-Centered Adoption of Technology

The Language Centre will modernise its courses and support services and enhance the integration of AI with human-teacher collaboration while preserving human uniqueness and creativity in thinking. A roadmap for mobile/desktop applications, flipped classroom videos, and interactive platforms will be developed for specific teaching, assessment, and performance analysis purposes. Technologies will provide students with flexible, accessible and personalised learning experiences.

5.7 Responsibilities of the Language Centre and Academic Programmes in Language Education

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| **Entities** | **Responsibilities** |
| Language Centre | **University Requirement Cores**   * + Offer structured language training through foundational university courses   + Offer an enhancement course to students who meet only the minimum English language requirements for entrance to undergraduate programmes   + Develop students’ ability to properly and effectively use technologies, including AI tools, to facilitate language learning and communication |
| **Support for Disciplinary and Transdisciplinary Communication**  **-** Supportacademic programmes to tailor support for students to meet the disciplinary and transdisciplinary language communication demands  **-** Offer tutoring for the ‘language and communication’ component of students’ coursework |
| **Language Enhancement Activities**   * + Provide language learning facilities, materials and workshops for flexible and individualised learning   + Organise events and activities to promote cultural understanding and communication |
| * + Provide foreign language courses to cultivate multilingual competence   + Provide language learning resources (including AI tools) to support personalised learning |
| Academic Programmes | **Integration of Communication Competence into Assessment**   * + Use communicative competence as a criterion in grading rubrics for assignments and projects, which may be co-designed with the Language Centre as appropriate.   **Identification of Learners’ Communication Needs**   * + Identify students’ communication needs and solicit support from the Language Centre as appropriate   **Monitor the communicative competence of their students.** |

5.8 Roles of Students and Other Support Units in Language Education

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| **Entities** | | **Roles** | |
| Students | | **Active Learning**   * + Engage actively in in-class learning and discussion   + Utilise available resources, including AI technology and facilities to improve written and oral communication skills   + Participate actively in language exchange and cross-cultural activities   **Proactive Self-Improvement**   * + Be self-aware of language needs related to professional and career prospects and proactively seek support from the Language Centre and academic programmes and departments.   + Participate in different programmes to offer help and be helped | |
| All support units including student residential halls and colleges | | **Create a campus ambience conducive to language development and inter-cultural communication** | |

5.9 Uses of Technology in Language Education

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| **Entities** | **Functions** |
| Technology | **Student and Teacher Support**  **Examples include:**  - Enhance multimodal communication skills for storytelling and real-world applications   * + Act as a sounding board to help students self-analyse their writing and troubleshoot   + Enable multi-party collaboration and improve communication effectiveness   + Co-assess students’ work with teachers, providing timely, constructive and personalised evaluation   + Enable personalised support to students   **Equitable Access**   * + Provide access to a wide range of resources and support flexible and self-paced learning   + Provide immersive practice and connect students with international communities |

**6. Quality Assurance Mechanism**

6.1 University-required courses are regularly monitored through CFQ scores and the Language Centre’s course evaluation surveys. Course revisions and proposals are submitted to the Language Education Board for feedback, and to the GE Office for review.

6.2 In view of the increased collaborations between the Language Centre and faculties, the Language Centre will strengthen its system for regular communication with individual faculty members. The Centre will gather feedback from both teachers and students to review the effectiveness of collaborative efforts.

6.3 Ongoing evaluations of transdisciplinary initiatives and enhancement activities will be conducted through surveys, focus groups, and student performance data. The results will be submitted to the Language Education Board for feedback and recommendations.

6.4 Academic programs and faculties will include the initiatives and outcomes for strengthening students’ communication competences in their annual quality report.

6.5 As evidence of demonstrable language proficiency, the percentage of undergraduate test-takers achieving certain thresholds on standardised tests in English and PTH before graduation will be monitored.

**7. Implementation Plan**

7.1 This paper will be implemented starting with the 2025/26 cohort of FYFD and SY entrants. The Language Centre’s enhanced language support will also be offered from that time.

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1. Departments include departments and academies.

   [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Faculties include faculties and schools. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)