

Tuesday English News Report

English proficiency in Hong Kong worse than in mainland cities for first time:
But critics question its methodology, saying results of the voluntary test will be **skewed** thanks to unscientific research samples

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Academics and politicians took issue with a **global** study of English-language skills that ranked Hong Kong adults marginally lower than residents of major mainland cities including Shanghai, Beijing and Tianjin.

The **annual** study, known as the English Proficiency Index, is compiled by the Swedish-owned global language instruction company EF Education First. This year's index is based on test results **gathered** last year from about 750,000 people across 63 countries and regions.

A local representative of US employers said the drop among Hongkongers could be due to public schools **switching** from English to Chinese as their language of instruction.

But critics of the study cautioned that the research samples in some of the regions might have skewed the results.

The index is based on results of a free online test and the enrolment tests for those taking the company's courses. Both tests include grammar, vocabulary, reading and listening sections. Only countries and regions with a minimum of 400 test-takers were ranked.

Hong Kong scored 52.5 out of 100, which the study interpreted as having "moderate proficiency" in English. The scores for Shanghai, Beijing and Tianjin were 53.7, 52.9 and 52.7, respectively.

Malaysia, the top-ranking Asian location, was 12th in the global index with a score of 59.7.

Hong Kong ranked 31st on the index, nine places down from last year's rank of 22nd. It was lower than Malaysia, Singapore, South Korea, Japan, Indonesia and Taiwan - but higher than mainland China overall, at 37th place.

The Education Bureau said the **rankings** might not reflect English proficiency in different regions because the samples could not represent the whole region. In many other local and global tests, the city scored better than neighbouring regions, the bureau said.

But Dr Richard Vuylsteke, president of the 1,700-member American Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong, said Hongkongers' English ability had been weakening noticeably.

"English is in **decline** in Hong Kong; there's no question about it," he said.

Vuylsteke said the reasons included the change to Chinese instruction from English in classes at government-funded schools since the handover, and the increasing expense of **alternative** schools that taught in English.

He said the government should allow more schools for local children to maintain an English-language curriculum, so that families wanting their children to be taught in English "will have a choice".

English proficiency ranking

World	1	Denmark
	2	Netherlands
	3	Sweden
	4	Finland
	5	Norway
	6	Poland
	7	Austria
	8	Estonia
	9	Belgium
	10	Germany
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	31	Hong Kong

China	1	Shanghai
	2	Beijing
	3	Tianjin
	4	Taiwan
	5	Hong Kong

Source: EF Education First

SCMP

1. What do you think?

2. Vocabulary

Fill in the blanks in the sentences below using words from the box.

proficiency	global	switching	alternative
skewed	annual	ranking	
academic	gather	decline	

1. The meeting takes place once a year. It is an _____ meeting.
2. To _____ means to collect things or come together for a meeting.
3. _____ means changing from thing one to another.
4. Your _____ is your position – first, second, third etc.
5. A person who is a teacher in a college or university is called an _____.
6. Your _____ is your skill or expertise. Basically, how good you are at doing something.
7. To change something so it is not accurate. The research results were _____ in order to support the medical companies wishes.
8. If you have an _____, you have a choice.
9. This means involving the whole world. English is a _____ language.
10. In _____ means going down in number or quality.