

Reform of English Learning Education in Macau: Challenges and Opportunities

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ABSTRACT

The lucrative casino industry in Macau has positioned this special administrative region of China as one of the world's fastest growing economies. Since the liberalization of the gaming industry in 2002, Western investors and casino operators have quickly developed Macau into the world's gaming capital - surpassing the Las Vegas Strip in 2006 and earning five times more than their Nevada counterpart in 2012. With a population of only 538,000, coupled with a growing demand for laborers, Macau currently enjoys a seemingly stable unemployment rate of 2 percent. Nonetheless, it has been challenging for Macau to meet the casino industry's human capital demand. Macau is currently in need of skilled workers, including those who can speak proficient English in order to continue its goal of becoming an international city. Government and casino companies have sponsored various training programs to address this demand for English-proficient workers (Cheang 2012). However, such efforts remain inadequate without a consistent territory-wide English curriculum or effective teacher training in foreign language pedagogy, leading to student demotivation to learn English (Hu 2011). The legacy of Macau's history as a Portuguese colony has left it with no experience with centralized education reform (Tang and Morrison 1998). Although a large sum of money has been thrown into foreign language education, there are no official quality assurance mechanisms to guarantee any type of proficiency or learning outcomes in Macanese education (Chou 2012, Lau 2010). This paper explores the challenges of implementing a systemic approach to raise the quality of English language learning in Macau. Primary obstacles are (1) the lack of government-control over K-12 education; (2) the incentives of pursuing competitive pay in low-skilled jobs in the gaming industry instead of higher education; and (3) the failure of Macau's government to incorporate quality assurance and teacher training into education reform.