

CHINESE EDUCATION FOR ETHNIC MINORITIES IN HONG KONG

Definition:

In Hong Kong, 'ethnic minorities (EM)' refers to the 'people from non-Chinese ethnicities', mainly belonging to the ethnic group of Indonesians, Filipinos, Indians, Pakistanis, Nepalese, Whites, Japanese, Thais, Pakistanis, Koreans, etc.

Chinese Language Proficiency as a Key Barrier

Education Bureau (EDB) Data:

- Acknowledges that EM students struggle with Chinese proficiency
- e.g., only ~30% of EM students meet the Chinese language requirement for tertiary education vs. ~80% of local Chinese students

Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) Report:

- 70% of EM students were placed in schools labeled as "low-band" (under-resourced institutions), perpetuating cycles of underachievement.

Key Insights

The Chinese curriculum is designed for native speakers, leaving EM students (e.g., South Asian, Filipino, Nepali) at a disadvantage, contributing a great differentiation in school performance.

EM students are

3x

more likely to drop out by Secondary 6 than local students.

Dropout Rates



Differentiation

Mental Health Survey

40%

of EM adolescents reported symptoms of depression linked to academic stress and social exclusion, compared to 25% of local peers.

University Admission Rates

4%

of EM students entered publicly funded undergraduate programs in 2018, compared to 18% of local Chinese students.

CURRENT SITUATION

- Lack second language policy for students with different native languages
- Local mainstream Chinese schools normally do not want to admit ethnic minority students → lack of experience
- Teachers report stress from frequent policy changes and lack training to address student diversity
- Lack of funding from Education Bureau to implement cultural integration, design teaching materials for NCS students, hire specialist and implement training etc
- Language barriers and acculturation processes exacerbate their academic, emotional and social development challenges and limit their access to programs

93.2% principals expressed difficulties in employing teachers with related teaching skills for Chinese as a second language

Over 90% teachers expressed that the Education Bureau does not provide special supporting measures or guidance in communicating with non-Chinese speaking parents and promoting cultural integration.



"Chinese students never spoke to us, and we never spoke to them. It was like an invisible separation."

74.8% teachers expressed that they encounter greater difficulties in catering for the learning differences between Chinese and non-Chinese speaking students at the same time.



Hong Kong's Unique EM Context

Colonial legacies

- South Asian communities (e.g., Indians, Nepalis) arrived under British rule for military/administrative roles, creating a "permanent outsider" status.

Legal Exclusion

- Foreign domestic helpers denied permanent residency despite long-term residence; family reunification restricted.
- EM identities shaped by metic (resident alien) status, not immigrant integration.

Failed Multicultural Policies: Beyond Language

Monocultural Education

- Chinese language education (CLE) prioritizes assimilation over integration.
- EM students fluent in Cantonese still face exclusion due to symbolic violence (Bourdieu): Local cultural capital (e.g., knowledge of traditions, social networks) remains inaccessible.

Social Psychology of Exclusion

- Ingroup/Outgroup Dynamics: EM students internalize "foreigner" labels despite local birth/language skills.
- Habitus Mismatch: EM students' cultural practices (e.g., religion, dress) clash with dominant Han-Chinese norms, limiting social capital accumulation.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Redefining EM Identity: A Bourdieusian Approach

Capital Deficits

- Linguistic Capital: CLE policies fail to recognize EM students as second-language learners, denying tailored pedagogy.
- Cultural Capital: Local curricula erase EM histories (e.g., colonial contributions), reinforcing "otherness."

Habitus & Identity

- EM students occupy an "in-between" habitus
- Disconnected from ancestral homelands (lack of "authentic" cultural ties).
- Excluded from local identity due to racialized stereotypes (e.g., "South Asians = low-status").



Hybrid Model

Integrate Top-down (policies provide framework) + Bottom-up (teachers adapt strategies) approach



Implement DEI

- Systematically implement diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in curricula
- Social and cultural activities



More Training

Develop culturally responsive training programs to bridge the gap between policy and classroom reality



Increase Subsidy

- Teaching materials & trainings
- Add specialist/teaching post to support NCS students
- Cultural exchange



Increase familial support

- Increase parent-school communication



Help Adapt to New Learning Environments

- Local Kindergarten or Summer Bridging Programme to help adapt

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