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**Abstract**

The paper explores how the policy of alternative Chinese qualifications policy affect ethnic minorities' (EM) social mobility, and how such multi-exit assessment framework affect Chinese as a second language (CSL) learning and teaching in Hong Kong. Chinese language (CL) qualifications other than the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education have been accepted by the University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded institutions in Hong Kong as university admission requirements, including General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE), and General Certificate of Education (GCE). These international qualifications are oftentimes considered lower-level non-equivalents to HKDSE in the job market. Even high achievers in these examinations are criticized by local employers as less-than-competent in workplace Chinese communication. Moreover, civil service jobs traditionally popular among EM require a Level 2 in HKDSE or specific government tests, which "implied" the said alternative qualifications as insufficient for career advancement. CL teachers and EM students are thus torn between the manageable alternative qualifications to improve university admission chances, or the difficult HKDSE examination as well for better career opportunities, which reduce their chance of upward mobility. Through triangulation of interview data from an EM focus group (N=8, all female), relevant surveys and government documents, the authors argue that EM students' academic advancement is highly related to their CL proficiency, and alternative qualifications do not necessarily suffice to improve their social mobility. The paper also looks into the policy's implicated challenges for curriculum planning and design faced by CL teachers, and recommend that policy reviews be carried out based on recent demographic shifts and classroom realities to better equip EM students' CL proficiency, so as to increase their employability, smoother social integration into Hong Kong society, and to resolve the intergenerational poverty.

Keywords: Ethnic minority, Chinese as a second language, alternative qualifications, forms of capital, career advancement, social mobility

Recent trends of intensifying globalization and transnational migration have given rise to the physical mobility of ethnic minority (EM) youth around the world. Second language teaching, in such contexts, is becoming more challenging than ever, given that the diverse backgrounds and learning needs of the multilingual, multicultural EM student population (Banks 2010; Lesaux and Geva 2006). As their overseas counterparts like the EU, UK and the US, which have long been taking in migrants from around the world and tackling the issues of social integration and barriers to opportunities with an array of second language programs for migrants of all ages, Hong Kong is facing unprecedented challenges in the teaching and learning of Chinese as a second language (CSL), as Chinese language (CL) was introduced to local, mainstream secondary schools as a mandatory subject for EM students only after the 1997 Handover. As Hong Kong's *lingua franca*, CL plays a key role in one's academic and career advancement, and CL assessments have a great impact on the social integration and mobility of EM youth. In light of the aforementioned context, this study seeks to look into the impact of alternative Chinese qualifications on the advancement opportunities of EM youth, and the ways in which current multi-exit assessment framework affect the teaching and learning of CSL in Hong Kong.

### **Research Background**

The continuing rise in the number of EM students in Hong Kong's local schools has attracted much social and scholarly attention over the past decade. The dropout rate of EMs at secondary level is above the local mean and the percentage of tertiary educated below the local mean (HKSAR Government 2015), and teachers are faced with the double challenge of equipping these socially vulnerable students with literacy in the CL, as well as other necessary skills and subject knowledge for academic and career advancement. Learning Chinese as a second language and a compulsory subject in school, EM students in Hong Kong are presented with a number of assessment options for academic advancement. Other than the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE), the school-leaving public examination offered by the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA), the students are allowed to sit for overseas examinations for the CL subject as options of multi-exit, such as the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE), and the General Certificate of Education (GCE), and/or the recently launched Applied Learning (Chinese) (ApL[C]) subject offered at senior secondary level. These options vary in requirements and proficiency levels, and assessment arrangements are usually made on a case-by-case basis by participating schools and teachers. Satisfactory grades obtained in overseas examinations and ApL(C) serve as "alternative Chinese qualifications" (or Alternative Qualifications in Chinese Language [ACL]), and theoretically qualify the candidates for university admission through the Joint University Programmes Admissions System (JUPAS), which is specifically for local school students.

Flexible as the CSL assessments seem, the current ACL policy is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, EM students, often put in the official category “Non-Chinese speaking (NCS)”, are offered *de facto* “second language” pathways for their Chinese learning, which is supposed to increase the opportunities to enter local universities. Besides, overseas CL examinations taken by the majority of EM students are internationally recognized and theoretically valuable additions to the students’ learning portfolios. On the other hand, the challenges faced by frontline teachers to curriculum planning and design, as well as the language prerequisites in the tertiary sector and the job market, informs us about the “not-so-rosy” reality. Among the approximately 16000 EM students in Hong Kong (Lam 2014), most of them are of Indian or Pakistani, Nepalese and Filipino descent. Given that their vastly diverse ancestral origins, socio-economic statuses (SES), number of years spent on learning Chinese, and CL proficiency levels, frontline teachers have to customize their CL curricula with various means to accommodate individual learning needs.

Streaming based on students’ CL proficiency level and use of school-based curricula are two major ways to achieve such an end, especially after the phasing-out of “designated schools” (i.e., local English-medium schools officially designated for EM students) in response to local activists’ criticisms of the implied “ethnic segregation” (Hong Kong Unison 2012). Nevertheless, to the majority of CL teachers who were not trained to teach CSL, such challenges could be overwhelming, as the Education Bureau (EDB)’s “Chinese as a Second Language Learning Framework” (2014) remains a breakthrough yet rudimentary attempt requiring further development and refinement (Oxfam Hong Kong 2016). The current framework illustrates only the abilities to be attained for each level without any curriculum or pedagogical guidelines, which closely adhere to the nine Key Learning Areas (KLAs) based on generic skills, values and attitudes (Hong Kong Curriculum Development Council 2008).

Furthermore, the aforementioned overseas CL examinations are not equivalents to the HKDSE examination in terms of CL proficiency. Although recognized as CSL “alternatives” to their local counterpart by JUPAS and local universities, those overseas examinations, as well as ApL(C), are lower-level CL qualifications and do not serve as equivalents to the HKDSE in the job market. While CL proficiency is a high priority requirement in the ethnic minority job market (Employee Retraining Board 2013), EMs with ACLs are criticized by local employers as less-than-competent in workplace Chinese communication or even discriminated against during recruitment exercises, particularly reading and writing. Besides, the aforementioned overseas CL are not currently accepted by the HKSAR Government as the sole CL requirements of most civil service jobs, including disciplined services traditionally popular among EM graduates like the Police Force and the Correctional Services. These positions also require candidates to attain a pass in specific government language tests (e.g., Common Recruitment Examination), implying that overseas examinations are insufficient for job application and career advancement.

CL teachers and EM students, against such a backdrop, are therefore torn between opting for the manageable ACLs to improve university admission chances as “lifebuoys”, or the difficult HKDSE examination for better academic and career advancement opportunities.

This paper aims to address two research questions:

- (1) How does the multi-exit assessment framework affect the teaching and learning of CSL in the local mainstream secondary classroom and EM students’ academic advancement opportunities?
- (2) How do ACLs affect EM students’ preparedness for local workplaces, and the resulting flow of three capitals (Bourdieu 1986) as related to social mobility?

## **Literature Review**

Bourdieu defines linguistic capital as a form of cultural capital to be inherited or acquired (1991), and cultural capital is a determining factor that possibly explains why children from different social classes perform differently in terms of academic achievement (1986). The more cultural capital one inherits from family or acquires through upbringing, the more likely they will succeed in their studies (Lee and Bowen 2006; Modood 2004) and gaining entry into high social status groups, organisations, or institutions (Carter 2003). Other research also points out that family plays an important role in the socialization of students into their primary Discourses, i.e., the set of cultural practices or culturally appropriate ways associated with their first languages and cultures. Such primary Discourses are possibly in competition with secondary Discourses, i.e., the set of cultural practices associated with school, church, or businesses, which are often the dominant Discourses that social status and privilege (Gee 1989, 1996). Botelho et al. (2014) claim that critical engagement with multiliteracies pedagogies for fostering engagement in literate inquiry, meaning making, and communication among culturally and linguistically diverse students brings people closer, and the elicited social interactions create new sociopolitical relationships and possibilities that redefine and recreate school culture.

Given that education and professional qualifications no longer adhere to a strictly-defined canon of knowledge passed on from generation to generation, development of competence has become the main objective of education (Hartig et al. 2008). Assessment of competence, therefore, has evolved into a significant part of education in the contemporary era. Bernstein’s theory of language codes (1971) proposed that the less sophisticated “restricted code” adopted by most working class children limits its speakers’ expression of inner experiences, and with more complex grammatical structures and more causality their upper-middle class counterparts, a majority of whom adopt the “elaborated code” tend to outperform the restricted code users in educational assessments. Shohamy (2008) argued that language policy should be expanded to introduce the notion of “policy mechanisms”, including language tests, and how these mechanisms can lead to de facto language policies in implicit and covert ways. She stresses that tests serve as a tool to create, enforce, and perpetuate de facto language policies that

interact between ideology and practice in a hidden, covert, and implicit way. Scarino (2008), referring to the case of Australia in which assessment plays an intricate role in policymaking as a “complex and shifting interface between language policy, curriculum and assessment, suggested that assessment processes should be accountable to learners and teachers alike while being sensitive to the contexts of specific learnings and contexts of learners and learning.

In Hong Kong, EM intergenerational poverty issues have come in the limelight after the 1997 Handover. The Commission on Poverty (CoP) of Hong Kong defines “intergenerational poverty” as “the poverty induced by the socially/economically challenged background of a person’s parents” (2005, 1), and higher skill levels would help lower risk of poverty (2015, 46). The estimated poverty rate after policy intervention in EM households of South Asian descent (including Indian, Pakistani, Nepalese, Sri Lankan and Bengali) with children was 30.8% in the year 2014, which was much higher than the territory-wide average of 16.2% (HKSAR Government 2015; Oxfam Hong Kong 2016). Worse still, economically disadvantaged EMs are faced with the challenge of communicating with coworkers in the workplace, with only slightly over half (53.1%) of poor working population of South Asian households with children reported no difficulties in communicating with Chinese-speaking workmates (HKSAR Government 2015).

Many studies indicated that there is a close relationship between poverty and second language proficiency (e.g., Kieffer 2008; Wamba 2012) among ethnic minorities in migrant societies. Secondary School Places Allocation (SSPA) System is the last resort for EM parents in Hong Kong who failed to secure school places in international schools or cannot afford their high tuition fees, through which their children are allocated to *local schools* (i.e., mainstream government, grant-in-aid, subsidized, and Direct Subsidy Scheme schools) in the hope of brushing up on the CL and staying in Hong Kong for study and career in the future.

With the phasing-in of compulsory CL curriculum for NCS (including EM) in these local schools after the Handover, numerous policy measures have been implemented to enhance the teaching and learning of Chinese as a second language. In response to the local advocacy group’s call for enhancing EM youth’s CL proficiency and advancement opportunities while preventing them from falling into the vicious cycle of intergenerational poverty, various school and student support programs for Teaching Chinese to NCS students have been set up in collaboration with local universities. The EDB has been providing fee subsidies and remissions to NCS students to sit for overseas CL examinations since 2010 to encourage NCS students to set higher goals in the learning of the CL and facilitate their academic and career advancement. The means-tested Examination Fee Remission Scheme for needy Secondary 4 to 6 NCS students was introduced in 2011/12 covering GCSE Chinese, and extended to IGCSE and GCE AS- and A-Level Chinese in 2012/13 (EDB 2012).

Frontline teachers and local NGOs providing social services to EM (e.g., Hong Kong Unison and

Oxfam Hong Kong) has also been calling for a CSL curriculum as a major reference point for improving the teaching and learning of CSL in formal education. Drawing on their views and urges, EDB launched a “Chinese as a Second Language Learning Framework” featuring a breakdown of learning goals and the use of “small steps” in 2014/15 to help NCS students to adapt to the local education system, master the CL (i.e., attaining the level equivalent to L1 CL curriculum, which the EM students are expected to achieve when they finish secondary education) and integrate into the society. ApL (C) was introduced in the same academic year to prepare students, primarily the EM youth, to work in the fields of hospitality and service industry while equipping them with the practical CL skills (EDB 2014), if they are not intended to sit for the HKDSE Chinese subject.

### **Methodology**

The current research is a qualitative study based upon a close examination of data from a focus group interview with eight sub-degree female EM students graduating from three local, mainstream schools of different bands (aged 19 to 21, having studied Chinese for 2 to 8 years upon completion of secondary education) from a Hong Kong-based tertiary institution recruited through snowballing sampling, which forms part of the qualitative data collected in the initial stage of a longitudinal participant-observant study. The focus group, consisted of 6 Pakistani students, 2 Indian students and 1 Nepalese student, elicited education histories from the students and narrative accounts of their life aspirations. The interviewees’ diverse sociolinguistic backgrounds, personalities, attitudes towards the CL, learning styles, as well as their school background, Chinese teachers’ teaching styles, had, to varying extents, contributed to their prior CL performance and current Chinese proficiency levels. Other questions were asked about their CL proficiency levels, barriers to universities and job market, and views on the CL curricula in local schools, which reflect their upward mobility prospect. In addition to the students, the authors interviewed a frontline educator with more than 20 years’ experience in CL (including CSL) teaching, and a social service provider/mentor to the focus group members with 8 years’ experience in EM family and education support. The interview data are triangulated and analyzed with existing documents including news articles, government circulars, non-government organization (NGO) reports and scholarly literature using critical discourse analysis (CDA).

### **Results**

Many of Hong Kong’s EMs are characterized by their relatively low Chinese proficiency level, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The proportion of persons aged 5 or above able to speak Cantonese was namely 34.3% (Indians), 60.1% (Pakistanis), 48.7% (Nepalese) and 42.7% (Filipinos); 63.2% of EMs claimed only partial or no ability to read Chinese, whereas 63.6% claimed only partial or no ability to write Chinese (HKSAR Government 2015). EDB (2014) emphasized that schools should not come with any presumptions that NCS students would need a simpler Chinese curriculum, implying that the individualized, school-based CSL curricula would be by no means

inferior versions of the first language programs. The well-intended guideline, nevertheless, remained ambiguous for the fact that the learning framework was linked to the Chinese as the first language syllabus without any technical instructions or suggestions on curriculum development or choice of pedagogy.

Teachers also face difficult decisions about streaming, curriculum development and choice of pedagogies which could largely affect student performance and academic advancement. It is impossible to develop school-based curricula independent of the public examination syllabi, and the decision on the choice of ACLs take largely depends on school management and subject teachers' knowledge and perception of minority opportunities in relation to CL proficiency. Without any technical instructions on tailoring or suggested CSL syllabi, such great flexibility allowed might confuse teachers who have not received any training in CSL, or those who are taking care of ethnically diverse, mixed-level classes in schools with only a few EM students.

Streaming according to one's CL proficiency, as mentioned earlier, is one of the most popular measures in schools in response to EM students' diverse learning needs. ACLs theoretically improves their university admission chances, but it might not be the case for those applying for majors requiring practicum, such as social work and education. Student F recounted her experience:

“Chinese proficiency level did affect my study options. I also applied to a Bachelor of Education program I was asked whether I wanted to do the group interview in English or Chinese – I said English. I was the only EM there. The interviewer was kind and asked me questions in English, because they knew I'm EM. But they asked the rest of the interviewees in my group questions in Chinese. Later I learned the course would be conducted in Chinese and I thought that's why I didn't get into it.”

The bleak reality that the aforementioned degree programs adopted English teaching materials yet offered face-to-face classes in Chinese had barred both students from the programs, even though they were theoretically “qualified” for the programs with their GCSE Chinese results, as they lacked the elaborated Chinese code to understand the lectures and tutorials. The social service provider we interviewed, Ms Z, offered more details on such information discrepancy in the tertiary sector:

“Degree programs in courses with practicum like social work and education normally requires candidates to be fluent in all aspects of Chinese, which is quite understandable. However, such *de facto* ‘CL requirements’ are not uncommon for sub-degree programs, including associate and higher diploma. These programs use Chinese as the medium of instruction, and all the materials, lectures, and practical sessions are in Chinese. EM students' choices are thus limited further. Worse still, they might experience difficulties even if they get into English-medium tertiary programs, as they are the minority and the



rest of the class are usually weak in English, who are unable to converse in English to facilitate fruitful discussions in class. This would hinder EM students' involvement in class activities particularly for those whose Cantonese is less than fluent.”

With regard to such cases, CL proficiency, in the form of both linguistic and cultural capitals, is becoming more important than ever for academic advancement, [which echoes Lee and Bowen \(2006\) and Modood \(2004\)](#). There remains a question: many of these EM students received most of their education in Hong Kong in local schools. What causes the huge proficiency gap? Student G, born to non-Chinese speaking parents with no local friends, lacked the cultural nor social capital to succeed in CSL learning from her own family. She relied on her CL teachers in school for relevant L2 input. Another issue brought up by the focus group member were the level of Chinese being taught to them during their secondary years. Student B recounted her “strange” Chinese teacher who insisted on teaching her class very simple Chinese phrases, which matched the GCSE requirements but considered too easy for most EM students:

“The syllabus of that Chinese class [for NCS] was too basic, like the ones we already learned in primary school. In Secondary 4 the teacher was still teaching us how to say “爸爸”, “媽媽” in Form 4, yet we already learned it in primary school, which is why we were stuck in the same level and not improving at all.”

Student B's example of frustrated CSL learners portrays a specific, “lagged-behind” generation of EM CSL learners characterized by their stagnant or even attrited CL proficiency level in restricted code even after years of language study ([Gu and Patkin 2013](#)). Some of them received rather intensive training in the CL before Secondary 1, particularly those attending Chinese-medium primary schools. Nevertheless, they were left with no choice but to follow the oversimplified, off-level curriculum designed by their secondary school teachers who were struggling to cater for the extremely diverse learning needs of their NCS-only or ethnically mixed classes. Given that GCSE and GCE A-level Chinese are roughly equivalent to Primary 2 and Secondary 1 level respectively of the local curriculum, one cannot help but wonder if there should be a flexible timeline on acquiring overseas CL qualifications for EM students. Extending the Examination Fee Remission Scheme (which is currently available to Secondary 4 to 6 students only) to junior form, and encouraging younger students to take level-matching examinations at the time they are ready, would in a way motivate the students and teachers alike while equipping the former with the CL skills essential for academic assessments in senior form.

Besides examination-based ACLs, the EDB introduced the Applied Learning (Chinese) program, or ApL (C) in 2014/15 for EM senior secondary students as “yet another ACL”. The program offers the options of “Chinese for the Service Industry” and “Practical Chinese in Hospitality”, are pegged at the

Qualifications Framework (QF) Levels 1 to 3 and students would receive QF certificates upon completion of the free program. Both practical and QF-pegged, the program highlights itself as a “middle-of-the-road” option that allows students to take overseas Chinese examinations on the side (EDB 2014). Mr W shared his view on and experience with ApL(C):

“Given that qualifications are of utmost important to EM students and they often go into the hospitality business, ApL (C) is useful and relevant in terms of content knowledge and program objectives. However, the program is commissioned to two major service providers, both of which are local tertiary institutions and CL teachers in the secondary schools are not supposed to be involved in the program at all. It takes time for the external instructors to build relationship with the students. Participation of teachers would benefit the students, as they are closer and teachers can even act as coordinators between the external instructors and EM student. [...] The CL teachers are worried about the cohesiveness between the junior secondary curriculum and the ApL (C) syllabuses.”

To Mr W, ApL (C) can help EM students’ career development, yet the exclusion of CL teachers is questionable as a current practice. External instructors might ease teachers’ workload and relieve the schools, yet the teachers’ non-involvement in the participating school implies that the students need to manage their incoming cultural capital, i.e., communicate directly with the external instructors, who are themselves independent contractors and theoretically not attached to either the school and the major service providers. Also, ApL (C), as a standard and career-oriented curriculum not recognized by tertiary institutions for exemptions in retail or hospitality-related courses, lacks relevance to the CL knowledge previously acquired by the EM students. The current system does not allow continuity in EM students’ CSL learning, and the lack of teacher involvement further enlarges the gap between one’s previous and current studies. Service providers of the ApL (C) courses are not required to take the current CL/CSL curricula into consideration when designing their programs, for the courses are not aiming to serve as a bridge to more advanced CL proficiency. Furthermore, the ApL (C) teach functional CL (i.e., workplace Chinese) and not academic CL, which means the CL proficiency attained will not be sufficient for further studies in local tertiary institutions. Therefore, EM parents hesitate about letting their children take ApL (C). Given that it is a recently launched program which was introduced to the senior secondary curriculum in 2014/15, its effectiveness and impact await further investigation upon graduation of its first batch of EM students.

Other than academic advancement, even the high-achieving EM students face the same issue: despite their good grades in overseas CL examinations, their Chinese is far from sufficient for daily workplace communication, and thus do not possess the Chinese communicative expertise unspecified in the recruitment advertisements to be considered “employable” in the local job market (Hong Kong Unison 2016). The implied requirements are “default” cultural capital possessed by ethnically Chinese

locals, and the EM students find that they have been treated unfairly, since they are covertly left out of the job market and lose the opportunities to turn their supposedly well-received cultural capital (e.g. multiethnic exposure, intercultural competency, and oftentimes above-average English language proficiency) into social and economic capitals. Ms Z, with extensive experience in EM community work, elaborated on the issue by drawing on her frontline social service experience:

“EM secondary school graduates without high CL proficiency level would find it particularly hard to find a well-paying job. [...] Besides that, most EMs only speak basic Cantonese and it would be difficult for them to clarify their stances in the workplace. Some of their bosses and coworkers might be kind enough to speak with them in English, yet given the nature of jobs the coworkers are seldom English speakers. Misunderstanding is not uncommon in such cases.

EM tertiary students are aware that broken Cantonese can lead to difficulties and consequences, and their comparatively low CL proficiency could be a blow to their confidence and motivation in job search. Many EM students studying at less-than-stellar local schools are from the working class and their families are less resourceful from their international school counterparts. Without much exposure to information and insights, and these EM students might not be aware of their own strengths in career terms, such as their English and heritage language proficiencies. Also, without the *guanxi* (social connections) that well-off EMs possess, it would be harder for EM students with low Chinese proficiency level to find a good job. A non-Chinese speaking EM client had to make use of her own connections to get a teaching job in Hong Kong despite her matching qualifications.”

Ms Z’s account echoes Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1990) concept of “cultural reproduction” by highlighting the reproduction of class – the more resourceful a person’s family is, the more likely s/he will be successful in school and at work. Under the current system, Chinese learning is definitely key to breaking the poverty cycle prevalent among EM as a linguistic capital (a form of cultural capital), especially those from the working class whose children need extra resources in school to learn Chinese as a second language. EM children “inherit” their cultural capital, including linguistic capital, from their parents. The more restricted one’s language code (e.g., short answers, the use of “low” language, implied prior background) is, the less competent they would be seen by the assessors in language tests requiring the use of elaborative code (e.g., complete sentences, sophisticated vocabulary, correct grammar, explaining with the topics in focus while providing the prior background). Without sufficient cultural capital, EM youth would be left deprived of the employment opportunities they need to acquire economic capital and advance on the social ladder.

## Discussion and Concluding Remarks

As detailed in the previous sections, CL assessments are closely related to EM students' academic and career advancement. Evident in our study, Chinese proficiency as defined by the ability to use the language in real-life scenarios serves as the “genuine” prerequisite to university admission, and unfortunately the overseas CL examinations do not necessarily help the EM students meet the rather stringent local requirements. Such information discrepancies are results of intertwined, contesting language policies on both government and institutional levels. In Gee (1989, 1996)'s terms, the primary Discourses (i.e., heritage language and culture, family values) the EM students have long socialized into are in fierce competition with the secondary Discourses (the values acquired in schools and the host society). The latter, as the dominant Discourses, have left the EM students to rethink their role and position in Hong Kong society as disadvantaged non-native speakers of Chinese. Their choices are narrowed by their comparatively low Chinese proficiency level, and to avoid the Chinese-medium tertiary programs they are often forced into strictly English-medium Business and English Education majors. Still, they would need to pay extra effort to master the CL so as to improve their future prospect with communicative expertise in the target language. Similar to Kieffer (2008) and Wamba (2012)'s findings, unsuccessful school leavers with relatively low levels of Chinese proficiency are put in an even more difficult position, as their choices are limited to manual jobs, or hospitality jobs in expatriate-dominant businesses without prospect to advance further to the much wider array of jobs matching their terminal academic qualifications.

The high EM poverty rate points to intergenerational poverty and echoes with the theory of cultural reproduction, and there is a pressing need to improve their social mobility with not only social but also education intervention. EM students in Hong Kong, mostly second or third generation of transnational migrants who moved to Hong Kong during the British colonial rule, are short on social and cultural capitals from both their host society and heritage culture in the local market for symbolic exchange (Coulmas 1992; Bankston 2014). They are often partially socialized, as members of South/Southeast Asian diaspora, into their primary and secondary Discourses, without the opportunity to acquire the elaborated codes of either side and often feel stuck in an embarrassing position of incompetence. The authors concur with, to a certain degree, Kennedy's (2012) recommendation that a competence-oriented approach should be taken to enhance minority training and opportunities for the Hong Kong context. Nevertheless, against the backdrop of cultural reproduction in the postcolonial era, one should note that social integration, instead of social resilience as recommended by Kennedy, would be crucial to the quest for self-identity and self-esteem among EM youth, so as to empower them and facilitate career development over their lifespan (Kumar 2007).

The launch of the multi-exit assessment framework has been a partial success in advocacy terms, as it has provided the EM students with “alternatives” to HKDSE for attaining beginner to intermediate levels of CL proficiency. Nevertheless, the immense impact on daily teaching and school management

must not be overlooked. CL teachers, especially those yet to receive training in CSL, are left with little choice in ACLs, curriculum and pedagogy but to struggle through the “essentials” of CSL in Hong Kong: streaming and school-based curriculum development. Unlike the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), the current Chinese as a Second Language Learning Framework is intended for basic, formal education solely based on academic CL, instead of a territory-wide framework leading to both functional and academic tracks for adults and teenagers alike. In light of this, we recommend that the current framework should be further improvised to include [curriculum, pedagogical and assessment guidelines](#) for teachers’ reference, given that they are not necessarily trained in CSL and [relevant input would be beneficial as an integral part of successful policy implementation](#) (Scarino 2008; Shohamy 2008). Types of learning difficulties their students are likely to face at particular age groups and language development stages, as well as possible solutions to these issues, should be addressed while adapting a format similar to CEFR that details the proficiency levels, learning goals and requirements. The current study also points to the need for further research in developing [multicultural](#) curricula and pedagogies (Botelho et al. 2014) in professional communication and life planning for EM students, which should contribute to the design of institutional or community programs for enhancing one’s sense of belonging and self-worth while gaining genuine cultural membership to the multicultural Hong Kong society.

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