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Teacher Expectations of South Asian Students in a Hong Kong Primary School

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ABSTRACT

South Asian ethnic minorities (SAEMs) represent a growing population in Hong Kong public education. However, schools struggle to offer them fair and equitable education. One frequently mentioned, but rarely studied component in their performance is teachers' lower expectations. This article reports on a qualitative case study to examine ethnically Chinese teachers' expectations of South Asian students in a public primary school in Hong Kong. Five Chinese teachers were interviewed, with observations in three of these teachers' classrooms. Results indicate teachers have lower expectations. Several influencing factors were identified, including perceptions of cultural differences between Chinese teachers and South Asian ethnic minorities' families and inadequate training of teachers in Chinese as a second language and incorporating diversified learning strategies into the curriculum. This is one of the first studies specifically focused on exploring in greater details primary teachers' expectations about South Asian students in Hong Kong.

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Intruduction

Hong Kong, like other diverse regions, faces challenges in ensuring equitable outcomes for ethnic minority youth. Despite their protection in the 1991 Bill of Rights Ordinance and via the 1996 establishment of the Equal Opportunities Commission, diverse young people continue to face race and class discrimination in Hong Kong (Bhowmik and Kennedy, 2016; Erni and Leung, 2015; Kapai, 2015; Ku, Chan, Lo, and Singh, 2010). One group particularly susceptible to discrimination is South Asian ethnic minority (SAEM) youth, whose families have come to Hong Kong over generations from countries including India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. In 2016, about 14.5% (84, 875) of Hong Kong's ethnic minorities were classified as SAEMs (Census and Statistics Department, 2017, 21). They are ethnically distinct from the Han Chinese majority of Hong Kong, and compared to the whole population they typically have a lower participation rate in higher education (Census and Statistics Department, 2017, 57-58), a lower monthly median income, and a higher poverty rate (Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, 2018).

Most SAEM students attend local schools, which often fail to effectively integrate non-Chinese speaking pupils (Equal Opportunities Commission, 2019). As a result, SAEM children in these schools do not achieve the same performance standards as their ethnic Chinese classmates. Inadequate Chinese language education and other systemic factors including racial insensitivity and discrimination against SAEM students contribute to their lower educational outcomes and impose barriers to long-term economic and life outcomes (Bhowmik & Kennedy, 2016). The failure to provide adequate second language learning opportunities for SAEM students and not giving due emphasis to other systemic factors create a cycle of academic disappointment for students, families, and teachers (Equal Opportunities Commission, 2019).

Previous studies indicate that teachers' attitudes and expectations influence student performance (e.g., Campbell, 2015; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1965). Significant evidence from social, educational and developmental psychology literature (Schofield et al., 2006) suggests that teachers' lower expectations regarding ethnic minority students' academic ability and achievement is negatively linked to their academic outcomes. This paper presents a qualitative case study to explore the presence of teachers' expectations and biases towards SAEM students in Hong Kong primary schools. Data were obtained via semi-structured interviews with teachers and classroom observations. By examining the performance gap of SAEM students in Hong Kong, this study creates awareness of the influence of teachers' expectations and biases and offers suggestions on how to better include SAEM students in schools. This is important to ensure equitable educational outcomes for all students irrespective of their race and ethnicity.

Literature Review

The foundational work of Rosenthal and Jacobson (1965) determined that teachers' perceptions of minority students impacted their different treatment of them and ultimately their performance. While Rosenthal and Jacobson focused primarily on positive outcomes

of teachers' expectations, Babad, Inbar, and Rosenthal (1982) revealed that teachers' negative biases also impacted their treatment of students and students' performance. Davies, Weinstein, Huang, Gregory, Cowan, and Cowan (2014) demonstrated that teacher expectations as early as kindergarten affect long-term potential. While many studies have been performed in the United States, De Boer, Bosker, and Van der Werf (2010) identified long-term effects of teacher bias in the Dutch context. Meanwhile, Strand (2012) found that Black Caribbean students in the United Kingdom were underrepresented in higher education in part due to their difficult relationships with teachers, also suggesting a link between teacher bias and student performance (see also Campbell, 2015).

An ethnographic study by Ku et al. (2010) illustrated that Hong Kong residents' limited knowledge about SAEMs resulted in racial discrimination and social exclusion. Their research found that Hong Kong residents frequently held misconceptions of SAEMs as lazy, dirty, stupid, unlawful, uncivilised, and impolite. These stereotypes can be used to rationalise the disadvantaged position of SAEMs in Hong Kong. The authors suggested that such attitudes thus create barriers to equal opportunity in education and employment. More importantly, they argued the general lack of knowledge of SAEMs made it difficult to meet their needs. To understand the position of SAEMs, they compiled detailed life experiences from eight SAEM individuals in Hong Kong. While each was varied, one thing remained constant: each had experienced racial discrimination in employment, school admission, shopping, access to government services, and searching for a place to live.

In 2014, Erni and Leung produced a comprehensive publication on South Asian minorities in Hong Kong. Their aim was to identify key areas of inequality faced and the failings of anti-discrimination policies. Socially, they found that SAEMs are stigmatised by Chinese media, film, and advertising. In relation, Ku et al. (2005) claim that ethnically Chinese (EC) residents formulate opinions without interacting with SAEMs. They claim the media has created a 'radicalised narrative' creating and reinforcing negative perceptions (see also Jackson and Nesterova, 2017).

In education, Erni and Leung (2014) suggest that Hong Kong fails to offer equal opportunity for SAEM students. A significant concern is the segregation of SAEM students from EC peers. Hong Kong's first attempt to promote equal education led to the development of designated schools. The schools taught primarily in English, without providing adequate opportunities to develop Chinese language skills they needed to succeed in a predominantly Chinese speaking region. Additionally, even non-designated schools at times segregate SAEM students. SAEM parent and student testimonials suggest these practices reduce their opportunities.

Some research reports the presence of cultural insensitivities on the parts of teachers and principals in Hong Kong schools (Oxfam Hong Kong, Loh & Hung, 2020; Yeung, 2006). These studies specifically suggest that Hong Kong's local teachers have lower expectations of SAEM students. Ku et al. (2005) found that SAEM students felt their teachers did not provide them with equal treatment. They believed teachers paid more attention to EC classmates and punished them more frequently and severely. There was also concern that

teachers stereotyped students as incompetent, poorly behaved, and impolite. Similarly, in Bhowmik and Kennedy's (2016) study, SAEM students commonly mentioned being punished more severely and frequently than EC classmates. Additionally, teachers appeared to have lower expectations of their performance. A later exploration by Bhowmik, Kennedy, and Hue (2018) described low expectations of teachers as a key factor in the low participation rates and educational outcomes of ethnic minority students.

Meanwhile, Zhang et al. (2011) has identified a severe shortage of qualified and experienced teachers of Chinese as a Second Language (CSL). Teachers often use pedagogy like that used for native Chinese speakers (Zhang et al., 2011). Yet attitudinal, cognitive, and cultural differences influence second language learning, resulting in a need for pedagogically distinct curriculum (Lightbrown and Spada, 2011). SAEM students generally find such CSL difficult, boring, and ineffective, while teachers frame students' attitudes as based in disinterest. Ultimately, the process can lead to a lack of understanding and lowered expectations (Zhang et al., 2011).

In summary, teacher expectation and bias affect student performance, and young children are the most susceptible to its effects. The implications are far reaching and frequently used to understand attainment gaps among students. As indicated above, several studies in Hong Kong (Ku et al., 2005; Bhowmik and Kennedy, 2018; Zhang et al., 2011) suggests the presence of teachers' lower expectations about SAEM students' academic achievement. However, none of them examined this specific issue in detail. The current study aims to contribute to research into the education of SAEM students by exploring teacher expectation bias in primary schools, specifically focusing on how teachers express low expectations and the factors that influence such expectations.

Theoretically, our investigation is positioned in a critical, post-positivist framework informed by critical race theory in education (Gillborn, 2015; Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995; Taylor, Gillborn & Ladson-Billings, 2009). This theory explains that racialized experiences negatively affect ethnic minority students' educational achievement. It also helps deepen understandings of the educational barriers for ethnic minority students and explore ways to resist and overcome such barriers (Taylor, 2009, 9).

Methodology

A qualitative case study at a local public primary school was undertaken to answer two research questions: First, how do teachers express low expectations regarding SAEM students' academic and behavioural performance at the primary level? And second, what factors influence teachers' low expectations? The study aimed to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomena through gathering first-hand data in a natural setting and comprehending meaning as expressed by the study participants (Denizen and Lincoln, 2000).

A qualitative case study method (Stake, 2000; Yin, 1994) was adopted for this study for a number of reasons. First, it helps gain deeper insights from the participants' perspectives (Stake, 2000) – five primary teachers in this case. Second, it also helps develop better or

more complex understanding and subsequent theorization (Stake, 2000). Third, case study is a powerful technique to generate context-specific knowledge (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Based on interviews with five teachers and lesson observations of three of them, the qualitative case study in this research provides in-depth understanding of five teachers' expectations of SAEM students from their perspectives in the context of a local public primary school in Hong Kong.

Convenience sampling was used to identify the school, based on the first author being able to gain access to the school (Schreier, 2018). The selected school is a Chinese-medium school in a rural area of Hong Kong. The area contains a mix of luxury estates and government-funded low-income estates. In addition, new low-income estates are under development. The school is one of several built in the 2000s to meet demand for primary education. There are approximately 800 children in attendance. The majority are EC. However, the school has recently seen a significant increase in non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students, the majority of which are SAEMs. Approximately 100 students or 12% are classified as NCS. Of them, 90 or 90% are SAEMs, including Indian, Nepalese, and Pakistani students. Pakistani children represent the highest percentage in the school. The majority reside in the nearby government estates. Although we do not aim to generalize our findings, the selected school can be considered as a typical CMI school that has seen increases in SAEM students in recent years (Patton, 2015). This signifies the importance of the study of the selected school, even if it is a single school.

Each class has two to four SAEM students, except for top-stream classes, which are reserved for native speakers of Mandarin in levels one to three and for elite students in four to six, based on grades. Additionally, unofficial high ability classes exist for primary two and three, which also exclude SAEM students. Lower-level classes are taught in Cantonese except for English class and Mandarin.

As discussed in the interviews, the school has made several attempts to regulate Chinese learning of SAEM students. At one point, the majority were placed in a segregated class, which the teachers and principal felt could allow teachers to better support them. However, the class was frequently delegated to new, inexperienced teachers, and no alterations were made to pedagogy. The segregation reduced opportunities for SAEM students to converse with native speakers in their age group. This plan was cancelled after a few years. At present, all NCS students attend remedial class twice per week during Chinese lessons. Pedagogy and teaching materials remain the same, and unqualified, inexperienced teachers are again assigned. The school also offers an extra Chinese language class twice per week during students scheduled tutorial lessons. Lastly, there is a paid program SAEM students can attend for homework help. The program is offered every day after school and is partially sponsored by government grants. The class is affordable to most SAEM families. However, the teachers are typically university students or recent graduates with no formal teaching credentials, from a private organisation.

Data were collected via five semi-structured interviews and three lesson observations. Semi-structured interviews were selected due to the personal nature of the subject matter.

Also, interviewing provided a greater breadth to understand the participants' perspectives critically (Fontana & Frey, 1994, 365). Two administrative and three class/subject teachers were interviewed. Each class teachers also agreed to participate in lesson observation and a post-lesson second interview. These teachers provided data unique to their daily experience with SAEM students. The administrative teachers offered insight into the school's educational and disciplinary policies and practices. Observations aimed to provide additional understanding of classroom practices and teacher-student relationships. It provided an opportunity to understand such practices and relationships in a naturalistic setting as well as to gain insight about the surrounding context (Adler & Adler, 1994, 378). Observation data also helped triangulate the interview data by comparing and contrasting them.

Teachers were asked a variety of questions regarding students' performance and behaviour. Their answers were compared and combined with lesson observation. Key areas of note included teachers' perceptions of SAEM students and their families and students' academic and behavioural performance. EC teachers do not exist independently of society, and personal feelings can impact their work. Teachers' expectations may also be influenced by the school environment. Performance measurements, support structures, and teacher training all influence how teachers perceive students. Thus, we identified influencing factors through a series of questions related to their academic training, beliefs about students, and school support.

Teachers were selected for their experience in working with SAEM students and the role-specific data they could provide. The teachers include the Non-Chinese Speaking (NCS) coordinator, a teacher from the school's disciplinary committee, and three primary one teachers. The class and subject teachers all teach a class with SAEM students. Participants' credentials and other relevant information is included in Table 1.

Table 1. *Summary of teacher qualifications, language, and experience*

Teacher	Credentials	Demographic	1st Language	Experience
Teacher, Chinese (CST)	PGDE Chinese PGDE Special Needs	Hong Kong Chinese	Cantonese	1 Year Teacher 2 Years TA
Teacher, English (EST)	PGDE English	Hong Kong Chinese	Cantonese	3 Years
Library Teacher (LST)	PGDE Chinese	Hong Kong Chinese	Cantonese	15 Years
Discipline Teacher (DT)	PGDE in English	Hong Kong Chinese	Cantonese	18 years
NCS Coordinator (NCS)	BEd Education PGDE Counselling MEd Chinese	Hong Kong Chinese	Cantonese	19 Years

The observed lessons were filmed and not observed live to minimise distraction. The researcher and teachers decided this would be less invasive than the presence of another person in the classroom. The researcher reviewed the film using an observation form

focused on SAEM student engagement, classroom discipline, and methods of inclusion. The observation sought to determine if EC teachers attempted to effectively communicate with SAEM students and encouraged SAEM students to participate and collaborate with EC students. Observations were also made to consider if SAEM students were disciplined more frequently or harshly. Notes from observations were compared to statements made by teachers. Although a single observation cannot capture the quality of teacher-student relationships and student-student relationships, it presented evidence relevant to the discussions on teachers' training. Information provided by the interviews and observations was triangulated to identify commonalities in teachers' perceptions of SAEM students. The use of triangulation helped validate findings and conclusions.

Prior to the commencement of this project, ethical approval was obtained from the University of Hong Kong Faculty of Education Ethics Research Committee. No interview, observation, or discussion of this project occurred prior to the receipt of approval. One concern regarding the interviews was the potential for linguistic misunderstanding. All participants were native Cantonese speakers having learnt English as a second or third language, while interviews were conducted in English. To compensate, teachers were presented with a copy of questions prior to the interview and given time to formulate their answers. During the interview all attempts were made to ensure questions were asked in a clear and concise way. No time limit was allocated to the interview, to prevent teachers from feeling stressed. Teachers were also informed that they need not answer any unstructured or surprise questions if they felt incapable of answering. Finally, all were granted an unlimited amount of time to review and sign the transcript later to indicate all statements were correct. They were also given access to the interview recording.

Data analysis was based on interview transcripts and notes from observation. Data were analysed thematically, and the analysis comprised a number of steps including identifying unit of analysis, coding data, sorting code, checking code, and creating themes (Foss & Waters, 2007). Research questions guided the team to identify the unit of analysis. Existing literature informed the coding of data. The first author carried out the coding exercise. Once all the data were coded, they were checked and sorted thoroughly to identify the categories or themes, sub-themes, etc. In order to answer the research questions, salient themes were created from the coding categories. The findings are presented under those themes in the following section.

Findings

Academic performance of SAEM students

Class and subject teachers were first asked what students needed to do to be academically successful, based on their own experience. In response, all teachers identified two key areas: extra-curricular reading and family support for revision and homework.

> CST: Attention, pay attention. Getting involved in the class activity. They need to have enough sleep, otherwise they fall asleep very easily. And home

> revision, at home, is very important because there is too much information in the class and they may not obtain all of it. … parents teach them at home and parents do revision with them ….
> LST: I think they should have a hobby to read. Reading is very important. And also family support is very important. …
> EST: Don't compare [SAEM students] with the Chinese students. Most of my Chinese students from my class, they can hand in the homework on time … but two of the students from Pakistan, they always cannot hand in their homework …. So I'll have to remind them…. I have to inform the parents. … I have to spend a longer time to ask them to finish the job. …
> NCS: I think the most important [thing] is they need more tutorial classes to finish their homework and make revision.

While minor differences could be noted in teachers' definitions, success is clearly defined extrinsically. No matter how much effort is made in class, without external support in reading, homework, and revision, students are unable to succeed. In relation, all of the teachers classified SAEM students at a lower level of academic achievement than EC peers.

> Interviewer: In general, how would you rate their (SAEM students) academic performance?
>
> CST: Low.
>
> EST: If in English, I think it's okay, because this type of student, they can speak basic English compared with Chinese. I think they perform bad in Chinese.
>
> LST: At the beginning they have the Chinese proficiency assessment. I saw the result. They have just 8% qualifying. Yeah, not very good.

The three class teachers stated that SAEM students perform at a lower level particularly in Chinese subjects. The EST noted that her students' performance in English was acceptable, barring handwriting and homework. However, her statements about Chinese lessons corresponded with those of other teachers. The CST did not comment on the overall performance of students. However, she did comment on the performance of SAEM students and noted students' tendency to exit school with lower literacy rates:

> CST: This school year we tried to launch pull-out learning classes from the regular Chinese lesson, for primary 2 and primary 4 NCS students, because our school has more funding to employ teachers for Chinese as a second language, so as to try to improve NCS students in learning.
> Interviewer: You said P2 and P4 levels, right? Why those levels?
> CST: Because at the level of these students, Chinese is not good.
> Interviewer: Okay, so that's where they struggle. What is the normal level they graduate [primary 6] from?

CST: If they work hard, maybe primary 4…
Interviewer: Okay. The ones who don't work as hard, where will they…
CST: Maybe primary four or primary three.

To determine factors influencing teachers' expectations, it was necessary to understand why EC teachers believed SAEM students performed worse than EC peers. The teachers were asked to rationalise their assessment of SAEM students' performance to determine if their beliefs were synchronous with their understanding of success. The teachers provided the following statements:

> CST: Maybe their experience in speaking Chinese and using Chinese, for example, the Pakistani, he only speaks, um, learned Cantonese since he is in kindergarten. But for other students, they learn Cantonese before kindergarten. So, I think the duration of using Cantonese makes them perform lower.
> EST: I think their parents cannot help them because they have a different language. So, they speak in Urdu and here we speak Cantonese, maybe some of them have difficulty in speaking Cantonese. And Mandarin as well.
> LST: Maybe influenced by their family background… family support is very important.

In the closing statements of interviews, teachers were asked what they thought the school could do to better support SAEM students' learning. The question returns to teachers' definitions of success. The teachers provided the following statements:

> CST: I guess tactile learning is good because when they listen to Cantonese …I think they can remember more.
> EST: I think our school needs to put more effort to teach them how to do the homework. It seems that this kind of student doesn't know how to do the Chinese homework. So, I think it's better to spend more effort to guide them to finish this kind of homework. Yes. Provide more manpower to help them. I think the school should organise more workshops for NCS parents. The school organises a lot of workshops for local parents on how they can better support their children's learning. However, due to language, NCS parents are unable to attend and do not benefit from these workshops.
> LST: I can maybe provide some good reading material for them. … Maybe do some counselling or tutoring for them.
> NCS: I think the most important thing is to enhance teachers' professional development in teaching Chinese as a second language… Maybe if he's better … and EDB [the Education Bureau] has a policy to have compulsory requirement.

Given the teachers' definitions of success, they believe that students, EC and SAEM, cannot

succeed via their own merit alone. Instead, they believe students must have external support mechanisms in place, including home reading, after-school tutorials, and support from their family. At the same time, teachers stated that their SAEM students perform at a lower level than EC peers. The data suggests that due to teachers' beliefs in the extrinsic nature of success, they have lower expectations for SAEM students' performance.

Behavioural performance of SAEM students

If teachers believe SAEM students are naughtier, they may act pre-emptively, influencing students' perceptions of the environment. Such behaviour can lead young children to hold negative feelings toward themselves, their teachers, and their peers, creating an atmosphere of exclusion and avoidance. To assess teachers' perspectives on the behaviour of SAEM students they were asked to compare the behaviour of SAEM students to EC classmates.

> Interviewer: Okay. In terms of how they behave, do you find it different than the other kids or…
> CST: No.
> Interviewer: Pretty much the same?
> CST: Pretty much the same.
> EST: Luckily for my class I think it is okay.… I know some of them from other classes are very naughty. But in my class, I think it's okay that one or two students don't hand in their homework.
> LST: I think they are quite similar.

Here, the EST teacher hints at the possibility of rumours regarding SAEM students' behaviour by mentioning students in other classes. Meanwhile the DT, who acts as the school authority on student behaviour, was asked a series of questions related to SAEM behaviour and discipline. When asked to generalise, she made several comments. Contrary to subject teachers, she noted differences between SAEM and EC students.

> DT: It's very common for them. …They [SAEM students] like to use, to say foul language. … So, sometimes the students, maybe their classmates will tell us that oh, they say some dirty things…. So we cannot know whether or not they really say foul language, but sometimes the students may tell us about that… And then, they also like to hit their friends more often than the Chinese students. Some girls, NCS kids, they are very good and behave well but, you know, some kids, maybe they are naughty and will always make trouble in their classroom. … I think the cultural background for sure.

Despite noting differences in behaviour, the DT was adamant that SAEM students are treated the same, or in some cases more leniently than EC classmates.

> DT: Honestly when we are dealing with them, we think that we give them much more, um, we accept them more than the Chinese kids. Because we understand their culture is not the same as ours, so we may accept that

> sometimes they may have some bad behaviour, but we would just talk to them and tell them not to do that. …But for the Chinese students, as we have the same backgrounds, same culture, we understand why they did it, so we will try to use another way to deal with them.

Lastly, the DT was asked whether SAEM students get in trouble more than EC students.

> DT: They will get more complaints from the teacher.

In summary, the teachers did not identify differences in SAEM students' behaviour compared to EC peers. However, this contradicted the observations of the discipline teacher. The DT suggested that SAEM, particularly Pakistani students, were more likely to engage in rude or disruptive behaviour. She also noted a difference in the frequency of complaints about SAEM students' behaviour. When asked about the harshness of punishment, the discipline teacher explained that the school was more lenient with SAEM students because they did not always understand the source of students' misbehaviour.

Teacher training in CSL

The extent of teacher training in CSL and NCS-related topics is indicative of a teacher's ability to adapt lessons, materials, and attitudes to meet SAEM students' needs. Without training, nuances in students' behaviour can be misinterpreted. Appropriate training could help moderate expectations, limiting feelings of frustration and failure in teachers and students. CSL and NCS-related teacher training is specific to each school and teacher. The subject teachers confirmed that training in NCS was not offered by their school. However, they explained the availability of NCS training at the Education Bureau. Teachers made the following statements when asked about their training and support to work with SAEM students:

> CST: Academically? No….
> EST: Yes, but I think just for Chinese and maths; for English, no.
> LST: The EDB has training. Yeah, maybe a teacher can go to see and search for the course. I think there's plenty of training.

The Chinese teacher and NCS coordinator noted that Chinese teachers have no CSL training or qualifications and their training is specific to teaching Chinese to first language speakers.

> Interviewer: Do the Chinese teachers have any training in teaching Chinese as a second language?
> CST: No.
> Interviewer: None of them, or just…
> CST: For me, no. But like [NCS Coordinator], I think she has lots of experience….
> Interviewer: So …you've only learned how to teach Chinese in Chinese?
> CST: Yes. And for some, they may have experience, but they think they should not put effort on NCS. So just ignore it.

The CST confirmed that Chinese subject teacher training is specific to first language learners, which was corroborated by the NCS. She also identified a lack of CSL training for teachers.

> NCS: I do not have formal, specific qualification, but I always personally take different thematic seminars and workshops on teaching Chinese as a second language to facilitate teachers' understanding of the underpinning philosophies and mastery of the pedagogy in teaching NCS students. All these seminars, workshops, are also organised by the EDB or local universities. … the most important thing is to enhance teachers' professional development in teaching Chinese as a second language.

Additional comments were made to suggest weaknesses in the organisation and structure of NCS programs for SAEM students. Teachers complained that NCS programs were insufficient in frequency, coordination, and professional staff. The Chinese teacher and NCS coordinator made the following comments:

CST: Our school provides NCS class, but it's just once a week and not enough.

> NCS: I think it is most important that they need more tutorial classes to finish their homework and make revision after school every day because they need time to do some religious ritual at home.
> Interviewer: Do you think they [after school tutorials] are any good?
> NCS: No… It is good for our teachers to teach them.

The teachers were also asked to comment on the appropriateness and effectiveness of the curriculum.

> Interviewer: Do you think the Chinese language curriculum is appropriate for teaching Chinese as a second language?
> CST: Um, no, of course not, no. Because it's too difficult. For example, in the textbook … there are deeper levels of meaning in the story. …it's [hard] for a normal Chinese-speaking student to understand. And for the Pakistani and Nepalese, they cannot really know the deeper meaning….
> NCS: They feel difficulty in learning Chinese because the content of Chinese curriculum focuses more on aspects including reading, writing, speaking, and listening … Some abstract concept… or hidden meanings. They don't know what may be related to Chinese culture….

Time appeared as a recurring theme.

> NCS: It is a challenge for me to teach them, because I always need to take more time to design some interesting programs for them to learn Chinese.
> CST: Things should be done. But time is an issue.
> LST: Yeah, so very rushed the time they have to borrow a book and read

and also teach them some skills.

Due to school organisation, structure, division of labour, and curriculum design, teachers lack time and training to ensure effective teaching of Chinese subjects to SAEM students. The Chinese and library lesson observations supported teachers' claims of insufficient training, time, and support. The Chinese lesson was packed with administrative tasks, limiting time for teaching. The lesson was teacher-centred. Students rarely moved from their desks. The lesson included minimal scaffolding or structuring to teach the student to dispense with outside assistance, and no attempts were made to diversify lesson objectives or materials to meet diverse needs. Similarly, the library lesson lacked child-centred activities and diversified materials. However, the library teacher did attempt to include SAEM students by incorporating English into her lesson whenever she found students struggling. Additionally, there was more scaffolding in the library lesson.

Inclusion of SAEM students

Exclusion can lead to feelings of isolation. The more distanced SAEM students are from EC peers, the more difficult it is to generate their interest in language, culture, and other relevant topics. All teachers at some point addressed the subject of inclusion of SAEM students in the classroom. The subject teachers were also asked if they encouraged students to work together.

> CST: Sometimes I may find some high-ability student to teach the Pakistani because sometimes he can't write. So some of the classmates are helpful, and they really want to be the lead to teach. I think it's much better, because if I teach the Pakistani, he may feel stressed.
> EST: The Chinese student can help the teacher to remind this type of student, guide them… the Chinese student can understand what a teacher wants, and then they are a reminder for this kind of student of what to do. … One of their parents might request that their daughter sit next to Chinese students because they want their daughter to communicate with Chinese students, to learn more, and speak Cantonese. So they would have this kind of requirement. Most of this kind of student sits next to the Chinese local student.
> LST: Because they are minority, they must join. They must work together and then they can build this sense of belonging… If not, if they don't work together, they will be discriminated [against].

The teachers agreed it was important for students to work together. Additionally, the LST introduced 'sense of belonging'. This was also mentioned by the DT when addressing methods to improve behaviour.

> DT: I think that if we try to do more things to let the kids have a sense of belonging to the school, it is better. If they have a sense of belonging, they love our school, they will behave well and the chance that they are absent

from school will be less.

The NCS also emphasised the importance of SAEM students working with EC classmates.

> NCS: To promote integration between NCS students and Chinese students, we organise some groups which invite some Chinese students to act as Chinese ambassadors, to assist NCS students in learning Chinese language after lessons and besides this, I can also use the funding to fully subsidise some extracurricular activities related to Chinese culture and organised by other teachers in order to invite NCS students to take part with Chinese students.

In previous years, the school had attempted to segregate SAEM students into one classroom to cater to their needs. The Chinese teacher and NCS coordinator were asked to provide their opinions on this.

> CST: No, I don't think it's good for them…because, you know, learning Chinese…before you learn to write and read, you need to speak. But in that class, they speak Pakistani and avoid speaking Chinese, even to their class teacher. I don't think that's good. Only some better students speak Cantonese to their teacher, and they do not have enough experience to speak in Chinese and listen to Cantonese.
>
> NCS: Not effective… No intention to speak.

The discipline teacher also mentioned that SAEM students' behaviour was more difficult when segregated.

> DT: Because the Pakistani, the majority of the NCS are from that group, so the probability that they get into trouble may be more…

The DT elaborated on the importance of building a sense of belonging for SAEM students. She explained they often try to include them in English activities, where they are strongest.

> DT: I think it's really important that we … let them feel like part of our school. It's very important.
> Interviewer: Is there anything you can think of that would make them feel more a part of the school?
> DT: We involve them more in different kind of activities because they are NCS and some activities we don't have a chance to invite them because they have to use Cantonese. That's why for some English activity, we will involve quite a lot of the NCS
> kids.

Observational data also showed that when opportunities arose, SAEM students appeared to be recruited to support their classmates in reading. They were particularly active in the

English lesson and less engaged in Chinese.

The overall findings suggest that EC teachers have lower expectations of SAEM students. The factors influencing their expectations included preconceived notions of the tools necessary for success. They did not believe any students capable of success without the support of family. This excluded SAEM students whose families do not read, write, or speak enough Chinese to contribute to their children's educational outcomes. Additionally, the teachers did not feel they had adequate time or control over the organisation and execution of curriculum. This resulted in the inability to provide diversified support for weaker and less capable students. Lastly, teachers did not have substantive training or support to maintain quality CSL for SAEM students.

Discussion

The research of Campell (2015), Davies, Weinsteen, Huan, Gregory, Cowan, and Cowan (2015), De Boer (2014), Diamond, Randolph, and Spillane (2004), Babad, Inbar, and Rosenthal (1982), Gollub (1978), and Rosenthal and Jacobson (1991) emphasise the significance of teachers' expectations in relation to student performance. Teachers' preconceived notions about students are reflected in pupils' performance. The effect can be long lasting in students' careers. This research has sought to study teacher expectations in the context of a Hong Kong's primary school. The findings suggest EC teachers have lower expectations of SAEM students' performance. This supports the findings of previous research in Hong Kong (Ku et al., 2005; Bhowmik and Kennedy, 2018; Zhang et al., 2011). The majority of teachers stated that SAEM students were incapable of meeting the demands of the Chinese language curriculum. They believed students' lack of linguistic exposure in conjunction with cultural beliefs, religious rituals, and an absence of familial support interfered with students' ability to meet demands. The reasoning fell in line with teachers' beliefs about success. They placed the responsibility for success outside the classroom. Success is the responsibility of the student with support from the family (OECD, 2014). By this logic, SAEM students are presumed to have neither the tools nor support necessary to succeed regardless of intelligence or capabilities.

Teachers' commentaries indicated that negative expectations about students' behaviour may exist. However, our research was unable to determine if students were punished more frequently or harshly. Participating teachers were asked a variety of questions related to SAEM students' conduct, behaviour, and discipline. The teachers' commentary was conflicting. The class teachers maintained that SAEM students behaved the same as EC students. The word 'same' was used often within interviews. Teachers almost overemphasised that they did not view SAEM students differently. This emphasis may imply a form of racial paralysis wherein a person chooses not to make decisions involving members of specific races (Norton et al., 2013). In this case, class teachers chose not to discuss or acknowledge differences in SAEM students' behaviour rather than risk making judgements based on race. However, additional commentary by the EST and DT contradicted these statements.

While the EST attempted to maintain neutrality when discussing her students, she hinted at rumours regarding SAEM students' conduct circulating amongst staff. While her students behaved acceptably, somewhere, someone had mentioned that SAEM students exhibited questionable behaviour. This comment may have been linked to the DT's statement claiming SAEM students get into more trouble when in larger groups. The recognition of SAEM students' misbehaviour in other classes suggests that teachers negatively generalise the behaviour of SAEM students. Additional evidence from the DT implied a higher frequency in complaints about SAEM students' behaviour. She also noted SAEM students' tendency to get into trouble for different reasons than EC peers. The difference in teachers' statements may also be due to the category of students about whom they spoke. The subject teachers were careful to speak only about the P1 classes they were teaching, while the DT spoke about all the schools' SAEM students. The differences in statements may also suggest that SAEM students' behaviour deteriorates over time. It also supports Rosenthal and Jacobson's (1992) suggestion that it is easier for teachers to overlook racial differences in small children.

The teachers were careful in how they discussed SAEM students, particularly in non-academic areas. While they may not have wanted to direct negative statements at SAEM students or families, they held similar beliefs about their home life and sense of belonging. While teachers were careful not to make negative stereotypes presented in the research of Ku et al. (2005) and Bhowmik and Kennedy (2016), they generalised that SAEM students 1) lack a sense of belonging, 2) adopt minimal participation in extracurricular learning, and 3) have families that are uninterested in their education. Such generalisations, however minor, contribute to teachers' lowered expectations and potential attainment inequalities (Campbell, 2015; De Boer, Bosker and van der Werf, 2010).

The DT, NCS, and LST all mentioned students needed to feel a sense of belonging to achieve. It is clear from teachers' comments that they believe many of SAEM students' problems are related to alienation. When asked how the school promoted sense of belonging, teachers mentioned inclusion in school activities, responsibility, and extracurricular activities designed to help them fit into Chinese culture. While the intention for inclusion exists, there are several problems with the suggested model. First, the DT discussed including students in more activities. She explained that teachers tried to ensure SAEM students participated in *English* activities, where more capable. However, participation in *English* activities may not fit the definition of inclusion. Although taught in primary schools, English is still a foreign language helping students fit into the global marketplace. Despite the best of intentions, placing SAEM students at the forefront of English activities may remind them that even their strengths set them apart. As a result, one of the main steps developed to promote sense of belonging may be driving them apart. Carefully planning activities where ethnic minority students' diversity is seen as a strength and celebrated, promoting opportunities for more intergroup contact and more meaningful interactions, and upholding antiracist values are likely to positively contribute to their sense of belonging.

Additional measures were extracurricular activities to inform students about Chinese culture, history, and heritage. However, these activities maintain a Chinese-centric focus and lack a bridging component. Hong Kong's position as an international city includes the culture, history, and heritage of SAEMs (Erni and Leung, 2014). However, they are only being encouraged to adopt and understand the EC community in this case. While well-intended, such activities reinforce differences. The school does not attempt to bridge cultures through the introduction of common ideas, activities, or history. Instead, an ethnocentric view continues to place SAEM on the periphery of Chinese society.

The teachers frequently expressed concerns about extracurricular practices, particularly related to homework and home revision. Chinese academic beliefs are based on traditional Confucian ideologies (OECD, 2014). Such ideologies minimise the significance of intelligence, instead emphasising hard work. While such ideals hold merit, they limit the responsibility of the school and teachers to ensure proper teaching, pedagogy, and scaffolding. Teachers frequently commented on the abundance of material that they are required to teach. However, there was little to no focus on ensuring learning. It is assumed parents will revise with students to ensure they understand the material and can pass exams. However, families from low-income backgrounds, including the majority of SAEMs, lack the time, education, and funding to support their children's' learning. One of the main purposes of education is to provide skills needed to participate in society. SAEM students are not matriculating with adequate language or literacy skills to succeed in secondary schools (Equal Opportunities Commission, 2019). Yet the burden is neither placed on the school nor teachers. Rather, it is placed on SAEM students' lack of extracurricular participation. They do not complete homework or revision at home, the two skills teachers indicated were necessary to succeed.

Finally, the teachers believed that SAEM families seemed indifferent to education. Teachers perceived that SAEM parents do not care whether their children complete homework, revise material, or participate in activities. However, many pay to send their children to extracurricular homework class provided by the school. Previous research also indicated that there is a lack of understanding on the part of Hong Kong teachers about South Asian schooling traditions that characterise societies' very high level of trust in teachers, and thus parents generally keep distant from schools as it is not culturally appropriate for them to interfere with teachers' activities (for more, see Bhowmik & Kennedy, 2016). Furthermore, none of the teachers had positive things to say about the afterschool program.

There was consensus that Chinese teachers did not have much if any CSL training. In addition, the NCS pointed out that minimal consideration was given as to which Chinese teacher taught NCS classes. NCS classes were allocated to newer, less experienced teachers. The NCS mentioned that NCS classes for second language learners did not use second language pedagogy. In relation, teachers could identify a difference in the abilities of first and second language learners' language acquisition skills and capabilities extending across

all Chinese-medium subjects. In the case of SAEM students, teachers identified them as weaker and less capable.

In regular classrooms, teachers commented that they had no control over the content, speed, and quality of the materials, while the environment was teacher-centred. Schools in Hong Kong tend to maintain a hierarchical structure. The principal is the highest authority in the school. Senior teachers usually design the curriculum and junior teachers are expected to follow it. As mentioned, there is more emphasis on ensuring content is taught, rather than learnt. In the interviews, teachers complained that the content often did not fit the timeline. This also leads to a teacher-centred environment, whereby students listen without participating. The inflexible design of lessons does not allow for diversified learning opportunities. The rushed timeline reinforces the need for homework and home revision. At the same time, it reinforces the idea that SAEM students are unable to keep pace in a Chinese medium environment.

While all effort was made to ensure the validity and reliability of the research, two limitations are evident. First, the research is limited by the parameters of an individual case study. In this case, data was only collected from one school. Hong Kong education is complex and there is significant variation in educational practices. This variation makes it difficult to use the findings to generalise the conditions of SAEM in Hong Kong schools. Furthermore, no SAEM parents or students or teachers were interviewed. It is possible to determine EC teacher expectations of SAEM students from this study. However, without the perspectives of SAEM students, families, and teachers' conclusions about the impacts of teacher expectations can only be hypothesised from previous research.

Implications and recommendations

This study considered how EC teachers' express lower expectations of SAEM students in public primary schools and what factors influence their expectations. The teachers often expressed concern about their ability to support students while covering materials required. They had neither control over materials taught, nor the speed at which they presented them. Limited control over materials and the timeline inhibits teachers' abilities to provide a diversified learning environment. While diversified teaching strategies have long been pushed by the EDB, the organisational culture does not allow teachers time or flexibility to implement them. In relation, the EDB should work with principals, teachers, and parents to develop a Chinese language curriculum incorporating diversified learning strategies. This includes giving teachers more authority over the pace at which they teach and the materials.

Several teachers believed SAEM students needed to feel a sense of belonging. However, existing measures to integrate SAEM students are unidirectional, emphasising differences. Incorporating activities outlining the historical and cultural significance of SAEMs in Hong Kong and allowing students to discuss how their beliefs and culture fit into the context could establish multidirectional integration. Thus, EC teachers need further training and practice in incorporating multiculturalism into the school culture and classroom. Banks' (2015, 4-5) five dimensions of multicultural education including content integration, the knowledge

construction process, prejudice reduction, an equity pedagogy, and an empowering school culture and social structure can be a relevant resource.

Learning Chinese is fundamental to achieve success in a Chinese-medium school. However, CSL programs are taught using ineffective first-language pedagogy. Additional measures focus on homework support. While homework is a significant part of Chinese education, it is less beneficial in developing linguistic input and advancing literacy, both necessary for social and academic success. In this case, we recommend that CSL teachers and tutors acquire professional qualifications in second-language teaching strategies. Additionally, the CSL curriculum must be focused on linguistic input and literacy, not homework.

One of the most effective ways for SAEM students to build vocabulary is through interaction with EC classmates. Schools can help improve SAEM-EC relations through play-based learning. Several studies (Sainas, 2016; Rin, 2018) mark the significance of play. However, presently there is little opportunity for SAEM and EC children to play during school. Their schedule remains packed with lessons. The incorporation of playtime can allow SAEM children to practice Chinese language skills and promote interaction. The expansion of playtime can inspire conversation, understanding each other, making friendships, and ultimately helping students develop a sense of belonging.

Conclusion

Hong Kong must ensure the provision of equal opportunity to education for SAEM residents. This case study draws attention to the significance of teacher expectation and bias for SAEM children in primary schools. The findings are consistent with previous research and present evidence indicating EC teachers have lower expectations of SAEM students. Teachers are forced to meet rigorous objectives which do not permit time to address SAEM students' difficulties in the classroom. Diversified learning strategies are side-lined to ensure quantity of material taught over quality of learning. Without classroom attention, academic success becomes a measure of external support mechanisms in the form of family members or tutors. The need for outside learning is detrimental in the case of SAEM students who lack the home learning support or financial resources to succeed in this environment.

SAEM students represent a growing population in Hong Kong's primary schools. However, schools are unable to provide SAEM students with equitable educational outcomes. Action must be taken to ensure SAEM students are presented with equal learning opportunities. More needs to be done at the primary level. Young children are more vulnerable to teachers' expectations and more capable of catching up with their EC classmates. With appropriate strategies and effective CSL teaching these learners have more opportunities for long-term success.

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