

My name is Trisha Tobar and I am a filipino student born and raised here in Hong Kong.

Hong Kong prides itself in being a multicultural society, but ethnic minorities are hardly represented, be it in the media or in political campaigns. This stems from various underlying issues, and one that should be scrutinized is the de facto segregation of ethnic minority students in primary and secondary schools.

In the school year 2019/20, there are 10 public or subsidized schools in Hong Kong in where more than 80% of students are NCS students, while more than 50% of NCS students are concentrated in 29 schools¹.

However, some studies identify that the ideal period to learn a foreign language is before one's teenage years,² while others illustrate that an immersive approach is the most efficient method for doing so.³ Many EM students are unable to take advantage of this period and learning method. The de facto segregation deprives them of the opportunities to immerse themselves in a Chinese language learning environment.

Unable to develop their Chinese to the same extent as locals, around 90% sit for an alternative Chinese language qualification, the General Certificate of Secondary Education . However, its practicality is questionable because a Grade A in the exam is equivalent to Primary Two level. This restricts EM student's future career. According to Hong Kong Unison research on post-secondary education programmes in 2015, 71% programmes are not suitable for students who do not speak or write Chinese. The issue is certainly not alleviated once they enter the job market. Some employers may feel skeptical about their workplace communication skills in a local workplace environment.⁴ The barrier compromises their prospects to advance to employment matching their qualifications. Their social mobility is lowered in the long run.

It might be that the government believes the current approach is the most feasible. But many countries with successful second language policies, such as the US, Canada and Australia

¹ Please refer to 2020 Administration's replies to Members' supplementary written questions, "EDB 369" https://www.legco.gov.hk/yr19-20/english/fc/fc/w_q/edb-e.pdf

² Please refer to Ghasemi, B., & Hashemi, M. (2011). Foreign Language Learning During Childhood. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 28, 872-876.

³ Please refer to Tam, L. C. (2016). Struggling to Thrive: The Impact of Chinese Language Assessments on Social Mobility of Hong Kong Ethnic Minority Youth. *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher*, 25(5-6), 763-770.

⁴ Please refer to Loh, E. K., & Tam, L. C. (2016). Struggling to Thrive: The Impact of Chinese Language Assessments on Social Mobility of Hong Kong Ethnic Minority Youth. *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher*, 25(5-6), 763-770.

have proven that it is possible to use an immersive approach.⁵ EM students are separated and taught with alternative learning programs until they reach a certain standard of proficiency. They are then reintegrated into mainstream schools.

One criticism of the UN on the ICCPR regards citizens' participation in public affairs. Each citizen should be given the access to participate, including the marginalized EMS. Yet, if some of their needs, such as the right to seek employment that matches their qualifications and the self-fulfillment arising from this, are not sincerely considered, it is unreasonable to expect their full potential in contributing to public affairs.

⁵ Please refer to *Second-language education policies abroad and in Hong Kong* (Rep.). (2014, April) from Oxfam Hong Kong website: <https://www.oxfam.mo/en/what-we-do/development-programmes/hong-koyng/povertyamongethnminorities>