Exploring the Inclusivity and Integration of Indian and Pakistani Students in Hong Kong: Critical Race Theory Approach

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1. Introduction

Hong Kong (HK) is one of the international cities where the East meets the West. According to the latest report, 328,747 secondary school students were enrolled in a secondary school, school types including government, aided, caput, direct subsidy scheme, international, and other private (Student Enrolment Statistics, 2024). According to a recent report (Legislative Council Panel on Education: Education Support for Non-Chinese Speaking Students, 2024) from the Legislative Council, around 5% (about 16,500) of students were non-Chinese speaking students, including both local and non-local students in the secondary school environments.

In the educational environment in HK, a group of students, particularly students of Indian and Pakistani descent, were born and raised in HK as second-generation immigrants who received HK permanent residencies (Yuen, 2018). As of the 2023/2024 academic year, 594 primary schools, 512 secondary schools, and 63 special education schools were available for students to study and student enrolment. Although these students were considered local students who could enjoy all benefits (e.g., 12-year free education in government-based and funded primary and secondary education), not all non-Chinese speaking students could select their targeted schools due to various reasons (Yuen, 2018).

(1)   The Challenges and Problems for Non-Chinese Speaking Students: Indian and Pakistani Students

For Indian and Pakistani students (IPSs), sociocultural backgrounds, economic challenges, and language barriers could be some of their challenges (Erni & Leung, 2014). In other words, despite being categorized as local students due to their birthplace, ethnicity, skin colour, and sociocultural background have marginalized their identities within the East Asian, Chinese, and Western (i.e., international schools) educational systems. The current educational situations not only outline the nature of identity in an international-based city but also establish questions about the inclusivity and integration of educational practices and policies (Ho & Lam, 2020).

The challenges of these IPSs can be explored and described through Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, 2023; Dixson & Anderson, 2018), which believes that racism is employed and situated in the community in HK, impacting both individual experiences and educational systems (i.e., the structure). CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, 2023; Dixson & Anderson, 2018) focuses on the notions of race and power that lead the educational results. Therefore, it is important to examine the relationships among how curricula, pedagogical approaches, and assessment tools can either reinforce or challenge social justice and social equity in the school environments in HK.

The discussions and applications of inclusivity and integration are important in the educational system in HK, where educational structure and curricula are considered the tools to reflect the social values and norms (i.e., an international city where the East meets the West) (Fleming, 2019a, 2019b; Forlin, 2010; Ho & Lam, 2020; Loper, 2004). However, due to the extreme population (i.e., more than 90% of the city's population are Chinese speakers of Chinese descent), the curriculum and instruction tend to focus on the instructions and knowledge transfer about the Chinese cultural curriculum and perspectives, which can ignore the needs and social justice for non-Chinese speakers from diverse backgrounds (Fleming, 2019a). For IPSs, the missing parts (e.g., the exclusion) do not only matter to a sociocultural understanding but also impact their sense of belonging and social identities within the schools and social environments.

(2) Purpose of this Brief Review

The purpose of this brief review aims to explore the inclusivity and integration experienced by IPSs in HK school environments through the lens of CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, 2023; Dixson & Anderson, 2018), particularly how sociocultural backgrounds, religious and dietary challenges, and language barriers together with race, racism, and skin colour, impact these students as second-generation students with HK permanent residency (i.e., local students).

(3)   Significance of this Brief Review: The Gaps

Although some studies have been conducted based on CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, 2023; Dixson & Anderson, 2018) or other related backgrounds in HK, only a few studies focused on the problems of IPSs due to the insignificant population in the city. Although the population of these students is not large, researchers, educators, and policymakers should contribute resources and studies to exercise inclusivity and integration. Therefore, the further development of this brief review will be developed as research articles that can fill the research gaps in this area, particularly exercising inclusivity, integration, social justice, and social equity to non-Chinese speaking students in HK, in this case, IPSs.

2. Theoretical Lens for this Brief Review: Critical Race Theory

CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, 2023; Dixson & Anderson, 2018) played as the theoretical lens of this brief review, offering the lens through which to explore the experiences and challenges of IPSs in HK. Developed in the United States during the late 1970s, CRT challenges the traditional norms of race and racism, indicating that these elements could play roles in the social structures and educational systems (e.g., fairness and social justice).

In the background of HK, where the main population is Chinese speakers with East Asian heritage, CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, 2023; Dixson & Anderson, 2018) allows the researcher to understand the unique challenges experienced by non-Chinese speaking students. The examinations among sociocultural backgrounds, religious and dietary challenges, and language barriers, together with race, racism, and skin colour, could outline the marginalization of non-Chinese speaking students, in this case, IPSs.

3. Findings Based on Theoretical Analysis and Personal Experiences: Inclusivity and Integration in the HK Context

Inclusive and integrative education (Ho & Lam, 2020) refers to the practice of integrating students with different abilities, skills, and backgrounds into mainstream schools. This arrangement is based on the ideas of fairness, and students should have the same rights to learn in diverse and equal environments.

Non-Chinese speaking students (e.g., IPSs) could experience challenges in the Chinese educational context. Two recent newspaper articles (written in Chinese and

English) highlighted the challenges and stories of a group of South Asian students (Ng, 2024) and a Pakistani mother (Tsang, 2021) who expressed her efforts to send her children to a socially equitable mainstream school in HK. The newspaper case expressed concerns about inclusion, sociocultural misconceptions, religious challenges, and language barriers.

(1)   Establish a Supportive Network and Sharing Group: Community-Level

Like other Asian diasporic communities, IPSs and people in HK have strong collectivist bonds within their communities. Therefore, it is important to establish some community-level networking and sharing groups for effective development (Erni & Leung, 2014). Although the government departments and legislative councils could offer support and referral to minoritised communities and population, sociocultural challenges, problems, and concerns are hard to solve based on some general information without detailed information for some targeted groups, such as IPSs. Therefore, many families receive information on personal connections with their communities about schools, enrolment, resources, language courses, and even job opportunities. As a result, establishing an NGO or volunteering team (based on some targeted groups) for schools and educational information could share information effectively as many first-generation and second-generation immigrants and children have no network to receive appropriate information for their children.

As mentioned, information and support from NGOs or volunteering teams could help these groups of people fill the knowledge gaps in understanding and establish a sense of belonging in this host region (Gu, Guo, & Lee, 2019). For example, policymakers and social service providers can connect with NGOs, such as the South Asian Association in HK, for enrolment and sociocultural workshops and language support (Michelle Gu, Mak, & Qu, 2017). Such activities could establish a sense of belonging and understanding of the new communities (i.e., HK), which help students feel more connected to their racial groups while understanding and adapting the living environments in the Chinese communities in HK.

(2)   Sociocultural Understanding and Diversity: Development in the School Environments

Sociocultural backgrounds (e.g., ethnicity, language, cultural and religious practices) could influence the educational experiences and outcomes of marginalized groups. In HK, although IPSs (i.e., second-generations) are local students (e.g., enjoy free 12-year

education), all students have the right to join all funded schools in HK. However, not all students could study in mainstream schools like other Chinese-speaking local students (Tsung & Gao, 2012). The lack of representation in the curriculum and the missing parts of supportive cultural understanding could lead to feelings of exclusion and invisibility. These students could experience stereotypes, discrimination, prejudice, and biases that impact their interactions with peers, teachers, and community members, which CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, 2023; Dixson & Anderson, 2018) indicates.

At the school level, some school management adds additional information, such as multicultural curriculum and instructions, that coordinate aspects from different cultures, including ideas about minoritised people in HK (not only South Asian but also others). Such a reformed curriculum at the school level allows students, teachers, parents, and staff to understand the differences between Chinese and non-Chinese students in the same learning environment.

At the classroom level, teachers offer activities to students for the understanding of sociocultural diversity where all students, regardless of their backgrounds, can experience inclusive and accepted learning environments. Activities could include culturally responsive pedagogy, which focuses on the combination of students' sociocultural backgrounds, religious practices, and language development in the subject matters. When all students experience caring and respect, a positive educational experience can be created.

(3) Language Development and Training Schemes

Some schools have already established language development and training schemes for non-native speakers with no or elementary-level Chinese language background. In addition, some schools offer additional language support to non-native speakers, which allows them to learn and manage basic and academic skills for both school and community engagements. For example, some afterschool language training and book reading clubs are established to help both Chinese and bilingual development in overcoming language challenges. Such language development and training not only allow students to gain essential language skills but also establish their self-confidence, self-efficacy, sense of belonging, and community engagement in HK (Michelle Gu et al., 2017).

4. Findings Based on Theoretical Analysis and Personal Experiences: Exclusivity in the HK Context

Although some activities and schemes have been established to overcome the challenges of minoritised people and students in HK, many aspects of educational experiences remain unanswered.

(1) Sociocultural Misconception, Misunderstanding, Discrimination, and Biases: Problems and Suggestions

Discrimination and biases are some significant challenges for many minoritised people and students (not only in HK but internationally). Due to the population, many school management, teachers, and school staff are Chinese people who may not have extensive experiences with non-Chinese students in their classroom environments. In other words, many do not understand IPSs' sociocultural values and concepts. Some activities, such as wording and examples of social issues in the communities, could create discrimination and biases (teachers and Chinese students may not know such discussions can be problems). When minoritised people and students feel their sociocultural practices and values are looked down on, they may refuse interactive activities and engagements in schools and communities, particularly students could withdraw their learning motivations with no effective results.

In order to solve these issues, some schools have established some training programs through three different channels, (1) schools that actively enrol minoritised students and non-native speakers, (2) schools with similar educational foundations (e.g., Catholic school unions), and (3) schools in the surrounding regions. Both immediate and long-term schemes should be introduced: (1) invite guest speakers and establish mentorship teams for sharing and networks which can help teachers handle their current classroom management and (2) encourage teachers to study the Master of Education in Inclusive Education for long-term career and professional development.

(2) Language Barriers of IPSs in HK

According to a previous study (Yuen, 2018), IPSs could experience and recognized the challenges from the mainstream schools and social environments (e.g., the unfairness) due to their language barriers (Tsung & Gao, 2012). Unlike some countries, such as the United States, English as a Second Language (ESL) courses and programmes are available to first-generation immigrants to learn the local languages for education, career

development, and daily activities. Although HK offers two instructional languages (i.e., Chinese and English) for students, only a few Chinese-as-a-Foreign Language or English-as-a-Foreign Language courses are offered to non-native speakers. More importantly, due to the missing parts of the information, financial challenges, and even sociocultural practices, not all non-Chinese speakers could attend these courses for language development. Therefore, it is not uncommon that non-Chinese and non-English speakers (both students and parents) could not satisfy the admission requirements of many mainstream schools (Tsung & Gao, 2012).

In order to solve these issues, some schools can introduce the bilingual education model, which allows classroom instruction in both Chinese and English simultaneously. It is worth noting that bilingual instruction could widely benefit not only IPSs but also all non-native speaking students from different parts in the HK context. Moreover, once students experience and learn both Chinese and English from the bilingual classroom environments, these graduates can manage both official and useful languages in HK and global communities after graduation (Michelle Gu et al., 2017).

(3)　Religious Practice and Food Challenges in School

Based on The Chief Executive's 2024 Policy Address, Hong Kong would like to expand its reputation and image in the Muslim communities. Currently, although HK is known for its sociocultural diversity and respect for people with different religious practices, Muslim and Hindu students face challenges in schools due to their religious and dietary requirements. First, the missing prayer rooms in schools and communities could not satisfy the needs of Muslim students and people. The exclusion of religious considerations forces students to find alternative spaces, such as basements and even toilets, for their religious worship.

Second, Halal, pork, and beef are some of the religious restrictions for South Asian students and people. Due to the limited population, most of the schools with a Chinese population do not offer any food options for religious fellows (e.g., Halal food). Although students can bring their meals to school, the isolation, separation, and uniqueness could create significant mental challenges and even bullying to minoritised students who face challenges already (Chee, 2015).

5. Discussion

Based on CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, 2023; Dixson & Anderson, 2018), this

paper examines the educational experiences of IPSs in HK. CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, 2023; Dixson & Anderson, 2018) offers a theoretical lens for the exploration of inclusivity, integration, social justice, and social equity. By analysing the findings from professional experience, literature, and newspaper articles, the discussion chapter compares and outlines the barriers to inclusion and the potential directions toward inclusivity, integration, social justice, and social equity for non-Chinese speaking students in HK.

(1) Support from Schools, Communities, and Groups with Collectivist Identities

CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, 2023; Dixson & Anderson, 2018) focuses on the importance of community and collectivism in inclusivity, integration, social justice, and social equity, particularly based on ethnicity and skin colour. Indian and Pakistani communities in HK show their collectivist connections, which can be useful for sharing effective information within the communities. By establishing NGOs and volunteering teams with the purposes of educational resources and sociocultural inclusion, Indian and Pakistani parents, families, and students could receive useful information that can meet the enrolment challenges and needs of their children.

(2) Sociocultural Representation in Schools and Communities

Sociocultural backgrounds significantly impact the experiences of IPSs in HK. Although second-generation students enjoy free education, many still experience challenges to inclusion and integration in mainstream schools due to the missing parts in the curriculum and sociocultural misconceptions, which could lead to exclusion and invisibility (Tsung & Gao, 2012). CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, 2023; Dixson & Anderson, 2018) indicates that racism highly relies on the ignorance of sociocultural identities of minoritised people and groups. Schools that could not introduce multicultural curriculum, teaching and learning strategies, and diverse management could lead to discrimination and biases against students from other cultural backgrounds, in this case, IPSs (both first and second generations).

(3) Languages and Academic Challenges

Language challenges play significant roles for IPSs, particularly impacting their academic success, community engagement, and social integration. Unlike some countries (e.g., the United States) that offer structured English-as-a-Second-Language programmes, non-native Chinese and English speakers in HK could not enjoy support from both school

and community environments. According to a previous study (Yuen, 2018), many South Asian students (e.g., IPSs) could not meet the admission requirements due to their limited skills in Chinese and English. Although parents seek help from others, non-native-speaking parents also face similar challenges in the communities. Therefore, bilingual education models could fill the practice gaps that allow opportunities for students to develop language skills with a sense of belonging in the HK environment. CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, 2023; Dixson & Anderson, 2018) indicates that the development of minoritised people and language skills could play a significant role in ensuring that the IPSs are noted and valued (Gu, Mak, & Qu, 2017).

(4) Religious and Dietary Demands in Schools and Communities

The religious practices of Muslim and Hindu students could experience daily challenges as many schools and community environments do not offer prayer rooms and religion-based food (e.g., Halal) for minoritised people and groups. The exclusion not only limits students' abilities to worship their religion but also enhances the discrimination, isolation, and exclusion of students, people, and residents in HK. CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, 2023; Dixson & Anderson, 2018) focuses on the need for schools to acknowledge and establish spaces and selections for their students. School management, policymakers, and government agencies need to take immediate action to establish inclusive and integrative environments by offering religious rooms and dietary options that respect students' backgrounds (Chee, 2015).

6. Contributions to Practice and Conclusion

Based on CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, 2023; Dixson & Anderson, 2018), this paper outlines the significance for schools in HK to reform and enhance the practices that allow inclusion, social justice, and social equity for IPSs and other minoritised students, people, and groups. The following practical recommendations are suggested.

(1) Curriculum Design and Development

Schools, particularly schools with a significant population of minorized students and schools located in regions with significant minoritised populations, could develop or seek resources and support in order to design two sets of curricula and materials that integrate multicultural elements across different subject matters. The materials could incorporate South Asian histories in social sciences, exploring the multicultural backgrounds and perspectives in southern Chinese regions, and religious studies about multiculturalism in

southern Chinese regions. These materials could also link to the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination (HKDSE), which could increase the motivation of learning for both students from majorities and minorities.

Schools could also develop and design a dual-language curriculum model where both Chinese and English are used as instructional mediums, together with teaching and learning materials in both languages. For schools with limited financial resources and human resources for additional curriculum and materials, the government agencies, the Education Bureau, and multiple higher education institutions have pre-designed teaching and learning. As sociocultural-related understanding and backgrounds are important for both teachers and students, some preparations could be helpful in order to cover these areas.

(2)   Teaching and Learning Recommendations

Teachers should understand some culturally responsive pedagogical strategies, including teaching and learning approaches for integrative classrooms that match the needs of students with multicultural backgrounds and understanding (Dos Santos et al., 2024). The communicative language approach, peer-to-peer interactive learning approach, flipped classroom strategies, and project-based learning approach could connect students with different backgrounds together in the same classroom environments (Dos Santos, 2021, 2022). Also, teachers could employ computer-assisted and AI-assisted tools, which could further increase the motivation for learning (Dos Santos, 2019).

However, as not all teachers are well-prepared for such an integrative classroom environment due to their previous backgrounds and overall school enrollment and development, teachers are encouraged to join some regular-based professional development, training, and seminars with a concentration on cultural competency and integrative teaching and learning. Moreover, such seminars and training can be hosted online or on campus.

(3)   School Space Development Recommendations

First, schools should enhance and upgrade some areas for religious practices, including prayer rooms with appropriate dressing rooms for all genders. Schools do not need to do additional construction as these rooms can be designed based on the current facilities.

Second, it is not uncommon that minoritised students may need to bring their own food to school due to the cultural arrangement. Therefore, adding additional meals for Halal and vegetarian options could significantly increase the integration for all students with special needs.

Third, for students who cannot read Chinese and English, the school could add some multilingual signage on some essential locations, such as nursing rooms, restrooms, dressing rooms, prayer rooms, and libraries.

In conclusion, by recognising and acknowledging the sociocultural challenges experienced by minoritised students and people, schools can establish environments that understand sociocultural diversity and encourage social justice and social equity for all students, regardless of their backgrounds. Based on the current summaries and suggestions with CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, 2023; Dixson & Anderson, 2018), the results not only benefit IPSs but also enhance the educational communities with sociocultural understanding in HK. These results would contribute to a more inclusive and integrative community where students and people can enjoy the benefits of academic and social success, establishing the direction for multicultural communities that value and accept diversity in all its forms.

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