

# **Home and School Factors Contributing to Poor Educational Outcomes of South Asian Minority Students in Hong Kong: A Systematic Review**

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*In Hong Kong, many South Asian students are from economically disadvantaged families and at risk for poor educational outcomes. There is a policy focus on promoting educational equity and improving the educational outcomes of this vulnerable group. This formal systematic review summarizes home and school factors contributing to poor educational outcomes of South Asian minority students in Hong Kong. A total of 30 articles were reviewed after a systematic search through multiple databases. These articles were published in or after 2010. Most of them involve qualitative analyses of findings and focus on Chinese language learning among secondary school students. Analyses tend to focus on factors that are assumed to adversely influence the academic performance of South Asian students. Common home-level risk factors include a lack of cultural capital and gendered educational practices. At the school level, the common risk factors are considered to be culturally insensitive teachers and non-differentiated curricula. A positive relationship with primary caregivers is considered to be a protective factor. Research and practical implications for improving South Asian students' educational outcomes are discussed.*

**Keywords:** *educational equity; educational outcome; Hong Kong; minority education; South Asia*

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## Introduction

South Asians, predominantly Indians, Nepalis, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, and Sri Lankans, are a small but growing population in Hong Kong. Many of them are in a socioeconomically disadvantaged position in the host society, and South Asian students are at risk of poor educational outcomes in Hong Kong's competitive education system. There is a policy focus on promoting educational equity and improving the educational outcomes of this vulnerable group (Rao & Lau, 2018).

In the past decades, increasing research attention has been paid to the factors contributing to the poor educational outcomes of South Asian students in Hong Kong. While formal systematic reviews have focused on ethnic minority youth development (Arat, Hoang, et al., 2016) and teaching Chinese as a second language to ethnic minority students (Wang & Tsung, 2022) in Hong Kong, these reviews include other minority groups in addition to South Asians. Given the significant cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic variations between different ethnic groups, it is important to focus specifically on South Asian minorities to gain contextual knowledge about this vulnerable population. This study is a formal systematic review that summarizes home- and school-level protective and risk factors contributing to South Asian students' educational outcomes, defined by school behavior, academic performance, and school completion (ten Cate, 2001), from kindergarten to secondary education. Homes and schools are the most proximal learning environments for children, and the influences of these two settings on educational outcomes are profound (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). It is crucial to conduct a systematic review to summarize and analyze factors identified by existing studies in this area, identify research gaps, and provide directions for further research in the field. This review provides some preliminary findings and practical implications for educational research and practices in improving the educational outcomes and prospects of minority students in Hong Kong and other East Asian societies where minority youths face similar challenges, such as poor educational outcomes and poverty.

## South Asian Minorities in Hong Kong

About 92% of the population in Hong Kong is Han Chinese and ethnic minorities constitute 8% of the population (Census and Statistics Department, 2022). There are around 593,000 inhabitants from ethnic minorities comprising Filipinos (2.7%), Indonesians (2%), South Asians (1.4%), Whites (0.8%), Thais (0.2%), Japanese (0.1%), and Koreans (0.1%) (Census and Statistics Department, 2022). The majority of Filipinos and Indonesians in Hong

Kong are generally foreign domestic helpers. Among the other ethnic groups, South Asians are chosen to be the target of this study because they are the most socioeconomically disadvantaged and have the lowest level of education attainment (Census and Statistics Department, 2022). For instance, the median monthly income from primary employment of South Asians was HK\$18,000, which was significantly lower than that of Japanese (HK\$38,750), Koreans (HK\$39,810), and Whites (HK\$61,500) (Census and Statistics Department, 2022). The post-secondary education attainment rate of South Asians at 39.2% was also significantly lower than that of Japanese (80.1%), Koreans (87.3%), and Whites (82.9%) (Census and Statistics Department, 2022). Although there are significant variations in median monthly income and education levels among different South Asian ethnic groups, we categorize students of South Asian origin as a single group because they face similar educational challenges, such as discrimination, social exclusion, and difficulties in learning the Chinese language (Tsung & Lau, 2017).

South Asians have a long history of migration to Hong Kong. India and Pakistan are the two largest countries on the Indian subcontinent, and they were under British colonial rule until 1947. In 1841, Hong Kong became a British colony, and the first “Indians” migrated and worked in Hong Kong as government officials and merchants. In contrast, the Nepalis settled in Hong Kong as soldiers in the British colonial army (Weiss, 1991). Immigration of South Asians to Hong Kong is still active. The South Asian population increased from 65,521 (0.9% of the total population) in 2011 to 101,969 (1.4% of the total population) in 2021 (Census and Statistics Department, 2022).

## **Education of South Asian Minority Students in Hong Kong**

The education system in Hong Kong is highly stratified and competitive. Pre-primary education is not mandatory, but the Kindergarten Education Scheme provides free education in institutions that meets government quality benchmarks. Kindergartens are divided into Scheme and non-Scheme schools in the local and non-local sectors. More prestigious local and international kindergartens generally do not join the Scheme and charge a high tuition fee. Regarding the primary and secondary sectors, the government provides 12 years of free education through schools in the public sector. However, compulsory education is from age 6 to 15 (primary and junior secondary schools). Secondary schools that are supported by government funding follow the “banding” system, with Band 1 schools admitting the highest-achieving third of primary school leavers, Band 2 schools admitting the middle third, and

Band 3 schools admitting the bottom third. Families of students from low-income South Asian households generally cannot afford the high fees of international schools, and South Asian students typically attend local schools. They are also in an unfavorable position in the competition for elite Band 1 school places and most of them are attending government-funded schools in the lower bands that use English as the medium of instruction (Shum, Gao, Tsung, & Ki, 2011; Zhang et al., 2010). However, some South Asian students attend schools in the lower bands that use Chinese as the medium of instruction (Shum, Gao, Tsung, & Ki, 2011; Zhang et al., 2010). Students in both types of schools need to learn Chinese as a subject. Minority students are referred to as “non-Chinese speaking” (NCS) students in government official documents.

After the enactment of the Race Discrimination Ordinance in 2008, the government has taken initiatives to provide additional support for South Asian students. Before the 2013–2014 school year, there were designated schools that admitted a large number of NCS students. Starting from the 2013–2014 school year, the “designated school” policy was abolished on account of racial segregation, and South Asian students could henceforth be admitted into mainstream schools. The number of primary and secondary schools in the public sector admitting minority students increased from around 590 in the 2013–2014 school year to approximately 680 in the 2022–2023 school year (Education Bureau, 2024). In addition, kindergartens that admit NCS children are eligible to receive a five-tiered support grant based on the number of NCS students they enroll. Tier 1 grant provides a subsidy of HK\$50,000 per year to kindergartens that admit 1 to 4 NCS children, which can be used to purchase Chinese learning materials, translation services, and organize parent activities (Education Bureau, 2020). However, this subsidy is insufficient to hire an additional teacher. Only kindergartens admitting 8 to 15 students can receive a subsidy equivalent to the salary of one teacher (Education Bureau, 2020).

Although the government has taken initiatives to support minority students’ education in terms of financial provision, it does not implement multicultural education in local schools as a policy measure (Gao & Gube, 2020). The lack of Chinese language proficiency among minority students is identified as the primary obstacle to academic success and social integration (Education Bureau, 2024). Current policies are largely “remedial” and focus on increasing minority students’ Chinese language proficiency. Primary and secondary schools that enroll a significant number of ethnic minority students generally develop school-based curricula to teach Chinese as a second language, where minority students are grouped together in a class that focuses on learning basic Chinese (Gao & Gube, 2020). However, these

curricula are often decontextualized, and it is difficult to ensure consistency and quality across schools (Shum, Gao, Tsung, & Ki, 2011). The effectiveness of providing a robust Chinese language curriculum without facilitating a language-rich environment that encourages regular interaction between Chinese and ethnic minority students is also in doubt. Chinese language, as the lingua franca of Hong Kong, plays a crucial role in continued education. With proficient Chinese, only 10% of South Asians aged between 18 and 22 were pursuing a government-funded bachelor's degree compared to 23% of the whole population who were in a degree program (Legislative Council Secretariat, 2018).

## **The Current Review**

The current review summarizes home- and school-level factors that affect the educational outcomes of South Asian minority students in Hong Kong. Based on the above literature review, it is predicted that South Asian parents who are in a socioeconomically disadvantaged position may not be able to support their children's education because their cultural capital is not valued in mainstream society. At the school level, it is predicted that schools may not be able to provide culturally responsive education for minority students due to a lack of multicultural education policy, and this can contribute to children's poor educational outcomes.

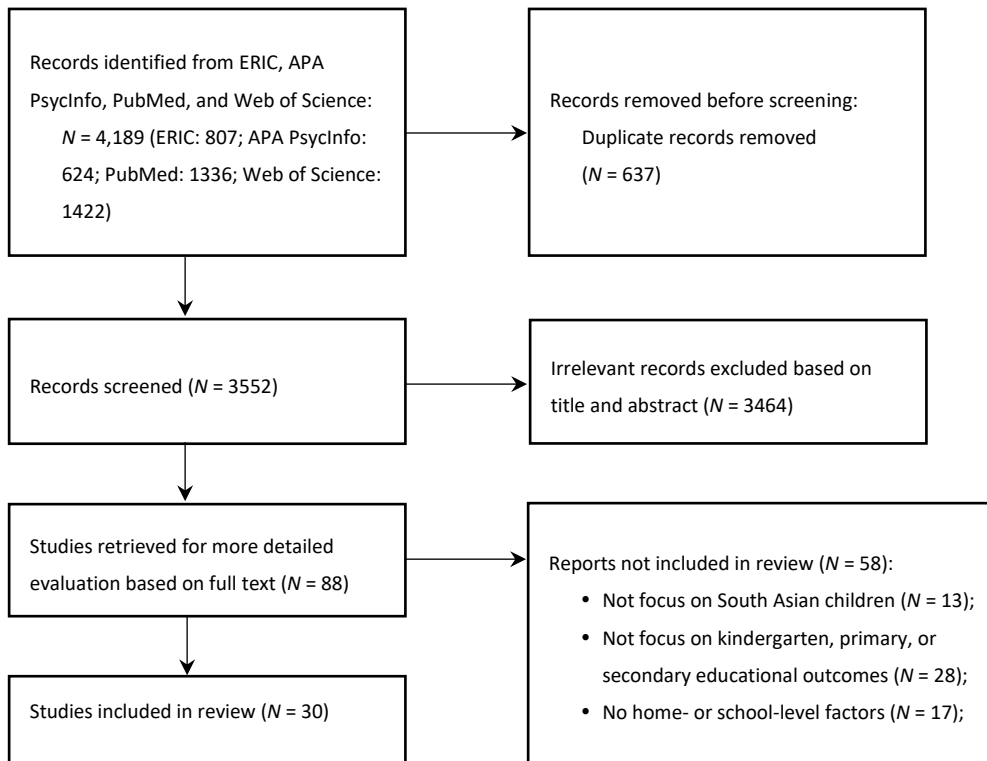
## **Method**

### ***Search Strategy***

We followed the Non-Interventional, Reproducible, and Open Systematic Reviews (NIRO-SR) (Topor et al., 2023) to identify, select, appraise, and synthesize studies. After formulating the research questions, we searched for peer-reviewed articles that were published from 2000 up to the end of July 2024 through four electronic databases: the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), APA PsycInfo, PubMed, and Web of Science using the following key phrases and their variants: ("South Asian" OR "ethnic minority" OR "non-Chinese speaking" OR immigrant OR multicultural OR inclusive) AND (education\* OR learn\* OR school\* OR teach\* OR home\* OR "home learning") AND (Hong Kong). The initial search resulted in 4,189 records. All the records were stored in EndNote 20. The articles were selected based on the following inclusion criteria: (a) examining the educational outcomes of South Asian minority students at the kindergarten, primary, or secondary school

levels; and (b) examining home- or school-level factors contributing to educational outcomes. Each record was screened by the first author and a research assistant who has a master's degree in education. Inconsistencies were discussed between the two reviewers until a consensus on the final list of selected articles was reached. A total of 30 articles were retained after selection. Figure 1 illustrates the detailed selection procedure.

**Figure 1: A Flow Diagram of Article Selection**



## *Data Analyses*

Before synthesizing the findings of the selected articles, we used two critical appraisal tools to evaluate the quality and risk of bias of each study, thereby evaluating the trustworthiness of the findings. For qualitative studies, we employed the 32-item Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ) (Tong et al., 2007) to assess the study quality and risk of bias in the domains of the research team and reflexivity (8 items, sample item: "what experience or training did the researcher have?"), study design (15 items, sample item: "were transcripts returned to participants for comments?"), and analysis and findings (9 items, sample item: "was there consistency between the data presented and the findings?").

All the items are scored with 0 = *no* and 1 = *yes*. Based on established criteria, a score between 0–8, 9–16, 17–24, or 25–32 indicates “very poor quality/very high risk of bias,” “poor quality/high risk of bias,” “fair quality/medium risk of bias,” or “good quality/low risk of bias” respectively (Al-Moghrabi et al., 2019). For quantitative studies, we used the 20-item Appraisal Tool for Cross-Sectional Studies (AXIS tool) (Downes et al., 2016) to assess the study design (7 items, sample item: “was the sample size justified?”), reporting quality (7 items, sample item: “were the methods sufficiently described to enable them to be repeated?”), and risk of bias (6 items, sample item: “does the response rate raise concerns about non-response bias?”) in 5 domains, namely introduction, methods, results, discussion, and other relevant information. All the items are scored with 0 = *no* and 1 = *yes*. A score between 0–5, 6–10, 11–25, 16–20 indicates “very poor quality/very high risk of bias,” “poor quality/high risk of bias,” “fair quality/medium risk of bias,” or “good quality/low risk of bias” respectively. Critical appraisal was performed by the first author and the research assistant. The final scores were mutually agreed upon.

## Results

### *A Description of the Selected Studies*

The table in Appendix outlines the methodology and findings of each selected study. Among the 30 articles, none of them was published before 2010. The majority ( $n = 22$ ) reported qualitative data and the sample size ranges from 1 to 46. Others reported quantitative data ( $n = 3$ ; sample size ranges from 230 to 457) and data from mixed-method studies ( $n = 5$ ; sample size ranges from 32 to 387). The participants of the 30 studies included South Asian students (predominantly Indians, Pakistanis, and Nepalis), their Chinese and non-Chinese teachers, teaching assistants, school principals, and parents in the kindergarten ( $n = 4$ ) and secondary ( $n = 22$ ) sectors. A total of 3 studies sampled participants from both primary and secondary schools, whereas 1 study examined educational outcomes at all three levels.

### *Quality and Risk of Bias of the Selected Studies*

Results of COREQ showed that most of the qualitative studies ( $n = 16$ ) were rated as good quality with a low risk of bias. However, 4 were rated as fair quality and 2 were rated as poor quality because they did not report the credentials, occupation, and training of the interviewers ( $n = 5$ ), and the number of data coders ( $n = 6$ ) consistently. These are considered

as minor issues in the assessment of study quality and risk of bias because the results may imply poor reporting quality rather than poor study quality. Therefore, we did not exclude these studies but exerted caution when interpreting the study findings. Regarding the quantitative studies, results showed that the 3 studies could be rated as good quality with low risk of bias. The 5 mixed-method studies were also rated as good quality since the authors integrated and analyzed quantitative and qualitative data well.

## ***Common Factors in the Educational Outcomes of South Asian Minority Students***

### **Risk factors**

A total of 14 (secondary education: 11; primary and secondary education: 2; kindergarten education: 1) out of the 30 articles documented home-level risk factors in the educational outcomes of South Asian students (low academic achievement: 5; low Chinese proficiency: 5; school dropout: 3; development of risky behavior: 1). The risk factors included parents' lack of cultural and linguistic capital (reported in 8 studies), gendered educational practices (reported in 4 studies), low heritage language use at home (reported in 1 study), drop-out history in the family (reported in 1 study), and parental development of risky behavior (reported in 1 study). Risk factors in academic underachievement included parents' lack of cultural and linguistic capital (Chee, 2018; Chee & Ullah, 2020; Gu & Tong, 2020; Sharma, 2012; Tsung & Gao, 2012), and gendered educational practices (Chee, 2018; Chee & Ullah, 2020). Specifically, 7 studies probed the risk factors that contributed to poor Chinese language proficiency. These risk factors included lack of cultural and linguistic capital of parents (Gao, 2012a; Loh & Tam, 2016; Tsung & Lau, 2017), and low heritage language use at home (Hue & Kennedy, 2014). A few studies investigated the issue of dropout, and the home-level risk factors were gendered educational practices (Gu, 2015; Shum, Gao, & Tsung, 2012) and drop-out history in the family (Bhowmik & Kennedy, 2017). Only one study probed the risk factor in students' development of risky behavior and the role of parental development of risky behavior was highlighted (Arat, Liu, et al., 2017).

A total of 16 articles (secondary education: 13; primary and secondary education: 1; kindergarten education: 2) have reported school-level risk factors in the educational outcomes of South Asian students (low Chinese proficiency: 8; low academic achievement: 5; development of risky behavior: 1; school dropout: 2). The risk factors included culturally insensitive teachers (reported in 11 studies), non-differentiated curricula (reported in 2



studies), lack of teacher professional development (reported in 2 studies), prohibition of heritage language use in classrooms (reported in 1 study), non-competitive school environment (reported in 1 study), and peer development of risky behavior (reported in 1 study). The risk factors for low academic achievement included culturally insensitive teachers (Gao, 2012b; Sharma, 2012; Thapa & Adamson, 2018; Tsung & Gao, 2012; Yuen, 2016), racial segregation (Tsung & Gao, 2012), and a non-competitive school environment (Sharma, 2012). Some studies specifically investigated Chinese language proficiency, and culturally insensitive teaching was again a common risk factor (Gao, 2012a; Shum, Gao, & Ki, 2016; Shum, Gao, Tsung, & Ki, 2011; Tsung & Lau, 2017). Other risk factors for poor Chinese language proficiency included non-differentiated learning materials (Loh & Tam, 2016; Tsung et al., 2010), lack of appropriate teacher training and professional development (Chan & Rao, 2023; Tsung et al., 2010), prohibition of heritage language use in classrooms (Gu et al., 2019), and discrimination by Chinese peers (Tsung & Lau, 2017). In addition, there are two studies that investigated the issue of dropouts and identified culturally insensitive teachers (Bhowmik & Kennedy, 2017; Bhowmik et al., 2018) as a risk factor. Only one study probed the risk factors in students' development of risky behavior and highlighted the role of peer development of risky behavior (Arat, Liu, et al., 2017).

### **Protective factors**

Only 4 studies (secondary education: 2; primary and secondary education: 1; primary, secondary, and kindergarten: 1) reported home-level protective factors in the educational outcomes of South Asian students (lower tendency to develop risky behavior: 2; better academic achievement: 1; enhanced Chinese language proficiency: 1). The protective factors included positive relationship with parents (reported in 2 studies), academic help from older siblings (reported in 1 study), and Cantonese use at home (reported in 1 study). The protective factor in academic achievement was academic help from older siblings (Chee, 2018). Specifically, Cantonese use at home can predict higher Chinese language proficiency (D. C. S. Li & Chuk, 2015). In addition, a few studies investigated the role of a close relationship with primary caregivers (Arat, Liu, et al., 2017; Arat & Wong, 2019) as a protective factor in the development of risky behavior.

A total of 9 studies (secondary education: 5; primary and secondary education: 1; kindergarten education: 2; secondary, primary, and kindergarten education: 1) reported school-level protective factors in the educational outcomes of South Asian students (enhanced Chinese language proficiency: 7; better academic achievement: 2). The protective factors

included culturally responsive teaching (reported in 2 studies), bilingual support (reported in 2 studies), early Cantonese immersion (reported in 1 study), differentiated curricula and learning materials (reported in 1 study), small class size (reported in 1 study), provision of remedial Chinese language classes (reported in 1 study), and alignment of medium of instruction between primary and secondary schools (reported in 1 study). Protective factors in academic achievement included culturally responsive teaching (Ng et al., 2022) and bilingual support (Gao & Shum, 2010). The other articles focused specifically on the protective factors in Chinese language proficiency, including early Cantonese immersion (B. Li et al., 2022; D. C. S. Li & Chuk, 2015), Chinese as the medium of instruction (MOI) (Tse et al., 2022), alignment of medium of instruction between primary and secondary schools (Loh et al., 2019), small class size (Loh et al., 2019), differentiated curricula and learning materials (D. C. S. Li & Chuk, 2015; Tse & Hui, 2012), bilingual support (Shum, Gao, & Ki, 2016), and provision of remedial Chinese language classes (Shum, Gao, & Ki, 2016).

## **Discussion**

We reviewed studies on the home- and school-level protective and risk factors in the educational outcomes of South Asian minority students in Hong Kong. The results showed that relevant studies were only published in or after 2010. These studies are generally qualitative in nature and focus on secondary education. Specifically, the risk factors in academic performance, especially the Chinese language proficiency of South Asian students, were predominantly reported. While many home- and school-level factors were reported in the literature, the five most reported factors were lack of cultural capital, gendered educational practices, relationships with primary caregivers, culturally insensitive teachers, and non-differentiated curricula. Owing to limitations of space, we will only discuss these five factors.

### ***The Need for More Scholarly Attention***

Despite the long history of migration, the educational outcomes of South Asian students have only received scholarly attention after 2010, a few years after the enactment of the Race Discrimination Ordinance. The selected articles were generally qualitative in nature because researchers may face difficulties in recruiting a large number of South Asian students for quantitative research, given the small population size. Nevertheless, these qualitative studies gathered preliminary and in-depth insights into the education of South Asian students, which

is a topic not thoroughly researched and understood. To provide a better generalization of relevant issues, more quantitative studies in the field are essential. Specifically, more scholarly attention has to be paid to the kindergarten and primary education of South Asian students. Secondary education is undoubtedly salient as it is a crucial period when students prepare for public examinations and university applications. However, kindergarten and primary education are equally important. They should not be neglected because the early years pave the pathway for subsequent development, and the benefits for students' future development are profound (Britto et al., 2017).

### ***Home-level Factors***

The selected articles identified and discussed more home-level risk factors than protective factors. The risk factors discussed by one-third of the articles was South Asian parents' lack of cultural and linguistic capital (Chee, 2018; Chee & Ullah, 2020; Gao, 2012a; Gu & Tong, 2020; Loh & Tam, 2016; Sharma, 2012; Tsung & Gao, 2012; Tsung & Lau, 2017). The cultural capital of parents refers to assets such as knowledge, skills, and attributes that can be inherited or acquired by children unconsciously during the family socialization process (Bourdieu, 1993; Huang, 2019). Children from different social classes are raised in class-specific "habitus" and acquire the "tastes" of a particular social class (Bourdieu, 1993; Huang, 2019). For instance, South Asian parents' cultural capital (e.g., language) is not valued by the monocultural mainstream society, and they are generally positioned in the lower class. Although some of them may have high educational expectations of their children and strive to provide better educational opportunities for their children (Chan & Li, 2020), children still develop lower-class attributes that contribute to their academic underachievement. For example, parents may not have sufficient financial resources to organize cultural activities for their children, and children tend to socialize primarily with peers in the same socioeconomic class, which limits their opportunities to interact with peers who have access to more learning resources (Tompsett & Knoester, 2023). Nevertheless, given the large family size of South Asians, help from older siblings (Chee, 2018) and Cantonese use at home (D. C. S. Li & Chuk, 2015) were identified as protective factors. Some selected studies identified low heritage language use at home as a risk factor because students' first language can help facilitate second language acquisition, for instance, by note-taking in the first language (Gu et al., 2019; Hue & Kennedy, 2014). These results are not contradictory, and they suggest that the best home language policy should be a combination of heritage and mainstream languages.

Another risk factor discussed in many selected articles is gendered educational practices rooted in the heritage culture of some South Asian communities (Chee, 2018; Chee & Ullah, 2020; Gu, 2015; Shum, Gao, & Tsung, 2012). Under the patriarchal South Asian societies, women are expected to be an obedient wife and a good mother (Chaudhuri et al., 2014). Girls are instilled with patriarchal norms and socialized to get married early in life to fulfill their role as good wives. They may need to drop out of school for marriage despite their desire for education (Chee, 2018; Chee & Ullah, 2020; Gu, 2015; Shum, Gao, & Tsung, 2012). In addition, patriarchal dominance takes place in the discussion of education-related issues (Chee & Ullah, 2020). However, fathers are generally the breadwinners, and they do not have much time to interact and communicate with their children and school teachers. In addition, Chinese teachers may not have a thorough understanding of the parenting and educational practices of South Asian families, and they may even have negative stereotypes of South Asian families due to differences in educational practices (Tsung & Lau, 2017). This can lead to misunderstanding and miscommunication between home and school. Without a thorough understanding of students' educational needs, fathers may not be able to make the best educational decisions for their children and this may bring negative impacts to children's education.

Although many risk factors were reported in the selected studies, some of them (Arat, Liu, et al., 2017; Arat, Jordan, et al., 2021; Arat & Wong, 2019) found that a positive relationship with primary caregivers can protect students from developing risky behavior. This finding is in line with the findings of prior studies that a positive relationship with primary caregivers is considered an important factor in preventing the development of risky behavior among ethnically diverse adolescents (Marsiglia et al., 2018). A positive relationship with parents provides students with a sense of security and emotional support. For minority students, such a relationship can provide students with a sense of belonging, which helps to counteract the negative influences brought by discrimination and marginalization that many minority students face (Arat, Jordan, et al., 2021; Franco & McElroy-Heltzel, 2019). They are, hence, less likely to engage in risky behavior to seek attention or cope with stress or anxiety. In addition, a positive and supportive relationship between primary caregivers and children enables parental monitoring of risky behavior and provision of guidance (Berge et al., 2016). Parents can set clear expectations and boundaries that can prevent the development of risky behavior. While a positive relationship with primary caregivers can be a protective factor against risky behavior, it is noted that this protective role is dependent on the caregiver's well-being. In other words, if parents develop risky behavior themselves, this can serve

as a negative role model for children and increase their likelihood of engaging in risky behaviors (Arat, Liu, et al., 2017; Small et al., 2019).

### ***School-level Factors***

Half of the articles identified culturally insensitive teaching as a school-level risk factor in South Asian students' academic achievement (Bhowmik & Kennedy, 2017; Bhowmik et al., 2018; Gao, 2012b; Sharma, 2012; Thapa & Adamson, 2018; Tsung & Gao, 2012; Yuen, 2016), especially in Chinese language proficiency (Gao, 2012a; Shum, Gao, Tsung, & Ki, 2011; Shum, Gao, & Ki, 2016; Tsung & Lau, 2017). Culturally responsive teaching concerns the incorporation of the cultural characteristics, strengths, and accomplishments of multicultural students into the teaching practices to make meaningful connections with students (Gay, 2018). However, the monocultural education policy in Hong Kong stresses the importance of learning the mainstream culture for the purpose of assimilating into the host society, devaluing South Asian students' heritage culture. A widely cited study, *School Effectiveness for Language Minority Students* by Thomas and Collier (1997) in the United States, found that first language instruction was more crucial than family background in predicting minority students' academic success. However, instruction in the first language is not available in Hong Kong classrooms. Learning in a language other than the first language can lead to difficulties in understanding learning content, participating in class activities, and interacting with teachers and peers. Prohibition of heritage language use in classrooms was identified as a risk factor contributing to South Asian children's poor educational attainment (Gu et al., 2019). In addition, Chinese teachers may have negative stereotypes of South Asian students and this can lead to discrimination and unfair treatment in terms of academic opportunities, behavioral expectations, and social interactions (Tsung & Lau, 2017). Nevertheless, some studies identified bilingual teaching assistants who speak the students' heritage language as a protective factor because they can act as cultural mediators between mainstream and South Asian culture (Gao & Shum, 2010) and facilitate students' Chinese language acquisition (Shum, Gao, & Ki, 2016).

Another risk factor commonly identified in South Asian children's Chinese language acquisition is the non-differentiated curricula and learning materials (Loh & Tam, 2016; Tsung et al., 2010). Apart from using an instruction language that is not South Asian children's first language, the lack of representation of South Asian children's ethnicity and culture in the curriculum may further lead to a sense of marginalization and disengagement from the educational system, contributing to their low school engagement and education

attainment (Loh & Tam, 2016). These can be attributed to the lack of appropriate teacher training and professional development to prepare teachers to teach in multicultural classrooms (Tsung et al., 2010). Some teachers were not adequately prepared to teach in multicultural classrooms. Nevertheless, a small class size, as identified as a protective factor, may contribute to the differentiation practice because teachers have more time to cater to individual needs (Loh et al., 2019).

## *Implications*

South Asian parents' lack of cultural and linguistic capital has been commonly reported as a factor contributing to their children's poor educational outcomes. However, this "cultural deficit" is a consequence of deep-rooted racism against minorities from disadvantaged backgrounds in the local community. The devaluation of South Asian heritage culture in society places their children at a disadvantage position. Furthermore, the negative labeling of students whose first language is not Chinese as NCS stigmatizes minority students as linguistically deficient and excludes them from the local Chinese community (Gao et al., 2019). In contrast, in England, immigrant students are categorized as "English language learners" instead of "non-English speaking," emphasizing the capacity to learn English rather than a linguistic deficit. We recommend that the government removes the NCS label and adopts a more positive approach to addressing these valuable students, such as referring to them as "Chinese language learners."

Exclusion of minority South Asian students is observed in the classrooms. Culturally insensitive teaching and non-differentiated curricula are common factors attributing to their poor educational outcomes. The current monocultural education policy concentrates on remediating minority students' limited Chinese language proficiency. However, it neglects the diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds of these students that contribute to their academic success (Gao et al., 2019). Teaching Chinese as a second language should aim to enrich and build upon students' existing linguistic repertoires while also valuing and incorporating their heritage culture (Gu et al., 2019). Therefore, the focus of minority education should shift from assimilation (i.e., minority students are expected to adopt the values of the dominant culture and pressured to abandon their own cultural practices) to integration (i.e., minority students can retain their heritage cultural values while embracing the dominant culture) (Berry, 2017). Schools need to adopt multicultural education to celebrate cultural diversity and promote culturally responsive teaching in classrooms. Teachers are advised to relate teaching content to South Asian students' cultural experiences

so that they can be meaningfully engaged in the classrooms. In addition, South Asian students' heritage languages, which were found to benefit their Chinese language acquisition, should be encouraged for use in classrooms (Gu et al., 2019; Thomas & Collier, 1997). One example is to adopt translanguaging pedagogy that enables students to use both first and second languages in classrooms to facilitate learning, especially when students' second language capacity is insufficient to understand complex instructions (Conteh, 2018).

The findings of this systematic review also have significant research implications. The existing research that focuses on home and school factors contributing to the educational outcomes of South Asian children primarily consists of qualitative studies that focus on the Chinese language learning outcomes of secondary students. More quantitative studies are needed to add to the extant body of research and to inform educational policy. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence the educational outcomes of South Asian students, future research can incorporate comparative studies that involve both South Asian minority students and other ethnic groups (e.g., Chen et al., 2018) or the majority Chinese children (e.g., Chan & Li, 2020; Chan & Rao, 2023). By examining the similarities and differences in home and school factors, researchers can gain a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by South Asian students in achieving educational success. While existing research examined the Chinese language learning barriers faced by South Asian children, future research should address the other deep-rooted and interrelated factors at the family, school, community, and macro-social level that have contributed to the educational disparities faced by South Asian minority students (Bhowmik, 2017). Additionally, future studies should also examine intangible learning outcomes such as minority students' inclusion in mainstream classrooms. Addressing long-term social inequalities and racial discrimination in society is crucial in ensuring that minority students have equal opportunities to achieve academic success (Wang, 2022).

## ***Limitations***

This systematic review has some limitations. First, this review only included peer-reviewed articles published in English. Grey literature, such as Chinese reports published by non-governmental organizations in Hong Kong, was excluded. Future studies may take these reports into account. Second, the included studies were generally qualitative in nature employing a small sample size. The findings of these studies should be interpreted with caution. Despite the above limitations, we believe that this review provides a valuable

synthesis of the home- and school-level protective and risk factors in the educational outcomes of South Asian minority students in Hong Kong.

## Conclusion

We reviewed existing studies on the home- and school-level protective and risk factors in the educational outcomes of South Asian students in Hong Kong. The results showed that relevant studies were only published in or after 2010, revealing that attention to South Asian students' education was only received in the past decade. These studies were generally qualitative in nature and focus on secondary education and Chinese language learning. The risk factors in academic performance were predominantly reported. Common home-level risk factors are parents' lack of cultural capital and gendered educational practices. At the school level, the common risk factors relate to curricula and pedagogy. Nevertheless, a positive relationship with primary caregivers is considered a protective factor. Research and practical implications for improving South Asian students' educational outcomes are discussed.

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## Appendix

### *Description of the Selected Studies*

Authors, Year	Methodology	Participants	Level of Education	Home		School		Educational outcomes
				Protective factors	Risk factors	Protective factors	Risk factors	
D. C. S. Li & Chuk, 2015	Interview (FG)	15 South Asian students	Kindergarten, primary & secondary	Cantonese use at home	/	Early Cantonese immersion; differentiated curricula	/	Higher Chinese language proficiency
Chan & Rao, 2023	Child direct assessment; parent questionnaire; classroom observation; document review	43 Chinese children; 32 South Asian children; their parents; 2 class teachers	Kindergarten	/	Low socioeconomic status	/	Lack of teacher professional development	Lower developmental outcomes in Chinese language and knowledge of society and environment
Ng et al., 2022	Interview (FG)	43 teachers	Kindergarten	/	/	Culturally responsive teaching	/	Higher academic achievement
Tse et al., 2022	Intervention	457 NCS students	Kindergarten	/	/	Chinese MOI	/	Higher Chinese language proficiency
Yuen, 2016	Interview (individual & FG)	29 teachers;  2 principals	Kindergarten	/	/	/	Culturally insensitive teachers	Low academic achievement
Arat, Liu, et al., 2017	Interview (FG)	23 Indian/ Pakistani students	Primary & secondary	Parental monitoring	Parental development of risky behavior	/	Peer development of risky behavior	Development of risky behavior
Gu & Tong, 2020	Interview (individual & FG)	5 South Asian parents; 10 children	Primary & secondary		Lack of cultural and linguistic capital	/	/	Low academic achievement

Authors, Year	Methodology	Participants	Level of Education	Home		School		Educational outcomes
				Protective factors	Risk factors	Protective factors	Risk factors	
B. Li et al., 2022	Questionnaire	230 NCS students	Primary & secondary	/	/	Early Cantonese immersion	/	Higher Chinese language proficiency
Arat & Wong, 2019	Questionnaire	405 Indian/ Pakistani students	Secondary	Close relationship with primary caregivers	/	/	/	Substance use
Bhowmik et al., 2018	Interview	1 school principal; 3 teachers; 1 Pakistani student	Secondary	/	/	/	Culturally insensitive teachers	Drop out of school
Bhowmik & Kennedy, 2017	Interview	1 Nepalese girl	Secondary	/	Drop out history in the family	/	Culturally insensitive teachers	Drop out of school
Chee, 2018	Interview	13 Pakistani parents; 19 Pakistani students	Secondary	Help from experienced siblings	Lack of cultural and linguistic capital; gendered educational practices	/	/	Academic achievement
Chee & Ullah, 2020	Interview	13 Pakistani parents; 19 Pakistani students	Secondary	/	Lack of cultural and linguistic capital; gendered educational practices	/	/	Low academic achievement
Gao, 2012a	Interview; classroom observation	14 teachers	Secondary	/	Lack of cultural and linguistic capital	/	Culturally insensitive teachers	Low Chinese language proficiency
Gao, 2012b	Interview; classroom observation	16 Chinese language teachers	Secondary	/	/	/	Culturally insensitive teachers	Low academic achievement

Authors, Year	Methodology	Participants	Level of Education	Home		School		Educational outcomes
				Protective factors	Risk factors	Protective factors	Risk factors	
Gao & Shum, 2010	Interview; classroom observation	2 South Asian teaching assistants; 13 teachers	Secondary	/	/	Bilingual support	/	Higher academic achievement
Gu, 2015	Interview (individual & FG)	13 Pakistani girls	Secondary	/	Gendered educational practices	/	/	Drop out of school
Gu et al., 2019	Interview; classroom observation	11 Chinese language teachers	Secondary	/	/	/	Prohibition of heritage language use in classrooms	Low Chinese language proficiency
Hue & Kennedy, 2014	Interview	12 non- Chinese teachers	Secondary	/	Low heritage language use at home	Culturally sensitive teachers	/	Chinese language proficiency
Loh et al., 2019	Interview	26 Chinese language teachers; 20 ethnic minority students	Secondary	/	/	Alignment of MOI between primary and secondary schools; small class size	/	Higher Chinese language proficiency
Loh & Tam, 2016	Interview (FG)	8 female South Asian students	Secondary	/	Lack of cultural and linguistic capital	/	Non- differentiated curricula and learning materials	Low Chinese language proficiency
Sharma, 2012	Interview	16 South Asian students; 7 parents; 4 teachers	Secondary	/	Lack of cultural capital	/	Non- competitive school environment; culturally insensitive teachers	Low academic achievement
Shum, Gao, Tsung, & Ki, 2011	Questionnaire; interview	300 South Asian students	Secondary	/	/	/	Culturally insensitive teachers	Low Chinese language proficiency



Authors, Year	Methodology	Participants	Level of Education	Home		School		Educational outcomes
				Protective factors	Risk factors	Protective factors	Risk factors	
Shum, Gao, & Tsung, 2012	Interview	11 Pakistani girls	Secondary	/	Gendered educational practices	/	/	Drop out of school
Shum, Gao, & Ki, 2016	Interview	18 South Asian students	Secondary	/	/	Bilingual support; provision of remedial Chinese language classes	Culturally insensitive teachers	Chinese language proficiency
Thapa & Adamson, 2018	Interview; classroom observation	28 Nepalese students	Secondary	/	/	/	Culturally insensitive teachers	Low academic achievement
Tse & Hui, 2012	Questionnaire; interview; classroom observation	4 schools	Secondary	/	/	Differentiated curricula and learning materials	/	Higher Chinese language proficiency
Tsung et al., 2010	Interview; student assessment	189 South Asian students; 31 Chinese language teachers	Secondary	/	/	/	Non- differentiated curricula; lack of appropriate teacher training and professional development	Low Chinese language proficiency
Tsung & Gao, 2012	Interview	10 South Asian parents	Secondary	/	Lack of cultural and linguistic capital	/	Racial segregation; culturally insensitive teachers	Low academic achievement
Tsung & Lau, 2017	Questionnaire; interview	387 South Asian students	Secondary	/	Lack of cultural and linguistic capital	/	Culturally insensitive teachers; discrimination by Chinese peers	Low Chinese language proficiency

Note. FG denotes focus group interviews; interviews without FG refer to individual interviews.

## 對造成香港南亞裔學童學習成果不佳的 家庭和學校因素之系統性文獻回顧

陳有榆、劉麗薇

### 摘要

在香港，許多南亞裔學童來自經濟環境欠佳的家庭，學業成績很大程度上未如理想。故此，教育政策的重點之一是提升這一弱勢群體的學習成果，促進教育公平。本文獻回顧旨在總結導致香港南亞裔學童學習成果不佳的家庭和學校層面因素。作者搜索多個數據庫後，共查閱了 30 篇相關文章，這些文章皆於 2010 年或以後發表，大多屬於定性研究，重點關注南亞裔中學生的中國語文學習。研究結果傾向關注對南亞裔學童學業成績的不利因素，常見的家庭不利因素包括缺乏文化資本和男女不平等教育，而常見的學校不利因素包括教師對南亞文化沒有適切認識和推行無差別的課程；然而，與主要照顧者的良好關係則被認為是一項有利因素。作者在文末提出了改善南亞裔學童教育成果的研究和實際建議。

關鍵詞：教育公平；學習成果；香港；少數族裔教育；南亞

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