Bridge over troubled water: An interpretive phenomenological study exploring relationships between Nepalese parents and special schools in Hong Kong

by

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Statement of Originality

I, GURUNG, Divya Darshan, hereby declare that I am the sole author of the thesis and the material presented in this thesis is my original work except those indicated in the acknowledgement. I further declare that I have followed the University's policies and regulations on Academic Honesty, Copyright and Plagiarism in writing the thesis and no material in this thesis has been submitted for a degree in this or other universities.

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Abstract

Inclusive education upholds children's rights, and as key stakeholders, parents' access to equitable participation in their children's learning is essential. Recognising the vulnerability of ethnic minority students with disabilities in Hong Kong who are at risk of marginalisation, the urgency of parental advocacy cannot be overstated. This study addresses the need for inclusion in home-school partnership in Hong Kong. Acknowledging multiple barriers for Nepalese families of children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in Hong Kong and global educational trends aspiring towards inclusion, this study asks: How do primary special needs schools and Nepalese parents in Hong Kong understand, develop, and practise home-school partnership? With a paucity of literature on home-school partnerships with ethnic minority parents in Hong Kong, this study aims to explore stakeholder experiences. The purpose is to gauge how current practice and institutional structures contribute to inclusive partnership with ethnic minority parents.

The research context of this study is in the domain of inclusive education and home-school partnership. With Bourdieu's social capital theory illuminating ethnic minority experiences, the study begins from the premise that home-school partnership is not accessible to all due to competing cultural and social capital. A constructivist epistemological paradigm helps achieve the inquiry's aims through a multiperspectival Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) method, using semi-structured interviews to gather a rich exploration of individual experiences of parents and professionals in primary special schools. Findings highlight three themes around the area of shared perspectives between stakeholders, measures to circumvent barriers, and institutional structures impacting home-school partnership. The study concludes that special schools in Hong Kong are failing to promote inclusive home-school partnership with Nepalese parents, where the educational and social implications

continue to impact the social divide, parental advocacy, and children's learning experiences. The outcomes of this study highlight the urgent need for revisiting the conceptualisation of home-school partnership in Hong Kong guided by an ethos of inclusion. The study makes recommendations along three dimensions: perspective, practice, and process, which include crafting inclusive policies, and investments into institutional shifts anchored by continuous whole-school development.

Keywords: ethnic minority, parental involvement, special education, inclusion

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I dedicate this work to all families and their exceptional children. May this work contribute to the alleviation of suffering for all. To my beloved Ama and Baba, my world, I dedicate this work to you. I am humbled by your compassion and the blessings of your enduring love and support. May I always remember where we came from, in honour of our ancestors, with great respect and gratitude.

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List of Abbreviations

EDB	Education Bureau
HKCSS	Hong Kong Council of Social Services
ICERD	International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
IPA	Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis
NCS	Non-Chinese Speaking
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OT	Occupational Therapy
PTA	Parent-Teacher Association
SEN	Special Educational Needs
ST	Speech Therapy
SWD	Social Welfare Department
UN	United Nations

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Home-school partnership is not inclusive for ethnic minority families in Hong Kong, where parents of children with Special Educational Needs do not have access to equitable participation in their children's education (Kwok, 2021). The current working relationships of ethnic minority families and schools is worthy of inquiry due to the educational, and social impact on children. Although arguably, the term ethnic minority is a fairly objective and technical description of individuals who are not Chinese by ethnicity, for many of the diverse communities, the term may harbour exclusionary connotations (Kapai, 2015). Nevertheless, for recognisability, this study's usage of the term to describe non-Chinese citizens of Hong Kong is in accordance with the common use of the term by the Hong Kong Government, NGOs, and the general public.

Despite being a largely monocultural Chinese population, Hong Kong is home to an increasing number of multi-ethnic communities, some of whom have resided in Hong Kong for generations. While the overall child population has been decreasing in Hong Kong, the ethnic minority population has increased by 57% from 2011 to 2021 (HKSAR, 2022). As of yet, there are 30 000 Nepalese individuals in Hong Kong. Recent figures indicate 1,106 ethnic minority students have special educational needs (Education Bureau, 2021).

With a global movement embracing inclusion and diversity across industries, schools' preparedness to cater to the needs of diverse families is essential. Despite expanding literature suggesting the need for institutional shifts to target the amelioration of discrimination and uplifting of the ethnic minority community (e.g. Bhowmik & Kennedy, 2016; Kapai, 2015), a lack of targeted action toward this goal raises doubts about the Hong Kong Government's vision of inclusion. It also causes concern about slow developments improving the

educational and social trajectory of those vulnerable to marginalisation. Evidently, ethnic minority children with disabilities are Hong Kong's "forgotten children" (Hong Kong International Special Education Needs Community, 2008).

Parental advocacy is of particular concern in the case of ethnic minority children with special educational needs, where efficacious advocacy is reliant on parent's knowledge, skills, and linguistic acumen. Furthermore, there may also be limitations to parental access to external resources in the community such as social networks. Thus, in relation to Chinese parents, ethnic minority parents are positioned unfavourably, where advocating for their children without support can prove challenging (Kwok, 2021).

The often-complicated realm of special education, with its unique processes, terminology, and not to mention the challenge of understanding the unique needs of children, creates further barriers for parental advocacy within schools and beyond (Valle, 2009). All stakeholders in education, namely: students, parents, and professionals in special schools, should have access to power, where they can exercise agency, so that their voices can influence positive outcomes with children at the forefront. For some, however, more is required.

While some stakeholders occupy advantageous positions via access to specialised knowledge, skills, and resources through their own learning or collegial network, parents are susceptible to a lack in these areas, inducing a power imbalance (e.g. Delgado-Gaitan, 2991; Nakagawa, 2000; Ware, 1994). Additionally, although home-school partnership is described as "a lynchpin of special education," the relationship between students with disabilities' educational outcomes and parental engagement stands unexamined (Trainor, 2010a).

To facilitate accountability in education, UNESCO (2017a) encourages the involvement of parents, professionals, and the government. Also, much research has explored the positive impact and necessity of home-school partnership (Drew et al., 2002; Epstein et al., 1997; Siller & Sigman, 2008; Wong & Kwan, 2010). Regardless of evidence, establishing and sustaining partnership is complicated, especially for families from diverse backgrounds. Therefore, despite the call for improved home-school partnership as a means to achieve equity in education, the accompanying challenges are innumerable.

Some of the difficulties with home-school partnership are noted as differing worldviews between teachers and parents (Horvat et al., 2003; Kao and Rutherford, 2007; Kim and Schneider 2005). In addition, parental beliefs about educational goals may also diverge from those adopted by the school, which has been noted in the United Kingdom, in the Bangladeshi (Chaudhary, 1986), South Asian (Shah, 1992), and African-Caribbean communities (ILEA, 1985).

Aside from the difficulties expressed by teachers in collaborating with parents (Bingham & Abernathy, 2007), other challenges include understanding cultural nuances (Kalyanpur et al., 2000; Ryndak & Downing, 1996) and acknowledging "hidden curriculums" (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). Such circumstances implicitly perpetuate exclusionary experiences for families who may not possess resources, in other words, capital, to participate meaningfully.

Hong Kong-based literature describes barriers to home-school partnership as ethnocentric attitudes, a power imbalance between stakeholders (Ng & Yuen, 2015a), and professionals' reluctance to adopt new practice (Ng & Yuen, 2015b). However, these studies do not particularly address partnering with minority families, and without an understanding of

professionals' experiences in this area, it can be assumed that knowledge of the ethnic minority parental experience is also amiss. For individuals marginalised due to language, knowledge, ethnicity, or disability - in this instance, an amalgamation of the four- navigating Hong Kong's educational terrain can be arduous. With an extensive literature gap, there is a need to examine the perspectives and experiences of professionals and ethnic minority parents to support stakeholders as they attempt to foster relationships.

Schools and classrooms manifest value systems in their daily happenings, which Huerta-Charles (2007, p.256) asserts is "politically and morally charged." Furthermore, Huerta-Charles adds that policies also function as an extension of these political ideologies, cementing their significance. Therefore, equitable participation in home-school partnership discourse demands a reflection of values embedded in policy, especially if they are to be aligned with international educational reforms aspiring for inclusion.

A brief examination of home-school partnership policies and initiatives in Hong Kong presents as well-meaning, paving the way for collaborative stakeholder relationships. However, in spite of such policies, the equitable participation of all families in Hong Kong may require revisiting by beginning with an analysis of praxis. Steps towards promoting such initiatives warrant a comprehensive inquiry into home-school partnership between schools in Hong Kong and ethnic minority parents.

The exclusion of minority parents, albeit unintentional, is indisputable. It presents itself as an overlooking of, or perhaps, a lack of groundwork for the inclusion of diverse families, emulating the deficits of a lack of preparation for inclusive classrooms in the early 1990s in Hong Kong. The marginalisation of minority communities in society, reproduced in schools,

is unsettling. The failure to address compounding barriers for the ethnic minority community in home-school partnership discourse is not limited to special schools; it is pertinent to all educational institutions in Hong Kong. Admittedly, the urgency that the profound stresses of caring for and engaging in the learning of children with disabilities inflict on families demands immediate acknowledgment. Only when the concerns of the marginalised are pushed to the fore can the journey toward inclusion in Hong Kong commence.

1.1 Background

This study was developed with the help of experiential learning and qualitative data collected from a pilot study. Volunteering experience supporting Nepalese children with disabilities also added exponentially to an understanding of their needs. The author's working experience as a paraprofessional in special education has also created opportunities to observe approaches to partnership, its crucial role, the demands it places on professionals, and the disparities that differing parental backgrounds can create. Praxis being another facet that stood out from these experiences, cemented the awareness that regardless of the existence of statements that serve to safeguard student's educational rights, along with their family's efforts for advocacy on their behalf, opportunities to enact these rights and realising these policies may not be guaranteed (e.g. Epstein & Sheldon, 2018). This reflection, especially relevant in the ethnic minority experience lacking linguistic proficiency and knowledge, was telling in accounting for differences in parental engagement styles. As an outcome, the limited or incongruence of skills and resources of ethnic minority parents may not afford access to information and membership to wider networks outside of their community. Some of the impediments noted were: time poverty, a lack of awareness of information, roles, and responsibilities, opportunities to engage in meaningful collaboration, and professionals requiring additional skills to partner with these families.

Preliminary Findings

The pilot study was a semi-structured interview with a Nepalese mother whose daughter attends a primary special school in Hong Kong. The parent was identified through the support of a common acquaintance in the community. The key preliminary findings include:

1. Attitudes and language maintain supportive and exclusionary home-school partnership experiences.
2. Parents need more opportunities to engage meaningfully with school professionals.
3. Parents need a better understanding of their role, responsibilities, and potential agency in home-school partnership.

The preliminary findings raised concerns about Nepalese parents' engagement with schools, providing grounds to further unpack home-school partnership experiences. To begin with, although a working definition of home-school partnership was not offered, the parent was unable to articulate what partnership with schools meant to her. Reflexive practice uncovered that the pilot faltered with the assumption of the concept of home-school partnership as being universal, failing to address the parent's educational experiences, differing cultural connotations of parental roles and responsibilities in education.

The lack of awareness about policies, programmes, and the potential agency her role encompasses to improve her experience of partnership with schools is thought to be the product of two factors: parents' cultural influence where the teacher is regarded highly in stature, thus avoiding questions and any conflict, and the school's oversight in assessing parents' awareness and needs. Moreover, the parent was unaware (and perhaps lacking empathy) of professionals' experiences in home-school partnership as well. As suggested by

other studies, the disadvantage of language barriers was most evident as a potential cause for poor relationships (e.g. McClelland and Chen, 1997; Turney and Kao, 2009).

In consideration of the preliminary findings, it is surmised that home-school partnership between professionals and Nepalese parents requires further examination. Extending the preliminary findings to the current study, which will also include school professionals as participants, attention to the following will be considered:

1. The inclusion of a working definition of home-school partnership for Nepalese parents (to be used as needed).
2. The opportunity to provide own interpretations of home-school partnership.
3. The opportunity to share what are deemed good examples of home-school partnerships and grievances.
4. The opportunity to identify barriers and avenues for improving partnership.

1.2 Purpose

This study aims to explore the promotion of ethnic minority parents' equitable participation in special schools. A multiperspectival Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) will assist to uncover the experiences of Nepalese parents and school professionals. The criteria for parent participants have been narrowed down to the Nepalese community only. By doing so, it does not claim to be representative or generalisable to all ethnic minority parents. Instead, the researcher's community network, and linguistic ability lends itself well to gaining access to participants and expands the possibility of cross-participant analysis due to similar cultural backgrounds. Acknowledging linguistic, social, and institutional barriers, the main question arising from this problem is: How do primary special schools and Nepalese parents

in Hong Kong understand, develop, and practice home-school partnership? The sub-questions

include:

1. How do stakeholders conceptualise home-school partnership?

2. What are stakeholders' understanding of their roles and responsibilities in home-school partnership?

3. What do stakeholders understand of national and school policies on home-school partnership?

4. How do stakeholders practise home-school partnership?

5. How do Nepalese parents and Chinese parents partner with schools?

6. How do stakeholders experience home-school partnership?

7. What are the barriers to home-school partnership?

8. How can home-school partnership be improved?

The outcomes of this study are expected to shed light on exclusionary home-school

partnership experiences, difficulties with collaboration, and institutional barriers. It will also

highlight the urgent need to revisit approaches to partnership.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

Navigating the contemporary world demands the acknowledgment of diversity. More importantly, it prompts reflections on inclusive attitudes and practice, leaving no room for differences to be grounds for marginalisation. It also calls to attention the protection of the rights of those at risk of exclusion. Home-school partnership is deemed crucial in research across the globe, in United Nations reports (2017a), and even in the Hong Kong Government's purview (Hong Kong Government, 1992). More research is thus required to hone in on the experiences of marginalised communities in Hong Kong. One such demographic is Nepalese children with disabilities, where their pursuit of the right to equity in education is challenging.

Inclusion lies at the heart of this study, also proving difficult to concisely demarcate sections in the literature review, resulting in eventual overlap in all areas of discussion. As much as possible, this study will organise the chapter thematically, keeping both global trends and the Hong Kong context in mind. To make a case for the significance of embracing an ethos of inclusion in home-school partnership, this chapter will begin by briefly outlining Bourdieusian concepts of capital, field, and habitus to explore how they can illuminate the experiences of marginalised families. The chapter will then be followed by a discussion on inclusion, partnership, and multi-agency working where attempts will be made to both conceptualise and problematise in light of equitable home-school partnership in Hong Kong and the oft obscure discourse of inclusion vs integration. Ending the chapter, will be an examination of partnership, keeping the experiences of minority families as its central focus.

2.1 Framing the study

The framework for this study is an adaptation of a self-assessment framework developed by UNESCO (2017b, p.16) to support inclusion and equity in educational policy as shown in figure 2.1. To meet the aims of this study, the framework has been modified, demonstrated in figure 2.2 to include contextually relevant features. For example, the addition of implicit and explicit systems and structures that influence the rules of home-school partnership.
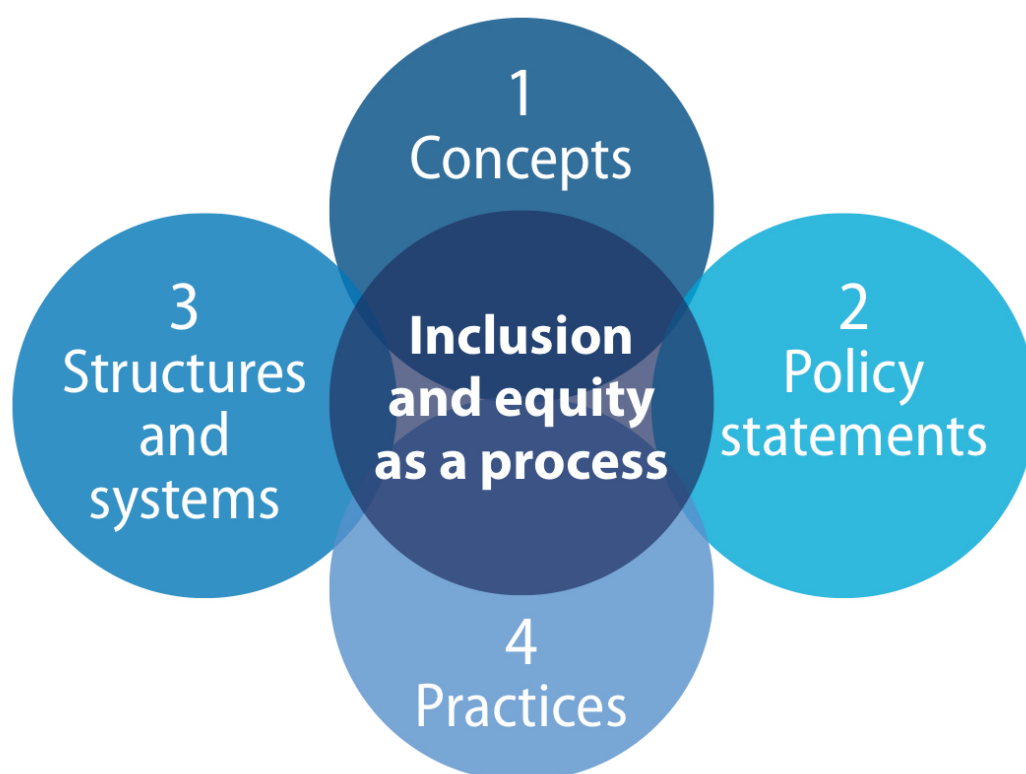
Figure 2.1   Dimensions of policy review framework UNESCO (2017, p. 16)
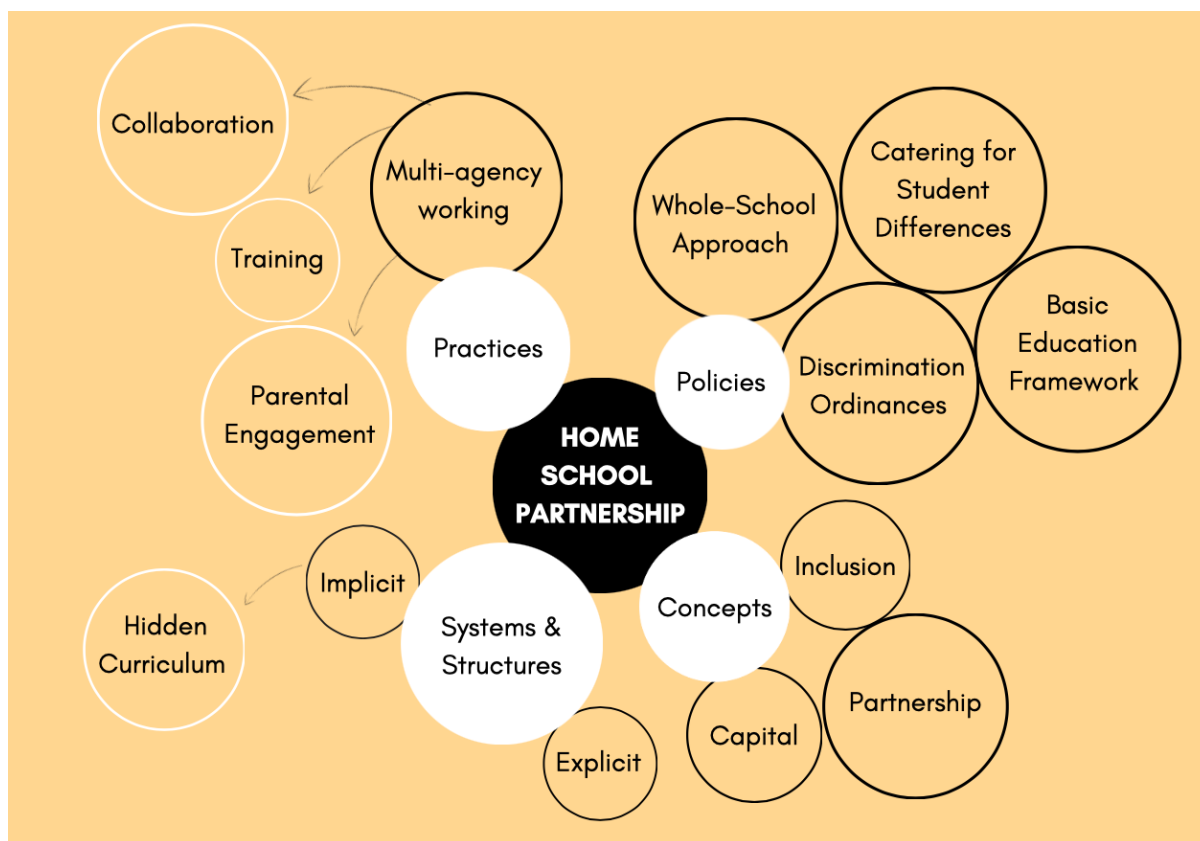
Figure 2.2 Conceptual framework

What follows is an exploration of literature pertaining to Bourdieu's social capital theory, inclusive education, home-school partnership, and multi-agency working. The section will begin by probing the multi-faceted dimensions of barriers that ethnic minority families of children with disabilities encounter.

2.2 Compounding barriers

There has been a discernible shift from the historical stronghold of the person-centred deficit medical model with the advent of discussions on the contextual environment's impact on the educational and social experiences of individuals with disabilities. Lai and Ishiyama (2004) note such shifts in studies that examine the analysis of practice and the development of

children's services that are "culturally competent" in supporting rights to educational participation; this marks a transition from the deficit model, which has historically been the view of ethnic minority parents.

However, for ethnic minority children in Hong Kong, Bhowmik and Kennedy (2022) argue that current approaches continue to exemplify the medical model. Although Bhowmik and Kennedy (2016) argue that there is more to integration than language skills, the authors note how Chinese language skills are touted as a ticket to enter mainstream Hong Kong society (e.g. Fleming, 2019). Language skills are often advised as a "prescription" for minority children to succeed rather than viewing linguistic diversity as a feature of contemporary society (Bhowmik & Kennedy, 2016).

Furthermore, Bhowmik and Kennedy note a slew of disadvantages for the ethnic minority student in Hong Kong, including racism, an unresponsive Chinese language instruction, and shortcomings in resource efficacy and monitoring. Overall, they highlight the absence of an education policy that encompasses the inclusion of culturally diverse communities in Hong Kong. The authors further assert that although ethnic minority children with disabilities in Hong Kong are susceptible to additional disadvantages, support mechanisms for these students and their experiences are yet to be understood. Their recent article (Bhowmik and Kennedy, 2022) refers to various Government documents and policies, arguing that a social model of support would fare better, thereby also arguing for a more inclusive discourse on disability. Although Bhowmik and Kennedy accurately note literature indicating unequal educational outcomes for minority students, this study contends that inequity for ethnic minority children starts early on, with unequal opportunities.

Language is often cited as a significant obstacle for minority communities accessing resources globally and in Hong Kong. Loper (2004), for example, found individuals from various ethnic minority communities in Hong Kong like Indian, Pakistani, Filipino, and Nepalese to have experienced language barriers in quality, information, and overall integration with the Chinese community. Yet, the simplistic resolutions of language acquisition as argued by Bhowmik and Kennedy dismisses various other concerns relative to working-class minorities. The institutionalised reluctance towards diversity and selective treatment of one ethnic minority group over the other problematises efforts for inclusion. Furthermore, where diversity is perceived as a "problem" (Fleming, 2019), it is troubling to consider its implications for minorities. Although the Hong Kong Government has made efforts to close the linguistic gap of ethnic minority students since 2014 through the implementation of a specialised curriculum, Unison's (2018) comprehensive review of learning and teaching of Chinese for ethnic minority Students in Hong Kong argues otherwise. For example, the curriculum implemented lacks clear teaching and learning goals, along with a lack of responsive measures. Another issue highlighted by the review is that although there have been growing studies and interest from academia and NGOs, practices and resources for the ethnic minority community have yet to be consolidated.

Although Driessen and colleagues' (2001) quantitative study in a Western context reported no differences between ethnic minorities and dominant native groups in parental contact with schools, Li's (2006) America-based study suggests otherwise. The authorw investigation of middle-class immigrant Chinese parents found them to describe their experience as conflicting with their children's schools due to linguistic limitations, their minority status, lack of educational experience in the host country, and social isolation from the wider society. Van Daal and colleagues (2002) also discovered language as a barrier in multi-ethnic

Dutch schools for home-school partnership due to difficulties expressing concerns and queries. Furthermore, when compared with Dutch parents, minority parents were perceived as disinterested; they were found to place accountability on the school for their children's education. As a whole, minority parents were perceived to have low interest in being involved with schools.

Individuals with disabilities encounter various barriers that intersect, and *add to* their disadvantage. Aspects that contribute to marginalisation such as language, ethnicity and social class have been well documented (e.g., Dyson and Kolezski, 2008; Garcia & Cuellar, 2006; Keil et al., 2006; Lindsay et al., 2006; Van Kampen et al., 2008. Some authors argue for the inclusion of children from mixed and single and working parents (Epstein, 1984; Kohl et al., 2000) in the discourse of inclusive education as well. By extension, parents and families of children with special needs also bear witness to these barriers. Valle (2009) comments on the "complex network" of people, structures, and services characteristic of the field. Families introduced to the world of special education may feel intimidated by the professionals who are armed with knowledge, jargon and procedures. Even those who may have spent a relative amount of time in the system may still feel perplexed. For example, concerns echo across multiple studies in the use of terminology in special education that is unfamiliar to parents, particularly for those who come from culturally and linguistically diverse communities (e.g. Mandic et al., 2010).

Taken further, the field of special education can be exclusionary for those who do not possess the technical knowledge and skills required for participation. Also, schools are more likely to exclude parents who do not fit the prescribed norms of involvement (Fine, 1994). In Lareau's

(1987) study, for instance, factors that determined parents' involvement in schools included what they perceived to be a reasonable sharing of responsibilities between teachers and parents, what parents knew about their children's schooling and the time, money, and other material resources at their disposal. There is also a risk of misinterpretation for low-income families, viewing them as uninvolved or disinterested in partnership (Bower & Griffin, 2011).

Kozleski and colleagues (2008) for instance, investigated home-school partnerships of South African and American parents, intending to examine how race, socioeconomic status, and disability intersect and influence relationships between stakeholders and how it extends to parental advocacy. Both parent groups hailed predominantly from low-income households and minority backgrounds. Commonalities expressed by both groups of parents included a sense of disempowerment. An outcome of unspoken expectations placed by professionals on parents of having to accept recommendations with few opportunities to deliberate. Professionals' assumptions were also highlighted as contributing to a disempowering experience.

Studies in the UK have demonstrated the overrepresentation of minority groups in special education (Dyson & Kozlesky, 2008; MacMillan & Reschly, 1998). With a growing minority community in Hong Kong, a similar phenomenon has already been highlighted. For instance, Bhowmik and Kennedy (2022) reference the Equal Opportunities Commission (2011) and Oxfam Hong Kong, Loh, and Hung (2020), citing similar concerns about the appropriateness of assessment tools and diagnosis of ethnic minority children. Bhowmik and Kennedy speculate that figures for ethnic minority children could be higher than that indicated by official estimates. Additionally, this study argues that a lack of parental input, understanding

of the purpose, diagnostic procedures, and consequences of the diagnosis is concerning. Also, there is a lack of strategic initiatives and research targeting the educational welfare of ethnic minority children with disabilities, which some authors suggest there is evidence for inadequate educational provisions (Connelly, Gube, & Thapa, 2013).

It is essential to note the risk of yielding inaccurate findings amidst efforts to garner data by homogenising ethnic minorities. A case illustrated by Crozier and Davies (2007), where variances were found between and within communities despite being identified as Asian and Muslim. The two-year study explored the views of Bangladeshi and Pakistani families in the United Kingdom about home-school partnership, relationships with schools, and their roles in their children's education. The study found a poor understanding of parental needs and views, and communication between home and school were also amiss. Amongst a variety of characteristics documented in this study, the authors found ineffective "fit for purpose" information from schools. There was also a lack of parental initiation, where they would, instead, wait for schools to approach them. Furthermore, avoidance of meetings due to linguistic barriers, not understanding the importance of these conversations, and the ramifications of not attending being perceived as indifference were underscored.

Considering the above, the manifestation of unequal participation in education, which includes a lack of procedural awareness, the availability of services, and not to mention, rights (Hughes et al., 2002), poses serious questions about *who* is granted access to educational goods. Clearly, in the absence of support, the equitable participation of families

in the educational process of their children is not guaranteed, leading to eventual marginalisation (Al-Hassan & Gardner, 2002).

The past two decades have observed considerable developments in inclusive education research, leading to a proliferation of studies where parental involvement is recognised as an increasingly important area. The teacher's ability to instruct a diverse class and maintain strong links between home and school is deemed crucial. Additionally, with new challenges brought on by the heterogeneous classroom, where there is a spectrum of learning needs, diverse cultures, languages, and religions, to name a few, teachers are being called on to respond effectively and equitably. Such classrooms also require teachers to negotiate with their own values and views that impact their perspectives and practice. Like many other international cities, classrooms in Hong Kong are exemplary of the challenges inclusion may incite. However, with competing obstacles such as an inconsistent understanding of inclusion, lack of adequate training, and an otherwise unyielding administration, the reality of inclusion and partnering with minority parents in Hong Kong could be a distant dream.

2.3 A cosmopolitan crisis?

An ethnic minority in Hong Kong is an individual who is not Chinese by ethnicity; they are also referred to as Non-Chinese Speaking in the educational domain. The term ethnic minority is problematic in Hong Kong's context, for despite being an umbrella term for any ethnicity besides Chinese, usage of the term seems to be targeted at those from South and East Asian backgrounds. For instance, the Hong Kong Government officially recognises Japanese, Korean, and Caucasian communities to fall under the ethnic minority category. However, public discourse and usage of the term in most NGO services are targeted at

specific communities if not exclusively, specific to those from Nepalese, Pakistani, and Indian ethnic backgrounds.

Lee and Law (2016) note that British colonialism in Hong Kong brought along a large population of ethnic minority groups, describing their contributions to Hong Kong's economy as disregarded (p.103). They argue that Hong Kong has yet to rid itself of its colonial mindset, further suggesting the adoption of its own form of "orientalism," wherein ethnic minorities are positioned as inferior to define a sense of superiority (p.82). The authors also posit that marginalisation due to race and ethnicity persist in the post-colonial era; worse still, there are chances that the divide is strengthened despite initiatives aimed at ameliorating social exclusion. Thus, Lee and Law suggest that although branded an international city, the multicultural theme alludes to the mere existence of diverse ethnic communities in Hong Kong. It is perhaps the residual manifestation of such attitudes that dismiss the experiences of ethnic minority communities in Hong Kong, barring the development of inclusion.

The segregated lives of the ethnic minority and Chinese communities are an unequivocal marker of Hong Kong society. Hence, it is unsurprising that most Chinese citizens have little knowledge of their otherwise diverse city and its rich history, to which various ethnic minority communities have contributed. There is bewilderment among the Chinese that many South Asian families have been in Hong Kong for generations and a sense that Hong Kong is fundamentally Chinese (Fleming, 2019). Furthermore, The Racial Acceptance Survey by the Census and Statistics Department published in 2009, which included over 95% Chinese respondents, reported the lowest acceptance levels towards Nepalese, Indians, Pakistanis,

Bangladeshis and Arabs (Census and Statistics Department, 2009), which Kapai (2015) highlights as hierarchical racism based on skin colour. Such experiences may not necessarily be shared by other ethnic minority communities in Hong Kong like the Caucasian, Korean, and Japanese to name a few. Furthermore, the field of education was found to have the lowest acceptance towards non-Chinese. It is possible to assume a lack of understanding, or even appreciation, of the city's diversity and subsequently, the potential for persistent stereotypes and discrimination.

There is little data about ethnic minority communities in Hong Kong, with most revolving around statistics delineating their population, poverty, and participation in the workforce. However, Kapai's (2015) extensive report on the status of ethnic minorities in Hong Kong, the first of its kind, outlines various experiences based on, for example, skin colour and ethnicity with ramifications on experiences in schools, the workforce, consumption of goods, and general participation in society. The lack of information on ethnic minorities' historical ties to Hong Kong and their contribution to Hong Kong society unfortunately contributes to the failure to regard the ethnic minority communities as Hong Kong citizens. Fleming (2019) argues that the limited perspective on diversity is homogenising, serving to reinforce and legitimise inter-group barriers despite good intentions. These limitations appear to manifest in the superficial display of celebrations around food, clothing, and festivals. Similarly, Kapai notes an exoticisation of cultures through for instance, celebration of cultural festivals as a means to target the elimination of discrimination, referring to it as a 'largely education-oriented approach.' The current study argues that such superficial exhibits of cultural appreciation shields much deeper-rooted concerns that have persisted for decades.

Returning to the suggestion of a lack of literature on the ethnic minority communities in Hong Kong, there's yet an understanding of the experiences of teachers who work with minority students (Hue & Kennedy, 2012), and suggested by the current study, their families as well. Furthermore, amidst stereotypes and a lack of information about diverse cultures, fostering positive and collaborative partnerships with families creates for a pressing need. Failure to do so increases the likelihood of cultural insensitivity and failed partnerships, impacting children's educational outcomes.

The Hong Kong Government's 2017 Policy Address included a review of the progress of Home-School Co-operation and parent education. Despite recognising difficulties experienced by ethnic minority families, their distinctive needs were not stated explicitly as a concern. This nullifies the Hong Kong Council of Social Services' 2010 study, which brought to attention the significant barriers faced by minority parents. Such oversight in policies bears consequence in practice. Although there was little mention of SEN and non-Chinese speaking parents in some of the medium and long-term measures, the vagueness overshadows the severity of the issue. Furthermore, one fails to locate mention of targeted aims at addressing the linguistic, cultural, and social barriers for ethnic minority families.

However, the review included a barrage of aims ranging from enhancing parents' knowledge and skills to developing attitudes to foster their children's learning—improving communication and home-school partnership. Parent-teacher associations were also mentioned, seemingly serving the purpose of functioning as bridges between home and school. Although it highlighted the crucial aspect of teacher education in realising these goals

and improving an online parent resource (Smart Parent Net), the alleviation of barriers to participation for vulnerable groups was nowhere to be found. Furthermore, the Smart Parent Net resource includes multiple sections which are accessible only in Chinese, suggestive of the idea that either inclusion is not on the Government's agenda, or that Chinese language skills are attributed to being a 'smart' parent.

2.4 Hidden curriculum

Literature on home-school partnership focusing on the participation of ethnic minority families is primary for this study. In building the conceptual framework, besides explicit barriers like language and resources, what is certain, are the more implicit aspects of sociopolitics, such as the hidden curriculum, (e.g. Bilbao et al., 2008; Bowles & Gintis, 1976) which Phillip Jackson (1966) defines as "the curriculum of rules, regulations, and routines of the things teachers and students must learn if they are to make their way with minimum pain in the social institution called the school" (p.354).

The hidden curriculum can be explicit, such as leaflets, or implicit, like understanding a school's routine and norms that are not discussed openly. Analysing hidden curriculum in schools is essential to understanding the 'microcosm of the social value system' (Vallance, 1974, p.6) that impacts educational experiences and outcomes. Similarly, Giroux and Penna (1979) assert that the hidden curriculum influences all aspects of the educational experience. Jackson (1966, p. 34) also points out that a multitude of the school's characteristics, space and culture "collectively form a hidden curriculum which each student (and teacher) must master if he is to make his way satisfactorily through the school." Although this study does

not focus on direct student experiences, the hidden curriculum also points towards parents navigating the school's institutional structure. In the case of ethnic minority parents, it is done through compromised means of access.

Institutions must make explicit the unspoken rules that govern norms and standard practice. Portelli (1993), for instance, argues that the hidden curriculum should be made explicit by educators, it is their responsibility, especially for families who do not access school information similarly due to sociolinguistic barriers. Additionally, Gordon (1982, p. 188–189) proposes three dimensions to the categorisation of literature on hidden curriculum: outcomes, environment, and latent influence. Of the three, outcomes are pertinent to this study, as it includes non-academic learning, such as attitudes, norms, and social skills pertinent to the space. When parents do not possess particular means to participate in the school community's practices, they are subject to exclusion (Delgado-Gaitain, 1991). And so, when ethnic minority parents navigate the institutional space, their knowledge of the hidden curriculum, or lack thereof, determines their success in adapting to the rules and expectations, subsequently impacting their children's learning outcomes. Here, the hidden curriculum concept is comparable to 'symbolic violence.'

The cultural experiences in the home facilitate children's adjustment to school and academic achievement, thereby transforming cultural resources into what Bourdieu (1977a, 1977b) describes as cultural capital. Similarly, parents too utilise their capital to navigate the education system. Moreover, such capital also ascertains the means and methods through

which parents partner with schools. The inception of such capital, and the forces that perpetuate it, will be explored in the following section.

2.3 Accessing educational goods

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is an American legislation that promotes educational rights. It is built on ideas such as students having the right to access the general classroom, using multiple linguistically and culturally non-discriminatory tools for assessments to avoid discriminatory evaluations. Also, the assessments are to include parents' perspectives about the disability in question. Children's learning profiles are expected to indicate their preferences, strengths, and learning needs; they should be able to learn in the least restrictive environment, with access to the general curriculum as much as possible. Parents also have the right to 'due process,' a formal procedure where their complaints or any violation of terms in their children's Individual Education Plan can be taken to a court of law. Lastly, school professionals are required by law to invest in home-school partnership where parents are included in decision-making, identification of disabilities, educational resources, and implementation of programmes and assessments (Turnbull & Turnbull, 2000). Across all six areas of the legislation, Trainor (2010b) highlights that parental involvement is critical. Such policies crystalise and protect the significant roles parents can play in their children's education. For children with disabilities, the power such policies offer families is crucial. However, the required capital to engage in such advocacy is inaccessible to all.

Pierre Bourdieu argues that social class influences the acquisition of knowledge and skills that perpetuate social classes further and that these influences are also produced in schools. Furthermore, Daniel-White (2000) suggests that although policy might demand home-school

partnership, be it of parents or institutions, the consequences for failing to achieve this has yet to be clarified. Where accountability in home-school partnership is not assured, despite well-meaning policies such as the IDEA, there is a risk of vulnerable families falling through the cracks, often unnoticed. Literature demonstrates the use of Bourdieusian ideas in explaining social inequalities. The social capital theory supports the framing of this study to help identify families vulnerable to exclusion.

An extensive analysis of Bourdieusian thought, however, far exceeds the capacity and objectives of this study. Also, devoting significant space to Bourdieu's theories can veer away from the inquiry's foci. This study has been selective, applying the primary features of Bourdieu's concepts to assist in framing the experiences of the phenomenon of home-school partnership through the theoretical tools of habitus, capital, and field. Nonetheless, this study will not neglect the utility or criticisms surrounding Bourdieusian concepts and will, thus, begin with a brief overview.

2.5.1 Structures

Critical disability studies increasingly emphasise schools and other social contexts as sites of injustice, shifting the focus away from individual pathology and onto the interplay of environmental circumstances that exacerbate disabilities (Lingard & Mills, 2007; Shakespeare & Watson, 2001). Critical pedagogy also raises similar concerns about the intersection of multiple operations (Barbules and Berk, 1999). Although schools have been identified as critical sites for addressing and alleviating social inequalities for marginalised groups (Bass & Gerstl-Pepin, 2011; DCSF, 2009), the actualities of schools perpetuating these inequalities are difficult to overlook.

Additionally, Lareau (1987, p.74) describes home-school partnerships as being "laden with social and cultural experiences of intellectual and economic elites," explaining further that similar to other social relationships, "family-school interactions carry the imprint of the larger social context." Lareau questions the influence of social class on the processes through which parents participate in their children's schooling, pointing out that equity in education has focused mainly on opportunities and outcomes, disregarding processes that develop educational patterns. It is this process that Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field and capital help articulate. Bourdieu's tools help analyse the impact of class and culture in the facilitation and impediment in children and parents' negotiations of the educational space.

Influenced by the work of Karl Marx (1963), conflict theory proposes that society is in perpetual conflict between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, battling for limited resources (Marx,1963). This theory suggests that this conflict manifests and is maintained in social structures through domination and power. Pierre Bourdieu is a conflict theorist, yet his focus shifts from a purely economic outlook on the distribution of goods to social and cultural capital (Musoba & Baez, 2009). Bourdieu (1979/1984) uses four conceptual tools to dissect social reproduction: field, habitus, cultural and social capital. He describes them as working in tandem. Central to Bourdieu's thesis is the reproduction of social inequality and exclusion through mechanisms such as education, an agent of social stratification (Winkle-Wagner, 2010).

2.5.2 Habitus

Habitus is the internalised embodiment of social structures and "cultural unconscious or mental habits" (Bourdieu,1989, cited in Houston, 2002, p. 157), which operates at an

unconscious level. It is those dispositions that are learnt from home and often taken for granted that then influence one's actions (Dumais, 2002, p. 46). Bourdieu (2002, p.27) defines habitus as "schemata or structures of perception, conception, and action," also referring to it as "socialised subjectivity." It includes beliefs, values, norms, and dispositions from life experiences. This conceptualisation frames social and institutional contexts as a means from which individuals gather habitus. It describes the linkage between an individual's actions and societal structures as their predispositions respond to specific contexts (Musoba & Baez, 2009).

Cyclical in nature, habitus generates and maintains thoughts, perceptions, and actions (Musoba & Baez, 2009). It manifests in the practice of individuals (Mills & Gale, 2007). As aspirations, it reflects an individual's view of their chance of getting ahead, it is an internalisation of objective possibilities (Reavis, 2019). Habitus also functions as a 'mind tool' that influences actions, interpretations, and people's responses to events (Agbenyaga & Sharma, 2014). Varying habitus offers access to different educational practices, social connections, cultural skills, and resources that can then be transferred into capital as individuals navigate the world (Lareau, 2011). Habitus both produces and preserves social structures in individuals' social practice (Nash, 1999). Although habitus can be developed later in life (new habitus), it might lack the natural feel compared to those acquired early on in childhood.

Edgerton and Roberts (2014, p. 200) refer to authors like Crossley (2001) and Sweetman (2003) to highlight the commonality and, more importantly, the necessity of invoking a 'flexible' and 'reflexive habitus' as modern societies become more culturally diverse and

experience social shifts. Such transitions demand that individuals work on adaptability. Yet, literature about ethnic minority experiences in home school partnership mentioned earlier (e.g., Crozier & Davies, 2007; Kozleski et al., 2008) also demonstrate the impact of discrepancies in habitus between home and school. Similarly, this study assumes that for Nepalese parents in Hong Kong, there is a misalignment of habitus between that which parents possess and that required for partnership as delineated by the school.

2.5.3 Capital

Social capital is the conscious and unconscious formation of networks of resources, relationships, and connections that establish norms and values of a social class, presenting opportunities and power over those who do not fall within the network (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu identifies various forms of capital that afford individuals both opportunities and, consequently, further develop their capital. For instance, through their social network, individuals with social capital can gain access to opportunities and build links with other networks; such experiences add to their existing social capital. Swidler (1986) succinctly likens culture to a "tool kit" that both permits and limits individuals' interaction and access to various social contexts and the world. The toolkit is described as allowing individuals their "strategies of action" (p. 273) that are reliant on their position within those contextual structures and the skills they imbibe.

Bourdieu (1977c) identifies forms of capital as mutually constitutive in that economic capital affords time and resources for investment in the development of children's cultural capital, which is connected with future educational and occupational success and, in turn, contributes to the accumulation of economic capital. Socioeconomic success is also associated with

greater social capital, in that one's social network becomes broader, more influential, and more conducive to opportunities and further enhancement of one's capital.

Reavis (2019) recommends viewing cultural and social capital from an "assets-based perspective." More specifically, Bourdieu (1979/1984) describes capital as skills, educational background, knowledge, and abilities that individuals enjoy as their cultural capital. The defining characteristics include "linguistic and cultural competence" (Bourdieu, 1973, p. 80), which includes familiarity with features of the dominant culture such as their aesthetics, tastes, and dispositions. Additionally, the extent to which individuals understand schooling is usually inherited through their upbringing and educational background, where children born into particular families continue reproducing status.

Although Kim (2009) suggests that cultural capital occurs to a lesser degree in minorities and lower classes (Kim, 2009), this study concurs with Zhou (1997) who in contrast, suggests that immigrant and minority parents also have access to ethnic-specific forms of social capital. The determining factor then, is whether or not the capital has value in a given context. Citing quantitative and qualitative studies Tzanakis (2011) pulls back further from this view and makes a case for demonstrating that the production and transfer of cultural capital in ethnic minority families are unlike and even, irrelevant to Bourdieu's highbrow conceptualisation of cultural capital, which has its basis on French high society of Bourdieu's times. Regardless, Ferguson, Hanreddy, and Ferguson (2014, p.772) emphasise that both formal and informal networks of support can contribute to influencing a families' quality of life.

As established earlier, schools function as sites for alleviating and perpetuating inequalities; the education system functions to reproduce and perpetuate society's class structure. Kim's

(2009) review states that parents who have access to more resources, partly due to having more cultural capital, have higher chances of contributing to their children's educational outcomes by engaging with schools in terms the school sets out. This is in contrast to minority families and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. For instance, Zhang and Luo (2016) referenced socioeconomic and cultural capital as factors affecting the discriminatory educational experiences of migrant children in China.

When parents can identify and respond to the school's demands with their social and cultural capital, their children can do better in school. Lee and Bowen (2006) contend that when parents come from the same social system as the institution with which they are interacting, their capital automatically leads to the procurement of additional capital. Information and resources gleaned from parent-teacher conferences, assemblies, or parent-to-parent networks have an increased potential to influence children's success. However, how teachers make sense of and work with diverse families is vital; teachers are often ill-equipped and undereducated in the forms of capital that families bring to school (Gonzales & Gabel, 2017), especially in institutions that are not committed to investing in developing practice that embraces diversity.

2.5.4 Field

According to Bourdieu (1979/1984), the concept of field is the structured social space of positions and power relations, where habitus and capital interact. It is a social arena where people negotiate, oppress, and dominate to access capital (Bourdieu, 1997). Individuals' position in the field, which affects access and power, is based on their capital (Lingard et al., 2005). The field is often compared to a game where an individual's standing in the field can

be construed as the product of habitus and capital. Individuals in the field undergo a push and pull of power, bringing their capital into play, thus shaping both the field's transformation and preservation (Bourdieu, 1998b, p. 40-41). Individuals within the field compete to control interests specific to the field and utilise their capital in this game.

Like Bronfenbrenner's ecological model, multiple fields exist, such as home, school, neighbourhood and the wider community. The field is a tension-filled space where capitals battle with each other. Fields are spaces of power built on the distribution of two competing principles of social hierarchy: economic and cultural capital (Edgerton & Roberts, p. 195). Teachers and other school professionals hold power in the field of home-school partnership due to their knowledge of the field and its processes; equipped with such capital, professionals are better positioned than parents, especially in the game of home-school partnership.

As widely lauded as it is for its attempts to conceptualise social inequality, Bourdieu's work is also criticised for its notions of power and deterministic views of the links between human agency and class cultures, the latter highlighted as oversimplified (Giroux, 1983). Such views characterise Bourdieu's ideas as offering little room for transformative agency. James (2015, p. 107) also directs attention toward tensions between a Bourdieusian outlook and the features of educational practice, policy, and research, which will be examined further in the discussion chapter.

Although Bourdieu identified that structures limit and influence an individual's actions (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 123), he cautions that one's action is not vulnerable to external forces alone but can be influenced by generative habitus (p. 9). It is proposed that when individuals

encounter a disconnect between habitus and field, circumstances are created where they are called upon to act (Bourdieu, 1990b). With this in mind, social reproduction is not entirely inevitable. Bourdieu's notion of habitus does not suggest a deterministic, rigid and unchanging mechanism. Instead, it is implied that although habitus may be challenging to transform swiftly, it is still susceptible to change over time when encountered with novel environments and those that demand change. Albeit shifts within limitations presented by one's cognitive capabilities, and contextual constraints, there is room for agency still, which Bourdieu describes functions "[. . .] by the effect of social trajectory leading to conditions of living different from initial ones" (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 116). Hence, contesting the idea of fatalism; instead, habitus acknowledges agency.

While some view cultural capital as significant in elucidating educational inequality, it has also been challenged, especially the concept of habitus, for its utility (e.g., Van de Werfhorst, 2010). For instance, according to Tzanakis (2011), qualitative studies on social reproduction do not lend themselves to understanding how agency functions and contributes to cultural capital. Tzanakis suggests that since it adopts a narrow focus on the relationships between home and school, understanding of cultural capital is limited to "identifying symbolic violence, exploitation, and class-based social exclusion" (p. 85).

Nonetheless, Horvat et al, (2003, p. 569) claim that the misinterpretation of Bourdieu's ideas restricts the notion of cultural capital. Their notion is supported by the assertion that current North American research on cultural capital revolves around the idea of highbrow culture and a conceptual and causal distinction of cultural capital from other abilities (e.g., knowledge and skills). Instead, they argue, cultural capital involves agency; it is fluid and encompasses a

variety of cultural and social know-how. The authors interpret cultural capital as an interaction between contextual expectations (standards) and technical and social-behavioural skills. They note "microinteractional processes" where individuals' skills meet "institutionalised evaluation standards." These skills are "transmissible across generations, are subject to monopoly, and may yield advantages or profits." Farkas (2003) also argues that cultural capital is not limited to the characteristic high brow status signifiers but instead encompasses a multitude of traits, behaviours, and cognitive skills, interlinked with academic and occupational performance.

Thus, the function of disability as an imperceptible characteristic in the "acquisition and use of capital" in parent participation in special education requires investigating (Trainor, 2010b, p. 254). Besides, the lens through which minority parents and their habitus are viewed, and the subsequent changes brought to the field can catalyse change by shaping cultural capital in the field (Kim, 2009). However, empirical work has not paid sufficient attention to the differences between the possession of capital and its activation. (Lareau & Horvat 1999).

2.5.4 Examining the field

The blend of capital and minority status can place parents of children with disabilities in Hong Kong in disenfranchisement. In the quest to partner with schools, further marginalisation propagated by unresponsive institutions renders a disempowering experience for parents, mainly when there is an excessive reliance on professionals and inadequate provisions to uplift minority parents. Amidst global attempts to embrace an inclusive ethos in schools, the plight of minority parents insinuates a pressing need for empowering families to partner with schools.

Although Hong Kong is home to diverse communities, and despite branding itself as an international city, Xu & Filler (2008) suggest that Hong Kong is essentially monocultural. This can also be observed in the scarce initiatives targeted at the equitable participation of minority parents in schools. For ethnic minority children with SEN, Kapai's (2015) report identifies barriers to learning as a lack of English medium of instruction schools in the public sector, exorbitant fees, and long waiting lists for the few schools that offer English medium instruction. As a result, ethnic minority children with special needs have no choice but to attend Chinese medium instruction special schools. This is suggested to aggravate existing developmental delays due to the additional demand of Chinese instruction. Furthermore, the ramifications of a lack of teacher training for inclusive classrooms and poor language instruction policy is concerning.

A common narrative found in Hong Kong amongst efforts to include marginalised communities includes placing the responsibility on them to rise to the occasion by expanding their linguistic skills and making efforts to integrate. Thus, it is not surprising to find Kennedy (2011) underscoring the monocultural nature of Hong Kong's education policy. Studies outside of Hong Kong share similar findings where schools expect disadvantaged parents to obtain, somehow, access to capital usually available to the majority to support their children's education (Lareau, 1987; Li, 2006; Nakagawa, 2000). Additionally, Hong Kong Unison's (2015) study reported that numerous kindergartens lack resources to support ethnic minority children. Available accommodations were temporary efforts provided by NGOs or university students rather than professionals with specialist knowledge. Despite the recognition of linguistic barriers for ethnic minority communities, accessing information continues to be complicated. For instance, multiple schools only provide information in Chinese. Ease of technological use also presents a potential barrier, especially when critical

information is often shared online. Moreover, the identification of segregated practices due to Kindergarten's language policies creates segregation in Hong Kong society early on.

Amidst this broader social context, developing more inclusive home-school partnership practice for diverse families raises doubts. Fleming (2019) describes the discussion of diversity and multiculturalism as ironically and subtly perpetuating minorities as "permanent others," for whom integration and dispelling diversity cannot occur, as well as withholding any credit due to the adoption of local practice. The burden is placed on South Asians to address discrimination by raising awareness about their cultural practice instead of focusing on discrimination.

The United Nations has continuously acknowledged the significance of inclusion and the role of parents (UN, 1992; UNCRC, 2016). Despite initiatives from various schools and the Government, the movement has not been received positively by all. Although inclusion addresses fundamental human rights, the harsh reality of including everyone in the social, economic, and political spheres of life is challenging. Todd (2014, p. 72) comments that inclusive education has yet to successfully address "underlying socio-economic problems of the families of disabled children." The author refers to the Plowden Report, where partnership between professionals is prescribed to help tackle social disadvantage. For initiatives to be considered inclusive, however, efforts need to extend partnership to all children and families, especially those who are at a disadvantage.

The Unison Kindergarten Report (Unison, 2012b) reported the difficulties faced by participating Kindergartens that include ethnic minority students in Hong Kong. Significant

findings included poor communication between home and school, hindering efforts to support positive student outcomes, and limitations to parental input in supporting learning at home. Also, teachers expressed their inability to provide the individualised care that ethnic minority students need and their inability to assess their understanding of the learning content. Additionally, the report emphasised that almost half of the participating Kindergartens did not receive assistance in supporting ethnic minority children, with a significantly low percentage of school staff undergoing specialised training to teach a diverse classroom. These findings are crucial, portraying a lack of institutional support in targeting the inclusion of children from the ethnic minority community. At the same time, families and schools are left with the task of dealing with the challenges independently.

The Committee on Home-School Co-operation was founded in 1993 as an advisory body to promote parental engagement. The committee organises various programmes disseminating information with themes related to children's development and communication strategies. The Parent Education Activity Information Hub was also created to offer information on parent education courses and programmes. The Committee's website states their aim as facilitating home-school partnership through various means, such as establishing Parent-Teacher Associations, workshops, seminars, and publicity programmes and grants for schools with ideas for improving home-school partnership. Additionally, their work involves data collection, also extending to providing recommendations to the Education Bureau for teacher education.

As stated in a 2021 document from the Legislative Council Panel on Education promoting Home-school Co-operation and Parent Education (EDB, 2021), The Education Bureau has

instructed the establishment of systematic and regular mechanisms to strengthen

communication and partnership. It also states that schools must ensure parents understand

and support the school's initiatives and acquire parental opinions to steer improvements.

Furthermore, through collaboration amongst professionals, schools are to provide

consultations and training to enhance parental skills in supporting children with special needs

and invite parental contributions to Individual Education Plans.

Evidently, the committee is involved in the critical task of assisting schools, imparting

knowledge to stakeholders and guiding parents to support their children's learning. Although

the report does mention specific methods targeted at ethnic minority families and their

children with special needs, the efficacy of these strategies remains undetermined. The reach

and impact of printed material and workshops targeted at ethnic minority parents have yet to

be evaluated. Although not stated explicitly, one assumes that parental needs, especially those

vulnerable to exclusion, are central to the school initiatives mentioned above. Aside from

enhancing skills in supporting children's education, the document expresses the continued

insistence, and perhaps primary focus, on learning Chinese.

As per the recommendations of the committee's Task Force, the Education Bureau-

commissioned curriculum framework on parent education is planned for launch in late 2022.

With the support of NGOs, efforts are underway to cater to parents with diverse needs.

However, with a lack of in-depth knowledge of ethnic minority parents' educational

experiences and perspectives the efficacy of the pedagogical approach of these parent

education courses prompts scepticism. Another Education Bureau effort to cater to diversity

includes sharing information about the Whole School Approach to Integrated Education, a lengthy 75-page document translated into English only in 2016.

The committee's role is undoubtedly vital; the responsibility to ensure that all families are included in the agenda is apparent. The committee could function as an intermediary between multiple stakeholders. Considering the findings found in Unison's report mentioned above, including other data at the Government's disposal, it is feasible to conceive of the committee as spearheading measures to alleviate barriers in education encountered by families in Hong Kong families, ethnic minority or not.

Unfortunately, the committees bypassing ethnic minority families or those for whom the notion of predefined partnership approaches may be novel is discernible. A brief skim through the committee's online resource exemplifies current attitudes toward inclusion. Large portions of the online resource are limited to those with a written command of Chinese. Sections that connect to external resources are also primarily Chinese. The exclusion of diversity from this critical and Government-led resource demonstrates much room for improvement, with significant shortcomings as a resource for diverse families. In sum, the outcome of the committee's various intended aims has yet to bear fruit for the city's most vulnerable.

The comparative study of Chinese and Ethnic Minority parents' awareness of the Hong Kong education system conducted by the Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS) in 2010

is critical for this study. It demonstrates the wide literature gap on the ethnic minority experience of partnering with schools as well as the impact of institutional barriers which exclude minority families from the mainstream discourse on home-school partnership in Hong Kong. By examining how both Chinese and ethnic minority parents (primarily Pakistani and Nepalese) were involved in their children's education, the study revealed how cultural competence and social networks impact the acquisition of education-related information, which subsequently influences children's educational experiences. Additionally, the study looked into identifying potential service gaps to close the educational advancement gap.

The HKCSS study concluded that not only were ethnic minority parents at a disadvantage, but the graver concern was their lack of awareness about their circumstances (p.38). Although Chinese parents took advantage of their cultural and social capital (p.7), ethnic minority parents, on the other hand, were not able to share this experience. Recognising Hong Kong's highly competitive educational environment, the barriers ethnic minority parents experience, such as language, places them at a further disadvantage. Language was cited as a reason for hesitation amongst ethnic minority parents to meet strangers and involvement with schools (p.11). Chinese parents used various methods involving proactive social activities (p. 31), such as volunteering and information sessions. While ethic minority parents were noted to have knowledge deficits about Hong Kong's education system and their involvement with schools was also noted as primarily reactive, examples which may include being invited to address behavioural and academic concerns. Evidently, differing capital creates differing experiences and expectations of partnership with schools. The consequences of such divergence undoubtedly impact the children's social and educational outcomes.

The HKCSS study cites ethnicity and a language barrier as crucial factors to exclusion from social networks otherwise available to Chinese parents. Indeed, language is essential to membership in external social groups and resources such as online forums and parent groups. Chinese parents are known to access information through various resources, which is out of reach for ethic minority parents. Being ill-equipped with information, ethnic minority parents continue to make decisions for their children through recycled experiences of other ethnic minority parents in their social network, where accuracy is not guaranteed. Despite the recognition of linguistic barriers for ethic minority communities, accessing information continues to be complicated. For instance, multiple schools only provide information in Chinese.

Elaborating on ethnicity, the study highlighted differences in attitudes, aspirations, and behaviours towards education as being markedly different amongst the parents (p. 5). They asserted that Chinese parents viewed educational success as the fruits of hard work and discipline. Meanwhile, suggesting that for ethic minority parents, "religious or spiritual accomplishment" was on par with success in other areas such as career (p.5). However, such conclusions are problematic, as it homogenises ethnic minority communities. Drawing on the sample from Ku et al. (2003) study, which focused primarily on the Pakistani community, conclusions found in the HKCSS report are stereotypical and misleading.

HKCSS offers various recommendations based on their study. It prioritised communication, suggesting reformulating dissemination of information, and "active communication" between

families and schools (p. 42). Attention was also called upon an possessing a social and cultural understanding when conveying information. Furthermore, the establishment of support groups was recommended to support ethic minority parents' integration into the broader community and develop their social network with Chinese parents. As for teachers, the inclusion of cultural sensitivity and improved communication skills in teacher training was proposed.

2.6 Inclusive Education

Inclusion, described by Barton (1999), posits that it is a societal transformation often achieved through institutions like schools. Yet inclusion extends beyond four walls and is a call to radical shifts, which Barton suggests "means changes in the values, priorities and policies that support and perpetuate practices of exclusion and discrimination" (p. 58). In 2006, 82 nations pledged commitment to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). This historical movement solidified decades of work at the grassroots by activists, families, and organisations advocating for the rights of individuals with disabilities. The Convention ushered in an official call to action in shifts in attitudes and practices, supported by policies prioritising inclusion.

Unfortunately, despite political and philosophical discourse around inclusive education, authors such as Winzer and Mazurek (2005) problematise inclusion, noting a lack of uniformity. Considering both the significance and complexities of inclusion, this section will outline conceptual themes and challenges for its application within the context of ethnic minority children with disabilities in Hong Kong.

2.6.1 Inclusion?

In the development of inclusive education, two principal documents take precedence: the Warnock Report (1978) and the Salamanca Statement (1994). Both contributed to paving the way for discourse on inclusion. Although numerous developments have occurred since, despite nearing four decades after the dissemination of the reports, and the ratification of the CRPD, it is suggested that inclusion has yet to be fully achieved (Frederickson et al., 2004; Riddell, 2009) in schools and society at large. The reform movement in special education, first referred to as mainstreaming, is generally encompassed under inclusion, inclusive schooling, inclusive education, or, occasionally, progressive inclusion. In its philosophical and ideological guise, inclusion rests on particular conceptions of social justice, civil rights, and equity (Winzer and Mazurek, 2005).

In addition, resistance towards inclusion by some parents and professionals and the emphasis on meritocracy create further contention. Furthermore, "pragmatic and cautious voices" raise concerns over "the liberal trappings and emancipatory dialogue" of aiming for full inclusion, dismissing it as "utopian and an impractical ideal" (Winzer & Mazurek, 2005). Campbell (2002, p.13) highlights debates surrounding the implications of inclusion. For instance, what is the relationship between inclusion and exclusion? Is inclusion an ongoing process or a "state of affairs?" To what extent does inclusion permit children's agency versus it being something *done to* them? Also, what of the balance between the needs of the individual and that of the majority?

As recommended by UNESCO (2017b), making room for interpretation and contextual considerations allows for a multitude of manifestations of inclusion and equity. It is advantageous as it enables fluidity to account for diversity and contextual needs. However, it also creates difficulty in clear definitions of inclusion, leading to challenges in ascertaining mechanisms to measure, monitor, and compare from one school, district, or country to another. Existing data sets are incomplete and inconsistent in their definitions of disability; they provide little basis for meaningful international comparisons and, with some exceptions, are of unknown reliability and validity (EADSNE, 2013, p. 35). Additionally, the term's vagueness makes room for multiple meanings and confusion. Campbell (2002) notes the resulting complexity of definitions. Lunt and Norwich (1999) extend this further by accounting for multiple expressions of inclusion. For example, they point out that it could refer to :

1. individual needs

2. individual achievement

3. appreciation of diversity

4. the physical location of children in schools

5. the educational experience of children, and

6. their emotional well-being and social interaction (Norwich, 2008, p. 19)

The current study adds further complexity by including the parent's participation in their children's education, wherein the term participation also sparks debate.

Inclusive education is often justified as promoting an inclusive society and, at the very least, one that aims to reduce social exclusion. Mainly promoted as ensuring access to educational goods and participation in society, the human rights framework is also cited as a means to conceptualise inclusion (Norwich, 2008). However, Gerwitz (2002) is critical of this analysis, suggesting that the anchoring of inclusive education to social justice perpetuates the problem without a concise interpretation of social justice. For example, Todd (2014) critiques the failure of inclusion in addressing underlying socio-economic issues for families of children with disabilities.

Gewirtz (2002) differentiates two types of justice: distributional, which refers to the allocation of goods in society, and relational, which describes the nature of relationships between individuals and groups within society. Inclusion as an ideology reflects more extensive, political, and social changes in attitudes towards marginalised communities, and so, is interested in addressing both forms of social justice. This notion differentiates inclusion from other views on disability, where the emphasis is positioned on the right to participate in education and society (Winzer & Mazurek, 2005). Nevertheless, pursuing such a monumental task with schools at the forefront is questionable. Indeed, according to Lareau and Horvat (1999), schools contribute to the production and preservation of social class and, thus, social class-related inequalities.

Examining conceptualisations of inclusive education, Loreman, Forlin & Sharma (2014) compiled 13 themes based on their international literature review, with an additional theme for consideration. The themes covered a wide range of areas relevant to inclusive education. Through consolidation, this study has categorised them for organisation purposes: policy,

practice, and provision. However, due to the interconnected nature of these areas, it is difficult to compartmentalise them distinctly and, in actuality, should be regarded as a whole. Other studies not included in the authors' review will also be referenced where applicable.

This thesis aligns with Ainscow, Booth, and Dyson's (2006) understanding of inclusion, which refers to reframing cultures, policies, and practices to respond to student diversity. Inclusion is also described as access to the curriculum, the school's culture and community, especially for those vulnerable to exclusion. While equity speaks of fairness, viewing all students as equally important (UN, 2017).

2.6.1 Policy, provision and practice

Loreman et al. (2014) affirm that policymakers should communicate how they envision inclusion and maintain consistency. Policies should clarify how inclusion will be supported and how students' needs will be identified where applicable. This study adds that policies should also indicate how students' individual needs will be accommodated by schools and monitored. Parental roles in the process should also be included, for example, in the identification of disabilities, deliberation over learning accommodations and goals; such systems should be made explicit.

At its most fundamental level, policies should safeguard individuals and their rights to access educational goods. In turn, this suggests that policies should align with most current human rights advancements. It should be communicated from the top down, involving the input of higher levels of administration. However, considering the contextual needs of any given

institution, this may not be permissible or even demonstrated in praxis. Indeed, the lofty ideals of inclusion have often been criticised. Despite the desire to heed educational reforms demanding inclusion, the realities that prohibit such developments due to various factors are undeniable, rendering efforts to inclusion as mere lip service. The translatability of policies and contextual barriers to inclusion is an area that will be revisited later.

The authors highlight that the enactment of policy attempts at dismantling barriers that exclude individuals from participation. This indicates the acknowledgment of diverse voices when crafting policies, such as parents, teachers, students, the wider school community and individuals that work directly and indirectly in children's services. However, the extent to which such effective and responsive collaborations currently occur must be investigated. Accountability for all stakeholders ensures that policies must be carried forward in praxis seamlessly. Also, the establishment of policies demands the availability of provisions to bring them to life. However, the question remains, through what means and by whom?

Funding and resources have the potential to be both barriers and pathways to inclusive education. Loreman and colleagues consider how improvements in education are made through the provision of services. The authors highlight multi-agency working to create access to centralised resources. Another crucial area noted was the availability of early intervention. Also, in line with the monitoring of initiatives is ensuring that regulatory procedures govern the tracking of finances that address these provisions.

It is important to consider equitable access to provisions, especially for families from minority backgrounds. For instance, account for linguistic barriers by ensuring accurate translations. Addressing educational barriers by considering the legibility of disseminated content. Acknowledging diverse perspectives about child-rearing, and socioeconomic barriers by examining the cost of accessing provisions. To begin with, reviewing the schools' values can assist in determining inclusion. The emphasis is less on the school's physical infrastructure, although this could be a contributing factor for students with physical needs. Instead, the emphasis here is more so the 'feel' of the school, reflected in the professionals' attitudes, such as the tacit communication reflected by a welcoming smile. Alternatively, educators attitudes towards inclusion and their beliefs about minority groups translated through their interactions with parents from minority backgrounds. The lack of recognition for diversity in school walls and decorations can also demonstrate a lack of inclusion.

Furthermore, where and how are educators supported to garner skills and knowledge for advancing inclusive practices within and outside the classroom? Is inclusion encouraged by leaders, and is it conveyed through actions? Do educators have a sense of self-efficacy? Although challenging to specify, these features of the day-to-day happenings in schools can significantly impact the overall experience of stakeholders and, more importantly, convey the institutions' values.

2.6.2 Integration: Hong Kong's response to inclusion

In 1977, the Hong Kong Government published the White Paper on Integrating the Disabled into the Community, following movements emerging in the UK. As much as possible, the

policy called for integrating students with disabilities currently in special schools (Hong Kong Government, 1977, p. 14). However, according to Yung (1997), the policy's implementation was ineffective, with a plan of action being available only five years later.

In 1996, the Sub-Committee on Special Education of the Board of Education recommended inclusive education as an approach to support the integration of students with disabilities into mainstream schools. A year later, the implementation of the Pilot Project on Integration managed to make considerable strides. With persuasion from the Government, students with mild disabilities and learning needs were enrolled in several primary and secondary schools in a two-year project under the whole-school approach. Unfortunately, despite much Governmental effort, the number of participating schools and enrolled students was erratic, where Crawford et al. (1999) describe the initiative as challenging. Hui and Dowson (2003) associate this with schools being unable to comprehend the underlying values of the project. They also mention opposition from teachers towards the initiative. This study argues such resistance is not so much a reflection of professional's refusals to agree with the values of integration (or inclusion), but instead, reflects a lack of preparedness. The project was rushed, with schools being flung to fend for themselves. A lack of preparation in terms of teaching resources, teacher training, and discussions framed in a whole-school approach was lacking. Further to the implementation of integrated education, Ho and Lam (2020) suggest teacher concerns about insufficient training and barriers presented by the three-tier system, particularly, the curriculum and methods of assessment. At a more broader level, the challenges presented by collaborative working with other teaching staff and leadership commitment were also cited as barriers to integration. Although referring to a different concern, as noted by Kapai (2015), teacher education in Hong Kong [still] lacks preparation

in teaching a culturally diverse classroom two decades after the Pilot Project on Integration was initiated.

Norwich (2008, p. 18) describes inclusion as involving a more "systematic and social" meaning, as it imparts the restructuring of schools to accommodate all children. Integration, on the other hand, favours assimilation within existing systems. Although many perceive integration and inclusion as interchangeable, the "embracing and universalist" meaning attached to the latter impart greater value; it does not delineate boundaries between vulnerabilities. This study argues that regardless of the path the Hong Kong Government favours, it must ensure that schools are equipped to undertake the accompanying challenges.

2.6.3 A whole-school approach

Initiated by the Education Bureau in 1997, the whole-school approach was introduced to all schools through an Operational Guide (EDB, 2014). The document included principles and guidelines that outline the enhancement of educational services to cater to diversity. Furthermore, the document aimed to push the agenda for individual growth and the development of an inclusive society by positioning the school administration as a driving force to dismantle attitudinal and physical barriers. The Guide, therefore, was intended to function as a means of school development and an accountability framework.

The role of parents and their partnership with schools is not expanded in the Guide. Evidently, parents are recognised as having access to a pool of knowledge about their children, which could be informative to teachers. Likewise, parents too could benefit from the

sharing of information from teachers. Although there is mention of ensuring "integrated education" through consistent communication and an empathetic attitude between schools and parents (p. 51), what remains unclear is how this might be achieved and to what extent different stakeholders are responsible for realising this goal. Furthermore, a somewhat conflicting stance is observed. Despite the mention of parental input in understanding students' needs and the planning and monitoring of interventions, the student support team, a rather significant body described as involving the planning, implementing, and revision of support services (p.28), forgets to include parents. Such exclusion of an essential and influential stakeholder can be viewed as a manifestation of parents being positioned as passive conveyors of information rather than active collaborators holding, if not equal, a vital role in a student's learning.

Thus far, the literature has presented evidence to support the claim that multiple barriers exist for ethnic minority parents in partnering with special schools in Hong Kong. What is vital here is the exclusionary nature of the dominant parental partnership discourse, which disregards inclusion and diversity. By failing to address the perspectives and experiences of ethnic minority families, schools are setting them up for failure. In the absence of robust policies, continuous teacher training, and institutional support, initiatives for home-school partnership will likely be superficial.

2.6.4 Index for inclusion

Further to the positive implementation of the Index for Inclusion (Booth & Ainscow, 2002), a guide to support inclusive school development which has been implemented globally, the Education Bureau in Hong Kong also published an adapted version. Titled 'Catering for

Student Differences-Indicators for Inclusion,' the document emphasises the Government's vision of responding to diversity by enhancing school's capacity to meet various student needs (EDB, 2008). In contrast to the whole-school approach, the Indicators for Inclusion positions parents in a more active role, by explicitly articulating partnership between staff and parents. Other expectations involve ensuring that everyone feels welcome in schools and that discriminatory practises are minimised. This may translate to the very design of the school, whereby staff are mindful of the inclusion of notice boards that are accessible to linguistic minorities or adjustments to the infrastructure where students with specific physical needs can navigate the school. It might also mean reflecting on the attitudes or school culture which impacts service delivery. A simple example might include professionals being able to communicate in English (a common international language) for parents who may not be familiar with Chinese or the availability of printed material in English, if not in other languages. In order to facilitate this, drawing upon community resources may be required, which is another indicator of inclusion and an example of multi-agency working.

The document also refers to the Code of Practice on Education, which falls under the Disability Discrimination Ordinance, as a guide to reducing barriers to learning and participation. Reference is made to teacher training and continuous professional development equipping staff to respond to student diversity. The comprehensive nature of the Index can be influential as a policy framework, a monitoring mechanism, and a training resource. The usage of the Index in the context of special schools in Hong Kong as a tool to develop staff training, assess school policies, or safeguard ethnic minorities has yet to be investigated. Although literature abounds with studies indicating the necessity of establishing relationships

with parents, even more so for children with disabilities and ethnic minorities, there appears to be little effort from schools and other community bodies targeted at this in Hong Kong.

The possibility of misinformed opinions is highly likely in the absence of critical reflection, leading to adverse ramifications for home-school partnership—the added complexity of cultural and linguistic differences between teachers and minority families increases the need for dialogue and better understanding. Most importantly, professionals need to welcome the responsibility of supporting the equitable participation of all parents in their children's education (Kim, 2009); this could be highly impactful in initiating partnership programmes. It is suggested that the adoption of inclusive attitudes highlights the value of striving for equitable partnership for families from diverse backgrounds. Such changes can also guide the development of positive attitudes toward partnering with minority parents, teachers' self-efficacy, and openness toward trying varied strategies. This will undoubtedly create a domino effect on parents as they feel welcomed, listened to, and offered more opportunities to be involved

2.6.5 Disability discrimination ordinance

In 1996, the Equal Opportunities Commission in Hong Kong established various ordinances to safeguard the individuals from family status, sex, race, and disability discrimination. The latter ordinance, and to some extent race, is of particular interest to the current study. The Disability Discrimination Ordinance protects individuals' equal access to services, including participation in meaningful local education. All education institutions are required to uphold the ordinance. The Code of Practice on Education (EOC, 1996), also referred to as the Code, was designed to support the facilitation of the ordinance. It enforces standards wherein the

rights of individuals with disabilities are protected and that parents are also aware of these rights and their responsibilities. The ordinance and the Code are to be made available to and promoted to all parents, including minority families.

A closer examination of the Code reveals numerous clauses that identify the unique needs of minority parents. Clause 16, for example, which speaks of educational services, states that educational institutions are to provide information through legible modes of communication. Here, the linguistic barriers seem to be addressed. Furthermore, parent participation in children's education is mentioned in Clause 25.5, where parent-teacher associations are allocated as facilitators for equal opportunities, placing responsibility on schools to welcome parents from all backgrounds. Nevertheless, it also encourages parents to actively partner with schools to ensure their children's educational accommodations and recreational needs are met. The Code also encourages teachers to gain a better understanding of equal opportunities, but it does not state through what means. Another missing aspect in the Code is the lack of weight given to parental advocacy. Furthermore, teacher education also fails to make an appearance. Overall, the ordinance, despite being well intended, does not appear to highlight diversity as much. This is a failure to communicate the risk of marginalisation experienced by ethnic minority students, a point echoed by Hue and Kennedy (2014). Besides the ordinance, Hong Kong's obligations under UN conventions (e.g. ICERD and ICESCR) to eradicate racial discrimination and ensure the protection of rights (Kapai, 2015) cements the Government's commitment to inclusion, although effective measures to achieve these aims in education has yet to be seen.

2.6.6 Teacher training

UNESCO (2017b, p. 35) states it succinctly:

> In an inclusive and equitable education system, all teachers need to approach the
> diversity among the learners with a positive attitude and an understanding of inclusive
> practices. Teachers can acquire much of the preparation they need regarding such
> inclusive practices during their initial training and through short, customised, in-service
> training units.

Inclusive education significantly emphasises teacher education in advancing positive working relationships with parents. For example, when teachers adopt positive beliefs about the efficacy of home-school partnership programmes, they will recognise the need to utilise strategies that can include minority parents (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2002) and demonstrate respect and willingness to learn from parents (Swick & McKnight, 1989). Also, respectful and collegial in-service education can positively impact teachers' self-efficacy (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2002). The opportunities to interact with parents may also help teachers perceive them as collaborators (Seitsinger et al., 2008).

As bridges between school and home, teachers have a pivotal role. Often, most teacher training does not provide enough exposure to the actualities of the role which demands teaching a diverse classroom (Richards & Clough, 2004) or working with parents (Bingham & Abernathy, 2007; Epstein & Sanders, 2009;Forlin et al., 2008). The contemporary teacher in a highly globalised world cannot make do with training limited to instructional content. Attitudes and skills to support the heterogenous classroom, be it of learning needs or cultures

(in some cases both) is crucial. Thus, ensuring that teachers have opportunities to equip themselves for this undertaking is essential. Opportunities to access relevant and timely teacher training can have positive outcomes for teacher self-efficacy, instruction, relationships with parents, and overall efforts towards inclusion (Baker & Murray, 2011; Murray, Curran, & Zellers, 2008; Romi & Leyser, 2006). Exposing pre-service teachers to potential scenarios likely to occur in schools/classrooms may be tricky. Yet, the potential of teachers dealing with complex issues, especially in interacting with parents, speaks to its necessity.

The need for rigorous, relevant, and continuous training to develop best practice is undeniable. Teachers' self-efficacy significantly impacts instruction. Meeting the needs of an inclusive classroom requires continuous professional development and teacher education. Loreman and colleagues review mentions the need for teacher self-efficacy, the belief that they are capable of supporting inclusion, and that the process of developing practices through creative means for improving methods of working collaboratively should be constant. For instance, Ainscow (2001) noted that it would be challenging to encourage inclusion to teachers in the absence of support. Loreman and colleagues indicate that teacher education cannot exist in isolation, away from the classroom; they acknowledge the need for "deliberate and required participation in teacher education for inclusive education at pre-and in-service levels" (2014, p. 171). Other authors also concur with this suggestion (Grinberg & Goldfarb, 1998; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2002). Furthermore, the current study asserts that teacher training cannot be limited to instruction but should empower teachers with skills, knowledge, and support, thus becoming an important area of discussion. Additionally, training needs to extend to paraprofessionals (e.g. teaching assistants); this supports consistency in practice

and empowers all professionals working with children. Like the backbone of any school, paraprofessionals play a crucial role in the daily operations and functioning of the classroom, omitting them from opportunities to develop their skills would be disadvantageous for the advancement of inclusive education.

2.6.7 Multi-agency working

Inclusive education necessitates working collaboratively. In the case of children with disabilities, where the input of multiple professionals is key, the necessity is increased. Loreman et al. (2014, p. 176) mention collaboration and shared responsibility as "a key feature" of inclusion; they add more stakeholders into the mix, such as the wider community staff, students, and even collaborations between school systems. Collaboration between an extensive network demands high levels of administrative organisation. However, until it is prioritised, or even mandated, it may remain an ideal. Besides collaborative practices, the authors also highlight contextual relevance; they emphasise the availability of "professional development based on data relating to the needs of the staff and the impact of subsequent education being measured against this data." This suggests the need for schools to gather data about their demographic, student and family needs and the views and experiences of professionals.

Additionally, Todd (2014) argues that multi-agency working can also contribute to addressing social inclusion; it is a practice, a cultural shift that can support the development of inclusive education. However, such working relationships require the "integration of services," which demands extensive consideration from professionals to establish and

maintain new "ways of working," along with an evolved management structure. It may even require adapting to a new working model altogether.

However, Todd also problematises the prospect of multi-agency working due to various agencies' aims and priorities. Regardless of the efficacy of multi-agency collaboration, it may not contribute to inclusion. The author cautions that despite increased attention on bringing together a variety of services working for the welfare of children, effective multi-agency working is not a means for inclusive education as a shared educational focus may not necessarily be universal. In the absence of explicit reflections on the coordination of services, conceptualisations of practice, and political literacy, the move towards increased multi-agency working may create an accidental impact on inclusion or even create negative consequences, such as losing momentum on work already established. Todd (2014) suggests that greater political literacy is required to structure multi-agency actions cohesively, yet current ways of working may not be conducive for collaborative partnerships with young children and families.

Rather than working around the existing professional functions, Robinson, Atkinson and Downing (2008) suggest that multi-agency working requires working around the family unit. In the process of multi-agency working however, there is a risk of pushing the narrative of a systemic embodiment of the medical model, which implicitly purports that children and the family develop into requiring "fixing" is undeniable (Todd, 2014). Alternatively, we find that education professionals can practise more agency in their roles; they have more ownership. In some instances, this might extend to the categorisation of parents according to their styles of

involvement, students' academic performance and behaviour. In contrast, families are positioned as passive recipients, where the discreet power places them at a disadvantage, which is even more pronounced for minority families. Multi-agency working can assist inclusion only if it facilitates the rich storying of the identities of all stakeholders – through the inclusion of families' voices, a challenge to the deficit and blame perspectives of children, families, and communities; and a response to social injustices (Todd, 2014).

Furthermore, school leadership is unequivocally necessary to drive such efforts. Leadership in schools that express strong support towards inclusion is noted as effective in supporting the needs of diverse learners by Loreman et al. (2014). Some of the key points about leadership extracted from the review include examining and taking action by reflecting on the direction of the school and in turn, its model and working conditions, as well as questioning if the vision includes all stakeholders in creating the school's approach and focus. In agreement, Sharma & Desai (2008) also purport that inclusive leaders are democratic and transformative.

The role of student participation is highlighted as key in Loreman and colleague's review. However, for students with learning and communication challenges, as is the case for this study, the need for an advocate cannot be depreciated. This presents further essential considerations, especially in light of the challenges presented by communicating roles in ways that are understood and accepted. This includes clarifying avenues for participation, and the required know-how to participate in ways both feasible, effective, and representative of minority groups.

It is important to note that not all schools will have the ability to enforce such undertakings; hence, it might account for why very few have successfully adopted inclusive practices even in mainstream settings. Crucially, however, Loreman and colleagues acknowledge that special schools are also to be assigned responsibility, in that they too need to align with inclusive education developments. This may not mean that schools should undergo a radical transformation of structures, but instead, focus on adopting a mindset that welcomes more inclusive practices regardless of setting.

A good example of multi-agency working can be found in the 2010 project led by the National College, which set out to promote parental partnership in shaping services in the United Kingdom. With ten participating educational institutes ranging from secondary and primary schools and children's centres, collaboration through relationships built via multi-agency working was critical to the project. It employed parent support workers and managerial community and learning partnership coordinators. Staff involved in this project hailed from diverse backgrounds that may not necessarily be education, such as counsellors. The project was privy to a range of knowledge and expertise from areas such as the voluntary sector, mental health, nursing, and other service providers for programmes supporting families. More significantly, data from each cluster participating in this project was disseminated amongst various sectors, including housing, social services, and the voluntary sector. Parental voices were brought forward by a commissioner for parents appointed by the local authority to ensure their views were accounted for during decision-making. Accountability was clearly delineated.

Parents received the establishment of children's centres positively; it encouraged parental engagement in various programmes, increasing their understanding of improving their knowledge and developing their confidence to engage with educators. One participating school found initiating contact with parents more effective by reaching out to them by going out into the community. Furthermore, offering parents opportunities to engage in educational programmes to support their children's learning was found in this school. Another finding included the positive reception of coffee mornings that provided crèche facilities; this was also advantageous for outreach workers to engage with families.

The welfare of all children, regardless of background, must be prioritised. However, additional vigilance is required for vulnerable groups at risk of marginalisation. Maintaining collective data to equip our understanding of their needs better can help improve practice. A particular concern relating to the current study is that of 'ethnic' monitoring. Only when agencies work collaboratively to understand the needs and concerns of demographics at risk of exclusion, as the absence of such considerations is by no means exemplary of inclusion.

2.7 What is it to partner?

This section aims to draw attention to the needs of Nepalese children with special needs and their parents, arguing their position of disadvantage in partnering with special schools in Hong Kong. Dunst, Trivette & Snyder (2000), like other authors (e.g., Cross, 1989; Pugh, 1989), describe home-school partnership as stakeholders working collaboratively towards a common goal. There is shared decision-making, responsibility, along with mutual trust and respect. The framing of partnership rests on the notion that the relationship between

stakeholders is reciprocal, complementary and mutual (Dunst & Dempsey, 2007). Parents are noted for partaking actively in decision-making and implementation; they are as accountable as professionals. Parents receive services but contribute to them too, and they are also viewed as stakeholders having equal expertise and strengths (Wolfendale, 1985, p.14).

Like inclusive education, parental involvement is also challenging to define. For instance, Scribner et al. (1999) found that teachers in a high-performing Hispanic elementary school described partnering with parents as providing academic support, while parents deemed it to entail a focus on the well-being of children. Furthermore, parental involvement at home and school are described as distinctly separate (Epstein, 1995; Fantuzzo, Tighe, & Childs, 2000; Manz, Fantuzzo, & Power, 2004). Parental visibility in schools is considered more important than involvement at home and a critical component in children's academic achievement; a problematic idea for parents who cannot fulfil this proposition.

Auerbach (2007) identify limitations in the understanding of family experiences, often presented via narratives that hail from white, middle- to upper-class backgrounds. For instance, Wolfendale (1985, p. 14) describes partnership as involving active parents who engage in decision-making as well as key in its implementation. Parents are viewed to have similar strengths and expertise who are thus, able to contribute to the partnership sharing responsibilities and being mutually accountable with professionals. Such ideas of partnership could be problematic for families unable to fulfil such demands.

Ferguson, et al. (2014) argue for a reframing of parental involvement to highlight partnership, suggesting that the language itself ought to reflect the establishment of relationships between home and school (Banks & McGee, 2001; Barton, Drake, Perez, St. Louis & George, 2004; Ferguson & Galindo, 2008; Lopez et al., 2001). Considering the language used in Hong Kong, such as 'home-school co-operation,' there is room to infer that a tacit statement is embedded in the terminology. It either denotes that stakeholders are working together on an equal footing or that they need to negotiate. With further deliberation on the arguments made previously about access to educational goods as a consequence of capital, it is possible to contend that ethnic minority families who don't have the necessary capital would not be successful in 'cooperating' with schools or might even have to follow the school's lead with little say. Ferguson et al. (2014) refer to Abrams and Gibbs (2002), Ferguson (2008), and Harry, Kalyanpur, and Day (1999), proposing that partnerships between home and school require reciprocal interaction and collaboration, where stakeholders engage in critical reflection and possess cultural awareness.

To conceptualise the interaction between parents and schools, Cunningham and Davis (1985) present a practical model. The "expert model" isolates knowledge within the professional; it represents them as the principal source of expertise while positioning parents as passive recipients of information. On the other hand, where parents have more agency to make critical decisions and the liberty to select services according to their preference, the interaction is described as a "consumer model"; the professional is only a service provider. Lastly, the "transplant model" regards professionals as key decision-makers and the primary source of knowledge, while parents are valuable resources for active support and intervention. The term 'transplant' is telling, as the professional's expertise is 'transplanted'

to parents who then implement strategies and goals.

Another model (Table 2.1) is presented by Bastiani (1987) which is suggestive of similar ideas to Cunningham and Davies, involving varying types of parent's access to agency and influence.

Compensation	Educational inequality is overcome with shifts in attitude rather than structural modifications.
	Teachers are required to advance parental engagement.
	A deficit model of family life, where parents are viewed as passive, requiring professional's involvement.
Communication	Information about schools and children's progress is vital to parents' engagement with schools, demanding communication opportunities be sought.
Accountability	Parents as consumers of educational goods, exercising choice over school, with various models of accountability.
Participation	Shared goals and complementary stakeholders' roles are seen as equal.

Table 2.1 Bastiani (1987) model of partnership

The active, involved and decision-making image of the parent image does not appear to be a universal outlook on parental involvement. As demonstrated by the authors above, there are differing views about partnering with schools, likely resulting in variances in parental participation styles. In some instances, it is not a matter of choice but circumstance, with various factors presenting as barriers to participating in ways delineated by schools; often, excluded parents are from minority backgrounds. Further expanding the breadth of inclusive education, this study argues for the development of safety nets to support the engagement of minority parents in schools for better outcomes for their children.

In the absence of inclusive home-school partnership programmes, there is a lack of opportunities for teachers to develop positive beliefs about the capacity of minority parents to be involved (Burton, 1992; Michael, Arnold, Magliocca, & Miller, 1992). The positive link between the existence of such programmes and policies was identified by Kessler-Sklar and Baker (2000). Their survey of 169 school districts in 15 states in the United States demonstrated that 95% of school districts that did not include a formal policy on home-school partnership, and subsequently, did not have programmes. Thus, school policies that highlight home-school partnership are necessary for supporting teacher's beliefs about the efficacy of minority parental involvement (e.g., Chavkin, 2000), along with administrative support of teachers' practices (Chavkin, 2000; Moosam Karabenick & Adams 2001). Furthermore, policies need to be supported by systems that help develop teachers' beliefs that minority parents are keen to be involved (Moosa et al., 2001). The ability to work with parents could be perceived as a particular set of skills or requiring various resources. Although skills are essential, a key ingredient that supports collaboration with parents is a positive attitude, producing more significant results for inclusion (Forlin, Loreman, Sharma & Earle, 2007). Therefore, reflecting on attitudes and the values that inform them is vital for teachers attempting to collaborate with parents, especially those from diverse backgrounds. In the absence of opportunities for reflection, the potential to foster stereotypes, disconnect, and misinterpretation leading to adverse outcomes, is expected.

Multiple authors have put forth a range of recommendations. Viewed collectively, it calls for an institutional reconstruction, with various areas working in tandem, from policies that emphasise home-school partnership (Burton, 1992; Chrispeels, 1996), administrative support (Davies, 1993; Swick & McKnight, 1989), to the establishment of physical spaces where

families and stakeholders can collaborate (Davies, 1993). Other recommendations and ways to develop more robust, inclusive ties between home and school include adopting a positive attitude toward the inclusion of minority parents by actively seeking their involvement. Positive beliefs about the efficacy of partnership acknowledge the need for strategies to include minority parents at school (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2002). Time is a crucial resource; thus, making it available to parents and professionals through organised interaction welcomes the idea of viewing parents as collaborators in home-school partnership (Michael et al., 1992; Seitsinger et al., 2008).

Stemming from this, critical reflection on home-school partnership practices can be supported by action research (Davies, 1993). Initiatives that seek partnership with families also require support that extends beyond the four walls of schools, a task that can be led by professionals who receive specific training for this task (Chavkin, 2000; Davies, 1993; Huss-Keeler, 1997). Some authors suggest developing categories of parental involvement, adding that it may contribute to the advancement of research by reducing misinterpretations often brought about by contrasting definitions (Kim, 2009).

2.7.1 Challenges to partnership

Coming to terms with their children's diagnosis can be a stressful experience for parents. In the process, understanding the different features from that of a mainstream education system can present further complexities, proving to be elusive and challenging for parents. More so for parents who do not have the right capital, the world of special education can be daunting.

Improvements in home-school partnership are an extension of inclusive education, but the accompanying challenges are innumerable. Aside from the difficulties teachers express in collaborating with parents (Bingham & Abernathy, 2007; Leung & Mak, 2010; Wishart & Manning, 1996), inadequate planning and coordination (Daniel-White, 2002; Leitch & Tangri, 1988), lack of appropriate strategies or structures (McLaughlin & Shields, 1987), poor collaboration among agencies (Chavkin, 2000; Moles, 1993); and outcome assessments (Chavkin, 2000; Davies et al., 1992) of programmes all contribute to perpetuating barriers to home-school partnership.

In addition to the characteristics mentioned above, other studies cite additional barriers that impede working relationships between schools and minority parents. The difficulties include educational level (Daniel-White, 2002; Li, 2003), language (Daniel-White, 2002; Sohn & Wang, 2006), socioeconomic status (Pryor, 2001; Sacker, Schoon, & Bartley, 2002), cultural nuances (Kalyanpur et al., 2000; Ryndak & Downing, 1996), disparities in child-rearing approaches (Schneider & Lee, 1990), and a lack of social networks (Lareau, 1987; Schneider, 1993) to name a few. Studies also suggest that minority parents are viewed as less involved with their children's school (Geenen, Powers, & Lopez-Vasquez, 2001; Hughes, Gleason, & Zhang, 2005). Such an outlook can contribute to the perception of the underachievement of minority children as an outcome of low levels of parental involvement (Kim, 2009). Other factors that impact educational experiences include poverty, which according to Lieter and Krauss (2004), may quadruple difficulties in securing services for children with disabilities. Time poverty (Newman & Chin, 2003) was another feature cited as a potential barrier; for example, parents may not afford to take leave from work to attend school programmes or may need to provide care for other children.

Within-school barriers are not conducive to home-school partnership for minority families. Factors contributing to this include perceptions of the efficacy of parental involvement (Desimone, Finn-Stevenson & Henrich, 2000) and schools' disposition in advancing positive communication with parents (Halsey, 2005; Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001). Finally, initiatives require policies and leadership to be on board, which demands planning and coordination (Daniel-White, 2002) and collaboration among agencies (Chavkin, 2000), yet these can be a barrier too (Fantuzzo et al., 2000; Nakagawa, 2000).

Deciphering hidden curriculums (Bowles & Gintis, 1976) is also crucial to navigating the school's system and culture; difficulties in doing so can implicitly create exclusionary experiences for families who may not possess the means to participate meaningfully. The 'means' is described as cultural and social capital. Furthermore, contrasting capital and worldviews between teachers and parents are also cited as additional barriers to home-school participation (Horvat et al., 2003; Kao & Rutherford, 2007; Kim & Schneider, 2005).

However it is important to note that ethnic minority parents do engage in their children's education. According to Davies (1993), meaningful and positive contact with schools is sought by minority parents, especially to hear that their children are doing well (Scribner et al., 1999; Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001). However, when schools fail to make room for diverse approaches and instead pay heed solely to narrow definitions of involvement, they risk excluding parents from taking on meaningful roles with the belief that they are not interested or capable of being active collaborators. In addition, particular needs must be met

by conducting orientations in their native language (Pryor, 2001) and workshops to inform parents of available community resources (Desimone et al., 2000).

For children with disabilities, parents assuming the role of an advocate is considered essential by many (Wang, Mannan, Poston, Turnbull, & Summers, 2004). However, the difficulties inherent in the process are undeniable (Trainor, 2010a; Wang et al., 2004). Some challenges have been described as the inability to grasp complicated jargon (Park & Turnbull, 2001) and the feeling of intimidation (Fish, 2008) when interacting with professionals. Parents might also make comparisons between themselves and professionals over power differentials (Leiter & Krauss, 2004). Not "knowing enough" (Kalyanpur et al, 2000) can also hinder the advocacy process. Thus, ensuring parents are empowered with information and skills to navigate this foreign terrain is essential. To achieve this, it is crucial to support parental agency and parental advocacy. However, the power imbalance between stakeholders can profoundly impact children's educational and subsequent outcomes, which Todd (2012, p. 77) suggests that professionals are actively involved in making identity claims on behalf of students. Professionals also have more ownership over their roles, which differs vastly from parents, who are positioned as passive recipients. For ethnic minorities, considering the barriers, erases parental agency entirely.

The manifestation of the power differentials between stakeholders is strikingly evident in the Individual Education Plan meeting. As an important gathering of stakeholders where appropriate services and educational accommodations due to children are discussed (Burke, 2012), the Individual Education Plan meeting demonstrates the complicated working

relationship between parents, professionals, and other stakeholders. It also reveals wide gaps in knowledge between stakeholders. For example, Leiter & Krauss (2004) observe that parents participate in Individual Education Plan meetings consistently lower than teachers. Kalyanpur et al. (2000) remark that this may be due to unfamiliar jargon. In another study, Torres-Burgo, Reyes-Watson, and Brusca-Vega (2010) found that the difficulty of Hispanic parents' understanding of the Individual Education Plan resulted in them communicating less. Thus, parents were offered less advice than their non-Hispanic counterparts.

To engage in dialogue with professionals, parents have the difficult task of understanding contextual norms. For culturally and linguistically diverse parents to pursue the role of advocates, they need to share a common understanding with professionals about ways of talking, who talks when, and the validity of ideas which can be complicated (Kozleski et al., 2008; Lai & Vadeboncoeur, 2012). There is an unspoken consensus on what participation looks like, usually set out by the school, with little consideration for the equitable participation of families from diverse backgrounds, be it culture, language, education, or beliefs. (Gonzales & Gabel, 2017).

Todd (2006, p.68) identifies threats to home-school partnership. A lack of real partnership, the first threat, relegates partnership to a concept, which the author suggests can be identified in policy stating parents' involvement in education. Furthermore, barriers to partnership are created with the insistence on normative notions of parents and methods to engage with schools. Contrary to inclusion, professional practice seem to encompass assumptions that deem parents as incompetent when they do not meet schools' expectations. The second threat can occur when practitioners fail to engage with parents as a diverse group or are unable to

devise a variety of ways to engage with them or hear them on their own terms. Finally, the third threat is a pathologising deficit notion of parents underpinning home-school partnership initiatives.

2.7.2 Cultural nuances

The dominance of a Western lens on home-school partnership research diminishes diversity. For example, much literature on home-school partnerships often refers to the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). However, similar to this study's concern about the absence of experiences that fall outside the dominant class, other authors have been wary of Bronfenbrenner's model in light of its dismissal of the impact of race and other socio-cultural elements (Abdul-Adil & Farmer, 2006; Garcia-Coll et al., 1996; Tillman, 2009).

Studies from the West note home-school partnership aligning with White middle-class beliefs, capacities, and involvement styles (Lareau, 1987, 1996; Li, 2006). In the United States, where parents are required by law to participate actively in their children's learning, home-school partnership has been elevated to great heights with various initiatives attempting to bridge the gap. However, despite this, challenges can persist. For example, supporting cultural and linguistically diverse families may present different challenges for teachers who have little exposure to diversity. Gonzales & Gabel (2017) state that teachers' pedagogical practices and perception of parental roles, which are a product of cultural experiences and beliefs, may differ from other cultures.

Manz, Hughes, Barnabas, Bracaliello & Ginsburg-Block (2010) propose a distinction

between the reception of family literacy programmes for White and middle-to-high-income families compared to ethnic minority families. It is suggested that qualitatively, the latter were found not to receive as much benefit; the causes were assumed to be strategies failing to align with minority families' norms and values. The authors suggest two reasons: a relative lack of educational experience and engagement amongst disadvantaged parents; and a lack of interventions that are culturally valid for low-income and ethnic minority families – that is, studies whose approaches to intervention are consistent with their values and norms. This evidence suggests that interventions can be poorly informed of the social and familial values of some parent groups for whom these interventions are intended to support.

Continuing on in the American context, it is interesting to note how parental involvement is defined in empirical studies. They tend to highlight the parental investment of time, energy, intellectual or monetary capital, and the leveraging of social or professional networks on behalf of the school (Fishman & Nickerson, 2015; Hayes, 2012; Ice & Hoover-Dempsey, 2011; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005). On the other hand, Gonzales and Gabe (2017) point to other forms of parental involvement that are not as visible, understood, or defined (Bower & Griffin, 2011; De Carvalho, 2000; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Soto-Manning & Swick, 2006; Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996). What it means to be 'involved' with schools is often influenced by socioeconomics, culture, and language, amongst others (Ice & Hoover-Dempsey, 2011). Unfortunately, these other ways of partnering usually fail to be acknowledged and, in some cases, disregarded as they do not conform to conventional patterns of involvement (Geenan, Powers & Lopez-Vasquez, 2001).

Garcia, Perez, and Ortiz (2000) found Mexican American parents to perceive delays in language development as typical, which was in contrast to the views of school professionals. Subsequently, such disparities in perspectives led to assumptions that parents were in denial or resistant due to a lack of response. Here, cultural interpretations of child development and the professionals' inability to acknowledge differences create room for contention. The authors cite Kozleski et al. (2008, p.27), who contend that narrow views on parental involvement could render diverse families to be "subordinated to the rules and procedures of institutionalised practice."

Kim's (2009) literature review on barriers experienced by parents from minority backgrounds that prevent them from participating in their children's schools in the United States identified teachers' perceptions, beliefs and school resources. The review defined minority parents as those who come from a lower socioeconomic status, hail from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and those of single marital status as well. The limitations of this review include parental experiences of school-based involvement and home-school conferencing only. Kim argues that home-school partnership requires a holistic approach, where the contextual needs and limitations of both home and school are considered. Kim revealed that successful and long-term collaborative home-school partnership can be built by understanding the nature of minority parental involvement. It also draws attention to the dangers of the hierarchical structure of parental involvement and its implications for minority parental involvement.

Kim also draws attention to the limitations of studies where minority parents from various socioeconomic status have been compared and to the diverse methods that minority parents

of the same socioeconomic status get involved. However, she suggests that there is reason to believe that the experiences are similar regardless of socioeconomic status. She recommends that further comparison of these groups may provide more information about the extent to which socioeconomic status is (or is not) an influencing factor in how parents partner with schools.

Akbar and Woods (2019) focused on the views and experiences of parents to address the intersectionality between ethnicity and disability. Aiming to improve outcomes for ethnic minority children with special needs by developing culturally competent services for children by addressing stereotyping and identifying features across different cultural contexts. In their study with 15 families of children (mainly with Autism) from different ethnic backgrounds in the UK, Canada, and Ireland, the authors identified central themes that reflect challenges and support parental experiences (Table 2.2)

Stressors	Resources
Reactions to diagnosis	A sense of advocacy
Sense of isolation	Perceptions of service providers
Worrying about child's future	Religious faith
Strained marital relationships	
Stigma in the community	

Table 2.2 Akbar and Woods' (2019) study's central themes

Interestingly, some parents in this review were found to have adopted a proactive approach, despite encountering barriers, citing reasons of a sense of duty to advocate on behalf of their children. Some of their actions involved learning English, researching, and joining courses

and groups to increase their familiarity with the terminologies relevant to their children's educational needs. They described their role as being multi-faceted, not limited to being parents but an advocate and teacher, a role that usually tends to run around the clock. As for interactions with service providers, all of the studies in the review mentioned accessing services, cultural competence, communication, power differentials, and even disconnect amongst professionals as facilitators and barriers to some degree. Furthermore, there is a sense of frustration in navigating the world of special needs. The review described bureaucracy, slow, long waiting times, and inaccessibility of interventions as exhausting.

What is evident from Akbar and Woods study, is that access to opportunities had to be created by parents. Although some may have received support from schools, and the wider community, parent's agency impacted positive changes. Similar to Trainor's (2010a) claim that increased capital positively impacts access to educational opportunities, parents from UK, Ireland and Canada expanded their capital to be successful in the field of home-school partnership.

Upon whom does the onus fall to ensure inclusive home-school partnership? Moles (1993) suggests that schools have, by design, broader access to a wealth of resources such as funding, knowledge, and human resources too. Also, within the dynamics of home-school partnership, teachers play an essential role; initiating dialogue with parents and providing encouragement to participate increases the potential for parents to feel motivated to be involved (Green et al., 2007; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). In addition, involving minority parents in meaningful home-school partnerships requires teachers to believe in and be willing

to include minority parents (McLaughlin & Shields, 1987). With support from teachers, minority parents think they can help their children (Epstein, 1986) and be effective in their children's education (Watkins, 1997). However, Kim (2009) argues that the difficulties of partnering with schools that present themselves through cultural, linguistic, and economic barriers are complex and require societal intervention, spanning across time.

2.7.3 Partnering with schools in Hong Kong

The Basic Education Guide, a curriculum for primary schooling, highlights home-school partnership (officially termed as home-school co-operation), which includes the wider community, as an essential social resource contributing to students' learning (EDB, 2014b) In response to global reform trends, the broader ecosystem of home and community is recognised by the Education Bureau, where collaboration is encouraged. It also acknowledges multi-agency working and various systemic and strategic mechanisms that contribute to its efficacy. The curriculum refers to the overlapping of home, school, and community areas that can promote positive learning outcomes for children, reinforcing the need to establish collaborative links among the three. It also identifies the changing landscape of society, resulting in diverse classrooms, thus, necessitating close ties between home and school to respond to diverse needs. The curriculum advocates for a culture of inclusion, where diversity in culture, colour, and creed is respected. However, studies on home-school partnership in Hong Kong, although scant, does not reveal a positive outlook.

Multiple studies (e.g. Forlin et al., 2014; Ng, 1999; Ng, 2009; Ng & Lee, 2015; Wong, 2002; Wong et al., 2004) offer an analysis of partnership in primary schools revealed that practice merely fulfilled practical purposes of "policy rhetoric" (Ng & Yuen, 2015b). An examination

of power relations between parents and teachers reveals that home-school partnership do not translate well to practice. For example, viewing parents as a resource was primarily utilitarian, with ethnocentric attitudes when inviting parents to participate and a rhetorical approach to their participation in decision-making. Furthermore, distant working relationships between parents and teachers were revealed, with some evidence suggesting resistance. With the introduction of home-school partnership programmes, teachers were found to exhibit demarcations that reflected implicit and explicit ideologies in their attitudes towards the initiative (Ng & Yuen, 2015b). Although some expressed altruism, there was hesitation among others. Ng (2009) reports that responses were primarily dependent on teachers' dispositions, self-efficacy, and understanding of the initiative. Ng and Yuen (2015b) also found strategies to engage with parents were not taken on positively by teachers; their attitudes towards partnership revealed that while some were welcoming, there was reluctance as well.

Studies also indicate that stakeholders described their working relationships as weak (Ng, 1999). Power imbalances between stakeholders were also accounted for by teachers' unwillingness to explore new partnership approaches (Ng & Yuen, 2015b). In a fast-paced city like Hong Kong, the reality of time poverty for parents from all social backgrounds is a certainty. Ng and Lee (2015) discovered that parents whose children attend special schools in Hong Kong did not express a desire to partake in volunteering opportunities or higher-level involvement, such as decision-making and policy-making. What they were interested in instead were the supervision of children at home and engagements revolving around programmes outside of school, such as parent groups.

As for ethnic minority parents, in contrast to the uninvolved minority parent trope, the HKCSS Parental Involvement Report (2010) discredits this stereotype. Ethnic minority parents in Hong Kong have been documented as having high aspirations for their children's education (Lopez et al., 2001). However, as capital manifests in different forms for parents from middle and working-class backgrounds, despite the desire for their children to flourish in schools, the resources at their disposal differ, resulting in utilising different methods to achieve goals (Mehan, 1992; Ong-Dean, 2009; Trainor, 2010b).

Notably, there appears to be a wide literature gap on minority parents and their working relationships with schools in Hong Kong; this is a cause for concern. For the most part, although teachers may agree with the philosophical standing of inclusion, the practicalities of how it might manifest in schools are questionable. Considering the findings above, where professionals and parents who come from the same ethnic background cite difficulties partnering, it does not reveal a positive picture of the experiences of ethnic minority parents in home-school partnership in Hong Kong.

The current study contends that the inclusion of parents in schools through partnership is advantageous. It can garner positive outcomes for children, empower parents with a sense of agency (and subsequent responsibility), and not to mention the sharing of responsibility for children's learning with schools. For example, in the United Kingdom, significant shifts in policies aiming to support children with disabilities have been taking place where multi-agency work has been emphasised (Todd, 2012). This includes shifts in perspectives and welcoming of collaborative relationships between stakeholders which require examining

discourse, context, and conceptualisation of disability and stakeholder roles (p.78). Furthermore, how parents are conceived of by professionals as competent contributors raises questions about stereotypes, the extent to which schools know the parents, and the different ways they might be able to play a part in schools. It also compels reflection about teacher beliefs, attitudes, and skills to partner with diverse families. Notably, it challenges institutional structures to design possibilities conducive to home-school partnership.

Although meagre, most of the policies mentioned above touch upon the inclusion of parents in partnership with schools. Addressing linguistic and cultural differences, most initiatives do not seem to adequately emphasise the disparities circumstances present for some families. Despite recommendations that range from enhanced communication, teacher training, and access to social networks such as parent-teacher associations, there appears to be a lack of focus on how these measures can be achieved or measured. Parents are recognised as contributors to partnership, but at best, they are to provide additional assistance to schools to complete school-based tasks rather than contribute.

Terms such as integration and inclusion can be found scattered across various policy documents and initiatives, but appear to function as lip service, regurgitated objectives from two decades ago demonstrating little development from when dialogue about partnership and inclusion of minorities first began. Integration is predominantly in use, as opposed to inclusion, prompting questions about the feasibility of bringing about institutional change; the emphasis still appears to be person-centred.

With rigid structures, inadequate policies, and superficial initiatives in place, robust partnerships, for the wider Hong Kong community, seem idealistic. A need for a paradigm shift seems to be critical. Instead of positioning minority families as having additional needs to the typical Hong Kong family, viewing their concerns as inclusive of the general Hong Kong population would convey a more inclusive approach.

Chapter 3 Methodology

This study seeks to explore the experiences of multiple individuals as they attempt to partner with each other in the context of special schools in Hong Kong. These individuals were invited to engage in conversations about their knowledge and experience. Since these stakeholders occupy roles of principal, social worker, teacher, and parent, they occupy key positions in the education and wellbeing of ethnic minority children with special needs in Hong Kong, signifying the importance of their role. Literature gaps in this specific context justify the need for investigation for two reasons: informed understanding of areas of concern and reflecting on developing practice and provision. The study has narrowed its inquiry to Nepalese families, asking, How do primary special needs schools and Nepalese parents in Hong Kong understand, develop, and practice home-school partnership? The sub-questions that will support this investigation include:

1. How do stakeholders conceptualise home-school partnership?

2. What are stakeholders' understanding of their roles and responsibilities in home-school partnership?

3. What do stakeholders understand of national and school policies on home-school partnership?

4. How do stakeholders practise home-school partnership?

5. How do Nepalese parents and Chinese parents partner with schools?

6. How stakeholders experience home-school partnership?

7. What are the barriers to home-school partnership?

8. How can home-school partnership be improved?

As the study progressed from proposal to data collection, the COVID-19 pandemic reached all corners of the globe. The unforeseen circumstances presented multiple barriers for this study as the daily lives were impacted for both researcher and study participants. Multiple obstacles arose, such as: securing contact with potential research sites, participants' motivation to devote time to the study, and social distancing measures interfering with interview arrangements. Following the last point, technological solutions were sought, such as interviewing remotely via Zoom or telephone. However, for some participants, such possibilities were also met with challenges. Additionally, not only did the pandemic create difficulties for data collection, but it also added an unplanned dimension to the study. The pandemic's impact was reiterated frequently throughout the data collection process. Moreover, it was described as having significance for home-school partnership and, thus, warrants mention in this study.

This chapter will delineate the philosophical underpinnings of the methodological approach, ethical considerations, and other elements of the data collection and analysis process. Where relevant, the researcher will indicate reflexive practice throughout this chapter as it is considered essential in the approach particular to this study.

3.1 A qualitative approach

At the core of this study is the endeavour to explore human experiences and how they interpret and make sense of them. Such an inquiry is befitting of a qualitative approach,

recognised as being interpretive and naturalistic, and where the researcher attempts to make sense of and interpret phenomena through the meanings assigned by individuals (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p.3). Attempting to meet the needs of such aims and ensuring alignment with subsequent research design decisions, the study conforms to Cresswell's (2013, p. 44) definition of qualitative research where:

> the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns or themes. The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflectivity of the researcher, a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and its contribution to the literature or a call for change.

In agreement with Cresswell's stance, this study assumes Maxwell's (2013, p. 5) interactive model, shown in Figure 3.1, for research design as appropriate. It comprises five components that address research design features. Although it does not stray far from other models, Maxwell highlights an interactive process, rather than being linear or cyclical. The model places the research questions at the epicentre of the design, influencing all key design decisions. Maxwell highlights that the model's absence of ethics does not denote its lack of acknowledgment. Instead, it implies that ethical concerns are part and parcel of each component and the entirety of the research. Furthermore, as argued by Maxwell (p. 6), the model is compatible with "bricolage" (Hammersley, 2008; Kinchelow & Berry, 2004; Maxwell, 2011a), which makes room for spontaneity and improvisation in research, as opposed to strict adherence to an established plan. In light of the unpredictable circumstances brought on by the pandemic, Maxwell's model has, thus, been vital in supporting the research design process of this study.
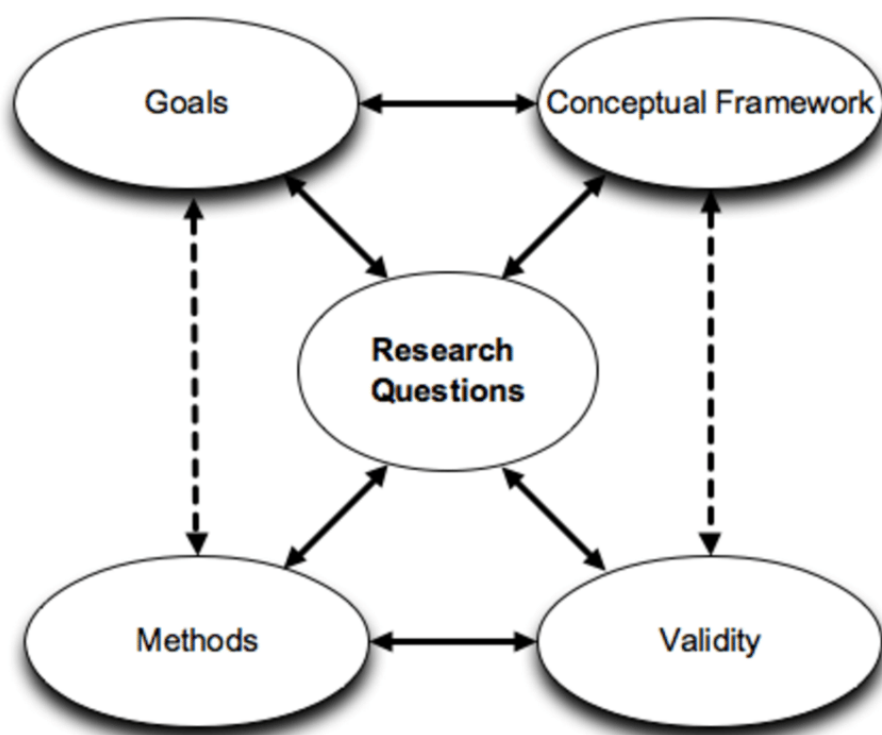
Figure 3.1 Maxwell (2011) Interactive research design model

To meet this study's objectives, the qualitative methodology is advantageous for its potential for transformation. Cresswell asserts that the outcome of qualitative research "includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and its contribution to literature or a call for change" (p.44). Again, such a method aligns with this study's aims and is apt for highlighting areas of research that are scant and meets the suggestions put forth by Tracy (2010), who recommends the selection of a worthy topic for qualitative studies.

Considering alternative methods, such as quantitative approaches, the disadvantages outweigh the benefits. Although quantitative methods safely inform policy and practices (Dyson & Desforges, 2002, p. 7) with their large-scale data collection, they are more suitable for identifying a single objective reality or cause-effect relationships (Gelo et al., 2008). Instead, qualitative studies characteristically explore issues of importance and impact (Yardly, 2000); for instance, they are particularly useful in representing the perspectives of socially marginalised individuals (Oakley, 2004), which is essential for this study.

In a similar vein, an additional goal of the qualitative method that quantitative methods may not support includes formative evaluation, which is an attempt at research that intends to improve existing practices, programmes or policies (Patton, 2001; Scriven, 1991). This concept is particularly relevant to this study since it draws on rights-based literature, with the primary aim being to contribute towards policy reform and recommendations in practice and provision, along with an opportunity to provide a platform to the voices of those rarely heard. To alleviate barriers to inclusion and equitable participation in education, this study will be "engaging in action, participatory, collaborative, or community-based research with participants in the study (Maxwell, 2012, p. 32)," yet another characteristic of the qualitative method that quantitative methods do now support. Furthermore, the subjectivity that is often discouraged by proponents of the quantitative method is recommended by the likes of Glesne & Peshkin (1992, p. 104), for whom experiential knowledge is to be capitalised as a source of strength for the researcher and by some, is also appreciated as a research instrument (Maxwell, 2012, p. 45). Other authors state that there is no dissociation between scholar's lives and their work (Mills, 1959), while Clarke and Braun (2013) recognise that the

researcher contributes to the research by including their subjectivity in the qualitative approach.

Where meanings and interpretations are essential, the nature of this study thus exemplifies an interpretive paradigm. Exploring this idea further, the following subsection will outline the philosophical underpinnings of this study.

3.2 Philosophical assumptions

Ontology, epistemology, and methodology constitute the guiding philosophy behind research; these four branches form axiomatic issues as espoused by Guba and Lincoln (1988). All research design clarifies the ontological and epistemological standpoints as they are inextricably linked (Mantzoukas, 2004). Thus, the philosophical underpinnings, which Smith, Flowers & Larkin (2009) assert, determine the "what" and "how" of research, impact the research design in its entirety.

Studies need to demonstrate methodological congruence (Morse & Richards, 2002), which refers to the study's cohesiveness, where the parts are interconnected. This is also highlighted by Maxwell's model of research design mentioned previously. Considering these points, a brief overview of the philosophical assumptions guiding this study will be delineated, clarifying the landscape, tools, and analysis methods.

Oldroyd (1986) argues that akin to observing nature, social phenomena should also be investigated through a similar lens of studying natural and physical phenomena. Other authors have described this positivistic methodology employed to study social sciences (e.g., Beck, 1979; Giddens, 1975). However, the positivist view has been criticised for its inability to account for the human experience, such as pain, desire, or even happiness. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011, p. 14) describe the drawbacks of positivism as being 'mechanistic and reductionist' due to its inability to account for human consciousness and the inner world while risking depersonalisation (Ions, 1977). The incessant chase of objectivity can lead to alienation from one's true self and nature (Roszak, 1970; 1972). Concern is raised over the conceptual mathematisation of nature (Horkheimer, 1972). Some authors have gone so far as to argue that the positivistic approach to inquiry has almost reached the level of scientism Habermas (1972).

In contrast to the positivist modes of inquiry, the social sciences, which are mainly subjective, opt for naturalistic approaches, acknowledging the individual's role in the construction of their world, which accommodates this study's objectives. Some of the features that describe this approach include the individual's autonomy and intentionality in meaning-making (Garfinkel, 1976), thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) to account for complexity in human experiences. The individual's interpretations having consequential actions based on these interpretations (Morrison, 1998) is also noted. These characteristics fall within an interpretive paradigm, a social constructionist view that focuses on perceptions of reality (Rubin & Rubin, 2012), where Cresswell and Poth (2018, p. 24) offer a sound definition:

In social constructivism, individuals seek an understanding of the world in which they live and work. They develop subjective meanings of their experiences-meanings directed toward certain objects or things. These meanings are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views rather than narrow the meanings into a few categories or ideas.

3.2.1 Ontology

Ontology describes existence. It refers to how reality can be described, categorised, and explained. It asks about what exists, how the existence of something can be determined, and also, its relation to other things. Ontology in the qualitative approach refers to the possibility of multiple realities and lenses to view reality. Ontological views may differ from absolute realism on one end and absolute relativism on the other (Willig, 2008). The former describes reality where "entities exist independently of being perceived, or independently of our theories about them" (Phillips, 1987, p. 205). While the latter, relativism, purports the existence of multiple realities and truths, where the framework itself is influenced by one's beliefs, cultures, and experiences.

To suit the aims of this study, the ontological position taken is relativist in nature, which holds individual, subjective and constructionist views of reality (Scotland, 2012). Other authors further elucidate this ontological position as the individuals' acquisition of meaning through interactions with the world (Crotty, 1998) and the interpretations of experiences (Creswell, 2014).

3.2.2 Epistemology

The importance of the epistemic stance is evident in its role in research design. Epistemology addresses knowledge; more specifically, it questions what can be considered knowledge, the basis on which one can make claims about knowledge, how it can be assessed, and the relationship between the phenomena under investigation and the researcher. Epistemology's primary concern is the "theory of knowledge" (Thomas, 2009). Investigations into the nature of knowledge production (Willig, 2013) are epistemic endeavours.

Madill, Jordan and Shirley (2000) distinguish three epistemological positions: realist, constructionist, and radical. The authors posit that these modes of thought are positioned on a continuum instead of being distinct from each other. Where knowledge is viewed as pre-existing and requires objective discovery, the approach is considered realist. Following this, knowledge that is contextually influenced and is built actively by individuals is constructionist. Conversely, radical constructivism assumes knowledge as a social construction entirely.

The objectivist epistemology is rooted in the realist ontological view, while the constructivist is based on relativism and subjectivism. The latter focuses on the fluidity of interpretations, which Hugly and Sayward (1987, p.278) argue is the absence of objective truth. Also, the objectivist approach views knowledge as objective and value-free (Scotland, 2012), while the constructivist approach views knowledge as acquired from people's experiences (Mack, 2010).

The constructivist epistemological paradigm, based on the work of Berger and Luckmann (1967) and Lincoln and Guba (1985), adopts a naturalistic mode of inquiry (Hunt, 2009). It approaches phenomena with contextual considerations and meaning individuals attach to them (Larkin, Watts & Clifton 2006). Thus, meaning is made through social interactions and acknowledges the historical influences and cultural perspectives. Furthermore, relevant to this study's aim is the assertion made by Madill et al. (2000), who imply that multiple individuals may perceive the same phenomena in different ways, which in turn, suggests the relative nature of knowledge. In other words, the multiplicity of experiences and perspectives leads to varied ascriptions of meaning to a particular phenomenon (Gray, 2013).

Constructivism has been questioned for its highly subjective approach (Rolfe, 2006) and its lack of attention paid to the impact of political and ideological influences (Mack, 2010). Likewise, others note an absence of advocacy or action that extends the understanding gleaned from studies of social phenomena to help marginalised groups (Cresswell, 2014). Keeping ethical considerations in mind, this study strives to avoid taking advantage of the participants. Instead, this study is driven by the intention to create space for disenfranchised voices, that of Nepalese parents of children with special needs. It also aims to support the development of inclusive practice. It places the needs of vulnerable children at the forefront while empowering professionals to support them.

As the researcher is embedded firmly within the data collection process, the researcher is also situated within the context and is integral to the meaning-making process as they aid the participant in discovering and constructing knowledge (Jaeger & Rosnow, 1988). Often

underscored as a pitfall of the qualitative approach, some prescribe the same critique of the researcher's involvement as the hallmark of the qualitative method. Guba and Lincoln (1988, p. 94), for instance, specify that qualitative research demands "distance" or "object separateness" between phenomena and researchers to be lessened. Also, Cohen, Manion and Morison (2007) assume the researcher as using the participant's perspective to understand, explain and demystify social reality, which aligns with the views of this study. The rationale for supporting this view will be explained later in this chapter.

3.3 Research Design

This study will adopt the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) method as it supports the analysis of lived experiences. Where the aim is to develop a detailed account in the "participant's own terms" (Gyollai, 2020), IPA is recognised for its ability to support participants' expression of their thoughts and experiences. Similar to Jaeger and Rosnow's (1988) views about knowledge production, Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) suggest that people are active participants in constructing meaning behind their experiences as they try to understand them. IPA is interested in such individual experiences, the meanings made out of them, and how it is made sense of.

This study takes note of Larkin, Shaw and Flowers' (2019) argument that the "one-dimensional perspective" of uncovering meaning through a "traditional approach" of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis as valuable yet limiting, especially when inquiring into "relational or systemic dimensions" such as home-school partnership (p.184). Some instances call on the investigation of individual experiences to describe a broader outlook on

the phenomena in question, which the authors describe as "people's experience as a lens for illuminating the broader meaning or consequences of an event or process to understand its wider constitution, dynamics, or mechanisms" (p. 185). Thus, employing a multiperspectival Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis supports an understanding of how individuals' lifeworlds "interact and overlap" (p.192). In the case of the current study, individuals occupying different roles, equipped with varying degrees of power, encapsulate this very relational aspect. Relevant to inquiring into the multiple experiences of different stakeholders, Larkin and colleagues identify studies (e.g. Dancyger et al., 2010; Rostill-Brookes et al., 2011; Smith & Shaw, 2016; de Visser & McDonald, 2007) that pertain to directly related groups that are "immersed in the same environment or involved with the same phenomenon, but that is likely to have distinct perspectives on it" (p.187). Larkin, Shaw, and Flowers (2019, p.194) recognise the utility of including multiple voices in IPA:

> The meanings of events and processes are often contested and can sometimes be understood in a more complex manner when viewed from the multiple perspectives involved in the system which constitutes them. Multiple perspective designs can be a useful way for IPA researchers to address research questions which engage with these phenomena.

Furthermore, the authors contend that employing multiple perspectives in Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis exemplifies and further extends the method's idiographic nature by including multiple viewpoints, thereby enabling explorations of "the relational, intersubjective, and microsocial dimensions of a given phenomenon" (p.183). Noting dementia as an example where individuals around the person living with the condition would also be part of the 'lived world', Larkin and colleagues argue that "the phenomena is also

located within the accounts of other people" further asserting that the analysis and synthesis of multiple perspectives can make for evocative accounts (p.181). Thus, understanding individuals' interpretations of their experience while acknowledging contrasting and congruent interpretations of others offers a broader picture of meaning and processes so that a better informed understanding of the dynamics and mechanics can be accessed (Table 4.1).

Despite having roots in psychology (Alase, 2017), IPA has found its way to the social sciences (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). With the growing importance relegated to quantifiable data in psychological studies, the need for more in-depth analysis led to the IPA methodology (Smith, 1996). The approach is intellectually connected to the philosophical ideas of hermeneutics and theories of interpretation such as idiography and phenomenology (Smith, et al, 2009; Brocki & Wearden, 2006) and is noted for critical realism and the social cognition paradigm as its theoretical basis (Fade, 2004).

Usually, studies employing IPA entail an intensively detailed analysis from a relatively small pool of participants (Larkin et al., 2006), as it attempts to say something in detail about the perceptions and understandings of a particular group rather than make general claims. Detailed analyses of a small sample, therefore, prioritises depth over breadth. IPA permits a "detailed examination of similarity and difference, convergence and divergence" (Smith & Osborn, 2007). Also, in highlighting the purposes of the IPA methodology, Larkin and colleagues comment that understanding the participant's world, and knowing what it is like, will lead to descriptions of experiences of a particular phenomenon. However, Smith (1996) cautions that accessing participants' experiences is complex and partial due to the recounting of these experiences through the participant's and researcher's lens. In Conrad's (1987)

words, IPA highlights the "insider's perspective" but warns that one cannot achieve this directly nor entirely.

Additionally, Reason's (1988, p.12) emphasis on "critical subjectivity" encourages the avoidance of being overwhelmed by personal experiences, and instead, utilising them to inform the inquiry process. To this end, the researcher's working and voluntary experience have provided an impetus for this inquiry, with casual observations informing much of the researcher's beliefs and assumptions.

Evidently, the researcher brings much prior knowledge and assumptions to the study. To some degree, by virtue of coming from the same ethnic community as the parents in the study, there is an additional layer of familiarity. With the view that the findings of this study may build grounds for further investigation, the researcher is found to be increasingly enmeshed in the proceedings and outcomes. In order to address this complex process of the researcher's involvement, a two-stage interpretation process is employed, otherwise known as a double hermeneutic (Smith & Osborn, 2003). The initial stage intends to generate "a coherent, third-person, and psychologically informed description, which tries to get as "close to the participant's view as is possible" (Larkin et al., 2006). This, in turn, helps develop a more 'overtly interpretative analysis' that embeds the initial descriptions into a broader context, considering social, cultural, and maybe even theoretical points. Here, the focus is to sift through the descriptions with a critical and conceptual lens (Smith & Osborn, 2003). For a more practical approach to analysis, the study takes guidance from Smith et al. (2009) to conduct a six-step IPA analysis which will be described later in the chapter. An appreciation

of IPA requires elucidation of its formative strands, and the following subsections will touch upon phenomenology, hermeneutics, and ideography to illustrate this.

3.3.1 Idiography

Idiography, a reference to that which is specific to an individual, is the cornerstone of IPA. Idiography steers IPA away from traditionally empirical methods of investigation (Breakwell, Smith, and Wright, 2012). IPA is idiographic in nature because it examines individual experiences in detail in particular contexts about particular phenomena (Smith & Osborn, 2015).

IPA supports analysis that uncovers themes and the individual's world as they see it (Breakwell et al. 2012). Thus, leaving no room for anticipating claims about human behaviour and experiences and ensuring individuals' accounts are reported justly. Idiography can be achieved by enclosing verbatim extracts from the interview; this idiographic method demonstrates the participant's voice. The analysis can then investigate convergence and divergence through an extensive examination of accounts, further illustrating IPA's idiographic characteristics (Smith, 2011).

In keeping with the ideographic nature of IPA, Larkin et al. (2019) describe the process as including a synthesis of analyses between samples, requiring an additional "analytic focus upon how participants' accounts are grouped according to certain criteria" (p.183). The authors acknowledge the complexity of the analytical design, describing the synthesis of the various idiographic analyses within and between samples, with the likelihood of requiring an analysis of how individuals' experiences fit into different criteria.

3.3.2 Phenomenology

IPA affiliates itself with phenomenological philosophies by focusing on the comprehensive examination of experience and the expression of these experiences through the individual's voice rather than relying on predefined category systems (Smith et al., 2009, p. 32). It is instrumental in the development of the constructivist paradigm (Mack, 2010). As iterated by Van Manen (1990), phenomenology seeks to capture a common thread within the experiences of multiple lived experiences, drawing out universal essences. The researcher's role, thus, is to identify an "object" of human experience (p.163). Phenomenology is also described as "the study of human experience and of the ways things present themselves to us in and through such experience" (Sokolowski, 2000, p.2). It is an inquiry into the subjective interpretations and individuals' perspectives as a prerequisite to understanding social phenomena (Ernest, 1994).

Edmund Husserl is touted as the founder of phenomenology. With other contributors, including Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty, the philosophical roots of phenomenology cannot be overlooked. Husserl's view is that consciousness includes 'intentionality,' which signifies that individuals direct their consciousness at some phenomena and thus, renders individuals essentially connected to the phenomena they perceive (Giorgi, 1997). This understanding of intentionality is vital in supporting analyses interested in figuring out how individuals perceive phenomena. In Husserl's opinion, phenomena can be fully understood by going "back to the things themselves" (Husserl, 1900/70, p.252), which describes the importance of analysing experiences carefully rather than dismissing experiences by viewing them with a "natural attitude" which refers to the lack of consideration afforded to experiences (Smith et al., 2009).

Husserl was interested in capturing the essence of phenomena by "bracketing," which refers to distancing or removing one's presuppositions and preconceptions. According to Husserl (1999, p.63), bracketing is the suspension of critical judgement and a temporary refusal of critical engagement that results in the researcher's assumptions and experiences being brought to the fore (Spinelli, 2005). This is also referred to as "epoche" and "phenomenological reduction" (Giorgi, 1997), where the researcher's assumptions and biases are withheld from mingling with the participant's interpretation (Moustakas, 1994).

Heidegger, on the other hand, proposed a shift in thinking from Husserl. Where Husserl is concerned with the examination of the psychological processes of the individual, Heidegger questioned existence itself and the person situated within a given experience (Smith et al. 2009). Although both points of view intersect, Husserl, focused on the descriptive, while Heidegger was interested in the interpretive (Fade, 2004). Heidegger's approach to phenomenology steps away from Husserl's notion of complete detachment from one's context; for him, epoch is impossible to achieve thoroughly. Individuals cannot escape their preconceived notions (Langdridge, 2007). To support his argument, Heidegger (1927/62) proposed "dasein," which illustrates that 'being in the world' is relative to other individuals and that it is contextual and reliant on perspective. In other words, individuals are involved with the world, an interrelated relationship, which includes the researcher.

Following Heidegger's line of thought, IPA supports the researcher's active participation. Rather than bracketing, researchers are to concede their knowledge and experiences to the interpretive process (Lopez & Willis, 2004; Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). This is achieved by

reflecting on, sharing, and attending to one's interpretations (Bynum & Varpio, 2018) which can be achieved through reflexive practices such as a diary (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008) to account for emergent interpretations.

To articulate phenomenology more succinctly for the needs of this study, van Manen's (1990, p. 31) discussion on phenomenology as inheriting multiple research endeavours is useful. Firstly, 'an abiding concern' is recognised as a topic of increasing interest. Van Manen then mentions thorough engagement with the phenomenon, which involves reflection of overarching themes and an inquiry into what makes a lived experience. Furthermore, as cited in Cresswell and Poth (2018, p.75-76), Stewart and Mickunas (1990) outline four of phenomenology's philosophical underpinnings that are also considered helpful for this study:

1. Diverting foci away from the dominating force of empiricism and emphasising the otherwise traditional philosophical goals of seeking wisdom.

2. Epoche, the suspension of presuppositions. However, in place of 'epoche,' this study adopts 'dasein' instead.

3. Recognising the dual Cartesian view of subject and object and its ramifications on an individual's consciousness.

4. Following on from the previous point, viewing the reality of an object as embedded within the individual's meaning-making of experience.

3.3.3 Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is described as a restoration of meaning (Ricoeur, 1970, p.8) and both the theory of interpretation (Langdrigde, 2007) and its practice (Dyer, 2010). Hermeneutics views reality as a social construction (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). Although the tradition began with the interpretation of biblical texts, the focus expanded to include other texts. Described as an explicitly interpretive process, Heidegger brought hermeneutic inquiry to phenomenological philosophy (Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Hermeneutics supports phenomenology by developing theories for meanings that individuals attach to experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2007; Fade, 2004).

Heidegger (1927/62) proposes that our interpretations are imbued with prior experience and preconceptions; through this prior knowledge, we engage with the world to make meaning of "the things themselves." Therefore, Heidegger introduced "dasein" to describe the interconnectedness of individuals and the world. Laverty (2003) suggests that the meaning of an individual's experience is interpreted through their "lifeworld," where their interpretations then influence their choices. This sense-making of others' meaning-making is described as a double hermeneutic, or as argued by Smith (2004, p.40), is a two-fold interpretation, where the participant is making sense of their world, and the researcher is making sense of the participant making sense of their world where "world" refers to the "personal and social."

The hermeneutic circle is a crucial concept in IPA; it relates to the interaction between the part and the whole (Smith, 2007). Proposed by Heidegger in his 1927 book Being and Time, the hermeneutic circle is a tool for achieving a circular understanding. It is a non-linear and

cyclical process that probes numerous aspects of a study: the participating individual(s), the researcher, and the particular phenomenon in question. The cumulative revelations are to be seen as a whole, yet inclusive of its various parts. In other words, to better understand the meaning of the parts, it has to be viewed in relation to the whole and vice versa. In contrast to Husserl, Heidegger acknowledged the researcher's active role in the interpretation process, as evident in his concept of dasein and the hermeneutic circle.

Researcher Reflection

Van Manen (1990) suggests that research begins from a personal interest resulting from one's experience with the phenomenon. As gleaned from the pilot study mentioned in chapter one, reflexivity was imperative. Questioning participants' and my perceptions would be imperative during data analysis. Here, I acknowledge my position as a researcher, a Nepalese professional in the field of special education, a Hong Kong citizen, with the potential bias accompanying my values informed by my cultural background, professional aspirations of advocating for inclusion, and personal experiences with families touched by Autism.

3.4 Rationale, limitations and alternative approaches

With the aim to understand multiple stakeholder experiences relevant to the same phenomena, an approach that permits space for individuals to speak freely and unveil diverse experiences was vital. The rationale for IPA, its limitations, and considerations for alternative approaches will be explored briefly in this section.

This study concurs with Reid, Flowers and Larkin (2005), who argue that IPA lends itself well to studying unexplored areas. Considering a lack of studies investigating the experiences of ethnic minority families of children with special needs, IPA is apt to explore this uncharted territory. Authors describe the approach as an attempt at understanding perspectives and meaning-making within particular contexts (Eatough and Smith, 2017; Smith et al., 2009). Another advantage of IPA is that it acknowledges the social, historical, and contextually bound individuals and their world (Eatough & Smith, 2017), offering deeper insight.

However, there are numerous criticisms about IPA. For instance, the extent to which a contemporary approach like IPA fits within phenomenology is questioned by Cresswell and Poth (2018). The subjective nature of IPA's findings is also highlighted for a lack of generalisability, thus described as a weakness (Giorgi, 2011; Smith, 2004). Although IPA has been characterised by Chamberlain (2011) as malleable, which speaks to the flexibility of the approach by being able to fit into various epistemological viewpoints. This too, is seen as an impediment to building cohesive research. In contrast, not only does Smith (2004) argue that IPA is an epistemological position by itself, but Larkin et al. (2006) view Chamberlain's critique as the very advantage of IPA.

Another limitation of the IPA method is its reliance on language; although it permits the transmission of information from one individual to another, the potential for misinterpretations is not negligible. There is a chance for incomplete understanding (Smith et al., 2009). Likewise, authors like Willig (2013) stresses the difficulty of communicating details of experiences since it may only be a customary practice for some individuals.

Furthermore, the author cautions that language permits an understanding of experience to the extent individuals talk about them, and it does not afford an understanding of the experience itself. Nevertheless, this study aims to fill gaps in knowledge, and the outcome of this study is expected to function as preliminary grounds to build a case for further investigation.

IPA commonly employs a small sample, commended by authors like Smith et al. (2009), as it supports in-depth analysis and achieves idiographic goals (Noon, 2018). Unlike grounded theory which employs larger sample sizes, Pringle, Drummond, McLafferty and Hendry (2011) point to IPA's sample size as failing to determine significant variables. However, Reid et al. (2005) assert that despite a small sample, multiple participant accounts can be analysed to draw out features that have broader implications. Also, Hefferon & Gil-Rodriguez (2011) suggest that the quantity of participants do not necessarily contribute to the quality of research. Similarly, Cassidy, Reynolds, Naylor, and De Souz (2011) indicate that findings lend themselves to contextual understanding and development of theory. Here, Smith and colleagues (2009) suggestion is helpful, as they encourage researchers to consider how the analysis may contribute towards "theoretical transferability rather than empirical generalizability" (p.51).

Viewing the researcher's role in IPA, Brocki and Wearden (2006) argue against this, raising questions about the researcher's analytical abilities and the impact it may have on interpretations. Furthermore, van Manen (1990, 2014) also acknowledges the challenge of exercising bracketing of personal experiences and assumptions during the data analysis process. In other words, interpretations are challenging to evade. However, IPA is

commended for its potential to derive context-dependent knowledge and the researcher's interpretive role (Pringle et al., 2011; Smith, 2004). With the support of a systematic analysis process proposed by Smith et al. (2009), the researcher can function as a critical element in a study.

As a novice, the researcher of this study is keen to hone her research skills, and this inquiry is seen as an opportunity for this undertaking. Inspiration is taken from van Manen (1990, p. 163), who suggests that:

> Phenomenology projects and their methods often have a transformative effect on the researcher himself or herself. Indeed, phenomenological research is often itself a form of deep learning, leading to a transformation of consciousness, heightened perceptiveness, increased thoughtfulness.

Grounded theory aims to produce theoretical concepts surrounding phenomena (Smith et al., 2009) and other features, such as causal conditions and consequences (Cresswell & Poth, 2018). Although it is used frequently to discuss social processes (Willig, 2013), it does not permit an idiographic angle as the understanding is geared towards the group rather than the individual.

Discourse analysis is concerned with the constructive nature of language (Burr, 2003) and, thus, is far removed from the focus of this study. A case study was not considered appropriate based on the difficulty of obtaining access to sites for two reasons: vulnerable groups (special

schools) and the shift to remote learning due to the pandemic. Also, case studies present other challenges, such as a lack of structure, where it is difficult to ascertain the topography of what is being investigated, how many individuals, and how much time leading to potential confusion and setbacks to rigour.

Narrative research would not be possible because of the in-depth and sensitive nature of the approach, such as gaining personal information about the participants. The method is also time-consuming. Czarniawska (2004) notes the complexity of retelling an individual's story, data collection, and analysis issues that require careful consideration. Also, this study's intent is not to retell one's experiences but to analyse the relationship of multiple individuals within a particular context.

Lastly, ethnography is considered unsuitable for the study because it does not align with its aims and presents multiple challenges. To begin with, the researcher requires a sound understanding of cultural anthropology and concepts such as the social-cultural system (Cresswell & Poth, 2018). Furthermore, like narrative research, the extensive time required was not feasible.

Researcher reflection

Following Cresswell and Poth's point about the need to understand concepts of cultural anthropology for an ethnographic study, 'culture' was intentionally excluded from the research questions. Another reason for this purposeful exclusion was to shift the focus away from culture as a contributing factor in home-school partnership since it has already been

established by literature globally. Moreover, in the context of Hong Kong, I was curious to examine stakeholder views outside of the dominant cultural discourse, as this appears to be a saturated narrative of the marginalisation of the ethnic minority community.

However, as the data collection process ensued, with each interview with school professionals, the inexorable feature of culture in home-school partnership was transparent. Culture was almost unavoidable. Several instances in the interviews demonstrated that culture was indeed the focal point, the crux of barriers that impact home-school partnership in the professionals' view.

3.5 Ethical considerations

Ethics should be at the forefront of all research. Ethical issues require deliberation throughout the research process regardless of topic, context, or size. No matter the philosophical underpinning of a study, ethical consequences should guide the course of action (Cresswell, 2012), realising that they can emerge anytime during the research phase (Cresswell & Poth, 2018; Israel & Hay, 2006). Ethics is described by Cavan (1977, p.810) as a "matter of principled sensitivity to the rights of others," and the author posits that "while truth is good, respect for human dignity is better."

Ethical concerns in research typically relate to respect for persons, concern for welfare, and justice (Cresswell & Poth, 2018). As for the researcher, they are encouraged to reflect on their role as "insiders/outsiders to the participants" (Weis & Fine, 2000). Pertinent to this

study, the just representation of participants' voices in parallel to the researcher's interpretations will be paramount.

Wolfendale (1999) argues for adopting a partnership model for cooperative research in the area of parental involvement, where parents are to be seen as partners. She outlines ethical guidelines to assist in this effort, raising concerns regarding the lack of attention given to the ethical dimensions to research in parental involvement, especially regarding partnership principles. She highlights the absence of equal opportunity policies and practices in social sciences research and ethical concerns in the relationship between researcher and participant, such as the inherent power imbalance between the two. Evident in the claim is that the researcher has more background knowledge about the context and purpose of the research, along with the freedom to impact the findings and other outcomes according to their will.

There is concern about the extent to which power imbalance in research can lead to exploitation of participants. Wolfendale (1999) raises concerns over the lack of alignment with principles of partnership with parents in research. Some examples of this can be seen in studies where parents do not fully know/understand the research purposes and outcomes. They may not have received the ethical guidelines in writing and withhold the opportunity to present their thoughts regarding how the research was undertaken and its outcomes.

A fundamental feature of Wolfendale's partnership model is that of rights/entitlement, the general insurance towards parents that they are aware of their rights. Moreover, the model

emphasises the need to guarantee opportunities to express these rights. Equality in research requires that parents be recognised as equals to the researcher and professionals, with each contributing knowledge and expertise vital to the research. In addition, there should be an acknowledgment that each stakeholder is informing the research, outcomes, and the impact of the research in invaluable ways. In a similar vein, reciprocity, where despite the overall responsibility falling on the researcher, participants are also accountable by sharing information and being made aware of their contribution being recognised (Richardson, 1996).

Lastly, Wolfendale's model incorporates empowerment, which refers to "the means and the ends of realising and expressing wants, needs, and rights and ensuring that the parental voice is heard and has influence (p.3)." Therefore, parents are acknowledged as active contributors rather than passive participants. More comprehensively, this might also impact the choices regarding the phenomena to be studied (Wolfendale, 1999).

Cohen and colleagues (2011) raise the question of who benefits from the research; they comment further by asking if the research is being conducted *for* people and issues or *about* them. This study aspires to achieve the former and to be led by a vision that seeks to empower participants with a voice so that their experiences and thoughts may provide fodder for taking action.

The study complied with all ethical procedures as outlined in the British Educational Research Association's 2018 Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (BERA, 2018). It sought approval from the Education University of Hong Kong and gained access to research sites after seeking permission from relevant representatives of those institutions. These sites were selected after careful ethical consideration and fit with the sample criteria. Although there was no vested interest in the study's outcome in the selection of research sites, the participating schools, professionals, and parents were nonetheless interested in the outcome, as it pertained to the potential improvement of their shared experiences. The research site was respected, and any potential disruptions were minimised, for example, by being flexible with scheduling times so that school professionals and parents do not encounter clashes with their routines.

Ethical concerns during the data collection were also deliberated. For instance, the researcher tried to avoid using leading questions and sharing personal impressions, as well as sensitive information that would jeopardise other participants, particularly those from the same school. Care was also taken to avoid exploitation of participants, especially viewing power imbalances between the researcher and participants and within participants, such as teacher and parent, or principal and social worker.

As mentioned prior, the researcher associates herself with the school professionals and parents in this study due to her working experience and being part of the parent's ethnic community. Despite this, the potential to 'side' with either set of participants was avoided. As much as possible, the researcher tried to maintain a neutral stance and report multiple and

accurate participant accounts without any bias or favour of either. Thus, multiple perspectives were reported, which included contrary findings.

As will be revealed later in this chapter, the participants' privacy was respected to the utmost degree. This has been achieved by the assignment of pseudonyms and the use of vignettes to give the reader a general idea of the participants, with the aim to avoid disclosing any information that may interfere with anonymity and confidentiality.

All study-related information was revealed to the participants, including the study's purpose and aim, procedure, interview questions, and dissemination of the findings. For the parent participants, information was provided in Nepalese for their convenience. None of the participants were pressured into partaking in the study and were informed of the voluntary nature of their participation and their right to withdraw and re-join at any point. All participants were provided informed consent, giving individuals the right to examine the advantages and disadvantages of participating in the study. The likelihood of any foreseeable risks and uncomfortable situations were mentioned, as well as the benefits that may be reaped from the study. As suggested by Swain, Heyman and Gillman (1998, p.25), the study sought to engage in inquiry that brings benefit to marginalised groups, rather than exploiting them. Participants were invited to ask questions to clarify doubts and consider their involvement, which is subject to their self-determination and were reminded about their right to withdraw at any point. The researcher's obligation to uphold the participants' privacy was iterated.

Confidentiality of identity and security of data was of importance for this study. All study-related material was kept in a secure location and protected with passwords. The researcher established a system for categorising and organising data-related files with anonymising codes. To ensure no loss of data, all of the data was backed up on a hard disk that was also kept in a safe location. Multiple sources cite different periods for data retention upon the study's completion. Taking this into consideration, as well as the anonymisation of participants and sites in this study, the study deems five years to be acceptable for retaining all study-related material, after which all data will be destroyed, both physical and digital.

3.6 Quality in qualitative research

Although IPA research does not propose distinct protocols for evaluating validity, Yardley (2000) recommends adopting four characteristics: impact and importance, coherence and transparency, sensitivity to context, and commitment and rigour. With reference to vertical generalisability (Johnson, 1997), Yardley suggests establishing links between findings and literature. The author further suggests that sensitivity to context is achieved through contextual awareness, including the social and cultural fabric—and sensitivity to data by acknowledging diverse views with the inclusion of extracts from the conversations. Additionally, Transparency, and where permissible, a triangulated consensus with congruent ideas supports the persuasiveness of data where multiple perspectives are involved. Larkin et al. (2019, p.195) propose that with careful consideration of context, a "moderated version of generalisability" is likely.

The overall strength of the study, Yardley asserts, can be determined by the extent to which the study brings value in terms of utility and contribution to existing literature. To support this, Yardley recommends commitment through extended engagement with the topic and ensuring in-depth immersion with the data, followed by analysis and interpretation to achieve rigour. The current study's research question was the fruit of the researcher's inquiry based on her voluntary experience in her community. Sensitivity to the context, data, and participants' views was a priority in considering research aims and a suitable methodology. The study also carried out a thorough review of existing literature to ensure a well-informed research design.

Extended engagement with the data and topic indicates commitment to the study. Rigour, demonstrated through research methods, was also maintained in this study by establishing arguments for the choice of methodology, in this case, IPA, and clear articulation of its strengths, weaknesses, and background relative to this study. Furthermore, access to the site and participants was also clarified. Additionally, Yardley (2000) suggests that transparency in a study can be achieved through researcher reflexivity, which involves articulating how the researcher's personal and professional life, motivations, worldviews, or even constraints may influence the study. Reflexivity has been noted, by including the researcher's first-person narratives (titled researcher reflection) where relevant. Also, acknowledging the highly subjective nature of IPA, Yardley encourages transparency through clear and detailed mention of the research process and providing direct quotations from the data for readers.

Lastly, the researcher anticipates the findings of this study to contribute to the current gaps in knowledge, thereby encouraging further research. Specifically, considering the scant mention of ethnic minority families of children with special needs, this study considers the topic to be of both impact and utility. With suggested recommendations, this study is anticipated to provide impetus for developments in practice and, consequently, improve the lives of those who experience and benefit from home-school partnership.

3.6.1 Robustness of design

Inter-rater reliability is a statistical measure used to establish consistency among different raters. While inter-rater reliability has been utilized extensively in quantitative research, its application in qualitative studies is questionable. Employing primarily quantitative features in an interpretive study can incite obscurity. According to Armstrong, Gosling, Weinman, and Marceau (1997), qualitative methodologies face the hurdle of accounting for reliability and validity, driving researchers to respond in various ways. The authors highlight discord in the ontological views that separate qualitative and quantitative methods, thereby scrapping the possibility of a "theoretical resolution" (p.599). Similarly, demonstrating the appropriateness of inter-rater reliability in qualitative research could prove arduous (Armstrong, et al., 1997) and even challenging to articulate such decisions to a diverse audience (McDonald, Schoenebeck & Forte, 2019). Also, the value of a qualitative study in the social sciences is sometimes misjudged when evaluated through a quantitative viewpoint where inter-rater reliability is sought (Elliot, Fischer, and Rennie, 1999).

The focus of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis as a qualitative research tool is to understand the participant's subjective world rather than to measure objective variables. In

contrast, inter-rater reliability is predicated on the assumption of a single correct answer or interpretation of the data, which is not always appropriate for subjective and context-dependent inquiries. Furthermore, as varied as participant interpretations may be, so too would the interpretations of raters vary on the same data. For instance, Armstrong et al (1997) found in their study that despite reaching a certain degree of consensus, the analyses was articulated differently amongst various raters, hinting towards a potential post-modernist view. With reference to Moscoviti's (1981) social representation theory, the authors note that "people's representations are embedded in a network of other related representations" (p.604). Furthermore, the study also emphasises that Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis is a type of interpretation that involves "a dialogue between the research and the data" wherein the researcher's outlook impacts the resulting analyses. The authors also highlight that although qualitative data may be treated in its purity as stemming from the participant's worldview, it is "contaminated" by the researcher's "socially patterned" analysis which impacts the interpretation (p.605).

Mcdonald and colleagues (2019) contend that reliability should align with the epistemological tradition that the researcher draws from, building distinctions between reliability and validity, where the former measures the repetition of an answer (sameness), while the latter measures the accuracy of a response. Furthermore, despite the availability of guidelines for inter-rater reliability, the rationale for 'when' and 'why' it should be applied remains murky. Citing examples of human behaviour, beliefs, and interactions amongst others, an instrument and the construct it is measuring is argued to be largely approximative. Additionally, the authors reference Kirk and Miller (1986), proposing that the social sciences depend on reliability rather than perfect validity, as it is both undesirable and theoretically impossible. Besides, the authors warn that rigid expectations of reliability may jeopardise the

complexity of concepts and nuances in the data, arguing the potential for the marginalisation and minimisation of perspectives. Some authors such as Marques and McCall (2005), have attempted to incorporate methods to achieving inter-rater reliability in phenomenological. The authors propose "solidification strategy" as a method to bolster findings through multiple individuals attending to the data to acquire "a similar or basic understanding of the topic" (p.440). On the contrary, Armstrong, et al. (1997, p.598) argue that "expecting another researcher to have the same insights from a limited database is unrealistic." Furthermore, the authors assert that multiple researchers would, presumably, produce multiple interpretations. After all, the authors surmise, qualitative inquiries are not representations of the social world but are evocations of it (p.598). The results of Marques and McCall's (2005) study also suggest that the solidification strategy is yet to be applied successfully to determine interrater reliability due to a lack of agreement for establishing consistency across raters. McMillan and Schumacher (2001) problematise inter-rater reliability further, where the extent of correlation to establish reliability needs to be clarified. The authors add that determining inter-rater reliability may need to consider the purpose of the study, the type of instrument, and the impact of the results.

Along with the challenges of establishing inter-rater reliability in an interpretive study is the additional challenge of including multiple perspectives in the sample. Multiperspectival Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis involves analysing data across several individuals with unique experiences and perspectives, making it challenging to ensure consistency across raters, which is in stark contrast to Krippendorff's (2003) stance where research is deemed reliable when phenomena retains consistency in responses despite a variety of modes of implementation. Also, another issue raised by Mcdonald et al (2019) is that raters may be

more concerned with reaching a consensus on the interpretation of the data, prioritising agreement over the richness of the data and exploring the nuances and complexities of the participants' experiences.

Furthermore, interrater reliability can be time-consuming and resource-intensive, with the likelihood of completing the analysis swiftly rather than engaging deeply with the data. More specifically, not only are the constraints of the current doctoral thesis time-bound, but also highly specialised in terms of research area. Thus, inter-rater reliability may not be an appropriate measure of quality. Instead, as proposed by studies (e.g. Armstrong, Gosling, Weinmann and Marteau, 1997; Horrigan-Kelly, et al, 2016; McDonald et al., 2019; Yardley, 2000) transparency and reflexivity may be prioritised, along with acknowledging biases to ensure rigour and trustworthiness of findings and clarifying the researcher's positionality which has been maintained in the current study (see p.98, 102, 129, 134).

The believability, appropriateness, and credibility of a study are demonstrated by providing means to consider its trustworthiness (Mills, Durrepos & Wibe, 2009) which in research is described as reliability and validity (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, and Spiers, 2002). With much contention regarding how validity fits in with qualitative research, Maxwell (2012, p. 122) suggests the "common sense" approach, referring to it as being one of "correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or another sort of account." Maxwell cites Huck and Sandler (1979), where the possibility of validity threat; in other words, 'rival hypotheses' should be considered as alternative explanations that are plausible to the research. This study will consider two validity threats often related to qualitative studies: researcher bias and reactivity.

On the contrary to validity, Willig (2013) argues that terms such as reliability and validity express a realist view of reality and knowledge. Instead, the rigour of qualitative studies has been explained with terms such as credibility, quality, and trustworthiness (Golafshani, 2003). As stated above, credibility is upheld by displaying contextual awareness of the study (Yardley, 2000) and contextual pertinence to the study participants (Elliot, Fischer & Rennie, 1999). Yardley (2000) also emphasises valuable research as involving committed engagement with the topic for a period of time. At the same time, Tracy (2010) encourages the researcher to be emphatic and considerate about the participants, including having self-awareness. Similarly, Ellis (2007) suggests establishing a sense of 'connectedness' between researcher and participant.

Acknowledging the interpretative approach of this proposal, the problem of researcher bias, instead, becomes a question of honesty. In other words, acknowledging the researcher's position and beliefs as separate from that of the participants. Doyle (2007) describes member checking, also known as respondent validation or participant validation, as a strategy for qualitative studies to account for research bias by actively engaging participants in confirming participant responses. Doyle asserts that through member checking, the trustworthiness of qualitative research can be established, illustrative of Lincoln and Guba's recommendations of ensuring rigor in qualitative studies (e.g., Guba & Lincoln, 1981, 1989; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

While some argue for the importance of rigor in qualitative studies (Morse, 2015), others are concerned with how it might constrain the researcher (Barbour, 2001; Sandelowski, 1993).

Furthermore, Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, and Walter (2016) raise epistemological and methodological challenges to this approach by underscoring "the changing nature of interpretations of phenomena over time" (p.1802). The authors also raise ethical questions about the handling of data wherein not only is the "anticipating and assimilating" of narratives a concern, but also considering whose interpretation takes precedence (p.1802), questioning the ownership of the data itself.

Birt et al. (2016) report that member checking can help reconstruct interpretations whereby data can be adjusted. The authors give examples where participants may reconsider how their voice is presented or whether it is valid over time. While Forbat and Henderson (2005) describe participant experiences of seeing their verbal expressions as text as possibly adverse or positive for some, Koro-Ljungberg and MacLure (2013) assert that the deletion of data itself is a data event. Furthermore, Also, Birt et al. (2016) argue that despite the opportunity to engage participants in reviewing the data to seek accuracy, it does not support "claims on the trustworthiness of the subsequent analysis" (p.1805).

Birt et al. (2016) mention member check interviews where participants can confirm, modify and verify the interview transcript. However, the current study's time and sample size constraints greatly limit the researcher's ability to engage in this interactive process. Instead, the researcher incorporated techniques to confirm participant responses during the interview. For example, interview questions and participant responses were repeated to verify accuracy, and responses were requested to be supported with examples.

A clarification of how the researcher's personal biases impacts the analysis and conduct of the research needs to be communicated. Since the researcher shares the same ethnicity as the parent participants, the researcher was conscious of the potential to approach this study with more personal regard, which could lead to clouded judgement, where parents are viewed as 'victims,' for example. Rectification was attempted by clarifying the researcher's biases by reflecting on prejudices and past experiences that may influence interpretations. Secondly, the participants' input was sought by affirming their perspectives to add credibility to the interpretations. This is achieved by asking follow-up questions to confirm their responses and the ideas they are trying to convey.

The second validity threat - reactivity- refers to "the influence of the researcher on the setting or individuals studied" (Maxwell, 2012, p. 124). Reactivity in interviews is a guaranteed phenomenon. Therefore, the researcher identified they might impact the participant's responses to this threat. For example, parents might view the interview as an opportunity to vent or complain. Teachers might view it as an evaluation of their skills. Finally, the administration might consider it to be a comparative analysis of how they fare with other schools or adhere to policies.

Furthermore, because this research touches on a presumably sensitive topic of ethnicity, professionals may feel compelled to provide positive remarks. They may gloss over issues and be cautious (withhold information) when commenting on issues they might assume to be offensive (in regard to culture, for example). In light of the reflections above, the following

strategies were taken into consideration. The last point (fictitious scenarios) were applied as needed depending on each individual's feedback:

1. Assuring participants that the interviews are not for assessing their skills or knowledge, and that it is not a representation of the school's views.

2. Reminding participants of the research objectives and their role in helping to achieve them.

3. Introducing fictitious home-school partnership-based scenarios that relate to each participant's role to seek feedback.

A plethora of techniques can maintain rigour in qualitative studies. Essentially aiming to maintain the robustness of the design and validity of the findings, this study employed methods such as examining the data through multiple means of analysis. For instance, repeated listening of the interview recordings and reading transcripts to check for conformity and extensive note-taking of initial wonderings. Followed by developing subordinate and superordinate subordinate themes and checking for the relation between the two within and across participants. Presenting data through summaries and tables is also a technique to show rigour in data collection (Cresswell & Poth, 2018).

With researchers actively interpreting and reinterpreting the data, it is apparent that reflexivity needs to be maintained. It is vital to ensure preconceptions do not interfere with the analysis. Heidegger's view of the phenomenological process of analysing interpretations and meaning includes the researcher's suppositions filtered through a constant process of

reflexivity (Horrigan-Kelly et al., 2016). To achieve this, Clancy (2013) recommends that researchers acknowledge their own beliefs, values, and motivations, to name a few. In particular, the author highlights ethnicity, which is especially germane to this study. Similarly, Finlay (2008, p. 9) notes that "the challenge for the researcher is to remain focused on the phenomenon being studied while both reining in and reflexively interrogating their own understandings."

3.6.2 Reflexivity

As established prior, the IPA method demands more involvement from the researcher; they are vital in making sense of and interpreting the experiences of others. This unique and active role of the researcher requires that they maintain an awareness of their position throughout the research process and constantly reflect on the impact of their role on the participants, the data, and the resultant interpretation. Reflexivity is not a process done at a particular time; it is continuous, and practised throughout the research journey (Mills et al., 2009). It is also encouraged to locate the researcher's social, political, and moral positioning (Koch & Harrington, 1998). Furthermore, Habermas (1984, p. 109), echoing Giddens (1976), speaks of the interpretive paradigm as a "double hermeneutic" in which people interpret and act in a world that is already interpreted. Undoubtedly, researchers bring their interpretations to the study as well. In a nutshell, the emphasis here isn't the phenomenon itself but the meanings.

Various methods for practising reflexivity are suggested, such as keeping track with a research diary (Fox, Martin, and Green, 2007) and including all aspects of the research

process in the audit trail (Berger, 2015). This study has included documentation covering various aspects of the research phase included in the appendix.

IPA is a dynamic, interactive, and active approach to analysis (Smith and Osborn, 2007). The approach encourages relationship-building with the participants through which richer data can be revealed. This study recognised cultivating empathy with the participants as a possible avenue for building acquaintance and trust. With this in mind, the researcher is situated in a unique position; by virtue of her Nepalese ethnicity, she can empathise with the experiences of the parent participants in the study. Meanwhile, with over a decade of working experience in special education in Hong Kong, she also has a sound knowledge base of the challenges of maintaining a balance between systemic constraints, a mismatch between parent and school perspectives, and the limitations of the role. Such background knowledge and familiarity with the participants can be seen as advantageous and encouraged; as articulated by Pascal, Johnson, Dore and Trainor (2011), the researcher is practising "being with others."

3.8 Sample

As established by the literature in chapter two of the current study, the experiences of home-school partnership are complex and multifaceted, shaped by various factors such as social and cultural backgrounds, and power dynamics between parents and school professionals. Including participants with different levels and types of power and capital can help capture the range of experiences and perspectives, generating insights into the dynamics of the phenomenon of home-school partnership; a diverse sample can help illuminate power imbalance issues in the research process. Furthermore, research on home-school partnership is often dominated by school professionals' perspectives, overlooking parental voices,

particularly those from marginalised communities. Therefore, gaining access to a rich and nuanced understanding, particularly in an interpretive study was deemed appropriate through a multiperspectival Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis. Larkin et al (2019, p. 186) offer an emerging taxonomy of multiple perspectives of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, and the design relevant to this current study is that of "directly related groups" metaphorically described as "all surfing the same wave." According to the authors, the aim is to demonstrate how "participants' lifeworlds interact and overlap" (p.192).

Through purposive sampling, participants for this study were sought based on a specific criteria: experience engaging in home-school partnership in a local primary special school setting with Nepalese families of children with special needs (Autism/Intellectual Disability). The two groups of participants, Nepalese parents and professionals, are from different backgrounds. Arguably, the professionals are a fairly homogeneous group with tertiary educational qualifications, proficiency in Cantonese, prior knowledge of the education system, and access to collegial networks and other resources in the community. Parents, in contrast, experience multiple barriers not shared by the professionals. Considering the parents' ethnic minority status in Hong Kong, educational background, parenting a child with Autism/Intellectual Disability, poor Cantonese language skills, and the placement of their children in the local education system, as opposed to an English-medium, private special school setting, they too, are a fairly homogeneous group.

Despite discrepancies in capital between parents and professionals, in other words, power, home-school partnership by default, demands that these unequal stakeholders collaborate effectively to impact student outcomes, preferably positively. Moreover, as will be evident in

chapter four, interview excerpts indicate hierarchies within the group of professionals and, where for example, principals occupy leadership positions, influencing decisions despite other professionals having access to more first-hand knowledge about parents. In contrast, social workers and teachers are at the receiving end of leadership decisions and interact more closely with parents on the frontline. Thus, not only was the inclusion of different participants, while acknowledging the power dynamics amongst and within them deliberate, but necessary to evoke the complexity of the phenomenon of home-school partnership, especially with ethnic minority families.

Developing inclusion criteria is an essential characteristic of targeting a specific population that can support the investigation of research questions (Patino & Ferreira, 2018) (Table 2.2.). Homogeneous sampling is recommended, comprising individuals for whom the research questions are meaningful (Smith et al., 2009, p. 49), or can offer insight into similar experiences (Langdridge, 2007). Furthermore, achieving the ideographic characteristic of IPA also requires participant homogeneity so that thematic patterns in the data may be explored for both convergence and divergence (Eatough & Smith, 2017). Although the participants in this study may or may not have similar experiences due to different capital such as language, positions of power, and knowledge, they are still part of the same phenomena of home-school partnership, albeit in different ways.

Parents	Professionals
Nepalese parent of child with Autism and/or Intellectual Disability.	Currently employed at a local primary special school that serves at least one Nepalese family.
Child currently attending a local primary special school.	Experience engaging with at least one Nepalese family in the context of home-school partnership.

Table 3.1 Participants inclusion criteria

Although criticised, common practice calls for smaller samples in IPA to achieve idiographic goals (Noon, 2018). For example, Hefferon and Gil-Rodriquez (2011) recommend four to ten participants for a professional doctorate level undertaking. However, Smith et al. (2009) argue that there are no strict guidelines. The participants identified for this study consist of thirty-two individuals in total. The sample can be categorised into two groups: parents and professionals. The latter can be further categorised as principals, social workers, and teachers. The sample included four principals (three male and one female), five social workers (one male and four female), eight teachers (three male and five female), and fifteen parents (two male and thirteen female). All professionals are ethnically Chinese, while all parent participants are ethnically Nepalese and have spent at least five years in Hong Kong; almost all of their children are born in Hong Kong. All professionals are university graduates, with some obtaining postgraduate qualifications. The parents, however, are primarily high school graduates who completed their education in Nepal. The parents have a rudimentary grasp of conversational Chinese and English.

3.6.1 Recruitment and access

Primary special schools were identified as the research site. The frequency of interaction between home and school is the rationale for selecting a primary school. Early childhood settings may have been more conducive for this research, but this is not viable in Hong Kong. Children in this age range attend private educational institutions, and often undergo a highly systematic procedure before a diagnosis is obtained, which can stretch to over a year before they attend special educational needs settings.

With a clear understanding of the target participants, the range of potential sites was explicit. Potential participants were identified as Nepalese parents and school professionals: principals, social workers, and teachers. Professionals were selected due to the researcher's assumptions that home-school partnership would demand high levels of engagement and collaboration between these stakeholders and parents.

Although Cresswell and Poth (2018) warn that as the diversity in participant characteristics widens, so does the challenge for the researcher to locate commonality in experience and themes. This study posits that despite variances in terms of educational background, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and even to some extent, power, the phenomenon of focus remains the same. Also, as the nature of this phenomenon requires the involvement of multiple individuals, the inclusion of multiple participants is obligatory.

An initial list of potential schools was prepared, relying on common knowledge and word of mouth. With the support of the research supervisor, the search for schools that fit the inclusion criteria was possible. The supervisor's professional network helped establish a trustworthy link between the researcher and potential sites, resulting positively in two schools' willingness to participate. For the remaining schools, the researcher made initial contact via email with an information sheet outlining the objectives and other details of the study. Phone calls were made to follow up, where the researcher established contact with the lead person in charge of ethnic minority students, primarily social workers. Communications with schools lasted for weeks before any data collection began, during which the signing of consent forms and arranging schedules that fit both parties were determined. Time was also required to establish contact with all parent participants, where securing time to interview while tending to their children and household chores presented a challenge. The final number of participants was determined on the basis of positive responses from schools approached. In total, 15 Nepalese parents of children with disabilities and 17 professionals working across six primary special needs schools in Hong Kong, of which were four principals, eight teachers, and five social workers.

Protocols were followed, and approval was obtained for this study from the Education University of Hong Kong. All stakeholders involved in the study agreed to partake. Nepalese parents were provided translated versions of the information sheet and consent form to uphold their right to know. Schools were provided with information sheets in both English and Nepali.

Heeding Creswell's (2016) warning about the implications of gaining access to marginalised groups for reasons such as culture, language, and trust, heightened caution was critical. Moreover, additional effort was taken to ensure that the researcher established a relationship through frequent communication via email and phone calls. Building rapport with key persons in each school was vital to establish trust, achieved by engaging with social workers and teachers. Once consent forms were signed, the researcher initiated contact via phone calls to make introductions with parents. Immediately, a sense of familiarity was established. In retrospect, the availability of the consent forms and information sheets in Nepali may have also contributed to the parent's willingness to participate. Furthermore, the majority of the parents were aware of the researcher's involvement in past volunteering efforts in the community, which may have positively impacted their eagerness as well.

The support from the research supervisor was crucial in forging connections with some of the participating schools. Through the supervisor's professional network, the researcher could access direct contact with principals to introduce the study. This is indicative of the value such networks hold in accessing sites, also mentioned by Festinger and Katz (1966), where they describe the advantage of securing contact with individuals positioned at an institution's top end.

3.6.2 Participant profiles

Ethical concerns of anonymity and confidentiality were taken into serious consideration. In this study, anonymity is described as the concealment of information provided by parents to prevent their identification. Confidentiality denotes the withholding of any information that

may potentially identify participants. Due to the specifics of this study, only a handful of primary special schools that serve Nepalese children were included; the narrowing of research sites also increases the potential to identify participating schools and stakeholders. Furthermore, considering the network of professionals in special schools and the parent demographic involved in this study, the likelihood of speculating identity potentially threatens the participant's anonymity. Therefore, this study, taking note of Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias' (1992) suggestion who outline various techniques for ensuring anonymity and confidentiality, will use vignettes with pseudonyms to portray an average person from the pool of participants. This technique is labelled as "microaggregation" and is used to ensure confidentiality. The vignettes will also be narrowed down to features relevant to partnering with schools and arguably, offering a richer picture.

Tony – Teacher

Tony has been working in the school for almost three years. He is Chinese, 32 years old, and was born and raised in Hong Kong. He has an undergraduate qualification in Education and is interested in continuing his studies. Tony has been working with Nepalese families for three years. Throughout his professional career, he has had limited exposure to professional development relevant to working with diverse families. Outside of school, he has limited to no social contact with people of other ethnicities. Tony does not feel he needs more training to work with families and those from ethnic backgrounds.

Melissa - Social Worker

Melissa has a postgraduate qualification and has been working in SEN schools for eight years. She is Chinese, 45 years old, and born and raised in Hong Kong. This is the first year that Melissa is working with Nepalese families. She rarely interacts with individuals from other ethnic communities. Melissa is interested in learning more about working with ethnic minority families.

Chandra - Parent

Chandra was born in Nepal, where she completed two years of college, and immigrated to Hong Kong when she was 22 years old. She has intermediate English speaking skills, but her Chinese speaking skills are not as good. Chandra works alongside multiple Chinese and Nepalese individuals as an assistant cook. She has picked up on some simple conversational Chinese. However, her social circle is entirely Nepalese, and she rarely interacts with people outside her community. Her husband works full-time as a labourer. Chandra lives in a self-owned flat with her husband, son, and five members of her husband's family. She works full-time and shares the responsibility of looking after her son with her mother-in-law. Her son has been diagnosed with Autism and has been at the school for three years.

Kalpana - Parent

Kalpana is new to Hong Kong; she moved here after marrying her husband right after completing high school. She started working for a few months and soon gave birth to her daughter and took on the role of a full-time homemaker. Kalpana lives in a rented flat with

her husband and daughter. Her husband works as a driver. Although Kalpana has simple conversational English skills, she is not fluent and cannot understand any Chinese either. With time, her daughter was diagnosed with Autism and is new to the school. Kalpana spends all of her time caring for her child and doing household chores, because of which she rarely has opportunities to interact socially with those outside of her immediate family.

3.8 Data collection

Cresswell and Poth's (2018, p. 149) model encapsulates the data collection process as a circle; it encompasses the various segments of the research process and extends beyond data collection. The model will be referenced as a guide for this study to articulate the data collection process more succinctly. The authors describe parts of the data collection circle as interrelated but note that ethical considerations are central as they intersect across all activities.

Smith and colleagues describe an interview as "a comfortable interaction" through which experiences can be explored in detail (2009, p.59). Achieving this was seen as key for this study. Semi-structured interviews were deemed appropriate for IPA research, as they create space for individuals to speak openly and are regarded as ideal for IPA (Reid et al., 2005; Smith & Osborn, 2007). Interviews create room for gathering information and generating meaning collaboratively between the interviewer and interviewee (Gubrium et al., 2012). Also, Kvale (2007) acknowledges the researcher's active role as they participate in the construction of knowledge with the participant; a description befitting of the IPA approach.

The researcher is encouraged to pose questions that assist participants in illustrating their "lived world" (Kvale, 1996, p.4).

Minimal probing was done during the interviews since, according to Smith and Osborn (2007), suggestions as opposed to direct and explicit directions make for a good interview. The interviews were conducted with flexibility, sensitivity and adopted a collaborative approach (Eatough & Smith, 2017). Questions were kept open, avoiding assumptions and "leading" participants to achieve answers (Smith et al., 2009). Also, as much as possible, interview questions were kept homogenous to strive for comparability across the multiple participants.

School professionals were invited for interviews conducted via Zoom, while parents preferred phone calls for their simplicity. Where technological difficulties presented, interviews with professionals were resumed via phone calls. Interviews were conducted over a three month period. Interviews were supported with a well-organised interview schedule beforehand (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012) and immediate note-taking of significant observations (Saldana, 2009). Transcriptions were made and categorised into digital files while ensuring anonymity.

Researcher Reflection

Noting obstacles encountered in the pilot study, care was taken to ensure that a simple description of home-school partnership was offered to parents, which proved helpful in eliciting a mutual understanding between researcher and parents. For instance, *"Home-school partnership can be the relationship between home and school, like interactions, communication, understanding and parents' participation in the school."* However, it could

be argued that this swayed parents' perspectives. Yet the varied responses indicated that parents were transparent in articulating their thoughts, whether in agreement or disagreement with the description provided. I was able to gather more detail compared to the pilot; parents provided multiple examples of their experiences.

As for interviews with professionals, I tried to articulate the questions in a manner that would convey a sense of casualness to the interview. For instance, rather than asking, *"How can home-school partnership be improved?"* The question was framed as, *"Imagine you have lots of money, support, or anything that you could ask for…how would you improve home-school partnership?"* Such phrasing was received with laughter by multiple professionals, which I think managed to break the barrier of formality. In hindsight, professionals may have been more honest if in a different setting. Since all professionals conducted interviews in their respective schools during school hours, this may have prevented them from revealing more.

After completing the data collection, it was evident that the parents' keenness to partake in the study was due to their desire to talk about their experiences. Parent attitudes enthusiastic throughout the interview, which may be due to the relationship established prior and the nature of the research topic, as it is highly relatable to their experiences and one that concerns them deeply. As was gleaned from the data, opportunities for articulating their thoughts are rare. Therefore, with the knowledge of a Nepalese individual, speaking with multiple parents and school professionals from various special schools to produce a 'report' may have been an attractive incentive.

3.9. Data analysis

The IPA data analysis process is circular and has both iterative and inductive processes. The analysis involves shifts from the shared to the descriptive and, finally, interpretive (Smith et al, 2009). IPA data analysis requires a balance between the suspension of bias and the researcher's active participation to harness the participants' meaning-making of experiences (Fade, 2004). To tackle this feat, Cresswell and Poth (2018, p.201), citing Moustakas (1994), encourages researchers to make their personal experiences of the phenomenon being studied known, as it "sets aside the researcher's personal experiences so that the focus can be directed to the participants in the study." Also, Finlay (2014) argues that IPA requires engaging in reflexive analysis, shifting to and from experience, awareness, and the parts and the whole, illustrative of a double hermeneutic.

Analysis at the multiperspectival level requires the development of a narrative, identifying patterns, links, and even conflicting ideas, and drawing out ways in which individual experiences link with one another (Larkin et al., 2019, p 191). This study employs three strategies: identifying conceptual overlap (consensus), differing perspectives (conflict), and complementary ideas (reciprocity). An adapted systematic six-step analysis process was developed (Larkin, et al., 2019; Smith, et al., 2009) as shown in Table 3.2. Although the process includes six stages, the undertaking was non-linear and approached with a hermeneutical circle in mind, addressing part-whole interactions.

Stage	Focus
1	Listening and reading • Access interview audio recordings • Examine interview notes

- Analyse transcripts
- Note initial thoughts and wonderings (reflexive exercise)

2	Exploring the data	

- Create further exploratory notes
- Categorise comments and descriptions, language, potential themes and meanings, and conceptual understanding of the text.
- Not arising questions and doubts

3	Identifying emergent themes	

- Develop statements of potential themes and researcher's wonderings.
- Highlight keywords/phrases for their significance or repetition within and across participants.

4	Searching for links	

- Extrapolate converging, diverging and reciprocal themes.
- Group similar themes (abstraction)
- Create subordinate themes
- Identify function of themes

5	Repeating analysis across all interviews	

- Analyse all transcripts following the same protocol from stage one to four.

6	Identifying patterns across interviews	

- Analyse all transcripts and resultant themes as a whole.
- Review emergent and subordinate themes as a whole.
- Craft superordinate themes from equal or similar statements made by at least half of the participants of each group, also noting deviations.
- Reconstruct themes if necessary.
- Group remaining subordinate themes to from overarching superordinate themes.

Table 3.2 Six-step IPA data analysis process (adapted from Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009; Larkin, Shaw and Flowers, 2019).

The data analysis in this study has involved thoroughness and the identification of themes extrapolated from the interpretations with supporting extracts. The presentation of data aligns with the idiographic feature of phenomenology. It also allows readers to reflect on the

interpretations made and even consider other possibilities (Smith et al., 2009). The data has also been arranged in an accessible pattern, allowing readers to follow the data seamlessly (Yin, 1989).

The analysis of documents also contributes to the contextualisation of this study. As mentioned previously, this study is interested in examining policy and other documents that interlink home-school partnership and those of children with disabilities and the ethnic minority community. McCulloch (2011) defines a document as a record of an event or process, and can take various forms. McCulloch also suggests that historical and documentary research methods permit the investigation of the past, change, and continuity and offer a glimpse into where the present stems from (p. 248). Specifically, it enables the investigation of "the origins of current structures, relationships, and behaviours." Analysing historical development can be conducted through interviews (oral sources) (e.g., Humphries, 1981; Gardner, 2003). However, the analysis of documents is not used as frequently as interviews and questionnaires. Additionally, published reports are an important source as they illustrate assumptions that underlie policy reforms (Scott, 2000, p. 27). Interview questions deliberately refrained from identifying these policies relevant to Hong Kong's context to gauge a better understanding of the participants' knowledge.

In terms of analysis, it is also indicated that by examining the text and the broader context, the document can be understood for its "underlying values and assumptions" (McCulloch, 2011). The emphasis on language and form to dissect the document for deeper meaning also aligns with hermeneutics (Reinfandt, 2009). The theorisation of the documents explored in

this study adopted an interpretive framework, which according to Jupp and Norris (1993), considers documents as social constructions.

Following the recommendation of Cohen (1999), the semiotics of documents were explored in this study; how meaning is conveyed and, in turn, how readers perceive it. This study also looked into how these policies translate to practise with reliance on participants' accounts in the interviews. It considered the external context, examining aspects of authorship (who created the document, why, and, how? Moreover, the document's audience and its outcomes were considered. Given this, various policy documents that pertain to this study's topic were examined with the use of content analysis and used as reference points and standards of practice against the findings acquired from the interviews. Content analysis is defined as "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts to the contexts of their use" (Krippendorp, 2004, p. 18).

Researcher Reflection

I have aimed to sample quotes from interviews proportionally across participants, striving for equal representation. Extracts from at least half of the participants related to each subordinate theme have been included to support the claims made (Smith, 2011). However, attention was also drawn to the views and experiences of the minority, with the justification that they may offer a divergent view. Throughout the analysis, I have strived to explore depth and breadth while highlighting both shared and distinct experiences, therefore capturing convergence and divergence between experiences.

Additionally, following Cresswell and Poth's point about the need to understand concepts of cultural anthropology for an ethnographic study, 'culture' was intentionally excluded from the research questions. Another reason for this purposeful exclusion was to shift the focus away from culture as a contributing factor in home-school partnership. Despite the significance of culture in home-school partnership, established by literature, I was interested in exploring other contributing factors to home-school partnership practices. Moreover, in the context of Hong Kong, I was curious to examine stakeholder thoughts and experiences outside of the dominant culture discourse, as this appears to be a saturated narrative of the marginalisation of the ethnic minority community. However, as the data collection process ensued, with each interview with professionals, the inexorable feature of culture in home-school partnership was transparent; 'culture' was almost unavoidable. Several instances in the interview demonstrated that culture was indeed the focal point, the crux of barriers that impact home-school partnership.

Chapter 4 Findings

This study set out to explore relationships between Nepalese parents and professionals in primary special schools in Hong Kong. With semi-structured interviews, the study inquired into various aspects of home-school partnership, such as conceptualisation, experiences, roles and responsibilities, understanding of policy, perceived barriers, and possibilities of improving home-school partnership. This chapter aims to provide a narrative of the research findings gathered by a multiperspectival IPA approach.

Overarching themes were found to intersect across multiple research questions (Table 4.1). Participant responses too diverge and converge, indicative of the hermeneutic circle. Interview extracts have been included to differentiate between the researcher's interpretations and the participant's voice. The developing narrative will be arranged along three strands of inquiry embedded within the research question of how parents and professionals understand, practise, and develop home-school partnership. As mentioned in chapter three, this study employs a multiperspectival interpretive phenomenological analysis using strategies of identifying consensus, conflict, and reciprocity to construct a narrative (Larkin et al., 2019).

	Convergence	**Reciprocity**	**Conflict**
	(Shared consensus or conceptual overlap)	*(Complementary ideas)*	*(Differing perspectives)*
Conceptualising home-school partnership	Child-centred view of home-school partnership Home-school partnership as a means of knowledge transfer.	Expectations of active parental participation through specific modes of engagement as set out by the school.	Home-school partnership to facilitate and promote cultural integration. Differing foci for children's development.

Roles and responsibilities	Collaboration between families and professionals.	Professionals as knowledgeable, and conveyors of information. Parental reliance on professionals.	
Approaches to partnership	All stakeholders keen to partner. Lack of Nepalese parents' participation in Parent-Teacher Association. Home-school partnership initiatives oriented towards Chinese families. Nepalese parents less visible than Chinese families. Unequal distribution of school resources between Chinese and Nepalese families.	Parent-Teacher Association as primary method of engagement with schools. External support facilitating communication. Similar approaches of engagement utilised for diverse families.	
Experiences	Parents appreciative of professionals' support. Positive stakeholder interpersonal experiences. Home-school relationships lacking depth. Nepalese families require more support than Chinese families.	Lack of parental awareness and agency. One-sided communication between home and school. Positive professionals' experiences of exposure to cultural diversity. Segregated parental experiences.	Multilingual learning environment for Nepalese children with communication difficulties.

	Nepalese parents create own personal information network.	Difficulty catering to diversity.

Table 4.1 Overarching themes from multiperspectival Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

4.1 Understanding home-school partnership

4.1.1 Conceptualising home-school partnership

A shared idea amongst all professionals and parents about how they perceive home-school partnership was found; relationships are seen to be led by a child-centred vision. One principal described home-school partnership as comprising three elements: the whole school approach policy, various professionals for addressing learning, behavioural and familial concerns, and parental training for the continuation of learning at home. All professionals identified consistent approaches between home and school as important. Like principals, social workers regard home-school partnership as targeting the development of children's internal well-being (e.g., learning, their personality) and the external (e.g., a positive learning environment at home).

Multiple teachers likened partnership to a bridge between home and school, with a shared aim targeted by different 'parts' (individuals). It is seen as a cooperative venture between parents and multiple professionals, and fulfilling this aim is understood as requiring parent training.

"[...] because a student's growth includes life from school and home so after teachers finish teaching at school, we hope parents at home can continue the same practice, no matter academics or behavioural aspects" *(Teacher 2A)*.

Most teachers acknowledged children's learning disabilities, which cemented their views on the purpose of partnership as revolving around improving students' behaviour and learning. By enhancing mutual understanding, support, and awareness of familial needs, teachers view the aim of home-school partnership as contributing to child development, finding solutions to problems, and supporting families. It is also seen as a means to strengthen connections between home and school.

> "The goal is to work for parents, students' learning, and other needs. We prioritise students. The parents and school cooperate to act accordingly. I think this is the definition of home-school partnership" *(Teacher 5B).*

> "Home-school cooperation can improve the relationship between parents and teachers through meaningful activities" *(Teacher 3A).*

All social workers shared a similar description of home-school partnership, where considering the children's holistic needs, working together towards a common target is vital. Likewise, parents also consider home-school partnership as a necessary joint effort to support children. One parent described the partnership in more detail as a collaborative process, where all stakeholders explore different ways of supporting children. Furthermore, the relationship between stakeholders should be close-knit and viewed with equality. Additionally, parents view home-school partnership as a process where they constantly learn more about their children and ways of supporting them from professionals.

> "We must be close to the teachers to learn more about our child" *(Parent 3D).*

However, some parents asserted that their understanding of their children would be different in the home environment, which presents challenges to the maintaining consistency as espoused by professionals.

A key aspect of partnership, described as essential by teachers, parents, and social workers is the enhancement of regular communication. The desired example of home-school partnership, as shared by most parents, is characterised as being positive, close, strong, and united, supported by consistent, sustainable, and effective two-way communication.

4.1.2 Defining roles and responsibilities

Principals identify their role as primarily administrative such as overseeing various aspects of staffing (e.g., allocating resources and training). Yet they also conceive of their work as involving the encouragement of parents to participate in students' learning and frequent communication with parents to strengthen relationships as pivotal. Most social workers and teachers identify principals as the school's steering wheel, including leadership, management, and administration responsibilities. Principals are looked upon for direction, policy-making, crafting the school's mission, and long-term planning.

> "Our first leader is the principal" *(Teacher 2B).*

Similar to how other professionals view their own role, teachers also recognise principals to be on the receiving end of opinions. However, the principal is relegated to a broader managerial position that overlooks policy-making.

"Does the principal acknowledge and understand the importance of parents' roles at school? Does s/he want to make changes after listening to the parents' voice? These are my expectations of the principal" *(Teacher 4B)*.

Principals view social workers as vital front-line workers with frequent and direct involvement with parents, thus affording them a better understanding of parental needs. On the other hand, they recognise teachers as focusing primarily on student needs, yet also required to establish relationships with parents and gain their trust and recognition.

As for their own roles and responsibilities, social workers perceive themselves as similar to teachers where they are to provide emotional support to students and counsel families. They identify themselves as case managers, with communication being a crucial aspect of their role and encouraging passive parents. Social workers also see themselves as introducing resources to parents, offering opinions, and guiding parents to navigate the school system, which includes ways of engaging with the school and clarifying parental roles.

More than half of the teachers view social workers as active participants in home-school partnership whereby they attend to parents' personal and emotional needs and any other difficulties they may encounter. As a result, social workers have a good understanding of parents' family background and needs. Teachers believe that social workers should be aware of community resources too.

While teachers view themselves as responsible for student progress, most parent communications and activities in their view are social worker-led. Since teaching-related work was described as highly time-consuming, leading to decreased opportunities to engage with parents, teachers rely on social workers for parent communications and keeping abreast with familial circumstances

"Since teachers work all day from Monday to Friday, we also rely on social workers to convey messages to parents and keep us informed on parent's condition" *(Teacher 4A).*

"Communicating with parents is mostly a role for social workers" *(Teacher 2C).*

A few teachers however, differentiated communication purposes between themselves and social workers, where they overlook aspects of learning while social workers' respond to the overall well-being of families. Additionally, although most teachers have a general idea of professionals' roles, a few were hesitant, while some assume that social workers are responsible for integrating Nepalese families with the broader Chinese community.

"I'm not too familiar with their work. I guess it involves supporting parents' integration because they are minorities here, so how might they make their lives better… I'm guessing that's what they do" *(Teacher 3C)*

"I cannot define it very deeply, as I am only a teacher" *(Teacher 5B).*

On the other hand, social workers appeared to have a clearer idea of professionals' roles, with their responsibility being to listen and gather parents' views. Teachers are seen to organise activities to encourage partnership and better understand students while focusing on their holistic needs involving discipline (behavioural concerns) and learning. Teachers are also seen to draw upon community-based resources to achieve these goals.

All teachers perceive home-school partnership as a division of labour, with some also including extended family and household members, and they hold schools accountable for communicating with families about their children and organising meaningful programmes for families. Most teachers agreed with each other about their role involving supporting students' learning, informing parents about what to do at home, and needing to understand both parent and student needs. While some teachers maintain that their focus is mainly academic, some distinguish their role as consisting of both academic and social-emotional/behavioural concerns. Furthermore, like social workers, maintaining a consistent approach is crucial between home and school.

> "So the cooperation between the two is very important, because if it's just the school helping the children in the absence of support from home, the effort is reduced to half, so if home and school can be 50-50, The result would be over 100" *(Teacher 6A)*.

A few teachers expressed home-school partnership as being part of their duty. At the same time, others shared that their role requires the demonstration of acceptance, respect, and sincerity. One teacher articulated her responsibility as comprising of looking over three dimensions.

"Along with their learning needs, their physical development, there might be some behaviour problems too, we, the teachers, need to handle it. These three areas are within the teacher's role, along with communicating well with parents" *(Teacher 4D).*

The acquisition of Chinese language skills was mentioned frequently. Teachers recognise their role as creating equal learning opportunities for students of all ethnicities, motivating ethnic minority students to learn the Chinese language and culture, and helping students understand its benefits.

"[…] so our role is definitely to teach Chinese language and Chinese culture. But the difficulty with this is that… we hope that they can be bilingual" *(Teacher 3B).*

"[...] teachers' role is also to look at their [student's] interests, and hopefully they will be interested to learn Chinese because learning Chinese is not a hard thing, it's about interest. Secondly, it is to make the students understand that learning Chinese is beneficial for their daily lives and to find jobs" *(Teacher 5B).*

Unlike the principals' view of social workers being on the frontline, most teachers view themselves sharing this position as well, placing them closest to the students and so, having access to first-hand information which is undoubtedly key to home-school partnership. Communication with parents was deemed crucial, with some teachers seeing themselves at the receiving end of opinions (e.g., opinions from principals and parents).

All parents expect conversations to be initiated by teachers, so that they can be informed them about their children. Additionally, a few parents recognise their role of actively seeking advice, following through, and cooperating. They acknowledge that they need to share their concerns with the school and other problems they are facing, adding that they need to be involved as well.

> "The teacher should be telling us how my child is, they should initiate conversations with us. But we should also seek their advice about how my child is too" *(Parent 4A)*

> "If we can gather ideas from each professional, if they can share with us, then that would be child-centred, so all of us are important" *(Parent 1D)*

Similarly, all professionals expect parents to support the school by gaining knowledge from professionals to ensure a continued practice from home to school. Teachers emphasise how support extends to not only children's learning but social-emotional well-being as well. Furthermore, one principal included domestic helpers as stakeholders in children's education as well; they were described as members of the home unit and, like parents, are also to apply knowledge gained from the school. Adding to this, some social workers suggested volunteering as part of parents' role in home-school partnership. Unlike other professionals, teachers assume parents to be on the giving end of opinions, almost all teachers shared their expectations of an active parent: voicing their opinions, expressing their views (e.g., the curriculum), sharing information about their children, and seeking strategies to implement at home.

"Regular communication, and encouraging parents to exchange information on their child, what can be done at home and at school so the student can make improvement" *(Principal 2A).*

"We have to come up with strategies to help students learn and inform parents what to do at home to keep up with our [school's] work, how to revise" *(Principal 3A).*

"When students require special support at home, parents can let the teacher know. We will do the same thing to help the students at school. There may be other situations where immediate assistance is required, and we will make necessary arrangements to help" *(Social Worker 1B).*

The transfer of knowledge from home to school is valued by parents as well. One mother shared that she views professionals as experts and that they have equal responsibility to contribute to the child's learning and development according to their respective expertise and knowledge. In agreement with professionals, a few parents expressed the need for consistency in approach. A shared view emerged from all the parents regarding their role and responsibilities within home-school partnership. All parents expressed their lack of understanding about their children's needs and ways to support their development. With this in mind, parents expect schools to take on a leadership role, with some considering the school to be the 'second home'

"Since my child has been placed in a special school, the responsibility is 100% theirs. If I had placed him in a mainstream school, then it would have been our weakness, our mistake. But once in a special school, they [professionals] would have received training about how SEN children are" *(Parent 3B).*

Some teachers are cognisant of the difficulties for the Nepalese parents'; not only are they seen to be responsible for preserving their own culture and language, but are also tasked with encouraging integration with the Chinese community as well.

"Parents should preserve their own culture and language, but they should also teach the students that they cannot only follow their parents' community, and to encourage more relations with the locals" *(Teacher 3C).*

4.2 Practicing home-school partnership

4.2.1 Approaches to partnership

Home-school partnership was largely reflected as a process revolving around communication and knowledge transfer. For instance, most principals conveyed knowledge transfer between stakeholders as crucial for effective home-school partnership. Home-school partnership appeared to rely on external support to facilitate communication by professionals and parents. Principals shared experiences of working with a Nepalese community volunteer who assisted by liaising between the school and the parents by offering comprehensive translation services.

"I do think we need outside help and assistance as we are not familiar with the needs of the Nepalese parents, and it is difficult to communicate with them since English may not work as the medium of communication. So we think we need to seek outside help and perhaps invite professionals to help with parenting work" *(Principal 3B).*

"At the moment, I seek advice from Ms. G, who helps us. If she were not around, it would have been tough. We would be totally lost like we're walking blindfolded." *(Parent 4B).*

The significant role of the community volunteer as a conduit demonstrates the significance of communication and knowledge, key for home-school partnership.

"We were successful" *(Parent 4D).*

"Only some parents know about such facilities from their social worker, but otherwise, no one had informed me about any of this! Such as the need to apply for the cards [disability card] and the special octopus card Ms. G helped us apply for it" *(Parent 5B).*

Social workers appear to function as guides for parents, especially when they are new to the school. A few social workers described their school's approach to welcoming new parents with two key elements: adaptation and integration. The process was described as involving multiple sessions with a variety of components. Firstly, parents are familiarised with the school's environment, curriculum and policies. Speech therapists are involved by advising parents about how to support speech development and the Chinese language at home. Parents

are also taught self-relaxation techniques, followed by some mutual support group sessions. Parent and child programmes are also included in the form of sports.

> "We include some parent-child activities with sports elements using English, so they can also carry out at home" *(Social Worker 3C)*.

In the second year, parents begin the final portion of the programme, that of integration, which takes place in the second year. Social workers explained the objective as building connections between ethnic minority and Chinese families.

> "I will encourage the NCS parents to join the dance, hiking…because these activities don't require translation, it's just dancing together, doing exercise, and hiking. I think this year, they have integrated and participated well, and enjoyed the process too. So I think to accomplish integration is the aim. I also think for them to enjoy the process is important too" *(Social Worker 3C)*.

Culture was highlighted frequently by multiple social workers, where they described home-school partnership practices as encompassing a cultural thread, such as food stalls or celebrating festivals like the Chinese New Year and Christmas. In light of this, a few social workers disclosed the monocultural nature of their programmes.

> "I have to admit that our activities are often organised for local [Chinese] parents. It is because there are fewer NCS parents, and they don't participate a lot too" *(Social Worker 2A)*.

In a similar vein, most principals also emphasised integration between ethnic minority and Chinese families as an essential focus, and recognising linguistic barriers, schools have to consider how to navigate through the challenge.

"We have arranged a fitness dancing group and invited both Nepalese and local parents to join together. In the process, there is no need for speech. Unlike a sharing group, they only have to dance, which is fun and joyful. Bodily language is enough to express themselves. They don't have to speak much, but they can interact by having fun, dancing, smiling, and taking pictures together. They really enjoy it, and dancing helps break down the barrier between them" *(Principal 2B).*

To create a more inclusive and representative body, some teachers shared how their school changed the language of the Parent-Teacher Association to Parent Staff Association (PSA), where the new name denotes an expansion of stakeholders to include other professionals in the school. Such efforts were thought to convey a positive message to parents.

"This is because we don't want to limit it as something between parents and teachers, other staff should also be involved. So this year we changed. There are more professionals involved to learn about parents' needs. This will tell parents that the school cares about the students and we use our resources accordingly. Other than teachers, ST [speech therapist] and OT [occupational therapist] also joined. Parents can see how we work together for the student's overall development and growth" *(Teacher 3C).*

All stakeholders described communication as the crux of home-school partnership. Teachers

described their schools as utilising various communication methods to support ethnic minority families, which, similar to some principals' views, teachers pointed out may not be experienced by Chinese families. Face-to-face conversations were described as more convenient and an assured method of conveying information. Some teachers touched upon providing support to non-Chinese-speaking families by distributing bilingual notes as a requirement from the Education Bureau. Another teacher shared that the school uses English to cater to a broader range of parents, even though it is common knowledge that some parents, especially mothers, cannot comprehend English.

A few teachers noted that some Nepalese parents communicate with professionals indirectly through friends or translators. Thus, teachers are required to communicate through a third person, and such processes were described as time-consuming for both parties. Teachers made distinctions between direct and indirect communication where the latter was not preferred as it impedes promptness.

> "They may communicate to us through a friend, and we have to tell their friends to convey messages to us. Direct and indirect communication is very different. Direct communication allows immediate action, while indirect communication takes up more time, and during that time, the situation may have worsened. Language is the problem" *(Teacher 2C).*

One teacher described proactive measures he has taken to improve communication with Nepalese parents by giving out his personal WhatsApp so that parents may approach him even during non-school hours. In other examples of communication practices, a few teachers recounted more concerning instances. For example, despite facing problems, parents may not

approach professionals for help, leading to the exacerbation of the issue until it is addressed much later, which may also leave few options for solutions.

Some principals highlighted communication to involve dialogue *between* parents as well, especially for ethnic minority parents. For instance, one principal described the value of parent networks for sharing knowledge and experience.

> "We have a group where more experienced parents who know how to handle their children share with younger parents, or those who are in need…sharing their life experiences" *(Principal 5A).*

Almost all parents had never spoken with the principal, and interactions were non-existent. For example, some parents shared that they came across the principal on rare occasions, such as school events, and these instances were devoid of opportunities to engage meaningfully.

> "I can't say anything about the principal. It's like we don't have any interaction at all. I do recognise him, but we don't have conversations; we do greet, but that's it. I haven't talked about my son or the school with them" *(Parent 3D).*

Although less than half of the parents reported regular communication with professionals, it is considered inadequate and ineffective. In addition, parents of children who are now in upper primary classes described decreased interaction with social workers with time. A few parents described it as almost non-existent in recent times. Parents' reasoning for this were unknown, with a few pointing toward the pandemic exacerbating pre-existing barriers. One

parent explained that she has not even been able to meet the teacher satisfactorily, out of which a sense of distance has emerged:

> "We haven't even been able to see the teachers properly, who they are, how they are. We just listen. We don't get to see or meet them, so it feels like there's a distance from the teachers and the school" *(Parent 2A).*

More than half of the parents described their involvement with professionals (social workers or teachers) as being limited to mostly listening. One parent shared her thinking that schools initiate contact with parents primarily to communicate about her child's negative behaviours or problems in school.

> "I've never really received feedback that isn't… you know we're always receiving good comments about him, no complaints. And I guess that's why we don't really... if there were problems, that's when they would reach out to me, right? He's good [behaviour], so I guess that's why they don't really reach out to me. And because there aren't any problems, we don't really communicate much" *(Parent 6A).*

All parents prefer face-to-face conversations as it is easier to discuss concerns. The availability of WhatsApp as a means for communicating with schools was also mentioned, but parents noted the tool functioning primarily as a platform to receive information rather than engage in conversations. Furthermore, a few parents whose school includes support staff from an ethnic minority background are informed of upcoming programmes and other notices through WhatsApp in the form of voice messages in Hindi/Urdu. Although the spoken language between the said support staff and Nepalese parents may have similarities in

vocabulary and syntax and with increased comprehension compared to Chinese or English, the actuality of its insufficiency by most parents was conveyed.

In terms of professionals working together, there was little evidence from all professionals for ways they collaborate:

"We don't collaborate often, because we have different areas of focus" *(Teacher 4B)*.

Although parents reported various degrees of interaction with school professionals, less than half reported that they maintain an effective partnership with either the class teacher or social worker in terms of communication. There was an equal divide between parents interacting more with one professional (either teacher or social worker). Almost all parents approach teachers with concerns related to learning.

The remaining parents who shared that they interact more with social workers described it as being easier. Social workers are approached for various reasons: paperwork such as renewing cards, clarifying/rectifying administrative issues, or reminders for upcoming events. One parent shared that interactions with the social worker is rare where contact is made for paperwork.

Parent programmes are deemed significant by all parents; they are seen as opportunities to learn from professionals. They are also seen as a means to support their wellbeing. A few parents shared their positive experiences:

"Recently, they had organised a weekly dance programme. Mothers with children with Autism go through a lot of stress, so to help relieve that, they organised that. They showed us fast moves, made us sweat; it felt good, even if only a little" *(Parent 1B)*.

"They had taken us hiking while the kids were at school. I liked that because we don't usually get to spend time like that; we can't leave our children and go off. So, with the kids at school, we felt at ease" *(Parent 2D)*.

All parents are cognisant of their lack of knowledge about their children's learning and developmental needs, which leads to challenging and confusing experiences. Despite identifying training and parent meetings as an opportunity to gather advice and learn strategies about what to do at home, multiple parents highlighted dissonance between their ability to follow through with professionals' advice. Furthermore, they mentioned an inability to effectively continue learning at home despite being invited for observations at school. Some parents shared that despite attending programs that were explicitly catered for ethnic minority families, it was not deemed fruitful.

"It's a failure when I go to school to learn and come back home, and I'm unable to continue the support" *(Parent 4A)*.

4.2.2 Experiences

All professionals consistently highlighted communication barriers in their experiences of home-school partnership with Nepalese parents, resulting in differing experiences between Chinese and Nepalese families. The impact of communication difficulties can be observed

where Chinese parents' needs and difficulties are understood more clearly and quickly, resulting in immediate professional support, which might not be the case for Nepalese parents. Most teachers are familiar with the difficulties of accessing community resources for Nepalese parents, which Chinese parents do not experience. Consequently, like social workers, teachers find themselves guiding parents to navigate community resources. Teachers added that Chinese parents are familiar with the school's system, but for ethnic minority parents require thorough explanations. This may include information about Hong Kong's education system, and where and how to apply for external services. Also, teachers shared that Chinese children have more exposure to Chinese both at school and at home, which is not accessible to Nepalese children, significantly decreasing their opportunities for learning Chinese. Adding to children's different language experiences, most Nepalese parents pointed out that their children are being raised in a trilingual environment, adding difficulties to their existing language and communication delays.

> "They teach in Chinese, and on top of that, it is a child who does not speak [referring to Autism]" *(Parent 3E).*

Besides poor understanding between home and school, language barriers are also seen to contribute to a delay in communication. For instance, one teachers shared that parents are concerned about their child, and when communicating with the school, some tend to perceive things negatively. This is speculated to be the result of misinterpretations due to language barriers. In another instance, teachers identified communications delays as contributing to parental stress, as well as the exacerbation of problems or delays in intervention:

"We have come across a case where the parent is facing problems when handling their child's behaviour problems, but they don't tell us. They come to collect the child from school, and we actively ask how the child is doing at home, and it's only then that they tell us about the problem" *(Teacher 6C).*

"The problem may have existed since the beginning of the school term, but we didn't find out until the end of the school term. The delay certainly affects the problem-solving process. The problem could worsen during that time gap. And so, there can be a very different outcome." *(Teacher 3B).*

"Parents are pretty passive when telling us about their needs, they will accumulate it for so long, and it's only later that they tell us or we find out somehow. This is the most troublesome part because this stresses out parents, and it is bad for the students" *(Teacher 4C).*

Some teachers explained that all stakeholders are communicating in their second or third languages. They described such exchanges as ripe for misinterpretation or a lack of ease in expressing oneself. Many teachers shared that they rely on body language and a mixture of simple English and Chinese to communicate. More than half of the teachers mentioned the difficulty of understanding parents due to their accents. Some teachers notice that parents appear impatient when communicating with them, which according to their assumptions, results in avoidance of communication altogether.

Parents too described communication experiences with professionals similarly. Although most teachers speak English, many parents found their conversations lacking fluency. They shared that it is difficult for teachers to explain to the parents and just as challenging for parents to explain to the teachers. Furthermore, questions and concerns are hard for parents to elaborate.

A few teachers remarked that in the past year, communications have increased. Also, a few teachers mentioned using Google translate as a helpful tool, yet they also noted its unreliability. Some teachers adopt a positive mindset, describing language differences as possible to overcome. With the introduction of technological support, progress in communication has been made. For example, with the use of the WhatsApp mobile application, social workers notice improved communication as it can efficiently transfer detailed information to parents. Here, some mention how the difficulty of understanding accents is also removed. However, other social workers note that not all parents may be adept at navigating technology, thereby not guaranteeing successful communication.

Even though language barriers persist and are highlighted consistently by all professionals, a few teachers reiterated the necessity of the Chinese language. For example, one teacher raised strong opinions about how Hong Kong is indifferent to diversity or one's country of origin, explaining further that regardless of where one comes from, the ability to speak Chinese is absolute:

"But a characteristic about Hong Kong people is that you need to speak Cantonese. Hong Kong does not care where you come from! Even my parents were not born in Hong Kong. So a weird aspect about Hong Kong is that you must know how to speak Cantonese" *(Teacher 6B)*.

Parents are encouraged by professionals to consider their children's future in Hong Kong. In other words, the need for linguistic competency in Chinese is reiterated across most schools. Although parents understand and appreciate the intention behind such advice, many do not accept such arguments, especially to justify the absence of educational instruction in English entirely.

Principals noted distinct ways of thinking as having a cultural underpinning, explaining the differences between approaches to home-school partnership between Chinese and Nepalese families. Cultural differences are presumed to contribute to further impeding sound understanding between home and school. Furthermore, although highlighted with caution and uncertainty, one principal shared his observation of differences in gender roles in Chinese and Nepalese households and the subsequent impact on child-rearing:

"I'm not sure if my thinking is right or not. I just want to describe the situation. For the Chinese, the wife or the female has more of a right to speak for the family, and they have some authority over how children are to be taught. But in my thinking, in the Nepalese family, it's still the father who dominates, with less say from the wife. I don't know if this is right or not, but I got this impression" *(Principal 6A)*.

Most social workers believe that when parents speak the same language or come from the same cultural background, it is easier to understand each other. However, this is not the case for Chinese and Nepalese parents. Thus, a lack of interaction due to linguistic and cultural differences can have a negative impact. One teacher shared his perspectives on the similarities between Chinese and Nepalese families, by drawing comparisons between his assumption of the polytheistic nature of Nepalese religious beliefs as imbibing a more liberal outlook to monotheistic religions like Islam:

"I think that the Nepalese and Chinese can be connected in terms of religion. There's a difference between Monotheism and Polytheism. It seems like polytheism is more easy-going" *(Teacher 3A).*

The teacher elaborated his thinking about the alikeness between the Chinese and Nepalese families in terms of their physical appearance as well, which according to him, can lend themselves well to promoting integration:

"If you ask me what the differences are, then I would say they're actually quite similar to Chinese. They look similar to us. Some students, if you don't say that they're Nepalese, then you wouldn't know" *(Teacher 3A).*

In order to increase interactions between Chinese and ethnic minority parents, social workers have attempted to organise programmes requiring parents to coordinate with each other. Due to communication difficulties, this attempt proved unsuccessful, ultimately resulting in segregated activities. Similarly, the practicalities of catering to multiple cultures were highlighted as complex:

"Even though they are in small numbers, and they are NCS, they are from different cultures, and the bonding is difficult. It's also difficult to use one method to deal with all families. I wouldn't know all their cultures, so this is the difficult part for me. And it can be time-consuming!" *(Social Work 4A)*.

In contrast, exposure to diversity has been received well by some professionals. As shared by some teachers, partnering with ethnic minority families are seen as opportunities to gain exposure to diversity. Considering otherwise infrequent interactions with the ethnic minority community in their daily lives, teachers spoke positively about the opportunity to communicate with parents from different backgrounds and how it has contributed to their personal growth:

"There are fewer opportunities for me to speak English in my daily life, so my English has improved as well! I've learnt a lot of English words because the English I use with them is related to daily life" *(Teacher 4B)*.

Describing a school picnic, teachers found the experience positive, especially to see people from different backgrounds together. Teachers value such instances, as an opportunity for Chinese and ethnic minority parents to be engaged while accompanying their children as well. Another teacher found that some parents welcome teachers' invitations and are excited to share Nepalese food. In contrast, workshops and talks conjure less interest where parents are found to be less motivated.

All professionals noted differences in levels of participation between Chinese and Nepalese parents, where the former are viewed as more eager to partner with schools. They observe that Nepalese parents' participation is relatively low, appearing to be a lack of interest, even for programmes that have been designed specifically for ethnic minority parents. Principals mentioned little understanding about how these programmes are received. Nepalese parents' engagement is viewed as inconsistent and, in most cases, absent. However, language appears to impact how parents perceive programmes. Parents shared that although translations are offered, it most likely is not in their mother tongue. Current translation services provided at schools are deemed ineffective and unsatisfactory. Most parents reported not being able to understand most of the content or what the speaker was trying to convey. Furthermore, although briefings may be provided at the end of the sessions, parents felt they missed out on much of the content.

> "The translation was done in Urdu, and I felt the translation was very brief compared to what the speaker seemed to be saying. We were not given any handouts. The talk was already in Chinese, so the other parents could understand. But on top of that, the presentation on the screen was also entirely in Chinese" *(Parent 3B).*

> "Once there was a programme, and I was asked to fill in a survey after the programme. It was all in Chinese, so how am I to fill it in? The translator said that she would help read it out, and I could then tell her my response. I said I don't understand, so I said I don't want to fill it in" *(Parent 1A).*

Key to home-school partnership is seen as participation in the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), where teachers note higher participation rates for Chinese than Nepalese parents.

"In general, if the programmes are catered to all parents, then the percentage of NCS parents is low. And making calculations based on the ratio and numbers, their participation rate is still lower than the local [Chinese] parents" *(Teacher 2A).*

"The PTA is open to all parents, which includes Nepalese parents, yet in the past four years, I have not seen any Nepalese parents participate; they seem to take on a rather passive role. Their participation is limited to cultural booths, which is also infrequent" *(Teacher 1A).*

"Nepalese parents are seldom involved in PSA [PTA] work. Language is the barrier that hinders their expression. So they are not brave enough to join. Local parents are more involved. Nepalese parents only join when it is a large-scale event; they seldom join the committee" *(Teacher 3A).*

"We have very different habits, and it's hard to reach them, let alone push them to join our activities" *(Social Work 3B).*

"For us Chinese, we have Chinese New Year, and we invite them to celebrate together, but they're not so keen, maybe because it isn't their festival" *(Social Work 2A).*

Almost all social workers described Nepalese parents, unlike Chinese parents who do not open up easily, as being very open, friendlier, and having a strong sense of acceptance of

their children's learning needs. Teachers echoed social worker's observations, describing the parents as shy and rarely seeking help from professionals. One teacher noted that although Nepalese parents may be passive with communication, initiative, and involvement, they are friendly and enthusiastic. However, when approached, they are willing to share.

In contrast, Nepalese parents were compared with Chinese parents to differ in their approaches to behaviour management; comparably, they are seen as being more lenient. Similarly, many teachers, highlighted cultural differences that impact children's behavioural expectations. Also, Nepalese parents' views may not align with the professionals' in terms of emphasising academic performance; Nepalese parents are perceived as prioritising their children's happiness:

"Our culture is different, and our expectations for the child are also different. Nepali parents believe that studying should be fun and enjoyable. It should not be about the result. The most important thing is to make improvements. But as teachers, we want students to excel academically. Parents' ways of teaching and disciplining are more carefree" *(Social Work 6A).*

"They have very different views on how to discipline a child. We have to make them understand what problems their way of disciplining may cause in the future. They are quite lenient on disciplinary issues, and they do not spend much time on teaching their child to behave" *(Social Work 5B).*

Teachers highlighted other differences, including Nepalese parents' perception that communicating with schools is sufficient for home-school partnership. Also, some Nepalese parents are observed to express concerns for their children about bullying and a lack of friendships which are concerns Chinese parents may not share. However, a few social workers pointed out that because most programmes like parent training are conducted in Chinese, it might justify why they may not be able to pick up on strategies (such as behaviour management) that Chinese parents have access to.

Further misalignment of views is noted between professionals and parents, with some experiences demonstrating misunderstandings. As noted by one principal, Nepalese parents appear to be concerned about things that are beyond their children's abilities. They make inquiries about various things and have multiple requests for the school. However, according to the principal, parents' subjective ideas may not be in alignment with that of the professionals. Sometimes, principals shared that it can be tricky to make parents understand the rationale of how resources are distributed:

"It takes time for us to clarify why the resources are distributed this way. We worry that they may misunderstand it as discrimination when actually the resources are distributed according to student's need" *(Principal 5A).*

Similarly, teachers note most ethnic minority parents have high expectations which may not align with their children's abilities:

"Because we are a SEN school, the children have intellectual disabilities, but the NCS parents' expectations are high compared to their children's ability. We have to find a way to make the parents understand the real ability of the child and support their development step by step. It requires communication skills and time" *(Teacher 2C)*.

Parental expectations may also differ from professionals' evaluations and expectations, where parents may appear to not expect much from their children. Some parents were also found to make requests that may be difficult for teachers to fulfil, such as having homework translated to English for every subject. Although some teachers may try, it is described to be difficult and stressful for other teachers to provide the same. As Nepalese parents expressed concern about their participation in their children's learning and development. More specifically, a sense of dissatisfaction is noted. Some parents expressed their wish to see schools provide more attention to each student and their individual learning needs.

"If they could consider each child's capacity and teach in a way that matches that level, it would be good. They give him homework on content that he already knows; he can only learn more if they give him more difficult work. The school tells me that they cannot cater to him only, as they need to consider other children too, those who might not be of a similar level" *(Parent 4A)*.

Varying language skills were noted by the professionals. Some social workers pointed out that a few Nepalese parents cannot converse in English or Chinese. While some teachers shared that the few parents who speak some English are easier to communicate with. In addition, those who have stayed in Hong Kong for a long time have a grasp of Cantonese,

which makes communication more accessible. Yet, it might not be up to par to hold conversations about their children's development or to engage in school programmes, as these factors still seem insufficient in encouraging their active participation. Most social workers described their interactions with parents as occurring on an informal basis.

"They come by the school to drop off and pick up children, so I'm there to greet them, I have the practice of greeting them personally in the morning, and after school, I introduce suitable activities during the interaction to them" *(Social Worker 5B).*

Most parents claim that there is little understanding between home and school and that they experience distress when they are unable to express themselves:

"There are many problems, and despite being aware of it, we can't share it" *(Parent 5E).*

On the other hand, one parent noted that her communication with the school is easy and straightforward and that she is comfortable talking with the professionals. The parent emphasised that she values honesty from the teachers, even if it means receiving negative news about her child. Another parent shared that she is treated well by the teachers and is provided with opportunities to voice her grievances. However, despite such opportunities to express themselves, changes do not necessarily take place.

All parents noted that most parent training and programmes are conducted mainly in Chinese. More critically, the inability to express themselves openly about their children or engage in dialogue with professionals in meetings is a pressing concern:

"And we don't really ask much too, what should we ask anyway?" *(Parent 3B)*.

One parent explained an experience that left her feeling confused as she was uncertain of what the teachers were saying:

"They might say something funny and laugh, but we don't get it" *(Parent 5C)*.

Although some parents described home-school partnership experiences as frustrating, stressful, and confusing, a few parents were unable to articulate their experience at all. With much effort, one parent described it as perplexing since it was neither good nor bad, that it was a rather strange experience, making them feel puzzled.

Parents agree with principals' views, who emphasised educational shortcomings on the part of Nepalese parents as restricting their participation in schools. Nepalese parents deem their education inadequate to meet the needs of partnering with schools; this was highlighted repeatedly by all parents. They expressed a lack of awareness of their children's development or needs, the school system, and their role within home-school partnership. As a result, the difficulty of supporting their children at home and engaging actively with the school is noted.

"We cannot speak the language here, and our English isn't so great either; it's just ok. I feel there are differences, and on top of that, we don't have knowledge about children with special needs. That's why I find it difficult. It's important to make this relationship strong, but how do we do it? I don't think it's possible" *(Parent 6C).*

Parents shared that they are eager to continue providing learning support at home but cannot fulfil this since they are unable to close the knowledge gap. There was also an indication of a lack of resources at home to support their children's learning, ranging from knowledgeable adults to guide children's learning and tangible resources such as visual aids and sensory tools, to name a few. One parent noted institutional dissimilarities between schools in Hong Kong and Nepal; adding to this novel experience is the unknown landscape of special education. All parents are aware of the differences in teaching methods and engagement styles between home and school. Additionally, they shared that they are unable to follow through with strategies set out by the school, which consequently do not support their children's learning. Parents shared that they are confused or, in some cases, passively following expectations from schools with little contemplation:

"They tell us to do it at home, but there's a difference between them doing it and us doing it. So there are many things like that going on" *(Parent 3B).*

"Whatever the schools asks of us, we follow. We've been doing this ever since. And we don't even have any knowledge about this" *(Parent 6B).*

Language barriers also impact parents' participation in their children's learning. Some parents recall confusion during a parent-child speech therapy session, describing the process as a 'failure' since, despite being present at the session, the parent explained that they were unable to follow through at home. Similarly, some parents share that they manage to complete homework set by the school, but depend heavily on a translating device. Other parents described the process as being time-consuming and an unpleasant experience. For most, there is little to no understanding of the learning content.

Almost all parents expressed concern about their participation in their children's learning and development. More specifically, a sense of dissatisfaction is noted, especially when there are competing viewpoints between home and school. For instance, one parent spoke about the school's inadequate learning expectations for his child. In his perspective, the school should carefully consider children's abilities and provide appropriate instruction. In this example, although the school asserts responsibility to address the needs of the classroom as a whole, in the parent's opinion, his child is not being provided with appropriate learning accommodations. Similarly, other parents expressed their wish to see schools provide more attention to each student and their individual learning needs.

"If they could consider each child's capacity and teach in a way that matches that level, it would be good. They give him homework on content that he already knows; he can only learn more if they give him more difficult work. The school tells me that they cannot cater to him only, as they need to consider other children too, those who might not be of a similar level" *(Parent 4A)*.

Other experiences linked with learning accommodations touched upon the categorisation of children according to their learning abilities. One parent shared her perspective on the segregation of children based on their 'abilities'. She accepted segregation as necessary to cater to children's learning needs (mainstream vs. special needs), yet she firmly disagrees with further segregation of children within special schools as well. With such arrangements, she assumes, children do not get to learn from each other. The parent added that the school's response to her queries is unsatisfactory:

"The main thing that I don't like is that the child has special needs, which is why they are attending this special school. But even within this school, they are segregated into groups. They separate them according to their abilities, so in this way, the children do not get the chance to learn from each other. I have raised this, and they tell me that all children get equal opportunities, but I am not satisfied with this arrangement" *(Parent 5C)*.

Less than half of the teachers maintained that there aren't many differences between Chinese and Nepalese parents. Similar to Chinese parents, almost all of the professionals noted that Nepalese parents are busy, they do make an effort when they are invited, but may also have more than one child to care for, thus, unable to engage in school affairs.

However, teachers and social workers acknowledged that ethnic minority parents require more support, especially when accessing community resources, which principals concur by noting that there are indeed more resources allocated to ethnic minority. More than half of the social workers shared that recognising Nepalese families' status as minorities in Hong Kong, they deserve help. For example, they shared that ethnic minority parents do not receive enough information about community resources, which urges them to inform parents about what is available to them. Nevertheless, all social workers and teachers maintained that ultimately, there is no difference in their service towards both families:

"When we accept them into the school, we treat them fairly, no matter if they are Chinese or non-Chinese. We give equal service" *(Teacher 2C).*

"Both local [Chinese] and NCS children are part of Hong Kong. They are our students, and we will help them regardless of their race, background, and culture" *(Social Worker 4B).*

"I think everyone is quite similar. As I mentioned, we teachers must look at students' growth, results, personality, and behaviours to give advice. So no matter what nationality you are, whether you're Chinese, or Nepalese or Indian, the approach is similar" *(Teacher 3C).*

All Nepalese parents expressed awareness of the differences in experiences between Nepalese and Chinese parents. Although they may not have had opportunities to understand the Chinese parents' experiences, they are confident in their view about how their experiences fare poorly in comparison. For instance, they consider communication between

professionals and Chinese parents to be effortless; Chinese parents are able to ask questions openly.

> "It's not possible for us to ask questions openly. I'm sure the Chinese parents are able to ask more questions" *(Social Work 4B)*.

On the other hand, Nepalese parents consider themselves and their children to be on the receiving end of communication barriers. Similar to teachers' view, most Nepalese parents gave examples of Chinese children having more access to learning Chinese both at home and school. Such experiences are deemed as being unequal. Furthermore, some parents believe that teachers have a more 'open and free' interaction with Chinese families and are given more priority. Few parents went further to comment that the segregation of ethnicities, which may not be intentional, is also experienced by the children.

> "I sometimes feel that teachers are more open and free with the Chinese children and give them more priority" *(Parent 2D)*.

For professionals and parents alike, language barriers are persistent. In addition, language difficulties were described by all parents as making it challenging to engage with Chinese parents too. Most parents shared that despite being presented with opportunities (although few and far between) to interact, the language barriers for both Nepalese and Chinese parents deter meaningful engagement. Less than half of the parents maintained that they interact with Chinese parents but with limitations that render their conversations to remain within the boundaries of exchanging pleasantries and pointing out who their children are. In some

extreme instances, as shared by one parent, is the inability to recognise other Chinese parents from their own class.

"We don't interact with the Chinese parents too" *(Parent 5E).*

"There's no interaction, and I don't even recognise them" *(Parent 2D).*

"We meet during the school events, it's very rare, and we sometimes can't really tell who the parents are. So you attend and listen, as much as you can, and that's it, really" *(Parent 4D).*

All Nepalese parents shared that they are more involved with other Nepalese parents due to language and cultural similarities. To some extent, they may interact with Indian and Pakistani parents and, for those who can converse in English, with Filipino parents. In one particular school where most Nepalese children are in the same classroom, one parent shared that all Nepalese mothers find themselves congregating often. Nepalese parents find similar experiences to be a unifying factor. Professionals also note a perceivable unity and mutual support amongst the Nepalese parents, which is highly appreciated.

"If we find out that there are Nepalese parents in his class, we usually exchange contact details and information" *(Parent 3B).*

"I really appreciate them supporting and looking out for each other" *(Principal 3A).*

Based on experiences, professionals recounted negative and positives experiences of partnering with Nepalese parents. From these recollections, it is possible to draw out how home-school partnership is perceived. For instance, a principal demarcated the extent to which schools can support families, where the school was requested to intervene in familial problems. One teacher in particular described a positive experience with a parent, appearing to denote preferable parent traits. From the shared experience, the parent was portrayed as cooperative and willing to participate in programmes that have an element of communication, leading to more understanding about the family background and parental expectations about the child. Conversely, negative parent traits were also provided. The teacher identified a type of parent they label as a 'shadow parent,' alluding to their lack of visibility and participation. Recalling previous experiences, the teacher provided examples of how a shadow parent might present themselves:

"They don't ask anything, don't sign notices, and are not bothered by anything. They just drop off and pick up; they won't communicate with parents" *(Teacher 4C).*

Another teacher's experience seemed to resonate with the 'shadow parent' traits:

"Such parents might be those who don't seem to care about their child, those who do not read school notices for months, those who do not send their children to school, and who do not pay for school meals" *(Teacher 2B).*

All of the parents expressed gratitude towards the professionals for their support and

understanding. All parents demonstrated an awareness that as much as possible, schools are trying to do what they can despite the unfavourable circumstances. One parent shared that she appreciates professionals informing her about her child, even if it concerning negative behaviours. The parent is also grateful to teachers for sharing pictures and videos of her child during class activities and informing her about what to expect in class for the following week. Furthermore, the parent added that the teacher is very understanding of her working conditions as she tries to make adjustments to the programme schedule so that she may be able to participate:

"She is aware that I work at night. They have online classes in the morning, and she tells me she understands I might be late. She asks what time slots suit me so she can help me arrange it accordingly. I like that she understands and asks me" *(Parent 4B).*

Most parents also appreciate the acknowledgment of their requests regarding their children's learning. Some parents described class teachers and therapists as being very helpful because whenever problems arise, they are ready to assist and, often, seek solutions for the parents. One parent described therapists as empathetic to their needs and commended their efforts to conduct individual lessons in English as much as possible. Similarly, few parents noted the schools' efforts to provide information in English and that they do not recall any discriminatory experiences. Other parents remarked that teachers provide good care for their children, and because they are ethnic minorities, parents assume that teachers may sympathise with their circumstances.

4.2.3 Pandemic

The onset of the pandemic amplified the significance of home-school partnership. The crises compelled a pedagogical shift and increased parental involvement, demanding that home and school cooperate in novel ways to ensure the continuation of learning. The pandemic exposed further vulnerabilities for the families involved in this study, bolstering the argument for scrutinising equitable participation in education for ethnic minority families in Hong Kong.

Teachers in this study reported that parent communications were severely impacted, especially with those parents who did not have a good grasp on or the means to access technology. There was a significant drop in programmes as well. However, some teachers held the view that although the pandemic instigated drastic changes, it did not interfere with communication. In their perspective, if the parents are keen, they will initiate.

> "The chances of conducting activities together have decreased. Did it get difficult? No, it didn't because if there is a need, parents will approach us to talk about it" *(Teacher 4D).*

On the other hand, for parents, the pandemic forced classrooms into living rooms and bedrooms. It also pushed them to assume teaching roles. The pandemic enabled parents to observe their children's (albeit modified) learning environment. Moreover, all parents expressed dissatisfaction with remote learning; more than half of the parents described remote learning as 'useless' since none of the content was accessible due to language barriers. All parents were keen to resume regular schooling as they highlighted how the home environment was not conducive to learning, and the language of instruction also impacted parents' motivation:

"[…] would be better if they could go to school. There's a big difference between home and school." *(Parent 1B).*

"Online learning is all in Chinese, and only rarely will they have short segments in English." *(Parent 5C).*

"Now, even in this Zoom class, which is entirely in Chinese, there is not a single word of English!" *(Parent 6B).*

"When we're learning online, we can see it. We don't want to attend online classes. We don't understand what is going on, and it is difficult to control our children for that long too." *(Parent 3B).*

Parents spoke about the difficulty of engaging their children with the learning content. Amongst numerous negative experiences, one parent noted that the teacher would use Chinese words to accommodate Chinese students even during the English lesson. However, such accommodations were not available to ethnic minority students during other lessons:

"When it was time for the English lesson, to support the Chinese students, the teacher started speaking in Chinese too! She is adding Chinese words even during the English lesson. But for us, they won't even consider adding some English words to support us!" *(Parent 1B).*

"They [children] need our help during online learning to sit with them. But because of the language, I cannot do much, so we just sit there and look at the screen. And in between, if they say something in English, then we can respond, but besides that, we don't understand anything" *(Parent 6A).*

"During Zoom classes, all the Chinese parents attend, except for the other two Nepalese parents and me. It's fruitful for them [Chinese parents] because they understand. I do care about it. I have a need to know and understand many things." *(Parent 3C).*

"It is guesswork… you try to understand by looking at the pictures. Otherwise, you can't tell what is what". *(Parent 1B).*

One parent described the experience as listening to someone 'preaching':

"They go on and on and on in their own language. It's only when they call out his [child's] name that you understand" *(Parent 4A).*

The shift to remote learning also brought about further concerns about children's development for parents. One parent shared that she feels her child's development has been further impacted:

"I feel that my child has gone back two years. He is already developmentally delayed, and I feel that he has become even more delayed during the pandemic"*(Parent 3A).*

Prospects of building relationships between home and school have decreased significantly for parents. A few mentioned ethnic minority parent meetings held online but noted that it had not taken place in a long time. Similarly, wide communications gaps were noted and the a loss of connection between home and school, and how their learning opportunities have also been reduced. Parents experienced a lack of phone calls and a decrease in face-to-face meetings, with one parent describing current school communications as almost non-existent.

"In fact, we haven't even been able to see the teachers properly, who they are, how they are. We just listen. We don't get to see or meet them, so it feels like there's a distance from the teachers and the school" *(Parent 2A)*.

"Before, I would be able to talk with the teachers directly about programmes and training. But now, it's been about a year or so…now there's nothing going on" *(Parent 3C)*.

"[…] the parent meetings and sessions about how to deal with children have stopped" *(Parent 2B)*.

Additionally, for a few parents, there were notable changes in the frequency and key person they were in contact with before and during the pandemic. For instance, there was an increased direct interaction with the teachers and an adverse impact on communications with social workers; the need for strengthened home-school partnership was even more pronounced.

"Considering the current scenario, it has to be fruitful, and it is necessary because children are at home because of the pandemic. And in the current scenario, home-schooling is very important" *(Parent 3B).*

4.3 Developing home-school partnership

4.3.1 Barriers to partnership

Principals recognise language and educational background as primary barriers to home-school partnership for Nepalese parents. Nepalese parents were described as being uninformed about their rights and resources at school and in the community. Similarly, professionals also seem uninformed of Nepalese needs and views.

Like principals, all social workers highlighted the difficulties presented by language barriers. The obstacles that prevent good understanding between home and school are undeniable. Teachers note that the difficulties are more pronounced when parents are unwilling to be part of the wider school community, such as the Parent-Teacher Association and other school programmes, where Nepalese parents are seldom seen. They may only participate in large-scale and important events.

"I really want to talk to them on a deeper level. I want to ask them what they need, but sometimes they are shy. They nod their heads even though they don't understand what I am saying. So I am confused as to whether they understand what's going on or not" *(Social Worker 4A).*

For another social worker, despite frequent personal contact with parents and managing to get by, language and communication remain a big concern. Some social workers shared that the few parents who can communicate in basic English are comparably more active yet remain inconsistent in their involvement. Although the use of English for programmes may be feasible, the social worker noted that most of the programmes are conducted exclusively in Cantonese.

Teachers acknowledge that to accommodate the majority and for ease of delivery, English is used for talks held for all ethnic minority parents. This might be ineffective as English may not necessarily be spoken by everyone, but the complexity of addressing all linguistic needs is impossible to achieve. Furthermore, the burden of communication appears to take a toll on all stakeholders. Yet despite language barriers, all teachers try to maintain close communication with parents.

> "In terms of talking, you have to think that maybe you are not saying it correctly. So to express yourself, you need to think carefully. You need to go in rounds trying to communicate. So maybe in those moments, Nepalese parents feel annoyed and give up thinking that they'd rather not ask" *(Teacher 3C)*.

> "Communication could be difficult, but you can't say that there is zero understanding… we somehow understand!" *(Teacher 2B)*.

All parents identified language as the primary barrier to home-school partnership as well. For them, it prevents communication with professionals and limits their interactions. These

barriers are also seen to impact their involvement in their children's learning. Most parents expressed that despite their interest in attending programmes, in past experiences they were conducted entirely in Chinese, causing demotivation. Language barriers also require the simplification of language, which in turn, reduces the richness of conversations.

> "The language barrier is the biggest problem; it has created such a difficult circumstance. At the moment, even if my son is two years behind developmentally, the language barriers create even further delays. Language barriers create difficulties for both children and mothers" *(Parent 3B).*

> "If only I could have been able to talk openly from my heart" *(Parent 1A).*

> "During Parent's Day, we need to discuss with the teacher, we need to share things, but when you don't know the language, you are stuck! There's nothing! There are things in your heart, but when you don't know how to talk, it just remains there, and that is very unsatisfactory, very unsatisfactory!" *(Parent 4B).*

> "It is difficult, but it is working…somewhat. Yet it still makes the communication feel inadequate. The gist of what is being communicated can be understood, but there's a lack of clarity in what is trying to be expressed" *(Parent 6B).*

Some professionals also describe partnering with Nepalese parents as challenging where Nepalese parents' politeness could also impede their willingness to express their honest views.

"Whatever you ask them, they will say ok, but we don't know if they are actually ok!"

"Language will be the hardest nut to crack, they [Nepalese] are rather shy, and they may not seek help from teachers or social workers when they encounter difficulties. But if we notice the problems and talk to them about it, they are willing to share more". *(Teacher 2C).*

For some parents, their circumstances and self-perception appear to influence their willingness to participate.

"I've never been to any of those because I don't have the circumstances or the capacity to be involved in such things, and I don't even have the status for this... but there is such a thing apparently. I do see it occasionally. They ask for votes, but I don't recognise any of them. I don't know who or how those teachers are. Even the parents, I don't know who they are, so I vote blindly [Parent-Teacher Association]" *(Parent 5C).*

As an extension of the language barriers, teachers pointed towards the unique circumstances of Nepalese children as they traverse between multiple languages relatively poorly at home and school. The teacher highlighted the parent's role in ensuring that the mother tongue is also strengthened at home.

"We're afraid that they're not good in Chinese, and neither are they good in Nepali, so what might they be good at? So for the parents, they need to teach their own language and culture, because we can't help with that" *(Teacher 4C).*

Besides language, social workers identified cultural differences impacting how parents partner with schools. Working with families from multiple ethnicities (not just Nepalese), and understanding various cultures is complex and potentially time-consuming. Furthermore, being bilingual is difficult for a few social workers. Teachers also find cultural differences as being deeply embedded and much more challenging to work around.

"Even though they are in small numbers, and they are all NCS, they are from different cultures, and the bonding is difficult. It's difficult to use one method to deal with all families. I wouldn't know all their cultures, so this is the difficult part for me. And it can be time-consuming!" *(Social Worker 4B).*

"Although it may seem easy, the difficulty lies in whether or not parental expectations and concerns are dealt with appropriately or not; this is not so easy to determine" *(Teacher 3A).*

Cultural differences may also impact participation in school-led celebrations according to social workers. They admitted that most programmes are organised with the Chinese parent in mind, for instance, Chinese New Year, Mid-Autumn Festival, and Christmas. Two reasons were given for this: a much smaller number of ethnic minority parents and their historical lack of participation. Social workers find that different cultural backgrounds and habits create distance and make Nepalese parents hard to reach, making efforts to encourage their participation even more difficult. They speculate that cultural differences may also account for the different approaches to behaviour management. Thus, social workers find themselves investing extensive time in efforts to communicate with parents as they try to find common ground regarding approaches to dealing with children's behaviours.

Social workers assume that were programmes held in English or relevant to their culture, parent participation may improve. Some social workers found past programmes like cultural booths to be received positively by parents. However, some also noted that when such activities are used as avenues to target integration between ethnic minority and Chinese parents, it most often does not work well. Such initiatives are difficult to coordinate due to language, often resulting in parents segregating.

Although a few social workers commented that there is no conflict or limitations on resources, more than half of social workers held the opposite view. For instance, one social worker shared:

"There are times when you cannot reach them by phone and have to go to their home for a visit. You must stand in front of their door to remind them that their child has been absent for so long and must go back to school. This is really hard for me. The cost is high; I can't deal with schoolwork if I have to go out for a home visit. And I may not be able to help others in need" *(Social Worker 2B)*.

Also included in resource limitations is the narrow distribution of knowledge for professionals. For instance, they commented about the lack of access to training from a variety of providers:

"When the resources are limited, the training cannot be open to the public, so the information on such training may not even reach us. And the government's training for schools may not be known to NGOs as there are limited quotas and differences in target

recipients. If there is training available, I know many teachers will be interested, and they need it" *(Teacher 5C)*.

Due to a heavy workload, teachers identified a lack of time to establish partnership with parents. Principals also expressed empathy with parents' trying to manage their busy schedules, and are cognisant of time constraints that create limitations to partnership as they, professionals, too, experience the same. Principals added that parents of children with special needs are highly stressed, which prevents them from engaging with schools wholeheartedly. Additionally, some principals were of the opinion that in most cases, fathers are the breadwinners, leaving mothers to be the primary caregivers and also more involved with the school. However, mothers too may need to care for other children and attend to household chores, all of which add to the stressful experience.

> "Teaching-related work makes you very busy, like homework, preparation for classes. Teaching is already very time-consuming; it will impact the time available to invest in home-school relations" *(Teacher 1A)*.

Moreover, teachers indicated a lack of training for parents as well. Yet, their passive attitude and lack of awareness might also prevent parents from searching for relevant training on their own. For example, a few teachers shared that Nepalese parents' technological literacy is not up to par, impacting how they access information through digital platforms. This has a domino effect by adding to teachers' workload as they are then required to contact parents personally to inform them and, encourage their participation. Similarly, it was highlighted

that most NCS teachers do not have the appropriate qualifications or training to teach ethnic minority students either.

> "I am an NCS teacher, right? How did I become part of the NCS teaching team? It's actually a role the school assigns to you. So even if you don't have relevant experience, you can still do it. But if the EDB creates training to teach NCS students, which you can then claim to be an NCS teacher after you study, then it could be more recognisable, and training can be strengthened" *(Teacher 5B).*

A lack of knowledge impeding relationships with schools resonated with parents as well. Implications are found in parents' ability to grasp information about their children's disabilities and, in turn, provide support at home.

> "How can we give such children knowledge? Since you don't know, you won't know how to say it [to the professionals], and it's also not easy to teach your children. Well, it's not discrimination, but because we don't know how ourselves, how can we teach them?" *(Parent 5C).*

> "We can't speak the language here, and our English isn't so great either, it's just alright. I feel there are differences, and on top of that, we don't have knowledge about children with special needs. That's why I find it difficult. It's important to make this relationship strong, but how are we going to do it? I don't think it's possible" *(Parent 4A).*

"We don't have knowledge about children with special needs. That's why I find it difficult, and it feels hard" *(Parent 2C)*.

Teachers described the relatively forthright appearance of home-school partnership as being a façade covering the actual difficulties involved in the process. Some teachers expressed their concern that even when parents make their thoughts known, and there is a better understanding about their difficulties, the school may be unable to help find resolutions. Therefore, it is highly likely that the gap between expectations and actual achievement will continue to widen.

4.3.2 Policies

Home-school partnership policies are viewed positively by all principals; the provision of funding that supports parent-child programmes and parent training was highlighted. Furthermore, the Parent-Teacher Association is seen to be in alignment with the Government's policy in all schools. However, some principals stressed that the Education Bureau (EDB) primary concern with the operation of the Parent-Teacher Association might be inadequate. He supported his statement by highlighting the educational journey of a child with special needs.

"They will spend a considerable number of years here. After they graduate, they might find a job in the society, attend the shadow workshop, or come to the day activity centre. So, in actuality, it's a very long period of time that they spend here. Which is why we need to partner with the parents, we need their help. This is why it is more than just the

operation of the PTA" *(Principal 4A).*

In addition, the principal mentioned uncertainty about how the policy supports ethnic minority families, further asserting an urgent need to partner with parents to reinforce the committee's necessity and extend its operations and workings beyond the Parent-Teacher Association. Another principal stressed that as parents of children with special needs, particularly ethnic minorities with linguistic barriers, it is crucial to acknowledge their circumstances and address these in the policy.

"Because for a lot of SEN parents, it is very frustrating because of their children's behavioural or emotional needs. Compared to local [Chinese] kids, sometimes they [parents] cannot communicate. This is why I think the policy needs to be more parent-focused, meaning they should meet the parent's needs more so we stress on peer group sharing; this would help a lot" *(Principal 4A).*

Teachers also perceive the existing policy to be clear but highlight room for improvement such as teacher training. For some teachers, communicating with parents and counselling skills were sought. Some shared that the Government delivers teacher training, which includes skills such as processing documents and communication skills, which enables teachers to carry out administrative duties and host programmes. Such training is available to new teachers. However, the workload was a demotivating factor for some to conceive of or even attempt to take on training, which might be an experience shared by parents as well.

A recurrent theme amongst the parents was a lack of awareness, they do not understand the school's systems and structures. All parents are unaware of the existence, purpose, or mechanisms of policies and programmes designed for home-school partnership in their respective schools. Some parents added that they make no effort to inquire about them either. While some shared that they have never heard of the Parent-Teacher Association, for some, despite knowing its existence, they choose not to participate. Some recalled that they had attended programmes but were unsure if it was the Parent-Teacher Association or not.

"About the school… I don't really have an idea, actually" *(Parent 6B).*

"I don't know what exactly the policy is for home-school partnership, and I haven't even looked" *(Parent 3A).*

"PTA… no, I'm not sure. The school doesn't really give us information in detail" *(Parent 2C).*

"PTA? Well… I'm not sure if I've heard of this or not. Dealing with the children is extremely stressful, so my mind is frazzled" *(Parent 4A).*

All parents communicated that the Parent-Teacher Association is conducted primarily in Chinese, which impacts their interest and motivation to attend. Almost all parents shared that despite receiving notices about home-school partnership, they rarely pay attention and do not go over them carefully. Most parents recall being invited to meetings via notices placed in handbooks in Chinese. They noted further that there is a lack of effort from the school in

providing detailed information.

"The PTA book? That is in Chinese" *(6B)*.

All parents expressed a lack of participation in the Parent-Teacher Association (or any other school programme) due to language barriers and noted that other ethnic minority parents also rarely participate. A few parents shared that they have attended some programmes in the past, especially during the first year of their child's schooling, but discontinued due to language limitations.

In addition, all parents depicted their experiences of the Parent-Teacher Association programmes similarly. For example, they shared that they cannot express themselves during these gatherings. Furthermore, parents are not motivated to participate despite the availability of translation services; they view the translation process as cumbersome. Also, parents commented that they are dissatisfied with the translations because they do not offer an in-depth explanation of the ideas and concepts being addressed but provide literal translations instead.

"They offer individual translations on the side, and because of this other parents don't want to go either, they feel left out and they don't even understand most of the content" *(Parent 6B)*.

"I went a couple of times when I was new to the school to see what it was about. And I would try to make sense out of it with the limited Cantonese that I know. And they made us play games, but you know, because of language… you just attend, and you don't get to express yourself. No translators were present. I was the only Nepalese there" *(Parent 1C).*

"They do invite us to meetings and programmes, if I have time, I attend. But even if I attend, it's all in Chinese, so what's the use of just sitting there? I don't understand anything. They don't say anything in English" *(Parent 4A).*

In terms of policy that extends beyond home-school partnership, such as the curriculum, the policy's flexibility to support learning accommodations to meet students' needs were frequently mentioned. However, it was stressed that the Parent-Teacher Association's concern rests mainly in the mobilisation of parents in school activities, not necessarily targeting student growth, for example, improving students' learning outcomes, behaviour, or social-emotional wellbeing.

Similar to principals, all social workers agree that their school's policy aligns with the Government's stipulated requirement, and the operational guidelines on home-school partnership are considered helpful and flexible. Like principals, a few social workers think there is sufficient funding for the Parent-Teacher Association, with one social worker sharing that the Parent-Teacher Association has helped everyone. Additionally, some social workers

conveyed that having parents as part of the committee creates a sense of belonging; parents become more engaged and dedicated.

Social Workers could not identify policies that the Social Welfare Department that are specific to home-school partnership. Instead, other policies that interlink with the interests of home-school partnership were mentioned. It was also highlighted that it is the Education Bureau that has a more direct role in home-school partnership.

Most teachers understand their school's policies on home-school partnership functioning as a general guide. Like social workers, teachers consider it flexible and aligned with the Education Bureau's guidelines. While some teachers shared that they clearly understand school policies, some remarked unfamiliarity with national policies. Also, a few teachers expressed that despite an awareness of policies, a lack of understanding about methods of achieving desired outcomes persists. Teachers described how programmes are relatively simple to carry out. However, some questioned the focus of the Education Bureau; is the aim simply involvement, or is it addressing parental needs? The latter was described as more urgent, yet challenging to accomplish. Teachers were found to question the extent to which current practice is efficacious.

"On a surface level, home school cooperation seems easy. The difficulty is whether the parents' expectations and concerns are properly dealt with. This is not so easy to determine. It is easy to hold many activities, but the key is whether EDB simply wants them to be more involved or that they can get what they need. This is much more

difficult to fulfil. There could be this gap between the expectation and actual achievement" *(Teacher 4A)*.

4.3.3 Improving partnership

All principals agreed that schools require a better understanding of Nepalese families: their customs, language, and practices. How the Nepalese parent views parental roles was suggested as necessary too. Furthermore, details such as unique characteristics about their ethnicity and family life are deemed critical to know them better. Due to a wide gap in knowledge about Nepalese families, the type of services that may effectively respond to their needs is also unknown. Thus, the need for more research was put forth by principals. Although professionals seek to curate programmes for Nepalese families, their limited knowledge about parental needs makes their efforts uncertain regarding how the parents receive the programmes. Some teachers seek parental views on programme efficacy and general reception to improve and design appropriate engagements. Furthermore, programmes with a harmonious integration element is desired by almost all teachers for more opportunities to integrate.

"I believe we need more research to show the government or EDB [Education Bureau] what kind of support is required" *(Principal 2A)*.

Similar to principals, all social workers believe a better understanding of Nepalese culture and religion is essential. Besides culture, understanding the family's needs and background stand out. One social worker shared that despite her personal research efforts to understand Nepalese culture via the internet, her knowledge is still limited. Social workers justify their

need to understand culture as a prerequisite for crafting more effective engagements for families and building better relationships.

> "[...] once we know more, it will be easier for us to communicate and build relationships" *(Social Worker 5A).*

With the reality of caring for children with special needs being isolating and challenging, parent training was suggested as vital by principals. Parent training should be emphasised, and be the focus of the policy. Learning strategies to support parents' mental health is also perceived as necessary for professionals in a special school.

A creative idea was proposed to tackle issues concerning knowledge transfer from school to home. Given the power of media, the use of YouTube, television, or any other media platform was suggested as a vehicle to disseminate information. The platform would include strategies and teaching methods for parents to support their children. This technique was described as sustainable and advantageous in terms of its longevity and repeatability, since shortage of resources was highlighted. Similar to the principal's suggestion, some social workers also suggested the use of multimedia as a tool to increase interactions between Chinese and Nepalese families. Some parent suggestions also included more support with digital platforms, such as the availability of explanation videos about how to carry out tasks at home and easier access to learning materials.

> "We hope the EDB can provide more resources to us because the school does not have enough. We do not have enough staffing to provide more activities or an individualised

curriculum for the EM. We don't have the workforce to train or provide services to them. If the EDB can offer more, we can hire more teachers specifically for NCS. I believe they would be able to gain so much more" *(Principal 2A)*.

"Chinese and NCS parents can work together on broadcasting a show" *(Social Worker 2A)*.

Like principals, social workers requested more resources to improve home-school partnership. Social workers believe that improving home-school partnership relies on a focus on human resources, dismantling language barriers, and obtaining a better understanding of families.

" [...] a TA [teaching assistant] would be even better. Someone to help with communication and someone who can understand Nepalese families more. They don't even need to come everyday, but someone who can come two to three times a week" *(Social Worker 4B)*.

"[...] helping hands is a problem; I'm the only social worker to look after the NCS parents, so it gets busy."

Most social workers were interested in receiving training from agencies like the Social Welfare Department, the Education Bureau, and the NGO sector. They believe different skills and knowledge can be obtained from various providers. In their experience, they report a disconnect in how knowledge is disseminated. For example, the Education Bureau aims for

schools, while the Social Welfare Department focuses on social workers, and NGOs have their target audience. Also, a lack of pre-service training focusing on supporting families from linguistic and cultural minority backgrounds was noted. Multiple social workers mentioned that were training available, many professionals would be interested because there is a demand.

Social workers shared that outside of school, they hardly get opportunities to interact with people outside of their ethnicity. They also demonstrated interest in opportunities for Nepalese families' to showcase their culture to the rest of the school, as an acknowledgment of diversity and cultural integration. Most teachers showed concern with Chinese language skills, as proficiency is seen to support integration with Chinese families. Thus, some teachers suggested that engaging Chinese learning activities would help increase motivation. Likewise, teachers think Nepalese parents should also show some interest and a willingness to learn and participate in the celebration of Chinese festivals at school.

"Maybe we could have Nepalese festivals, so more sharing about cultural exchange can occur… so that integration can improve and they [Nepalese] also get more recognition" *(Social Worker 4B)*.

"I know that the Thai have a water festival held on a big scale, so I think the Nepalese can do it too. I don't know what the big Nepalese festival is, but I think they can be more brave and bold to host it so that the school and society can realise the importance of this festival for the Nepalese and see how it is celebrated. At the moment, there is little information on this" *(Teacher 3A)*.

"For instance, maybe their music is amazing, but we have not heard it. They could introduce it to the local [Chinese] students, and we could have more integration" *(Teacher 2B)*.

"A culturally inclusive corner can be set up. I have seen such a thing during a school visit. There are Nepali books, picture books, and toys for NCS. This really boosts NCS students' sense of belonging" *(Teacher 6A)*.

A few parents assume cultural awareness to have some positive impact.

"Because at school, the entire culture is Chinese. Even though our children can't express themselves well, they might have the desire to see their own culture too, isn't it?" *(Parent 4A)*.

"If you have students from other cultures in your classroom, knowing is better than not knowing" *(Parent 3C)*.

"If they had some training, at least they could say that we cater to ethnic minority students in the school" *(Parent 6B)*.

However, one social worker stressed that solely adopting a cultural lens to view Nepalese families can be problematic. They shared that social workers' (or any professional) understanding of the Nepalese parent should not only be limited to a Hong Kong or Chinese point of view. Similarly, almost all parents were sceptical about the feasibility of cultural awareness, with some questioning the purpose altogether. Learning about Nepalese festivals

and traditions is considered insignificant since it would not make a difference to their children's learning and development and parents' experience of partnership with the school. Furthermore, they stated that it would also be irrelevant to Hong Kong's culture. They suggested that cultural awareness has no potential impact or that it simply might be irrelevant in addressing their actual needs.

Regarding professionals learning the Nepalese language, a few parents drew comparisons to Nepalese trying to learn Chinese, saying that the difficulty of learning another language is significant. Instead of culture, parents requested teachers to invest their time in enhancing their skills relevant to teaching, especially strategies to cater to students' different learning needs and communicating with parents.

> "There's no relevance with learning Nepalese culture here [Hong Kong]. Because we are in a foreign country, we need to follow [Chinese culture]. If they come to Nepal, they must follow [Nepalese culture]. Instead, if they could think about how they could support us, that would be better" *(Parent 3B)*.

> "Teachers should focus on child-related training, according to children's different levels" *(Parent 2B)*.

Improved communication and collaboration skills and parents' willingness to listen are deemed crucial for improving home-school partnership by all teachers. Social workers also shared that they would like to see Nepalese parents participate more, accept invitations to school events, and work collaboratively with them to address their children's academic and

behavioural concerns. A few social workers have taken extra steps to establish better communication with the parents by purchasing apps that can help translate. Almost all social workers shared that if ethnic minority parents demonstrated a willingness to be involved, it would positively impact their motivation, urging them to be more mindful of creating more inclusive activities.

Given the informal, supportive circle that Nepalese parents have created in some schools, teachers hope that Nepalese parents can continue building on such connections so that they may mutually support, and learn alongside each other.

Some teachers identified gaps in their knowledge. For instance, one teacher shared his views about the lack of appropriate training for teachers who are expected to work with ethnic minority families. In his opinion, more training is needed, and the Education Bureau should consider formulating more vigorous programmes that support teachers with the skills required to work with diverse families.

> "If you teach mathematics, then usually you will not be the NCS teacher...to become a member of the NCS team, you would have a Chinese PGDE or your undergrad is in Chinese Education. Right now, there is no limitation or training requirement for those who would like to become NCS teachers. I have heard that English teachers from other schools can also be NCS teachers, making people feel that NCS teachers are not specially qualified. There is a lack of professional recognition. EDB should organise relevant training courses that people must complete before joining the NCS Team. I believe it will be better for the teachers" *(Teacher 3B)*.

In the past, a few school teachers were able to attend external training to learn how to assist and communicate with ethnic minority families. Other training sessions mentioned were also general in their approach, focusing more on teaching and learning, and did not go into detail regarding ethnicity and culture. Other teachers expressed their lack of understanding about global home-school partnership practices, adding that teachers are not updated with developments in best practice, and suggested that it is not included in their training or continuous professional development.

> "You know that there are many activities to build an inclusive society, right? But the information about such activities is not made available to schools. We want to learn more… not to say that the policy itself is unclear, but that it would be great if we could know more about these things" *(Teacher 5A).*

In order to sustain the process of continuous professional development, another teacher spoke of the provision of supply teachers when teachers attend training during working hours. However, a few teachers shared that they need help approaching the gap despite being interested in learning more. They are also not sure what training is needed to enhance their skills. Furthermore, one teacher pointed out that considering their role, it is difficult to think about whole-school development. Therefore, they cannot propose suggestions for improvement.

All teachers reiterated that although teacher training is essential, human resources such as additional teachers and assistants who can fill the linguistic and cultural gap would be more beneficial to attend to barriers immediately.

In contrast, most teachers preferred to tackle linguistic barriers and knowledge gaps by employing support staff.

> "They'll need to know three languages: Nepali, English, and Chinese. They might work at school for the entire time. Whenever there is a parent in need, that assistant might step in. They might also be able to respond to phone calls. Sometimes Nepalese parents face cultural problems, getting accommodated, language, or disciplining children's behaviour problems. They could communicate all of these problems with the assistant" *(Teacher 5C)*.

For parents, a unanimous consensus emerged. Regardless of which school, all parents requested a Nepalese professional from whom they could seek support. In their view, a Nepalese professional would eradicate the language barrier, which they consider the most problematic aspect of partnership. Similar to their positive experience with the Nepalese community volunteer mentioned above, they are keen to have an individual they could contact for assistance.

All parents demonstrated awareness of their minority status within the school-wide parent population. They believe the use of a familiar language would contribute to motivating their participation. Besides, multiple parents asserted that since they are small in numbers, catering to their communication needs should not be complicated. The need and feasibility of hosting small meetings catered to them specifically, with the availability of appropriate translations is justified. In contrast, some parents suppose that because of their small numbers, the opposite could be true, that their needs would not be prioritised. Some parents made explicitly highlighted concerns with equality.

"We want to be prioritised the way Chinese parents are prioritised. We want to be treated equally" *(Parent 4C)*.

To encourage improvement, a few parents agreed on the need for parents to engage in self-advocacy, unity, and cooperation amongst themselves as well.

"Maybe… that's something that can only happen when Nepalese parents sit and discuss" *(Parent 5B)*.

"Well, schools offer suggestions, but parents must cooperate too" *(Parent 3B)*.

The availability of English as a subject is also considered essential to parents. One parent shared her inability to understand why schools do not make any considerations for using English in the classroom. The parent added that, in her opinion, all teachers in Hong Kong can speak English, making it difficult for her to understand why they cannot speak a single word of English while teaching in classrooms with ethnic minority students.

Another suggested the provision of learning in English for the first few years as it would provide a good foundation for learning other languages. Others justified English as an international language used worldwide. For another parent, The presence of an ethnic minority student in the classroom justifies using some English words in the classroom in tandem with Chinese. Despite holding English in high regard, almost half of the parents also considered learning Chinese necessary; they were hopeful that their children might be able to learn both languages.

All parents seek better interactions with the teachers, primarily face-to-face, to learn more about their children and how to support them at home. In their recollection, there was no evidence or mention of receiving any training about ways to partner with schools. They did not receive any information about the Parent-Teacher Association. Furthermore, parents did not mention any form of guidance to navigate the school and their children's learning. This was in contrast to some social workers' accounts.

Chapter 5 Discussion

This study sought to answer the broad research question: How do primary special needs schools and Nepalese parents in Hong Kong understand, develop, and practise home-school partnership? Stakeholders were interviewed to gain insight into their thoughts and experiences about home-school partnership. The emergent superordinate themes developed through a multiperspectival Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) include: 'placing the child at the centre', 'making it work', and 'support systems'. Table 5.1 illustrates links between the overarching themes, research question and superordinate and subordinate themes. This study argues that special schools in Hong Kong are failing to partner with Nepalese parents across three areas of shared perspectives between stakeholders, measures to circumvent barriers, and institutional structures impacting home-school partnership.

A Bourdieusian lens has been instructive in the theoretical analysis of this study. The chapter will delineate the interrelated concepts of field, habitus and capital as it relates to the study's findings. It will make a case for the importance of reflecting on its influence on home-school partnership efforts, particularly for marginalised families. The analysis, interwoven with the emergent superordinate themes, will not be an extensive examination of Bourdieu's theories, but a brief and selected use of his ideas to support the illumination of home-school partnership experiences.

Additionally, this chapter will refer to the conceptual framework introduced in chapter two. The dimensions that inform the framework, namely: policy, practices, systems and structures, and concepts, will be used as precepts to evaluate this study's findings, questioning equitable partnership. The implications drawn will inform the recommendations for practice and further research included later in the chapter.

Superordinate Theme	Subordinate Themes	Overarching themes	Research question
Placing the chid at the centre	Aligning perspectives Roles and responsibilities Culture or capital?	Conceptualising home-school partnership Roles and responsibilities	Understanding home-school partnership
Making it work	Learning Research Understanding each other Communication and collaboration Multi-agency working Culture or capital?	Approaches to partnership Experiences Pandemic	Practicing home-school partnership
Support systems	Policy expansion Resources	Policies Barriers to partnership Improving partnership	Developing home-school partnership

Table 5.1 Superordinate and subordinate themes

Much educational research has ignored marginalised groups by not addressing their concerns or including them in research, or that regard them as minorities that do not merit research, and where, if research is conducted with or about them, it uses culturally inappropriate methods of investigation (Parker and Lynn, 2002, p.13). Furthermore, limited efforts in examining systemic barriers to equitable home-school partnership in special education are also noted (Trainor, 2010a). To this end, this study is one of the first initiatives in Hong Kong exploring the experiences of Nepalese parents of children with special needs in the context of home-school partnership. The researcher coming from the same ethnicity as the parents

proved beneficial for the study as linguistic and cultural familiarity removed communication barriers.

The purposeful intention to avoid an in-depth Bourdieusian study was iterated in the beginning. Instead, an exploration of partnership, and more specifically, the interpretation of individuals' experiences, was key, where Bourdieu's theories were utilised as an anchor to support this inquiry. The study is not oblivious to the objection of such a surface theoretical approach. It is well aware of criticism such as that expressed by James (2015), who argues that the superficial use of Bourdieusian ideas in educational research is a consequence of its likeness with other concepts. Pertaining to the avoidance of a deep dive into Bourdieusian theoretical constructs is what Hey (2003) likens to 'intellectual hairspray' and the 'habitual use of Habitus' by Reay (2004).

With reference to Giroux's (1983) and James' (2015) arguments in the literature review regarding the deterministic outlook of Bourdieusian thought and the interlinking complexity of concerns relative to education practice, policy, and research, transformative agency is problematised. It is discernible why James (2015) acknowledges the sparing use of Bourdieusian ideas because, in his opinion, such usage has little to contribute; he emphasises that the otherwise negative outlook of Bourdieu's idea could prove challenging to overcome. Honing in on the areas of tension suggested by James between Bourdieusian thought and common educational research aims appear relevant to this study's findings. Although complex, James' analysis helps clarify research efforts with a framework examining inequities in education.

Reflexivity is key to inquiry within a Bourdieusian framework (Grenfell & James, 1998). For instance, James questions the researcher's standing in analysing phenomena, a call for reflexive practices similar to the IPA methodology used in this study. James argues that within a Bourdieusian framework, proximity to the topic of interest is insufficient; he dismisses the 'teacher as researcher' tradition. Instead, he advises accountability for researchers to acknowledge the limitations created by their interests. Therefore despite the researcher coming from an educational background or from the Nepalese community for that matter, reflexive practices are still necessary. James promotes critical educational inquiry where researchers are pressed to acknowledge and come to terms with the tensions in the field of education and expose their ideas to criticism and 'dislodge their thinking.' Relevant to this reasoning is this study's intention to conduct research *for* the participants as opposed to being *about* them. Continuous reflection, as outlined in the methodology chapter, and traversing between the realm of an educational professional and a Nepalese in Hong Kong, while remaining neutral to both have been instrumental in the outcomes of this inquiry.

Also included in James' ideation is the "socialised body," a reflection of societal representation (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 15), demarcating the focus from the individual to a reflection of the collective. The individual habitus embodies a shared group habitus. Although individuals have distinctive biographies, Bourdieu recognised them as part of a collective where the individual habitus has inherent group-specific characteristics (Crossly, 2001). Thus, although scepticism regarding the applicability of this study to the extensive ethnic minority communities in Hong Kong is valid, the experiences documented are arguably a sound preliminary understanding of the field. Therefore, there is cause to contend for the plausibility of accounting for the general within the specific.

The third tension suggested by James is that despite accepting Bourdieusian concepts, it is challenging to ascertain an area of focus in tackling inequalities in education. As was pointed out in the literature review, Bourdieusian notions are suggested to raise doubt about the possibility of change. Undoubtedly, this study accentuates the complex nature of concerns encircling home-school partnership for parents from diverse backgrounds. It also prompts questions about the grounds on which the inevitability of deficiencies in home-school partnership efforts persist. If the findings of this study are to be considered, one might argue that although home-school partnership is regarded with value and there is keenness to improve this partnership. *Why*, then, are parents and professionals failing to partner?

Evidence from this study points towards alarming circumstances for Nepalese children with disabilities. This study's findings demonstrate that stakeholders are met with a plethora of limitations, most of which fall beyond their locus of control. All stakeholders agree that the most significant barriers to home-school partnership are communication, a lack of knowledge for parents and professionals and institutional support. This study argues that a potential solution is embedded within the transformation of the field itself. In other words, this study contends that institutional shifts need to occur to support stakeholders to make way for more equitable participation.

Lastly, James recognises the fourth area of tension as the resulting actions stemming from analyses correlating with a lack of shared purpose (Pring, Hayward, Hodgson, Johnson, Keep, Oancea, Rees, Spours & Wilde 2009), where most attention in educational research seems to concentrate on empirically based findings on what works (Biesta, 2007) instead of engaging with investigations into cultural underpinnings of education as well as an

unwillingness to critique. An analysis of this study's stakeholders' points of interest unfolds a somewhat disjointed finding. On one end, parents hope to receive support for their children, they seek language accommodations for themselves and their children in classrooms and programmes that cater to parental needs. While on the other hand, professionals express the need for resources such as time and language support to help understand Nepalese families and their cultural backgrounds, as well as prioritising learning Chinese. Although the end goal for both parties is somewhat comparable, the means through which it is approached appear distinct. This study emphasises that supporting home-school partnership efforts for families from diverse backgrounds requires additional resources derived from collaborative multi-agency working.

The embodied nature of habitus contributes to its generation, whose effects continue beyond the initial circumstances that led to it (Nash, 1999). It functions tacitly, occurring 'below the threshold of consciousness' (Crossly, 2001, p.83). Bourdieu (1986) cautions that habitus functions implicitly and can also be left unexamined, which this study argues conveys the necessity to deconstruct home-school partnership as essential. Thus, if home-school partnership for ethnic minority families continues to be overlooked, in stark opposition to inclusion, the marginalisation of these families and the consequential negative impact on children will endure.

5.1 Theme 1: Placing the child at the centre

5.1.1 Aligning perspectives

Conceptualisation of home-school partnership is essential, it establishes the 'field' where stakeholders interact. Although inclusion and equity have yet to be established as core

principles for partnership in Hong Kong, it appears that schools have begun to address the issue, which is evident in the manner professionals articulate what home-school partnership is. This study found home-school partnership to be conceived similarly by stakeholders. There is unanimous agreement that the purpose is child-centred. This finding is positive, as it unites stakeholders with a common goal. Both Nepalese parents and professionals seek better educational outcomes for children.

Stakeholder values, however, are dissimilar. Professionals view the child's needs through multiple lenses, such as behaviour, academic performance, social and emotional well-being, and even the acquisition of Chinese language skills as being central to home-school partnership, Nepalese parents, on the other hand, leaned towards prioritising expressive language skills and academic performance. And according to the professionals, children's happiness. More specifically, behavioural expectations, which according to all professionals is a significant cause for concern, was not necessarily a view expressed by parents. This leads to professionals assuming that Nepalese parents, and by extension, the Nepalese culture, does not hold discipline in high regard. This study found professionals to interpret parental views that differed to theirs as a consequence of cultural differences. However, this may not be the case. Instead, it could be the expression of parents' lack of understanding of principles of behaviour modification and management skills, a general lack of knowledge which professionals may assume as disregard. Additionally, poor communication and a lack of understanding aggravates such misinterpretations.

The rules of home-school partnership are communicated tacitly (Grenfell & James, 1998, p.20). The expected modes of behaviour and language for partnership essentially go unspoken. Subsequently, parental engagement efforts that are accepted and valued by the school are more likely to receive acknowledgment and encouragement (Dornbusch & Glasgow, 1996; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Lawson, 2003). This study's findings align with existing literature that points to differing perspectives and priorities between parents and schools (e.g. Ice & Hoover-Dempsey 2011; Kim, 2009; Whitaker & Hoover-Dempsey, 2013), such disparities impact collaboration especially if they are left unchecked. Differing priorities influence outcomes of home-school partnership efforts.

Power is assumed to be central to the relationship between parents and professionals and the institutional structure within which these relationships play out. This was also found to be true in Ng and Yuen's (2015a) study in Hong Kong. Findings from the current study also concur with such literature. For instance, parents in this study expressed that they do not understand special education's complicated jargon (Park & Turnbull, 2001); also assuming that these terms are being conveyed through a translator who most often has no background in special education, one wonders what message the parents might be receiving, what they make of it with their limited understanding and it's ramifications for children. Although parents in this study were not found to experience intimidation when interacting with professionals (e.g., Fish, 2008), they expressed apathy, in the view that their perspectives are not being heard and, thus, amounting to inaction. Besides not "knowing enough" (Kalyanpur et al. 2000) as a barrier to the process of advocacy, parents' feelings of inadequacy can be detrimental for children with disabilities who rely on their families to speak on their behalf. Interviews with some professionals reveal that they are unable to discern what the parents are

thinking or feeling when they communicate with each other; although language barriers may account for this difficulty, the absence of understanding between home and school indicates poorly established relationships, which research shows as describing uninterested parents (De Gaetano, 2007) or those that are "hard to reach" (Crozier & Davies, 2007). Again, perceived parental disregard, and disinterest appears to be a facade for a lack of know-how.

5.1.2 Roles and responsibilities

Parental roles and responsibilities are often characterised in policies such as the IDEIA in America. It conveys implicit values and perspectives that depict parental roles and responsibilities within special education in specific ways (Daniel, 2000). Likewise, Hong Kong's Disability Discrimination Ordinance (DDO), encourages parents to cooperate with educational institutions in their children's learning. The Basic Education Curriculum Guide of Hong Kong also delineates the parent's role as understanding the school's educational direction, and working collaboratively to enhance home-school partnership and student's learning outcomes. Highlighted is two-way communication and parental voice in crafting parental participation through activities such as parent training, supporting children's learning at home, volunteering at school, communication with the school and involvement in the Parent-Teacher Association. Nepalese parents in this study shared concerns and barriers relative to all of the areas mentioned above, with ineffective communication, where parents are on the receiving end only, was noted as a major concern, having a ripple effect on all other areas of partnership.

These perspectives on parent roles and responsibilities convey the idea that all parents, regardless of background, share the same values and views about disability and learning (Harry, Rueda & Kalyanpur, 1999). Furthermore, the presumption that parents and professionals are privy to the same power and skills needed to partner with one another and collaborate to make decisions for children may only be the norm for some parents (Kalyanpur et al., 2000), excluding those that do not possess such skills and knowledge. It is evident from the current study that Nepalese parents do not access the same capital or knowledge of the field as professionals and Chinese parents, impacting understanding and approaches to home-school partnership. However, parents in this study expressed eagerness to engage in advocacy for their children's learning. Although lacking articulation, they do appear to have ideas. This study takes note of literature that highlights school's failure to acknowledge minority families (Crozier, 2000; 1996). As well as Trainor's (2010b) assertion that "parent empowerment may be diminished as a result of complex interactions of race-ethnicity, language, socioeconomic background, and school experience" (p.247).

This study stresses that a lack of effort towards measures to promote parent empowerment is costly. The significance of parental agency is undeniable; it has been influential in affecting legislation, an example of which can be seen via the Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA), formerly known as the Education for All Handicapped Children Education Act of 1975. Parental roles in the education of children with special needs are also markedly unique and vital, as the position and circumstances call for the necessity to negotiate their children's educational experiences with professionals, institutions and the social world at large.

Legislation uses language to specify parental roles and make known the expected actions in interesting ways. Included in policies like the IDEA, for instance, is advocacy, identified and implied as a type of parental role (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1982). Some authors, however, question the inherent values in parental participation, responsibilities, and rights, as stated in legislation like the IDEA, along with the knowledge and skills parents are assumed to imbibe about special education for advocacy (Kalyanpur et al., 2000). Likewise, principals in this study questioned home-school partnership policies in Hong Kong for lack of promotion of parent empowerment, a focus on familial needs, and especially, the inclusion of ethnic minority families.

There is variance in stakeholders' view about their roles and responsibilities for home-school partnership and that of others as well. Although the principal occupies an undisputed position of leader, teachers' and social worker's roles relative to engagement with parents are obscured and to some degree, blurred. For instance, both stakeholders perceive their roles to require high levels of engagement with families, defining their responsibilities as 'case manager' or 'front line worker' or even having 'direct involvement with parents.' Furthermore, cultural integration was also identified by teachers and social workers as falling within their domain of responsibility. Such findings indicate a lack of clearly defined roles, where two professionals appearing to undertake similar responsibilities. Current approaches appear to be lacking efficiency and efficacy, thus impacting service delivery. Although parent accounts demonstrate that teachers are generally sought for learning-based queries and social workers for additional support, such as applying for services, it is difficult to determine which professional is sought consistently for what purpose. The frequency and reasons for communicating with professionals appear to depend largely on parental language skills, relationships with professionals, and confidence that queries will be successfully overseen.

Past experiences of parental efforts amounting to a lack of action are identified as causes for a lack of initiation on the part of parents. The overlapping of social workers' and teachers' roles in coordinating home-school partnership calls to question the impact on workload, clarity of responsibilities and message being sent to parents about whom to approach for specific purposes.

Across all parent interviews, it was clear that parents had no relationships with principals. Not a single instance of the principal's name or a moment of interaction was recollected. It appears that principals have yet to build rapport with the most vulnerable of families in their schools. A lack of leadership visibility and connections with families fails to convey a whole-school approach to inclusion. Again, institutional barriers of administrative workload, busy schedules and perhaps attitudes towards ethnic minority families may need revisiting to make room for leadership to prioritise uplifting families vulnerable to exclusion.

Focus groups in Scotland explored parental views on their engagement in their children's learning (Russell & Granville, 2005). Parents from diverse backgrounds, which included foster carers, asylum seekers, and those considered to be the "silent majority," described low levels of involvement. The study demonstrated that many parents held assumptions about delineating clear roles between home and school despite the awareness of needing to support their children's learning. The study asserts that such views can be challenging to address and shape for schools. In the current study, professionals made distinctions between a parent that positively contributes to home-school partnership and those who don't, the latter was described as a 'shadow parent', similar to the 'silent majority' mentioned above. These

shadow parents were described as inactive, oblivious, and unresponsive which compounds circumstances and adds to professionals' workload. Such experiences could negatively contribute to professionals' motivation. This study notes disparities in how roles and responsibilities are conceived, and the negative impact of misaligned thought.

Therefore, because stakeholders in this study seek consistency in home-school practice, a good understanding of stakeholder ideas, and negotiating dissenting views is essential. Considering stakeholders' keenness to better understand each other, with children's wellbeing central to these efforts, the motivation to collaborate is found to be high in this study, a positive finding. It is argued that acknowledging parents' reliance on schools, the institution is in an ideal position to empower parents by sharing knowledge and skills; the professional's (and by extension the institution's) role is thus key in supporting families work their way through complex school structures.

5.1.3 Culture or capital?

Power is central to Bourdieu's ideas, as was detected in this study. In contrast to James (2015), Nash (1999) asserts that with investigative tools like that of Bourdieu's, a sociological look into education presents educators with explanations. This holds precedence for educational research, and it is valuable for those participating in advocacy for equitable participation in education. Further to Nash's argument is the necessity for stakeholders in education to possess equal power for advocacy efforts to be efficacious (Biklen, 1976). Edwards and Usher (2003) observe a link between power, the institution's space, and the individual, where the relationship between the three determines power distribution. Pertinent

to this study, with limitations of language and knowledge, is Nepalese parents' struggle to advocate for their children in the context of special education.

Professionals in this study were found to associate differences in perspectives and practices about child-rearing and, subsequently, home-school partnership to parents' cultural backgrounds. In other words, professionals assume differing parental views to result from the Nepalese culture, which this study assumes, is a default rationale adopted to account for differences. Furthermore, professionals indicated that they lack exposure to diverse communities, linking with Kim and Rohner's (2002) study that suggests the importance of being cautious about utilising a standard view of values and interpretations of all families, especially those from disadvantaged and ethnic minority backgrounds (Manz, Hughes, Barnabas, Bracaliello & Ginsburg-Block 2010).

Schools appear to prioritise the integration of Nepalese families with the wider school community where investments for home-school partnership efforts focus primarily on culture as an avenue to partnership (e.g. culture booths, Chinese New Year and Christmas celebrations). Most programmes and activities targeting parental engagement were described similarly. On the other hand, parents are weary of such efforts and expressed scepticism about such foci, another example of diverging perspectives on home-school partnership. Parents question how adopting a cultural lens might assist in alleviating parental concerns and produce positive learning outcomes for their children. Some professionals referenced initiatives targeting language barriers and integration between ethnic minority and Chinese

parents. Examples of such programmes were hikes, picnics, and dance classes, which are received positively by a some parents.

While professionals are exploring ways to engage parents in schools via cultural programmes, parents are eager to receive ongoing feedback about their children's behaviour and performance at school (e.g. Russell & Granville, 2005). Nepalese parents are also struggling to come to terms with their advocacy efforts in an unknown terrain of special education. In a Western context, parental advocacy initiatives can be characterised as incorporating gaining access to inclusive learning environments and classroom accommodations (Leiter & Krauss, 2004; Leyser & Kirk, 2004; Turnbull & Turnbull, 2001). Nepalese parents in this study were unable to relate to such a notion of a participating parent. Instead, their experiences suggest that they have yet to gain access to a voice to in the discourse of home-school partnership in Hong Kong.

Perhaps in order to gain access to a dialogue about home-school partnership, parents seek to equip themselves with knowledge and skills. Parents express the need for training to work with their children, learn behaviour management skills, understand their children's diagnosis better, and prepare for adolescence. Parents are also concerned about how they can support their children's learning in a language that is not their mother tongue and not spoken at home either. In addition to collaborating with teachers and social workers, schools present the Parent-Teacher Association as a means for parents to engage with schools, not experienced as a space that by design is not prepared to support diversity. Poor past experiences, deter Nepalese parents from the Parent-Teacher Association. This study argues that with an

expanded, and inclusive vision, the Parent-Teacher Association can function to be a source to empower both professionals and parents with agentic capabilities to collaborate.

As is evident in Trainor's study, insider information privileged parents (p.258)n in special education regardless of their racial or socioeconomic background. Also, access to capital that allows parents to get a grasp on the hidden curriculum (Bowles & Gintis, 1976) influences their habitus. Yet Nepalese parents in this study were not privy to such capital. They are reliant on schools in order to access information. Also, some parents made use of social networks established with other Nepalese parents in their respective schools. Although a useful resource, it is not always reliable as the accuracy of information circulated in these networks cannot be determined. Where Chinese parents may access capital via a variety of resources such as newspapers, online forums, Hong Kong-wide support groups and even the PTA, Nepalese parents' access to capital is drastically reduced in comparison, thereby barring participation on an equal footing and having ramifications on children's educational outcomes. Therefore, while Chinese parents and professionals may have access to similar sources of information, Nepalese parents do not. This disparity may lead professionals to assume cultural roots as sources of tension rather than differences in capital.

Professionals also identify gaps in their knowledge about Nepalese parents and how to respond to diversity, with considerations for institutional limitations effectively. Most professionals appear to be learning as they go in the field, thus are not well supported to partner with ethnic minority families. This study accentuates a need for more resources for professionals to support inclusion and a lack of familiarity with current best practice. Furthermore, questioning Lareau's (1987) argument about schools' promotion of home-

school partnership in both working and middle-class schools, Tzanakis (2011) highlights that in spite of such efforts, gaps between these classes of families are still wide in terms of the 'social profit' that they acquire. Thus, he argues, social reproduction may occur without the underlying processes that Bourdieu describes. In other words, "inequalities may persist even when schools become more open and inclusive (p.84)." Considering this, Tzanakis argues the need for an alternative framework to account for inequalities since they persevere despite schools' efforts. An alternative explanation, he suggests, is that schools may only be partially involved in creating inequalities or that social reproduction is an ongoing process influenced by an amalgamation of context, circumstance, and "individual choice and risk (p.84)." Although Tzanakis and Lareau are comparing parents from an economic standpoint, this study is in partial agreement with Tzanakis. It agrees that social reproduction is the result of the compounding impact of multiple factors for ethnic minority communities. As illustrated by the findings, the experiences of barriers to home-school partnership are complex, involving more than a few defining features. Although socioeconomic characteristics and their role in home-school partnership experiences were not explored in this study, the explanations are also expected to be intricate.

Marginalisation and power imbalance between stakeholders influence home-school partnership and advocacy efforts (Harry, Allen, & McLaughlin, 1995), influencing features include language (Kasahara & Turnbull, 2005; Rueda et al., 2005; Salas, 2004), relations with professionals (Hess, Molina & Kosleski, 2006), parent's awareness of their rights and responsibilities, a know-how about special education and its processes (Leiter & Krauss, 2004), and ease of access to information provided by schools such as those that pertain to parental rights (Fitzgerald & Watkins, 2006). Parents with access to all three types of capital resources (cultural, social, and economic) have been found to be able to secure quality

education for their children to varying degrees in Trainor's (2010a) study. Unfortunately, the study also revealed that even for parents who successfully access hidden cultural capital, they continued to report barriers to their participation, advocacy efforts were not consistently effectual or acknowledged by institutions. From the evidence presented in the current study, Nepalese parents' advocacy is largely dependent on their ability to overcome barriers through external support. Although some parents may attempt to cross the hurdle of language, they are still faced with institutional barriers of knowledge and gatekeeping.

5.2 Theme 2: Making it work

5.2.1 Understanding each other

The former theme establishes a common goal of placing the child at the heart of home-school partnership efforts. As the findings demonstrate, stakeholders are doing the best that circumstances and limited resources allow. As the findings demonstrate, stakeholders are doing the best that circumstances and limited resources allow. Despite this, the findings also reveal that current practice is inequitable at best and marginalising at worst, both in stark opposition to inclusive education.

A lack of stakeholders' knowledge about each other is worrying. With little to no contact with communities outside their own, mirroring Hong Kong society, where Chinese and ethnic minority communities rarely interact. Schools are thus, reflective of the social landscape and reproducing social inequalities. While divergence in thought between parents and professionals may not be a novel finding, the evidence of inadequate support measures from to tackle barriers and aspire for equitable participation for ethnic minority parents is alarming. The disconnect between home and school and the resulting parental vulnerability indicated in

the findings is linked with James (2015) argument where Fraser's conceptualisation of justice (outlined in chapter two) draws attention to group belonging and the psychological impact of exclusion. Furthermore, James draws parallels between Fraser's misrecognition with Bourdieu's symbolic violence. The author adds that the domination of one group over another involves the subconscious complicity of those overpowered, an attribute also found in the current study. In light of the findings of this study, James assertion that Bourdieu's ideas can lead to an inquiry revealing educators' and institutional roles in reproducing social differences, where educators appear as "agents of inequality" regardless of how beneficent their intentions may be is a challenging revelation to digest.

Bourdieu speaks of symbolic violence as individuals adopting complacency with the inevitable, described as domination exerted on another with their complicity (Bourdieu & Wacquant. 1992, p.162). Such inevitability and lack of objection against domination is described as "seamless" by Webb, Schirato, and Danaher (2002, p. 92) because no alternative exists. Therefore, although individuals may disagree, there is no recourse. Similarly, Nepalese parents in this study were found to rely entirely on professionals to learn about their children's disabilities or strategies to support their learning and behaviour and navigate the special education system in Hong Kong. Despite extensive linguistic barriers obstructing understanding and depriving stakeholders of strong relationships, parents continue to depend on professionals and accept, albeit unwillingly, their current circumstances.

5.2.2 Communication and collaboration

Cultural, social and economic capital is necessary for participating in formal education (Bourdieu 1974, 1986), and parents with fewer barriers in the field are suggested to do better in home-school partnership (Lee & Bowen, 2006). Similarly, Nepalese and Chinese parents and do not enter the field of home-school partnership on equal footing. Cultural and social capital impacts special education processes because parental participation is key to implementing services and assessments (Harry & Klingner, 2006; National Research Council, 2002). Stakeholders in this study articulated home-school partnership experience to differ widely between Nepalese and Chinese parents, where Nepalese parents at a disadvantage. Chinese parents are more able to express themselves, and advocate for their children more effectively.

Referring to the HKCSS (2010) study mentioned in the literature review, which examined how Chinese and ethnic minority parents (mostly Pakistani and Nepalese) participated in their children's learning, this study agrees with their suggestion that cultural and social capital is significant. The current study also came across other findings that correlated with that of HKCSS. For instance, the finding that ethnic minority parents are unaware that they are unaware was also found to be present with the parents in this study. To some extent, the 'reactive' nature of ethnic minority parental involvement found by HKCSS was not evident in this study. Linguistic barriers and ethnic differences leading to restricted social networking amongst Chinese and Nepalese are common findings in both studies.

Linguistic barriers are central to weak links between home and school. For instance, very few parents demonstrated confidence and expressed active involvement in their communication with schools. They gave examples of airing their concerns and questioning school practices. At the same time, others are largely dependent on teachers to initiate conversations or even choose not to express their thoughts. They describe their communication efforts with schools as 'useless', leading to feelings of 'helplessness' and being 'unheard'. All stakeholders are relying on hybrid languages, a mix of broken English, Cantonese and even, body language to communicate. Aggravated by a lack of shared understanding of each other's roles and responsibilities, the lack of knowledge exacerbates the situation for most Nepalese parents.

Nepalese parents in this study are found to depict the "intuitive advocate," a type of parent advocate role suggested by Trainor (2010a), outlined in chapter two. The parents are dependent on professionals for support and knowledge, and rely on their intuition and parental knowledge of their child as a basis for advocacy. Trainor found such a type of role to occur more often when parents' experience barriers to information about special education. However, unlike the parents in Trainor's study, the Nepalese parents did not share similar experiences of dismissal. Instead, they report a lack of means to express themselves, implying that schools have yet to hear what parents have to say, further implying that schools do not have a good idea of what parents need. Professionals corroborate this assumption, articulating that communication is indeed inadequate.

Professionals' current strategies to circumvent language barriers include: Google Translate, interspersing between broken Chinese and English, requesting parents to seek language

support via friends and kin, or employing external translation services from NGOs. All of these scenarios are problematic to say the least. To begin with, stakeholders are communicating in their second language, where fluency is not guaranteed. Secondly, translation personnel from NGOs do not hail from special education backgrounds, thereby delivering superficial, verbatim translations. Parents are bereft of additional background information that could be crucial. This was found to be the case during parent training programmes, as shared by parents in this study, where they could discern the insufficient and vagueness of translations they were receiving, as opposed to the information being communicated to Chinese parents.

Parents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds in other studies (e.g. Horvat, Weininger, & Lareau, 2003; Lareau, 1987) were found to rely on professionals for decision-making as well as rely on social connections (friends and family /kinship) to tackle problems. Yet Marjoribanks (2005) suggests that *educational* capital accounts for social class differences between ethnic groups, which is described as a combination of social and cultural capital. In the context of this study, although a correlation between parents' socioeconomic background to their engagement styles has not been explored, Nepalese parents are found to have less access to educational capital than their Chinese counterparts and professionals. Thus, similar to parents from low socioeconomic backgrounds mentioned previously, Nepalese parents in this study are found to rely on informal social networks consisting of other Nepalese parents of children with special needs. The parents are seen to share a network of information even if their children attended different special schools.

Professionals and Nepalese parents' home-school partnership was found to mimic the "transplant model" proposed by Cunningham and Davis (1985). The model positions parents as a valuable source of support yet places professionals as key decision-makers and source of expertise. The term 'transplant' exemplifies the process of knowledge transfer from professional to parent. In many ways, it also typifies the nature of home-school communication styles where the parent is mostly at the receiving end, unable to express their views and queries. This finding supports the argument for improved collaborative practices for home-school partnership via multi-agency working to access a wider range of knowledge and expertise to support marginalised families.

5.2.3 Multi-agency working

As demonstrated in the findings, stakeholders frequently make use of external support from either NGOs and community volunteers to support home-school partnership efforts. This indicates an unquestionable need for enhanced multi-agency working. All stakeholders require access to knowledge and services that can support the multifaceted needs of families from diverse backgrounds.

Teachers and social workers in Hong Kong special schools do not appear to work collaboratively. However, there is room for improvement with the expansion and systematic organisation of contributors. For instance, the incorporation of home-school partnership teams where schools liaise with other agencies such as health institutions, the ethnic minority community and the NGO sector. The extent to which these various agencies share a similar

view on inclusion and equity in their service is vital to collaborating, and is open to question as literature in this field is yet to be established.

The intervention of the Nepalese community volunteer has shown to be largely influential for the informal network accessed by Nepalese parents in this study. Through word of mouth, parents from various special schools were able to reach the volunteer, who then supported multiple parents in experiencing successful parent advocacy. Some professionals were also found to reach out to this volunteer due to positive experiences of engaging with parents through her liaising. Although assumed roles and responsibilities place social workers as the bridge between schools and external services, both social workers and teachers were found to be in communication with the community volunteer. This again, demonstrates how social workers and teachers roles for home-school partnership overlap. It also demonstrates the importance of sourcing external expertise and services via multi-agency working. Not only do parents require access to 'diversified capital resources' (Trainor, 2010a) for power and status, but in this case, professionals do too.

5.2.4 Knowledge

Stakeholders' training experiences, or a lack thereof, is evident in their struggles to engage with each other in this study. Teachers mentioned a need for appropriate training to address diverse familial needs. Considering the growing population of ethnic minority children with special needs, it is troubling to find professionals in the field rarely experiencing facilitated opportunities to reflect and share ideas about practices or participate in in-service courses. With an absence of bespoke school development strategies geared towards inclusion,

professionals are not prepared to teach diverse classrooms. While there are limited opportunities for professional development targeting equity and inclusion, a few professionals are found to take the initiative and improve their understanding of Nepalese families, which is in contrast to Ng and Yuen's (2015b) study where teachers were reluctant to adopt new practices. Professionals in this study were found to access information online, purchase translation apps, and exchange experiences with other colleagues. Such efforts, although commendable, are insufficient, solidifying the urgent need for training.

Working in partnership with parents from diverse backgrounds necessitates empowerment for professionals (e.g. Baker & Murray, 2011; UNESCO, 2017b). There is evidence to suggest positive outcomes from teacher training that involves interactions with families of children with disabilities (e.g. Baker & Murray, 2011; Bingham & Abernathy, 2007; Murray & Curran, 2008; Murray, Curran, & Zellers, 2008). Examples of teacher training efforts with a particular focus on diversity include the Chicago Urban Teaching Education Program (Caspe et al., 2011), where teachers have the opportunity to engage with families from economically and racially diverse backgrounds to share experiences and their expectations. Another example includes the Families as Faculties programme (Collier et al., 2015), where teachers undergo preparation to work in partnership with parents.

Professionals have greater access to specialised knowledge and understand the terrain of special education better than parents. Through collegial networks, professionals cultivate capital (Murtadha-Watts & Stoughton, 2004), which is not accessible to parents. Thus, professionals are a potential source of expertise and knowledge which parents can access.

Murray, Handyside, Straka & Arton-Titus (2013), for example, found that parents experienced increased self-efficacy in decision-making, access to resources, group affiliation, mutual respect, and hope as a result of partaking in a teacher training course with pre-service teachers. The training was able to aid transformations in their perspectives of parent-professional partnerships. This indicates the potential for training to modify stakeholders' attitudes, which becomes especially important to build relationships, alleviate conflict, and work in collaboration. Professionals may also feel supported in their work, and parents, a sense of agency, thus parents in this study welcome investments in research about home-school partnership with ethnic minority families.

Some professionals recognise the ineffectual nature of programmes geared towards ethnic minority parents. However, there was no evidence to suggest efforts or plans that indicate action to rectify these shortcomings due to a plethora of institutional barriers. Thus, professionals also experience debilitation as they lack the tools to support parents, despite their eagerness. Although professionals are in positions of power in comparison to parents, they, too, operate within limitations. However, ethnic minority parents of children with special needs have much more at stake. Extensive research is required to better understand these limitations and explore strategies for development.

5.3 Theme 3: Support systems

5.3.1 Policy expansion

There is a clear indication of the awareness of school-wide policies that govern home-school partnership links. Professionals are aligned in their understanding of policy, although this was primarily based on PTA guidelines. Professionals did not mention national ordinances that

safeguard ethnic minority families' rights or that of children with disabilities. Other documents such as "Catering for Student Differences" which the Whole School Approach identifies as a tool for supporting strategies for Inclusion also were not touched upon. This is either a reflection of professionals' oversight, or a lack of familiarity, with the latter being a cause for concern.

There is little evidence to suggest that leaders articulate consistent policy aspirations for developing inclusive and equitable educational practices, yet principals appear to be mindful of the need to improve the situation. Despite articulating a good understanding of policy, principals did not share their thoughts regarding the direction of policy reform. In one instance, a lack of recognition for parent empowerment through training and the needs of ethnic minority families in policies was highlighted. Although principals acknowledge such gaps in policy, solutions may be beyond their reach due to a lack of resources, expertise, and priorities.

Although professionals described Parent-Teacher Association guidelines positively, suggesting that the procedures are stated clearly, their views suggest room for improvement. For instance, although the policy's purpose is clear, and there is a shared understanding of the rationale, the policy's direction may differ from what is happening in schools.

Teachers on the other hand, had little to say about policies, relegating the domain as falling under the principal's watch. Teachers did not demonstrate their judgement of how the policy

either supports or limits their contributions in home-school partnership. For many, the PTA guidelines for instance, functioned as a protocol for programmes. There was little interest or curiosity demonstrated to evidence teachers' engagement with the policy, perhaps alluding to lack of opportunities to reflect on and more importantly, influence policy.

For parents, the policy was even more elusive. None could express an understanding or share opinions about them. They had no recollection of being introduced to policies or their rights. The protection of the rights of individuals with disabilities to education in Hong Kong as administered by the Disability Discrimination Ordinance (DDO) is reinforced by the Code of Practice on Education (the Code). The findings of this study are a discrepancy to the assumptions put forth by the Code, which supposes that parents (including ethnic minorities) are to be made aware of the rights and responsibilities as stipulated. However, none of the parents in this study voiced their knowledge about school-based or national policy that protects their rights and their children's equitable participation in education.

Current policies in Hong Kong appear to promote the PTA as a means for parents to engage in home-school partnership. Unlike legislation elsewhere around the world, policies in Hong Kong do not appear to mandate parental participation or the involvement of professionals in supporting parents. Epstein and Sheldon (2016, p. 215) argue that successful policy implementation requires "a leadership structure, professional development, a budget, evaluations, incentives, and consequences." The authors refer to the National Network of Partnership Schools' research findings, suggesting that "effective and equitable" partnership programmes communicate their structures and processes with stakeholders via "training, tools, and publications."

5.3.2 Resources

The function and purpose of home-school partnerships is clear and shared consistently amongst professionals and, to some degree, parents. However, executing this understanding within current institutional structures may be far from ideal. Considering workload, time constraints, and a lack of knowledge and skills, home-school partnership efforts can be highly taxing for professionals and parents. Although stakeholders may be motivated to improve engagement, the current structures within special schools in Hong Kong do not support such efforts adequately.

Home-school partnership is challenging to achieve, requiring high levels of systematic organisation and collaboration. This study has identified a plethora of gaps that hinder meaningful, and impactful engagements for families. Investments in home-school partnership are recognised to require resources: time, expertise, people and money. To some extent, the school's physical space is an additional feature that can contribute to initiatives.

Working in partnership with families from diverse backgrounds requires professionals to make the most of the resources at hand that are already operating in the community such as NGOs. Also, extending links with community organisations can be helpful in gaining a better understanding of the community's background, while extending the school's network as well.

5.4 Recommendations

Within eight years, we are to have met the Education 2030 agenda for inclusive and equitable

quality education, where the framework for action is anchored by various articles tackling discrimination. The agenda for Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) number four is committed to address exclusion and marginalisation in education, particularly for individuals with disabilities, through changes in education policy driven by inclusion and equity.

The framework positions education as a fundamental human right, where countries must aspire to ensure access and quality (UNESCO, 2016). Education is a public good, "a shared societal endeavour," (p. 28) where multiple stakeholders occupy roles to achieve quality education. Additionally, education is viewed as the state's purview, where it is responsible for establishing standards. Amongst others, one of the overarching goals of the framework is implementing inclusive education through policy that acknowledges diversity and addresses discrimination (p.30). Recommendations for achieving educational goals include adopting strategies that include those at risk of marginalisation. More importantly, institutional shifts that emphasise inclusion and mechanisms to monitor accountability and quality assurance, along with multi-agency working, are also vital in developing strategies to ameliorate barriers (p.31-32).

This study has presented evidence for institutional limitations to home-school partnership with Nepalese families of children with special needs, which manifests in language barriers, knowledge gaps, shortcomings in policy, and limited resources. These characteristics are observed to lead to the exclusion of minority families, and increased workload for professionals. The lack of equity in partnership experiences for these minority families is

undeniable. The findings in this study raise questions about the efficacy of practice in meeting the global move towards inclusion.

Findings from the current study also appear to echo that of Li's (2006) documentation of ethnic minority families in America. In Li's study, for instance, middle-class immigrant Chinese families experience social isolation from the broader American society. Furthermore, a lack of educational experience in America and conflicting views between home and school were noted. The author proposed a framework, a pedagogy of cultural reciprocity, where positive student outcomes are achievable through collaborative practices between school and home. Key to these efforts is positive home-school relationships, institutional change, and a shift in how we perceive minority students.

While this study purports a similar perspective to home-school partnership as various other authors (e.g Goodall and Vorhaus, 2010; Dunst and Dempsey, 2007), it is also cognisant of the limitations of applying ideas from one context to another. The applicability of global findings to the current context has to be tread with caution. Given these considerations, this section will mull over avenues for development and attempt to make recommendations based on this study's findings, supplemented by attributes elucidated in Goodall and Vorhaus' (2010) review.

The studies cited in the 2010 review by Goodall and Vorhaus mention UK based interventions (unless otherwise specified) between 2000 and 2010. The interventions were selected because they provide evidence of educational outcomes targeting parental

engagement in children's learning. However, the authors caution readers about the predicament of such a task due to the scarcity of robust evidence that can corroborate its efficacy across numerous variables and different developmental stages in a child's life. The authors acknowledge multiple limitations to the research mentioned in the review, underscoring that multiple studies offer scant evidentiary support for interventions that target learning outcomes and the features of activities that aim at effective parental engagement. Even less evidence is found that demonstrates the efficacy of implementing a study from one context to another (programme fidelity).

Another caveat regarding the selection of studies in the review concerns the lack of studies beyond literacy outcomes. More significantly, despite the importance of building positive and engaging home-school partnerships, and the vast body of research that promotes its significance, the review states the inability to distinctly identify the mechanisms that explain how interventions and outcomes correlate. Despite these drawbacks, the review is helpful in highlighting features of interventions that have the potential to contribute to building positive home-school links. What is evident throughout the review is that all home-school partnership efforts are inextricably tied to children's educational outcomes. Goodall and Vorhaus propose a multi-faceted standpoint on home-school partnership. They state:

> The more parents are engaged in the education of their children, the more likely their children are to succeed in the education system. School improvement and school effectiveness research consistently shows that parental engagement is one of the key factors in securing higher student achievement. Schools that improve and sustain improvement engage the community and build strong links with parents. Where schools build positive relationships with parents and work actively to embrace racial, religious,

and ethnic and language differences, evidence of sustained school improvement can be found. (p.16)

Due to the nature of the various aspects of home-school partnership, the strands mentioned below are to be viewed as interconnected rather than distinct areas of focus. However, for organisational purposes, the content has been categorised into perspective, practice, and process. While perspective denotes ideas, values, and attitudes that inform partnership, practice describes the actions that stem from beliefs, the everyday way that stakeholders 'do' partnership. Lastly, process refers to the formalised policies, provision of goods (time, money, human resources), and other institutional boundaries with which stakeholders must comply.

5.4.1 Perspective

A whole-school approach, with commitment to ongoing whole school development is proposed as key for planning strategies aimed at improving home-school partnership for two reasons: it is a continuation of the EDB's current strategies and it aligns with accountability for all stakeholders in education, including the Government (UNESCO, 2017a). Within a whole-school approach, building the foundation of home-school partnership requires numerous measures to occur simultaneously. To begin with, schools need to know *who* they are serving, in other words, schools need to know the families well.

As established by the current study, schools have yet to establish a good understanding of the ethnic minority families they serve. Besides religious and cultural differences from the wider

Chinese society, professionals have yet to understand the needs, perspectives and educational values of ethnic minority families. There is yet an understanding of how parents, particularly disadvantaged, engage with their children at home (Goodall & Vorhaus, 2010) too, which is even more pronounced in the case of ethnic minority parents in Hong Kong. More importantly, the conceptualisation of parental engagement at home, in terms of attitudes and practices are unclear, especially to better inform interventions appropriate to families' homelife. Lacking such information, it is difficult to imagine on what basis might professionals curate home-school partnership programmes and learning interventions. Thus, it is imperative that schools gain a better understanding of families through informal conversations, interviews, questionnaires, or focus groups to name a few. By collaborating with community organisations and NGOs, schools can devise strategic methods of collating information of the demographic they serve. It is assumed that with such information, schools will be better positioned to understand parental needs, whether or not they are ethnic minorities, and deploy resources accordingly.

Secondly, schools need to consider doing away with previously held assumptions about home-school partnership. With an emphasis of 'one size does *not* fit all,' Feiler, Greenhough, Winter, Salway & Scanlan (2006) propound that schools require a good understanding of what parents consider helpful and appropriate. Furthermore, it is encouraged that schools adopt a fluid approach to partnering with parents, which calls for discarding standardised templates that attempt to cater to all families. Schools are urged to acknowledge various approaches to parental engagement and activities that may differ from one home to another since what works for one may not for others.

It is recommended that schools adopt a broad outlook on home-school partnership to permit diversity in engagement styles. Some examples of this include: supporting learning at home, home-school communications, attending school-based programmes, collaborating with the community, and the most commonly known Parent-Teacher Association. Schools should expand their view and acknowledge inexhaustible methods to engage. The aim is to be creative and open to new forms of partnership so that parents who cannot subscribe to methods assigned by the school are not excluded.

In a review of the evidence for parental engagement programmes in the United States, Kumpfer and Alvarado (2003) found that programmes that exhibit cultural sensitivity are associated with increased recruitment and retention. In another study, Brooks (2008) reported that a significant value for providers of family literacy programmes is to show respect for the first language used in the family. These findings indicate that respect and value for the family's background garners positive responses. Professionals that work with families should engage in training that requires reflection of their own beliefs and attitudes towards learning, stakeholders' roles and responsibilities in education and how these perspectives influence action. By acknowledging dissent and sources of tension, teachers may be better equipped to understand diversity and value inclusion. Such training is encouraged to take place in pre-service training and during continuous professional development.

5.4.2 Practice

Similar to the recommendation above, the needs of disadvantaged families, particularly ethnic minorities, must be understood through a parental needs analysis to craft effective

interventions to suit the specific needs of the families in question (O'Mara et al. 2010).

Families must be included in the analyses and the subsequent results in informing strategies

(Carpentier, 2005; Feiler et al. 2006). In other words, to improve interventions and

programmes, schools need to include parents in the design process of interventions and

programmes by seeking their input about what they need.

Training

The difficulty of catering to diversity has been noted by Ferguson et al. (2014), who note its

impact on student outcomes due to a lack of teacher preparation. A more significant impact

can be seen in teacher's perspectives about children and their families. Therefore, the

necessity for professionals to engage in pre-service teacher training and continuous

professional development to support home-school partnership is critical. This includes

training that equips teachers with skills to navigate relationships with families from

backgrounds different from theirs. In Hong Kong, schools can refer to tools such as *'Catering*

for Student Differences' to facilitate discussion, monitoring, and implementation of inclusive

practices.

Sharing information with parents is key, building their confidence and awareness of

community resources, and understanding procedural knowledge that is rife in special

education can contribute towards parent empowerment. As shown in the findings, parents are

keen to learn about their children and the ways they can support at home. With specialised

knowledge of the field at the institution's disposal, it is clear that frequent and effective

knowledge transfer needs to occur. Methods may include parent training, informal corridor

conversations, use of media such as videos and audio recordings to disseminate information

and leaflets. Statham and Harris, et al. (2010) highlight "upskilling" to raise children's achievements, arguing for the need to improve parental confidence and knowledge. Parent support groups can also operate as vital sources of information and emotional support. Successful parental support groups comprise two attributes: parent training and support programmes focusing on children's academic outcomes.

Considering the highly stressful nature of caring for children with special needs, parents' emotional well-being should also be prioritised. Taking note of programmes such as Family Links (Barlow & Stewart-Brown, 2001) which targeted improvements in mental health and behaviour of young children, the programme was found to not only bring about positive outcomes for children, but for the parent as well. A non-judgemental approach was key in delivering a supportive and well-received programme. More importantly, the programme guided parental acknowledgment of issues, supported knowledge acquisition, provided skills to address children's concerns, targeted self-efficacy (confidence), and empathy to utilise these skills effectively. The positive impact on parents' confidence and sense of 'personal power' in navigating involvement with the school is highlighted as crucial.

Additionally, knowledge transfer is to operate as a two-way conversation where parents and professionals exchange information consistently amongst each other. Findings in the current study indicate that language barriers and deficits in knowledge require immediate amelioration. Suggestions include investing in human resources that can support the communication process with trained school personnel that can fill the gap of language and provide extensive explanations to parents.

Multi-agency working

The Hong Kong based HKCSS (2010) study recommended efforts to concentrate on active communication and increased social and cultural understanding of ethnic minority families to support integration through support groups. Teachers were encouraged to participate in training covering cultural sensitivity and communication skills. However, the study did not clarify *who* would be responsible for curating such training. The current study argues that schools alone cannot facilitate such programmes, they require assistance and collaboration with external bodies. The government needs to invest efforts in multi-agency working to better support families especially to meet the aim of identifying children at risk of underachieving (Statham, Harris, et al., 2010), or families at a disadvantage.

Goodall and Vorhaus acknowledge that multi-agency working is an 'essential component' that makes part of a comprehensive strategy for parental engagement (p. 8). Multi-agency collaboration that extends beyond schools and social services is identified as a contributing factor in a successful model of increasing the quality of home-school partnership. By enabling families to take advantage of a broad range of knowledge and resources, multi-agency working fosters improvements in the quality of parental engagement. Furthermore, linking family, school, and community through an evidence-based model can improve outcomes for disadvantaged families. In an otherwise ideal setting, multi-agency working may involve a network shared between schools, social services, the voluntary sector, and even the medical sector to draw on multiple sources of expertise. Access to a spectrum of knowledge and services beyond schools enables families to receive wholesome services, including health and social care.

Multi-agency working can contribute to the sustainability of home-school partnership and produce positive outcomes for families. As mentioned in the literature review, one example is the social enterprise model developed in the UK. Features pertinent to the success of this model begin with its endorsement by the local authority; this is exemplary for communicating the prioritisation of home-school partnership to both the professionals involved and the wider parent community. The range of expertise and professionals (not necessarily education) involved in the project was far-reaching, along with the coordination of various roles (e.g., parent support worker, community and learning partnership coordinator) where accountability was delineated clearly. Also, parental voices were advanced by seeking parental input in developing services to guarantee parental representation in decision-making. Furthermore, data collection and dissemination were pivotal in the project's operation.

In summary, multi-agency working successfully supports home-school partnership by allocating a well-coordinated and expansive range of expertise and services. Through continuous data collection, monitoring of services, and parental input, programmes can be developed with informed decision-making.

Community building

Building community is essential, it creates opportunities for stakeholders to build relationships, share information and for families to feel a sense of belonging and support. Schools cannot function solely as institutions of disseminating knowledge to children but should welcome the possibility of operating as a hub for families. It is imperative that schools enhance and sustain improvement strategies where they engage with the community and

build strong links with parents. In the same thread, home-school partnership measures where parents support the continuation of learning at home are also incorporated into the culture of community-building. Although such initiatives alone may not account for positive student outcomes and improved home-school relations, the message is apparent that strong ties between home and school must be initiated by schools.

O'Mara et al. (2010) suggest that attending school-based programmes reduces the fear of stigmatisation, which can often act as a deterrent to participation for some parents. Some examples that are often overlooked by schools in welcoming parents from diverse backgrounds include the availability of signs and posters in different languages for parents to navigate the school with ease. Although information can be accessed online with the advancement of technology, not all parents are tech-savvy as echoed by some parents in the current study. Coffee mornings are utilised frequently as a strategy in schools to encourage parental engagement, and a warm and inviting space for parents to gather and interact supports such efforts.

Schools that successfully establish positive relationships partner with families building home-school partnership with the support of home visits and frequenting community sites that are meaningful to families. Schools should identify and encourage active parents to take on leadership roles supporting linkage with other parents and the community. Other features contributing to community building include arranging a time to meet flexibly and addressing linguistic barriers with translators (Keane, 2009), especially when catering to linguistically

diverse families. As evident from the current study, translation services must be mindful of addressing the contextual demands of special education.

Affordable and efficient ways of transporting learning to and from school and home are recommended. For instance, take-home activity packs rotated on a termly basis may be helpful for parents who request additional support and have no access to resources. Using video recordings to demonstrate how to complete activities or enforce strategies. For parents unable to read Chinese, providing audio recordings of stories may help fill the language gap.

The review found that implementing simple and specific writing techniques for parents to support their children's learning helped parents become successful. Communicating information to parents about children's learning that is clear, specific, and targeted to parents (Hoover-Dempsey, 2005; Moran & Ghate, 2005) was found to be more beneficial. Furthermore, informing parents about termly learning content so that parents can be involved. For parents unable to support their children's homework due to language barriers, schools need to acknowledge these limitations in their homework policy and provide access to appropriate content with sufficient information for parents to participate meaningfully.

A review of support services-led interventions indicates the necessity to conduct parental needs analyses (Moran & Ghate, 2005). The review demonstrated that parental programmes that strive to change attitudes or function as an add-on to parents' existing knowledge could not effectively contribute to improved outcomes for children. Instead, activities such as

parenting classes, extended schools, and outreach work present as powerful agents of home-school partnership that help improve children's achievement. However, this might only be the case for some families, reiterating the need for schools to better understand the parents they support.

5.4.3 Process

Across the globe, policies, legislation, and reports have helped prioritise home-school partnership, which exemplifies the weight of paper over practice. Examples of such policies include The White Paper (Department for Education, 2010) and the Field Review (Field, 2010) in the United Kingdom and the IDEA in the United States. These documents reinforce the need to involve parents in education. Although differing demographics and policy contexts require caution in borrowing, the current study demonstrates that policies in Hong Kong need revisiting.

The shaping of policy is considered vital in meeting the often complex needs of parents. For instance, policies need to acknowledge the logistical barriers experienced by parents and, in the case of ethnic minority families, address and reflect the importance of deconstructing institutional barriers. Inclusion and equitable educational participation should be articulated clearly. Through a whole-school approach based on continuous whole-school improvement strategies, policies can greatly benefit stakeholders. For Hong Kong, tools such as the *'Catering for Student Differences'* can be helpful in this regard.

Enforcing policy requires impactful leadership, which Goodall and Vorhaus identify as sustaining a shared vision that is rooted within the school culture, reflective of a whole school approach. The longevity of home-school partnership programmes, attitudes, and practices rely on leadership commitment, reinforced by the monitoring and analyses of initiatives. Goodall and Vorhaus also found schools that reported the most significant impact included appropriate staff allocation to management responsibilities, and liaising with parents who are vulnerable to disengagement. Staff training was crucial, along with opportunities to network with other schools. Formalising effective practice was also seen as necessary; it proved helpful for monitoring and continuous professional development.

Therefore, institutions that work collaboratively with other agencies informed by parental needs analyses are better equipped to craft equitable educational policies. Schools are urged to revisit and expand their policies to reflect contemporary needs and best practice, emphasising stakeholder empowerment. Efforts must be implemented to ensure that all stakeholders who work with families understand and support policy initiatives that promote inclusion and equity in education in Hong Kong.

Regarding the theme of multi-agency working mentioned earlier, this study asserts that institutional support is critical for success. Collaboration among professionals, regardless of scale, presents challenges. Data and information about families can be informative. However, data access and sharing can be complex, especially when dealing with multi-agency working or transitioning from one school or service to another. Goodall and Vorhaus found that information about children is often not shared seamlessly, signifying disconnect, a lack of

continuity within and among institutions, and a loss of time in recovering the child or family's historical particulars. The authors advise that institutions should prioritise the exploration of systematic sharing of data and knowledge.

5.4.4 Pandemic

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the value of home-school partnership became even more pronounced. Stakeholders felt the impact of transitioning learning spaces and methods from schools to screens. Amidst the unavoidable chaos, some pockets of families may have had little trouble adjusting to the new norm with the availability of technological tools, the knowledge of operating online applications, and the means to support their children's learning. However, this was definitely not the case for multiple families across the globe. In Hong Kong, the pandemic incited new barriers to children's learning and parents' access to participation.

As stated by the United Nations (2020), managing the COVID-19 crisis presents specific challenges for education where equitable access to learning and inclusion are vital. Supporting children's engagement in learning who are vulnerable to further marginalisation was prioritised. The closure of schools and interruptions in learning was typical, with the social and economic costs being notably high for families from disadvantaged backgrounds. Amongst many others, The UN noted distinct concerns rendered by the pandemic applicable to this study, which include interruptions in learning for children with learning disabilities and a lack of preparation for parents to support children's learning at home. Subsequently, these circumstances lead to stressed parents and loss of learning, especially for children in the

lower primary phase. Besides crafting measures to ensure equitable access to learning, the UN urges data collection and reporting on the impact of the pandemic on learning, with particular attention to the progress monitoring of students' learning as part of post-COVID plans. The UN suggests that countries develop data collection efforts immediately to assist in these monitoring efforts.

In conclusion, this study suggests moving forward with policy revisions for home-school partnership to better reflect reality, and empowering stakeholders through the development of robust training for professionals and parents. The undertaking of parental needs analyses to inform practice, interventions, and service monitoring that is data-based. Lastly, the formation of parent liaison officers and teams working within a multi-agency structure is also key. Table 5.1 below presents a summary of the recommendations made in this chapter.

Perspective	Whole-school approach to home-school partnership with continuous development.	Informed understanding of parental background, values, perspectives and needs.	Shared vision rooted in school culture (Goodall & Vorhaus, 2010).
Practice	Parent and professional training.	Multi-agency working and community building.	Data-driven, child-centred culture of service planning and monitoring.
Process	Expansion of policy to reflect needs of schools and families.	Committed leadership	Responsive provisions / resources.

Table 5.2 Recommendations

Chapter 6 Conclusion

This study sought to investigate inclusive practice in home-school partnership for ethnic minority parents by honing in on the experiences of 15 Nepalese parents of children with disabilities and 17 professionals working across six primary special needs schools in Hong Kong. The study explored how these stakeholders understand, develop, and practise home-school partnership. This chapter concludes the study by summarising the key research findings relevant to the research aims and questions, discussing its contribution and value. By reviewing its limitations, it will also make recommendations for future research.

Home-school partnership was investigated across four strands: policies, practice, concepts, and systems and structures, while Pierre Bourdieu's ideas of Social Capital supported the theoretical framework of this inquiry. At the same time, analysing global and local trends in inclusion and its intersection with home-school partnership has been influential in examining stakeholder experiences. Through semi-structured interviews, stakeholders discussed their experiences working with each other, uncovering various aspects that promote and hinder effective partnership. With a multiperspectival Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, the following themes were developed:

1. Placing the child at the centre

2. Making it work

3. Support systems

The current study emphasises that institutional barriers are failing to promote ethnic minority parents' participation in home-school partnership. Although stakeholders value home-school partnership, recognising its importance to children's development, their experiences of working with each other is mixed. Although it is received positively due to the development of an amicable relationship between parent and professional, multiple barriers impede the process and outcomes of home-school partnership. Additionally, while social workers and teachers have more opportunities to engage with parents, comparatively, principals have the poorest relationships with parents.

All stakeholders identify the need for consistency in approach, yet they also share discrepancies in their views where differing priorities influence their focus. While professionals value instilling behavioural expectations and learning Chinese, parents are aware of their shortcomings in their knowledge about special needs and their ability to support the educational trajectory of their children. Professionals attribute cultural influences to differing perspectives.

Additionally, although there appears to be an unspoken delineation of roles and responsibilities amongst professionals, a lack of clarity ensues. For instance, a lack of key professionals identified as accountable for overseeing home-school partnership initiatives was apparent, where roles often overlap between teachers and social workers. Similarly, parents' understanding of professionals' roles and responsibilities was also varied. Parents approach different professionals for several matters depending on their rapport with the said professional, meaning, there is not always a distinction made between teachers and social

workers.

Marked differences in the experiences of home-school partnership between Chinese and Nepalese families were noted by parents and professionals in the study. Nepalese families are less successful in partnering with schools, advocating for their children and exercising parental agency. Despite schools' efforts to boost interactions between Chinese and Nepalese families, measures have mostly failed.

The findings indicate multiple considerations for schools in developing inclusive practices for home-school partnership. For instance, interaction is seemingly relegated to one-way communication with poor linguistic comprehension barring deeper connections, leading to poor understanding between parents and schools. Infrequent parent participation in school programmes is noted, mainly explained by a lack of relevance and negative past experiences. Furthermore, the absence of ethnic minority representation in Parent-Teacher Association reveals a lack of opportunities for parent agency, while professionals had a sound understanding of policies. Although deemed helpful, some drawbacks were highlighted in policies, such as a lack of clarity regarding how ethnic minority families can participate or be supported. On the other hand, parents had no understanding of policies safeguarding their children, calling into question their awareness of their rights.

Also, the crux of programmes crafted by schools is monocultural and often led by cultural integration ideals which most ethnic minority parents do not necessarily value.

Although a child-centred purpose motivates professionals and parents to work collaboratively, there is inadequate institutional support to facilitate partnership. Examples include a shortage of purposeful training for parents and professionals that address the demands of their experiences, time poverty, teacher workload, and insufficient resources to address linguistic barriers. Furthermore, substandard multi-agency working practices also present obstacles.

Both parents and professionals are united in their views in seeking improved communication and collaboration. Home-school partnership works best with the active collaboration of multiple stakeholders, supported by a sound understanding of familial needs, expectations, backgrounds, and parents' social and cultural profiles (Goodall & Vorhaus). Thus, this study calls for an urgent assessment of institutional support for home-school partnership. It calls for investments into establishing a body comprising different agencies across education, social services, health, the NGO sector and community to assist in developing training, support with programmes, monitoring interventions, and executing parental needs analyses to inform practice. Strategies designed to target better outcomes include a parental engagement strategy that is developed and monitored with strategic planning embedded in a whole-school approach. They include the availability of resources and training, continuous support, an ongoing system of data-backed development, and community involvement.

In support of the actions mentioned above, further research is suggested to investigate potential multi-agency working methods that best fit Hong Kong's contextual needs. Furthermore, exploring training curricula for professionals that cover the demands of working

with diverse families is recommended. Lastly, a more in-depth look into the development of inclusive educational policies to better illustrate the needs of Hong Kong society is encouraged.

This study contributes to the expanding literature on ethnic minority families in Hong Kong. However, it may be one of the first to include families of children with special educational needs. As a qualitative study, it offers first-hand insights into the experiences of Nepalese families and professionals as they work together. Additionally, with the Education Bureau's announcement of their newly developed Curriculum Framework on Parent Education (primary school) in December 2022, it would be interesting to scrutinise this study's findings against what is addressed in the curriculum. More importantly, this study has highlighted a pressing need to investigate further equity and inclusion in the educational experiences of ethnic minority children.

Key limitations of this study comprise its focus on one ethnic minority group only. Although for a qualitative study utilising a multiperspectival Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis methodology, the sample size of parents and professionals in this study is relatively extensive, the findings may not be generalisable. Furthermore, it was specific to parents whose children attend primary special needs schools, excluding Nepalese children with disabilities who attend mainstream schools. Additionally, this study could not make a comparative analysis based on personal accounts of Chinese parents' experiences.

This study concludes that the issue is not so much Hong Kong's linguistic deficit view of its ethnic minority citizens or the adoption of an educational integration philosophy. Rather, the issue is the shallow notion that complex communities such as ethnic minorities, with their historical exclusion and cultural peculiarities, can be addressed solely through the acquisition of linguistic proficiency. Undoubtedly, such a reductionist stance warrants a thorough examination of the values and attitudes toward inclusion in Hong Kong. The suggestion here is not the assignment of special provisions for this demographic or to provide additional services, but more of a broadening of perspectives by identifying ethnic minority concerns as inclusive of Hong Kong society's needs. Delays in such endeavours risk increasing adverse consequences on the lives of those already vulnerable to marginalisation. If Hong Kong is genuinely keen to uphold the no loser principle, a good and perhaps urgent place to start would be the city's ethnic minority children with disabilities.

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Appendix A Ethics Clearance Form

香港教育大學
The Education University
of Hong Kong

19 November 2021

Ms Divya Darshan GURUNG
Doctor of Education Programme
Graduate School

Dear Ms Gurung,

Application for Ethical Review <Ref. no. 2021-2022-0006>

I am pleased to inform you that approval has been given by the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) for your research project:

Project title: Exploring Working Relationships between Nepalese Parents and Hong Kong Special Educational Needs Schools

Ethical approval is granted for the project period from 19 November 2021 to 31 December 2021. If a project extension is applied for lasting more than 3 months, HREC should be contacted with information regarding the nature of and the reason for the extension. If any substantial changes have been made to the project, a new HREC application will be required.

Please note that you are responsible for informing the HREC in advance of any proposed substantive changes to the research proposal or procedures which may affect the validity of this ethical approval. You will receive separate notification should a fresh approval be required.

Thank you for your kind attention and we wish you well with your research.

Yours sincerely,

Patsy Chung (Ms)
Secretary
Human Research Ethics Committee

c.c. Professor CHOU Kee Lee, Chairperson, Human Research Ethics Committee

香港新界大埔露屏路十號
10 Lo Ping Road, Tai Po, New Territories, Hong Kong
T (852) 2948 8888   F (852) 2948 6000   www.eduhk.hk

Appendix B Research Information Sheet

<div align="center">

INFORMATION SHEET

Exploring working relationships between Nepalese parents and Special Educational Needs schools in Hong Kong

</div>

You are invited to participate in a project supervised by Prof. Sin Kuen Fung and conducted by Divya Darshan Gurung, who is staff and student of Department of Special Education and Counselling in The Education University of Hong Kong.

Introduction
This study explores how Nepali parents of children with SEN and school personnel perceive home-school partnership, their experiences of working in collaboration with each other, and their understanding of policies and initiatives that advance such relationships.

It aims to understand how school stakeholders understand and experience partnership while also identifying systemic, and attitudinal barriers that hinder home-school partnerships. The outcome of this inquiry is assumed to shed light on experiences, difficulties in collaborating, systemic barriers, and attitudes that perpetuate marginalising experiences and hinder positive and effective home-school partnerships.In light of the findings, this study also aims to make recommendations for enhancing partnerships between school personnel and culturally diverse families.

Considering the focus of this study, you were chosen to participate in this study because you are a stakeholder in SEN primary schools in Hong Kong.

Methodology
This study will approach 10 primary SEN schools across Hong Kong, from where a principal, a social worker, two teachers, and at least two parents will be interviewed. Your contact information was obtained from the school with the principal's permission.

As participants of this study, you will be asked to participate in a short semi-structured interview which will last between 30-45 minutes via Zoom. The interviews will be audio recorded to transcribe the interview and for me to take notes. These recordings will then be destroyed after.

These interviews will be confidential and your identity will be kept anonymous.

Once the data has been collected, you will have an opportunity to be presented with the initial findings and provide further feedback. At the end of the study, you will be presented with yet another opportunity to know what the final outcomes are.

Potential risks

There are no potential risks in this study.

Your participation in the project is voluntary. You have every right to withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequences. All information related to you will remain confidential, and will be identifiable by codes known only to the researcher.

Research dissemination

Findings from the study will be made available to all participating schools and participants. It will also be disseminated in the form of a doctoral thesis. Where possible, it will be presented in conferences and submitted for journal publications. All of the participating schools and participants will remain anonymous.

If you would like to obtain more information about this study, please contact me by email at ███████████████████ or telephone number ██████████, or my supervisor Professor Sin Kuen Fung by email at ksin@eduhk.hk.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research study, please do not hesitate to contact the Human Research Ethics Committee by email at hrec@eduhk.hk or by mail to Research and Development Office, The Education University of Hong Kong.

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study.

Divya D. Gurung

जानकारी पाना

नेपाली आमाबुबा र हङकङमा विशेष शैक्षिक आवश्यकता स्कूलहरु बीचको काम सम्बन्धमा अन्वेषण

तपाईंहरूलाई प्रोफेसर Sin Kuen Fung को निरीक्षण र दिव्य दर्शन गुरुङ जो हंगकंग शिक्षा विश्वविद्यालय अन्तरगत विशेष शिक्षा र परामर्श विभागमा कर्मचारी र बिद्यार्थी द्वारा संचालित एक परियोजनामा भाग लिन आमन्त्रित गर्दछौं।

परिचय
यस अन्वेषणले कसरी SEN र विद्यालयका कर्मचारीहरु संग नेपाली बच्चाहरुको आमाबुबा घर र स्कूल बीचको साझेदारी, उनीहरुको एक अर्का संग सहयोग गरी काम गरेको अनुभवहरु, यस्तो सम्बन्ध लाई अगाडि बढाउने नीतिहरु र पहलहरुको बारेमा उनीहरुको समझदारी कस्तो छ भनेने बारेमा अनुसन्धान हुनेछ।

यस अध्धयनले कसरी स्कूलका हितधारकहरु अथवा दावेदारीहरूले साझेदारीलाई बुझ्ने र अनुभव गर्नुका साथै प्रणालीगत र घर-स्कूल साझेदारीमा बाधा ल्याउन सक्ने कुराहरूलाई चिन्न सक्दछ भन्ने कुरामा ध्यान दिईनेछ।
त्यसैगरी यस अनुसन्धानको नतिजाले साझेदारीमा हुने कठिनाईहरु,अनुभवहरू, प्रणालीगत अवरोधहरु, कुनैपनि दृष्टिकोण जसले सकारात्मक अनि प्रभावकारी घर-स्कूल साझेदारी हुन अबरोध पुर्याउने कुराहरूमा ध्यानाकर्षण गर्नु हो।
त्यसका साथ साथै यस अनुसन्धानले स्कूलको कर्मचारीहरूले विविध संस्कृतिक र पृष्ठभूमीबाट आएका परिवारहरू संग सुमधुर सम्बन्ध र साझेदारी गर्न सल्लाह सुझाव पनि दिईने छ।

यस अध्ययनको मुल कुरालाई ध्यानमा राख्दै, तपाई यस अध्ययनमा भाग लिन छनौट हुनुभएको छ किनकि तपाई हडकङको सेन प्राथमिक विद्यालयहरुको एक दावेदारीमा पर्नुहुन्छ।

पद्धति
यस अध्यनमा सहभागी हुने 5 सेन विद्यालयहरू, कुल 30 सहभागीहरूको (5 प्रिन्सिपलहरू, 5 सामाजिक कार्यकर्ता, 10 शिक्षकहरू र 10 अभिभावकहरूको) अन्तरबार्ता लिईनेछ।तपाईंको सम्पर्क प्रिन्सिपल को अनुमति लिई स्कूल बाट प्राप्त गरिएको हो।यो गोप्य रूपमा अडियो टेप गरिनेछ। अध्यनबाट प्राप्त निष्कर्षहरू थीसिस, शैक्षिक प्रस्तुति, र जर्नल प्रकाशनको रूपमा प्रसारित गरिनेछ।

यस अध्यनमा सहभागी हुनु भएकोले तपाईंको एउटा छोटो संरचित अन्तरबार्ता 30-45 मिनेट को हुनेछ। तपाईंको अन्तरबार्ता जूम (अनलाइन) को माध्यमबाट हुनेछ। तपाईको अन्तरबार्ता हुबहु मेरो नोट्सको लागी रेकर्ड गरिने छ। यी रेकर्डीहरू पछि नष्ट गरिनेछ।यी अन्तरबार्ताहरू गोप्य हुनेछन् र तपाईंको पहिचान गुमनाम राखिनेछ।

एक पटक सबै तथ्यांक संकलन गरिए पछी तपाईलाई प्रारम्भिक निष्कर्षहरू संग प्रस्तुत गरीनेछ र थप प्रतिक्रिया प्रदान गरिनेछ। अध्यनको अन्त्यमा तपाईलाई अन्तिम परिणाम पनि देखाइने छ।

सम्भावित जोखिमहरु

अध्यनमा संलग्न कुनै सम्भावित जोखिमहरू छैनन्।यस अनुसन्धानमा तपाईको सहभागिता स्वइच्छा को कुरा हो। तपाईलाई कुनै पनी नकारात्मक परिणाम हिना यस अध्यय\\नबाट जुनै बेला हट्न सक्नु हुने अधिकार छ। तपाइँ संग सम्बन्धित सबै जानकारी गोप्य रहनेछ र केवल अनुशन्धानकर्तालाई कोडद्वारा पहिचान हुनेछ।

अनुसन्धान प्रसार

अध्यन बाट आएको निष्कर्ष सबै सहभागी स्कूलहरु र सहभागीहरुलाई उपलब्ध गराईनेछ। यो एक डॉक्टरेट थीसिस को रूपमा पनि प्रसारित गरिनेछ। जहाँ सम्भव हुन्छ, यो अध्ययन बिभिन्न सम्मेलनहरू र पत्रिका प्रकाशनहरुमा प्रस्तुत गरीनेछ। सहभागी भएका सबै विद्यालयहरु र सहभागीहरु अज्ञात रहनेछन्।

यदि तपाईलाई यस अध्ययनको बारेमा अझै जानकारी प्राप्त गर्न चाहेमा , कृपया मलाई ईमेल द्वारा ▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇ वा टेलिफोन नम्बर ▇▇▇▇ मा सम्पर्क गर्नुहोस्, वा ksin@eduhk.hk मा मेरो प्रोफेसर सिन कुएन फंग लाई ईमेल गर्न सक्नु गुनेछ।

तपाइँको यस अध्ययनमा रुचिको र सहभागीताको लागी धन्यवाद।

दिव्य गुरुङ

Appendix C Informed consent form

INFORMED CONSENT (English)

Exploring working relationships between Nepalese parents and Special Educational Needs schools in Hong Kong

[REDACTED]   Switch account

* Required

Email *

Your email

Background

You are invited to participate in a project supervised by Prof. Sin Kuen Fung (supervisor) and conducted by Divya Darshan Gurung (Principal Investigator), from the Department of Special Education and Counselling in The Education University of Hong Kong.

This study explores how Nepalese parents of children with SEN and school personnel perceive home-school partnership, their experiences of working in collaboration with each other, and their understanding of policies and initiatives that advance such relationships. Considering the focus of this study, you were chosen to participate because you are a stakeholder in SEN primary schools in Hong Kong.

The study aims to understand how school stakeholders understand and experience partnership while also identifying systemic, and attitudinal barriers that hinder home-school partnerships. The outcome of this inquiry is assumed to shed light on experiences, difficulties in collaborating, systemic barriers, and attitudes that perpetuate marginalising experiences and hinder positive and effective home-school partnerships. In light of the findings, this study also aims to make recommendations for enhancing partnerships between school personnel and culturally diverse families.

Participants in this study include 5 schools, totalling 30 participants (a mix of 5 principals, 5 social workers, 10 teachers and 10 parents). It will be audiotaped confidentially. There are no potential risks involved in the study. Findings from the study will be disseminated as a thesis, academic presentation, and journal publication.

For concerns about the conduct of this study, please contact the Human Research Ethics Committee by email at hrec@eduhk.hk or by mail to Research and Development Office, The Education University of Hong Kong.

Research Investigator

Ms Divya Darshan Gurung, The Education University of Hong Kong
email: [REDACTED]
contact: [REDACTED]

Please tick those that apply

As a participant, I am aware of the following: *

☐ My participation in this project is voluntary. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time.

*

☐ If I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, I have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview.

*

☐ My participation involves being interviewed by Divya D. Gurung. The interview will last approximately 30-45 minutes. Notes will be written during the interview. An audio tape of the interview and subsequent dialogue will be made, which will not be shared with anyone.

*

☐ I understand that the researcher will NOT identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from this interview, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure. Subsequent usage of records and data will be subject to strict standard confidentiality.

*

☐ I understand that the researcher will NOT identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from this interview, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure. Subsequent usage of records and data will be subject to strict standard confidentiality.

*

☐ I have read and understand the explanation provided to me, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

*

☐ I have read and understand the explanation provided to me, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

*

☐ I will receive a copy of the consent form and an information sheet regarding the study.

Full Name *

Your answer

Contact number *

Your answer

School *

Your answer
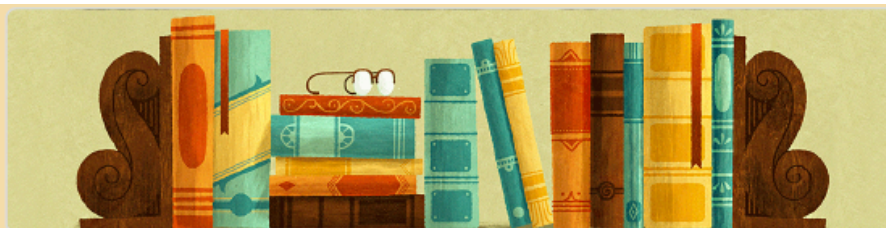
Role *

○ Teacher
○ Social Worker
○ Principal

साक्षात्कार सहमति फर्म

नेपाली अभिभावक र हङकङ को स्पेस्यल स्कूल स्कूलहरु बीच कार्य सम्बन्धको अन्वेषण।

[redacted] **Switch account** ☁

* Required

Email *

Your email

Background

तपाईंहरूलाई प्रोफेसर Sin Kuen Fung(निरीक्षक) को देख रेख मा अनि दिव्य दर्शन गुरुङ(मुख्य अनुसन्धाता) ले हंगकंग शिक्षा विश्वविद्यालय अन्तर्गत विशेष शिक्षा र परामर्श विभागमा द्वारा संचालित एक परियोजनामा भाग लिन आमन्त्रित गर्दछ।

यस अन्वेषणले कसरी SEN र विद्यालयका शिक्षक साथै कर्मचारीहरु संग नेपाली बच्चाहरूको आमाबुबा, घर र स्कूल बीचको साझेदारी, उनीहरुको एक अर्का संग सहयोग गरी काम गरेको अनुभवहरु, यस्तो सम्बन्ध लाई अगाडि बढाउने नीतिहरु र पहलहरूको बारेमा उनीहरुको समझदारी कस्तो छ भने बारेमा अनुसन्धान हुनेछ।

यस अध्ययनले कसरी स्कूलका हितधारकहरु अथवा दावेदारीहरूले साझेदारीलाई बुझ्ने र अनुभव गर्नुका साथै प्रणालीगत र घर-स्कूल साझेदारीमा बाधा ल्याउन सक्ने कुराहरूलाई चिन्न सक्दछ भने कुरामा ध्यान दिईनेछ।त्यसैगरी यस अनुसन्धानको नतिजाले साझेदारीमा हुने कठिनाईहरु,अनुभवहरू, प्रणालीगत अवरोधहरू, कुनैपनि दृष्टिकोण जसले सकारात्मक अनि प्रभावकारी घर-स्कूल साझेदारी हुन अबरोध पुर्याउने कुराहरूमा ध्यानाकर्षण गर्नु हो।त्यसका साथ साथै यस अनुशन्धानले स्कूलको शिक्षक र कर्मचारीहरूले विविध संस्कृतिक र पृष्ठभूमीबाट आएका परिवारहरु संग सुमधुर सम्बन्ध र साझेदारी गर्न सल्लाह सुझाव पनि दिईने छ।

यस अध्ययनमा सहभागी 5 विद्यालयहरूबाट, कुल 30 सहभागीहरु (5 प्रिन्सिपलहरु, 5 सोसियस वर्कर, 10 शिक्षकहरु र 10 अभिभावकहरू) हुनेछ। यस अध्ययनलाई गोप्य रूपमा अडियो टेप गरिनेछ। अध्ययनमा संलग्न हुदा कुनै सम्भावित जोखिमहरु छैनन्। अध्ययनबाट प्राप्त निष्कर्षहरू थेसिस, शैक्षिक प्रस्तुति, र जर्नल प्रकाशनको रूपमा प्रशारित गरिनेछ।

यस अध्ययनको मुल कुरालाई ध्यानमा राख्दै, तपाई यस अध्यनमा भाग लिन छनौट हुनभएको छ किनकि तपाई हङकङको SEN प्राथमिक विद्यालयहरूको एक दावेदारीमा पर्नुहुन्छ।

अनुसन्धान अन्वेषक
दिव्य दर्शन गुरुङ , The Education University of Hong Kong
email: [redacted]
contact: [redacted]

कृपया लागू हुनेहरूमा चिन्ह लगाउनुहोस्

सहभागीको रूपमा म निम्न कुराहरूमा सजग छु: *

☐ यस परियोजनामा मेरो सहभागिता स्वेच्छा हो। मैले बुझें कि मेरो सहभागिताको लागि मलाई भुक्तानी गरिने छैन। म कुनै पनि समयमा सहभागिता फिर्ता लिन र नगर्न सक्दछु।

---

*

☐ यदि म अन्तर्वार्ता सत्रमा कुनै पनि हिसाबले अप्ठयारो महसुस भएमा मैले कुनै प्रश्नको उत्तर दिन अस्वीकार गर्न वा अन्तर्वार्ता समाप्त गर्ने अधिकार छ।

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*

☐ मेरो यो सहभागितामा दिव्य दर्शन गुरुङ द्वारा अन्तरवार्ता हुनेछ। अन्तर्वार्ता करीब ३० - ४५ मिनेट सम्म रहनेछ। अन्तर्वार्तामा नोटहरू लेखिने छन्। अन्तर्वार्ताको अडियो टेप र त्यसपछिको वार्तालाप बनाइनेछ, जो कसैसँग बाँडिने छैन।

---

*

☐ म बुझ्छु कि अन्वेषकले मलाई यो अन्तर्वार्ताबाट प्राप्त जानकारी प्रयोग गरेर कुनै रिपोर्टमा नामबाट पहिचान गर्ने छैन, र यो अध्ययनमा सहभागीको रूपमा मेरो गोपनीयता सुरक्षित रहनेछ। रेकर्ड र डाटाको पछिको प्रयोगको लागि कडा गोपनीयताको अधीनमा हुनेछ।

---

*

☐ मैले मलाई प्रदान गरिएको विवरण पढेको छु र बुझेको छु र म यस अध्ययनमा भाग लिन स्वेच्छाले सहमत छु।

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*

☐ मैले यो सहमति फारम र अध्ययन बारेमा जानकारीको एक प्रतिलिपि प्राप्त गर्नेछु।

पुरा नाम *

Your answer

सम्पर्क नम्बर *

Your answer

स्कूल *

Your answer

भूमिका *

○ अभिभावक

○ शिक्षक

○ सोसियल वर्कर

○ प्रिन्सिपल

○ Other: _____

Appendix D Interview protocol

Preamble

Hello. My name is Divya Gurung. Thank you for joining me today to participate in this interview. Your time is very much appreciated, and your contribution will be very helpful. I am a student at the Education University of Hong Kong, conducting this interview as part of my Doctoral thesis. Your help is much appreciated.

This interview involves a series of questions. There are no right, wrong, desirable or undesirable answers. The purpose of this interview is to gather your thoughts and experiences of home-school partnership in special schools in Hong Kong. I would like you to feel comfortable with saying what you really think and how you feel.

Audio recording instructions

If it is okay with you, I will be audio-recording our conversation. The purpose of this recording is so that I can capture all the details of the interview while I can continue on in an attentive conversation with you. This is also to make sure that I can refer back to the recording to take down notes. I can assure you that this conversation will remain confidential. If at any time during the interview you wish to discontinue the use of the recorder or the interview itself, please feel free to let me know.

Consent form instructions

In order to ensure that you are fully aware of what this interview entails, please confirm that you have taken the time to read the consent form and understand what this interview entails. Please be reminded that you are free to take a break, or withdraw at any time as well. Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin? Then with your permission, we will begin the interview.

Debriefing

Thank you once again for participating in this interview. The results of this research will provide useful information in understanding home-school partnership between special schools and Nepalese families. The information shared during this interview will remain confidential. Please feel free to get in touch if you have further questions.

Appendix E Sample exploratory comments and emergent themes

<u>**Teacher 7A**</u> [Code: purple – descriptive / blue – linguistic / red – conceptual]

Emergent Themes	Line	Transcript	Exploratory Comments
	26	*There are many stakeholders in*	
	27	*education, like parents, the*	
	28	*principals, teachers, social*	
	29	*workers and even students. How*	
	30	*would you explain the roles and*	
	31	*responsibilities of different*	
	32	*stakeholders in home-school*	
	33	*partnership?*	
Facilitating cultural integration	34	Our role is to teach Chinese… so	Identification of own role as teacher.
	35	our role is definitely to teach	
	36	Chinese and Chinese culture. But	Perspective on the importance of imparting particular types of knowledge, which may or not be shared by parents. Teacher's view on the linguistic demands placed on Nepalese students. In some ways, they would need to be quadrilingual (Nepalese, English, Cantonese and Mandarin)!
	37	the difficulty with this is that…	
	38	we hope that they can be	
	39	bilingual, it's not like they	
	40	[children] should only know	
	41	Chinese, or only Nepalese. But	
	42	you know, usually, not all	
	43	students can be bilingual, where	
	44	they are fluent in both…usually,	
	45	they're only capable in one.	
	46	*Ah… I see.*	
Questioning ethnic minority children's future	47	So our students [NCS] can speak,	Acknowledgement of Nepalese student's linguistic limitations. What might they be good at? Questioning the overall linguistic competency of Nepalese students.
	48	but don't know how to read or	
	49	write Nepali. So we're afraid that	
	50	they're not good in Chinese,	
	51	neither are they good in Nepali,	
	52	so what might they be good at?	
Cultivating self-identity	53	So for the parents, they need to	Identifying parental role in imparting Nepalese culture and language.
	54	teach their own traditional	
	55	language and culture, because we	
	56	can't help with that.	

Parent 3C [Code: purple – descriptive / blue – linguistic / red – conceptual]

Emergent Themes	Line	Transcript	Exploratory Comments
	40	*Some of the teachers and social*	
	41	*workers I have spoken to recently*	
	42	*mention that they would benefit*	
	43	*from learning about the Nepalese*	
	44	*culture, what do you think?*	
	45	Well if the teachers understand	Parent recognises value
	46	the culture of the Nepalese	in learning about culture.
Importance of understanding culture	47	parents, it might be even better.	Skepticism towards
	48	It's necessary to understand	school's effort to be
	49	[culture], but what might they	more aware about
	50	understand about our culture	diverse culture.
	51	anyway… they don't even try to	
Lack of parent-professional engagement	52	understand. They don't really	
	53	inquire about it, they haven't	
	54	inquired about it… what would they understand?	
	55	*Oh… I see.*	
	56	*Well, how about sharing a*	
	57	*positive, good experience you*	
	58	*have had with the school?*	
	59	Hm… what can I say, there isn't	Lack of outstanding
Child-centred	60	anything that stands out…a good	positive experiences.
	61	experience would be… regarding	Positive experiences are
	62	the child, nothing much about	child-centred.
Ideas about partnership	63	other things, but the child…they	
	64	[teachers] will communicate what	
	65	the child did, or if they have	
	66	messed up… they will share this	Communication centered
	67	immediately. Besides that, I'm	around the child.
	68	not so sure.	Inability to recount positive experiences.
	69	*And how about the opposite?*	
	70	*How about difficult experiences?*	
Barriers to partnership	71	Difficult…well, what can I say? I	Parental struggle with
	72	find everything difficult.	schooling.
	73	*You mentioned language*	
	74	*previously, what more would you*	
	75	*share about language?*	

Lack of support	76 77 78 79 80	Yes! I can't speak Chinese, and there aren't any interpreters at the moment…there used to be some before… if there are some things that I want to share.	Lack of support to address linguistic barriers.
	81	*Can you share some examples?*	
Expected parental roles and responsibilities **Poor communication** **Poor engagement**	82 83 84 85 86 87 88 89 90 91 92 93	Like during Parent's Day, we need to discuss with the teacher, when we need to share things with the teacher…when you don't know the language, you are stuck! There's nothing. There are things in your heart [that you want to say], but when you don't know how to talk [in Chinese], it just remains there… and that is very unsatisfactory…very unsatisfactory.	Demands placed on parents to engage with teachers about child's learning and development. Experiences of communication barriers. There's nothing-descriptive of parent experience of engaging with schools. It just remains there-parents unable to articulate themselves. Parent's experience of communicating with school. Very unsatisfactory – repeated phrase depicting parent's view on home-school partnership?
Parental agency	94 95 96 97	So this time around, I called on Ms G (community volunteer) to help talk about me and my son during Parents Day.	Parent takes initiative, a step towards parental agency in advocating for her child.
	98 99 100	*Ms G? Why? Weren't there any interpreters arranged by the school?*	
Lack of support systems	101 102 103 104 105 106 107 108 109	There aren't any interpreters at the moment. When we were face-to-face, they would invite someone, there isn't any at the moment. It's been two years now, since it's been half day [schooling], there hasn't been an interpreter. They could have done something via phone-to-phone	Lack of support to tackle language barriers. Extended period of time in the absence of linguistic support. Parent identifies potential solution to

	110	conversations, but that's not there either.	barrier unaddressed by the school.
	111		Parent encouraged to engage in conversations despite communicating difficulties.
Communication barriers	112	When I tell them, they tell me that it's 'simple', and that I will	
	113	be able to understand… so you	Parental efforts amidst difficult circumstances.
	114	end up stumbling along, talking	
	115	as best as you can. But the things	things you want to say
	116	you want to say from deep	from deep within –
	117	within… its not like talking in	illustrates the extent to
	118	Nepali, you can't raise your	which parents are unable
	119	points. So it was just too much,	to express themselves
	120	so that's why I called on Ms G,	So it was just too much –
	121	and she helped communicate for	feelings of frustration
	122	me.	The need and value for
	123		additional support in addressing parent's needs.

Appendix F Sample superordinate theme and related subordinate themes across participants

Superordinate Theme 1: Placing the child at the centre		
Subordinate Themes	Emergent Themes	Sample of Quotes
Culture or capital?	Communication barrier Language deficient view Cultural differences Cultural integration	• *"The cultural and language difference make it difficult for me to serve and help them."* (Social Worker 7B / line 45-46) • *"The ways of thinking between the Chinese and Nepalese may be a barrier for us to have a better understanding."* (Principal 6A / line 85-86) • *"I don't really think that us learning Chinese is going to be so effective."* (Parent 6C / line 40-43)
Roles and responsibilities	Language barriers Parental agency Expected parental roles and responsibilities Administration Learning from the school Active participation Support children's wellbeing Facilitate partnership Introduce resources Child-centred Relationship building Consistency in approach Communication Parent training Collaboration Whole-school approach Work closely with children and parents Cultural integration	• *"But with both professionals, my interaction with them is very limited due to language barriers; I don't get to speak openly with them, neither is my Cantonese good or English.."* (Parent 2C / line 34-40) • *"Social workers introduce resources to parents. They are quite similar to class teachers as they both provide emotional support to students and offer counselling to family when needed."* (Social Worker 7B / line 16-17) • *"They [teachers] will communicate what the child did, or if they have messed up… they will share this immediately."* (Parent 3C / line 63 -67)

| Aligning perspectives | Narrow focus
External support services
Dissimilar expectations
Finding common ground
Cultural and language differences
Chinese-centred programmes
Cultural lens
Child-centred
Relationship building
Consistent approach
Communication
Parent training
Collaboration
Whole-school approach
Close relationships | • *"If there is a lack of practical input from the parent at home, the learning for me becomes meaningless.* (Principal 6A / line 5-6)

• *"[…] if the language at school was in English, we could offer our children support at home too. Because what they learn at school, we don't know. Our children can't tell us, and if we ask them, they cannot reply either. So even if we go to school and observe what they do, we can't continue that at home effectively."* (Parent 2D / line 88-99)

• *"[…] if the parents could help the students by looking over their homework, help them revise, or if there's something the student doesn't understand and the parents help with the subject knowledge then that would be great."* (Teacher 3A / line 58 - 66) |