

## Chapter 4

# 'Out of School' Ethnic Minority Young People: Multiple Data Sources, Their Meaning, and Extent of the 'Out of School' Phenomenon

**Abstract** This chapter draws on census data, national and international educational statistics reports, and three schools enrolment figures to understand the extent of 'out of school' ethnic minority young people in Hong Kong. Inconsistencies exist within reported statistics including census and Education Bureau (EDB) datasets. Employing the 'Five Dimensions of Exclusion' (UNICEF and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, All children in school by 2015, global initiative on out-of-school children. UIS, Montreal, 2010) and CREATE's 'Seven Zones of Exclusion' (Lewin K, Improving access, equity and transitions in education: creating a research agenda. CREATE pathways to access research monograph, no. 1. University of Sussex, Brighton, 2007), Hong Kong education was analysed regarding 'out of school' ethnic minority young people. School attendance rate analyses indicated the issue could be 25 % at upper secondary and above 85 % by post-secondary. More consistent and better quality data are needed to ascertain the extent of the 'out of school' phenomenon for both Chinese and ethnic minority young people. School enrolment and relevant interview data provided rich insights confirming the phenomenon was very much prevalent. Ethnic minority students appeared to drop out throughout the primary and secondary levels, with the end of Form Three being the first critical point. New arrival ethnic minority students were considered to drop out more than Hong Kong born students. Finally, Pakistani and Nepalese young people dropped out more than other ethnic minorities and gender-wise ethnic minority boys more so than girls.

The previous chapter detailed the theoretical framework, research methodology and methods of the research reported in this book. This chapter will be concerned with identifying the extent of 'out of school' ethnic minority young people in Hong Kong – the answer to the first question referred to in the previous chapters. Various sources of data will be examined in this chapter and an attempt will be made to make some meaning from them.

This chapter draws on census data, national and international educational statistics reports, and enrolment data from three schools to understand the extent of the 'out of school' phenomenon for ethnic minority young people in Hong Kong. This is also augmented by some interview data with the research participants. There are nine sections in this chapter. Section 4.1 examines international data sources that are relevant to this book. Section 4.2 provides an overview of the sources of data on

ethnic minority students in Hong Kong. Section 4.3 examines census data from 2001 to 2011 in an attempt to provide a baseline analysis of the numbers of ethnic minority students in Hong Kong and the implications for school participation. Section 4.4 explores sources of data available from the local Education Bureau (EDB). Section 4.5 compares this two different data sources and identifies whether there is any inconsistencies in terms of the number of ethnic minority students in Hong Kong. Section 4.6 provides an overall analysis of these multiple data sources, including an assessment of their reliability, and indicates what appears to be the extent of 'out of school' ethnic minority young people in Hong Kong. Section 4.7 illustrates school enrolment data and interview data with the participants from three schools. Section 4.8 analyzes interview data with a participant outside the school to highlight an important insight about the extent of 'out of school' ethnic minority students. Section 4.9 concludes the chapter by providing a summary.

## 4.1 'Out of School' Young People in Hong Kong: An Overall Picture

Before looking at the extent of 'out of school' ethnic minority young people, it is important to have an understanding first of the overall 'out of school' rate of young people in Hong Kong. There is a dearth of research both nationally and internationally that has examined 'out of school' children in the context of Hong Kong. For example, Education for All (EFA) Global Monitoring Reports (e.g. UNESCO 2010, 2011) do not report on educational statistics of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, while these reports provide all the basic educational statistics for rest of the world. The Global Education Digest report by UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2011), however, provides some statistics on 'out of school' children not only in Hong Kong but also in other jurisdiction in the region. Tables 4.1 and 4.2 have been adopted from that report (UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2011, p. 94, 134) in order to show the number of 'out of school' children not only in Hong Kong but also in other jurisdictions in the region.

**Table 4.1** Entrance age, duration and net enrollment rate in pre-primary education (2009)

	Entrance age	Duration	Net Enrollment Rate (NER)		
			Total	Male	Female
Hong Kong	3	3	87	85	89
China	4	3	–	–	–
Korea	4	2	43	44	43
Singapore	3	3	–	–	–
Macao	3	3	77	78	75
Japan	3	3	89	–	–

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2011, p. 94)

**Table 4.2** Out of school children (2009)

	Compul- sory age	Out of school children of primary school age					Out of school children of lower secondary school age				
		Rate (%)			Number		Rate (%)			Number	
		Total	Male	Female	Total	%F	Total	Male	Female	Total	%F
Hong Kong	6–14	2	3	–	6000	6	9	10	8	24,000	43
China	6–14	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Korea	6–16	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Singapore	6–14	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Macao	5–14	13	12	13	3000	50	8	7	10	2000	60
Japan	6–15	–	–	–	2000	–	–	–	–	1000	–

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2011, p. 134)

**Table 4.3** Primary 'out of school' children in Hong Kong

2006		2007		2008		2009		2010	
Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
6383	9501	6871	8284	7888	7122	7343	4384		

Source: The World Bank (2012)

Global Education Digest reports that 13 % of the pre-primary age-group children in Hong Kong were not in school in the year 2009 (UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2011, p. 94). Pre-primary education is not compulsory and free in Hong Kong that has a policy of 12 years free education of which 9 years are compulsory. The typical compulsory education age-group is 6–14 that normally covers grades from 1 to 9. Global Education Digest also reports on the percentage and number of 'out of school' children of primary and lower secondary age-groups in the year 2009. While the percentage of 'out of school' children for primary age-group was about 2 %, the percentage for lower secondary age-group was 9 % (UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2011, p. 134).

The World Bank (2012) data centre also provides some useful statistics about 'out of school' children in primary level in Hong Kong (Table 4.3). It should be noted that there are inconsistencies in 2009 'out of school' children data between the two datasets. While Global Education Digest reports 'out of school' figure for Hong Kong primary age-group children 6000, the World Bank data centre reports primary 'out of school' children about 12,000.

There does not appear to be any local data sources on 'out of school' students in Hong Kong but 'dropout' data are available from government officials. A data source was identified incidentally during an interview with an Education Bureau official, Mr. Lee Cheng (pseudonym). Mr. Cheng was a member of the non-attendance cases team within the Education Bureau. The team was responsible for looking after non-attendance and dropout cases for the students of whole of Hong Kong. When he was asked about the overall dropout rate in Hong Kong, Mr. Cheng handed over one page of statistics that have been reproduced in Table 4.4. He mentioned that Hong Kong has 9 years free and universal basic education for children

**Table 4.4** School dropout rate (%)

Year	1991	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
	0.43	0.25	0.28	0.22	0.19	0.18	0.17	0.16
Year	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
	0.18	0.18	0.20	0.29	0.29	0.30	0.31	0.34

Source: The Hong Kong Council of Social Services (2012)

aged between 6 and 15. However, he further added that those students completed Form Three but still below 15 are not issued any attendance order according to the section 74 of the Education Ordinance, (Cap 279) (Hong Kong Special Administrative Region 1997).

A careful examination of the data in Table 4.4 revealed that it was available in public domain (The Hong Kong Council of Social Services 2012) although it was acknowledged that the original source was the Education Bureau. The operational definition used for this dropout calculation was the number of students aged 6–15 who have left school without completing Secondary (Form) Three. It did not include students who left Hong Kong in between. The calculation formula is:  $\text{no. of school dropouts} / \text{total no. of P1 – S3 students} \times 100\%$ . In real terms, Mr. Cheng commented, “In the round figure about 1800 students dropped out every year, out of them 400 are from primary level and 1400 are from junior secondary level”. In terms of any specific pattern for dropouts he mentioned that, end of Form Three is one of the critical points for students dropping out and boys probably dropped out more than girls.

While this data shows the overall dropout scenario in Hong Kong schools it is limited to the primary and junior secondary level, and does not give us any indication about grade-wise dropout rate and the dropout rate beyond junior secondary level, and does not provide any information about pre-primary level. Essentially this data is calculated for the students who enrolled in schools but could not continue. It does not refer to students who have never been in school or who have been at risk of dropping out, which are very important components of the ‘out of school’ construct. If we compare 2009 dropout rate (.31 %) from this data (Table 4.4) with the Global Education Digest report (UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2011) that showed ‘out of school’ rates in primary and junior secondary are 2 % and 9 % respectively (Table 4.2), does it mean that most of the ‘out of school’ children actually fall within the categories of ‘never been to school’ or ‘at risk of dropping out’? The existing data source failed to provide an answer to such question. Therefore, the data Mr. Cheng shared helps very little to have a clear picture of the ‘out of school’ scenario for the overall Hong Kong young people. Nevertheless, the international reports discussed above and the data collected from Mr. Lee make it very clear that the phenomenon of ‘out of school’ children does very much exist in Hong Kong context. But nothing is mentioned publicly about the existence of this phenomenon. It appears to be an area where there has been little attention and because it does not refer to upper secondary and post-secondary students it does not provide a complete picture. Given this context, identifying ‘out of school’ ethnic minority young people is problematic and will be the focus of the following section.

## 4.2 Data Sources

There are several data sources available on the number of ethnic minority students in Hong Kong. Therefore, numerous were examined to draw upon the statistics related to ethnic minority students in Hong Kong. Table 4.5 lists the details of these different data sources.

### 4.3 Ethnic Minority Students: The Story from the Census Data

‘Ethnic minorities’ first appeared in official census data in 2001 and basic data were highlighted in a Thematic Report (Census and Statistics Department 2002). As a census sub-group, ‘ethnic minorities’ have been a component of successive census exercises in 2006 and 2011 (Census and Statistics Department 2007, 2012). What follows is divided into four sub sections:

1. Growth in ethnic minority population from 2001 to 2011;
2. Ethnic minority young people <15;
3. Ethnic minority young people 15–24.
4. Trend analysis: Ethnic minority students in Hong Kong in and out of education.

**Table 4.5** Different data sources

Relevant data	Data source	Time reference
Ethnic minority population data by ethnicity; demographic data such as by age-groups; and	<i>Thematic Report: Ethnic Minorities</i> (Census and Statistics Department 2012)	2011
Educational data such as school attendance rates, number of ethnic minority students in full time education	<i>Thematic Report: Ethnic Minorities</i> (Census and Statistics Department 2007)	2006
	<i>Thematic Report: Ethnic Minorities</i> (Census and Statistics Department 2002)	2001
Number of ethnic minority students	Education Bureau [(Hong Kong SAR Government 2008);	2006/2007–2011/2012
	Mr. C. Yeung, School Development Officer, Education Commission, EDB, (personal communication, 1 June 2012);	
	Mrs. P. Y. Shek, Education Officer, Education Commission, EDB, (personal communication, 24 September 2010)]	

### 4.3.1 Growth in Ethnic Minority Population from 2001 to 2011

Table 4.6 shows the number and percentage of ethnic minority population in Hong Kong by ethnicity in three census years.

The main ethnic minority groups in Hong Kong are Indonesians, Filipinos, Indians, Pakistanis, Nepalese, White, Japanese, Thais, Pakistanis, and Koreans. In 2011 the total number of ethnic minority population was 451,183, which was about 6.4 % of the total population of HKSAR (Census and Statistics Department 2012, p. 18). The number of ethnic minority population in 2006 was 342,198, which was about 5 % the total population of HKSAR. It means the total number of ethnic minority population increased by 31.8 % over 5 years. In 2001 the number of ethnic minority population was 343,950, which was about 5.1 % of the total population of HKSAR. Interestingly the number of ethnic minority population remained almost same between 2001 and 2006.

Data on South Asian ethnic groups such as Indian, Pakistani, Nepalese are listed separately in Census Reports. In 2011, the combined number of these three South Asian ethnicities was 63,176, which was 14 % of the total ethnic minority population, increase

**Table 4.6** Ethnic minorities by ethnicity

Ethnicity	Year					
	2011		2006		2001	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Asian (other than Chinese)						
Indonesian	133,377	29.6	87,840	25.7	50,494	14.7
Filipino	133,018	29.5	112,453	32.9	142,556	41.4
Indian	28,616	6.3	20,444	6.0	18,543	5.4
Pakistan	18,042	4	11,111	3.2	11,017	3.2
Nepalese	16,518	3.7	15,950	4.7	12,564	3.7
Japanese	12,580	2.8	13,189	3.9	14,180	4.1
Thai	11,213	2.5	11,900	3.5	14,342	4.2
Korean	5209	1.2	4812	1.4	5263	1.5
Other Asian	7038	1.6	7851	2.3	7572	2.2
Sub-total	365,611	81	285,550	83.4	276,531	80.4
White	55,236	12.2	36,384	10.6	46,584	13.5
Mixed						
With Chinese parent	24,649	5.5	14,932	4.4	16,587	4.8
Other mixed	4352	1	3160	0.9	2854	0.8
Sub-total	29,001	6.4	18,092	5.3	19,441	5.7
Others	1335	0.3	2172	0.6	1394	0.4
Total	451,183	100	342,198	100.0	343,950	100.0
Whole population	7,071,576		6,864,346		6,708,389	

Source: Census and Statistics Department (2012, p. 18)

of about 20,000 compared to the 2006 by-census (Census and Statistics Department 2012, p. 18). Yet, there are other South Asian ethnic groups such as Bangladeshi and Sri Lankan also living in Hong Kong, and they are not categorized separately perhaps due to their lower numbers, they are included in the 'other Asian' category.

### 4.3.2 Ethnic Minority Young People <15

Table 4.7 shows the breakdown of the age-group below 15 years in the ethnic minority population according to their ethnicities in three census years. In the year 2011 the number of ethnic minority young people in this age-group was 44,320 which was about 37.3 % higher than the corresponding figure for the year 2006 (Census and Statistics Department 2012, pp. 25–27). About 9.8 % of the total ethnic minority population belonged to the age-group below 15 in the year 2011. Of them 37.1 % were of South Asian ethnicities (Indian, Pakistani, and Nepalese together) and 6.9 % were from Japanese and Korean ethnicity (Census and Statistics Department 2012, pp. 25–27).

**Table 4.7** Ethnic minorities by ethnicity and age-group <15

Ethnicity	Year					
	2011		2006		2001	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Asian (other than Chinese)						
Indonesian	302	0.7	226	0.7	165	0.4
Filipino	2918	6.6	2467	7.6	2680	7.0
Indian	5767	13.0	3695	11.4	3690	9.7
Pakistan	7148	16.1	3826	11.8	3131	8.2
Nepalese	3562	8.0	2892	9.0	1305	3.4
Japanese	2152	4.9	2867	8.9	3251	8.5
Thai	398	0.9	366	1.1	233	0.6
Korean	897	2.0	876	2.7	1423	3.7
Other Asian	840	1.9	721	2.2	736	1.9
Sub-total	23,984	54.1	17,936	55.5	16,614	43.7
White	9295	21.0	6002	18.6	9533	25.1
Mixed						
With Chinese parent	8429	19.0	6177	19.1	9573	25.2
Other mixed	2397	5.4	1887	5.8	2049	5.4
Sub-total	10,826	24.4	8064	25.0	11,622	30.5
Others	215	0.5	287	0.9	279	0.7
Total	44,320	100.0	32,289	100.0	38,048	100.0
Whole population	832,560		939,675		1,109,417	

Source: Census and Statistics Department (2012, pp. 25–27)

### 4.3.3 Ethnic Minority Young People 15–24

Table 4.8 shows the breakdown of 15–24 age-group ethnic minority population according to their ethnicities in three census years. In the year 2011 the number of ethnic minority young people in the 15–24 age-group was 34,768 which was about 17.1 % less than the corresponding figure for the year 2006 (Census and Statistics Department 2012, pp. 25–27). About 7.7 % of the ethnic minority population was in the 15–24 years of age in the year 2011. South Asian ethnic minority population (Indian, Pakistani, and Nepalese together) accounted for 21.9 % of these where Japanese and Korean were 1.9 %.

### 4.3.4 Trend Analysis: Ethnic Minority Students in Hong Kong In and Out of Education

All three censuses reported the number of ethnic minority students in full time education. Tables 4.9 and 4.10 show the number of ethnic minority students below 15, and 15 and over age-groups respectively who were at full time education in three census years.

**Table 4.8** Ethnic minorities by ethnicity and age group 15–24

Ethnicity	Year					
	2011		2006		2001	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Asian (other than Chinese)						
Indonesian	12,405	35.7	21,656	51.6	21,098	42.3
Filipino	4016	11.6	7616	18.2	12,227	24.5
Indian	2965	8.5	1961	4.7	2580	5.2
Pakistan	2130	6.1	1378	3.3	2256	4.5
Nepalese	2521	7.3	1861	4.4	2781	5.6
Japanese	377	1.1	466	1.1	336	0.7
Thai	266	0.8	578	1.4	910	1.8
Korean	290	0.8	424	1.0	321	0.6
Other Asian	680	2.0	664	1.6	990	2.0
Sub-total	25,650	73.8	36,604	87.3	43,499	87.3
White	4031	11.6	2185	5.2	2581	5.2
Mixed with Chinese parent	4449	12.8	2536	6.0	3386	6.8
Other mixed	558	1.6	478	1.1	216	0.4
Sub-total	5007	14.4	3014	7.2	3602	7.2
Others	80	0.2	133	0.3	158	0.3
Total	34,768	100.0	41,936	100.0	49,840	100.0
Whole population	875,234		909,005		920,445	

Source: Census and Statistics Department (2012, pp. 25–27)



**Table 4.9** Ethnic minority students (below 15) in full-time courses

	2011	2006	2001
Level			
Pre-primary	8517	6777	8577
Primary	17,467	12,819	13,317
Lower secondary	6232	3550	4116
Upper secondary/Sixth form	184	298	271
Total	32,400	23,444	26,281
Age-group total (ethnic minority)	44,320	32,289	38,048
Whole population	659,996	797,103	947,447
Age-group total (whole population)	823,560	939,675	1,109,417

Source: Census and Statistics Department (2002, p. 47.; 2007, p. 51, 2012, pp. 25–27, 59)

**Table 4.10** Ethnic minority students (15 and over) in full-time courses

	2011	2006	2001
Level			
Primary		60	64
Lower secondary	1827	955	700
Upper secondary/Sixth form	5347	2970	3124
Post-secondary	2505	1293	981
Total	9679	5278	4869

Source: Census and Statistics Department (2002, p. 47, 2007, p. 51, 2012, p. 59)

In the year 2011 the number of ethnic minority students below 15 years of age at full time education increased by 38.2 % compared to the number in 2006 (Table 4.9). This is commensurate with the increased percentage of this age-group which was 37.3 % higher in 2011 compared to 2006. The number of ethnic minority students below 15 in full time education increased between 2006 and 2011 at levels of education: 25.7 % at pre-primary level, 36.3 % at primary level and 75.5 % at lower secondary level. Table 4.10 shows that the number of ethnic minority students 15 years and over in full time education increased by 80 % at upper secondary level in the year 2011 compared to 2006. And the number at post-secondary level increased by 93.7 % between 2006 and 2011. Perhaps the high number of new arrival ethnic minority young people during this period might have caused these increased numbers.

The data from Table 4.9 also reveal that a total of 32,400 ethnic minority young people in below 15 age-group were in full time education while the age-group total number was 44,320. It means that 11,920 ethnic minority students in the age-group below 15 were not recorded as being in any full time courses at school in the year 2011. This represents 27 % of this age-group ethnic minority population. Of course in this group there were some children who belonged to 1–3 age-group who were not supposed to be in the school. Due to the lack of that particular age-group ethnic minority population data in the census report it is not possible to estimate how many

of them were between 4 and below 15. Nevertheless, it clearly indicates that there seems to be a good number of ethnic minority young people in the below 15 age-group who were supposed to be in the school but in reality they were not in any full time education. The numbers of ethnic minority young people below 15 were not in any full time education were 8845 (27.4 %) and 11,767 (30.9 %) respectively in the years 2006 and 2001. For the whole population below 15, these numbers were 163,564 (19.9 %), 142,572 (15.2 %) and 161,970 (14.5 %) respectively in the years 2011, 2006, and 2001. In all three census years the percentage of population in the age-group below 15 who were not in full time education was higher in favor of ethnic minorities compared to the whole population. While these figures for ethnic minorities were more than one-fourth of their age-group total, it is important to note that the same figures for the whole population were also big. For example, in the year 2011, the figure for whole population in the below 15 age-group who were not in any full time education was 19.9 %. It means that a developed society such as Hong Kong's one-fifth of below 15 age-group population was not in any full time education where the compulsory education is until the age of 15. Given the indication of such high number of students not being in any full time education in the below 15 age-group, it might raise a question about the reliability of this data set. Nonetheless, census reports are the only source for this kind of data set in Hong Kong.

#### 4.4 Education Bureau Data

The Education Bureau (EDB) is the main government department with policy responsibility for educational institutions and students from the early years through to universities in Hong Kong. Although there is a separate section for ethnic minority students available on the EDB website, there is no data on the number of ethnic minority students. Written enquiries to EDB officers, however, resulted in the data shown in Table 4.11. In addition, the table also includes a dataset found in a Legislative Council's (LegCo) document (Hong Kong SAR Government 2008, pp 6–7) that was jointly prepared by EDB and Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau.

**Table 4.11** Number of ethnic minority students in Hong Kong

Level	2006–2007	2007–2008	2008–2009	2009–2010	2010–2011	2011–2012
Pre-primary		9242 <sup>b</sup>	10,214 <sup>b</sup>	10,013 <sup>b</sup>	11,192 <sup>a</sup>	11,570 <sup>a</sup>
Primary	4503 <sup>a</sup>	5583 <sup>b</sup> /5671 <sup>c</sup>	6034 <sup>b</sup>	6480 <sup>b</sup>	7237 <sup>a</sup>	7703 <sup>a</sup>
Secondary	2633 <sup>a</sup>	3272 <sup>b</sup> /3097 <sup>c</sup>	3842 <sup>b</sup>	4406 <sup>b</sup>	5236 <sup>a</sup>	6373 <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Mr. C. Yeung, School Development Officer, Education Commission, EDB, (personal communication, 1 June 2012)

<sup>b</sup>Mrs. P. Y. Shek, Education Officer, Education Commission, EDB, (personal communication, 24 September 2010)

<sup>c</sup>Hong Kong SAR Government (2008, pp. 6–7)

Table 4.11, based on multiple sources of information, shows the number of ethnic minority students from pre-primary level to secondary level. No data was provided for the pre-primary level for 2006–2007. According to these figures there was 25.2 % pre-primary ethnic minority students increased between 2007–2008 and 2011–2012. The number of ethnic minority students at primary level and secondary level increased by 71.1 % and 142 % respectively between 2006–2007 and 2011–2012. Although both datasets are from EDB, it shows a slight difference between two datasets about the number of ethnic minority students in primary and secondary level in the year 2007–2008. There was no data provided about the number of ethnic minority students at post-secondary level because Hong Kong normally does not capture students' ethnic information; therefore, no statistics are available.

## 4.5 Inconsistency Between Census and EDB Datasets

Table 4.12 shows the inconsistencies in datasets about the number of ethnic minority students who are in school where there are different sources of information available.

(EDB) reported the number of pre-primary, primary and secondary ethnic minority students in 2011 was 11,570, 7703 and 6373 respectively (personal communication, 2012) whereas the 2011 Census reported these numbers 8517, 17,467 and 13,590 respectively (Census and Statistics Department 2012, p. 59). Similarly, it shows a significant difference about the reported number of ethnic minority students at primary and secondary levels between census and EDB datasets for the year 2006–2007. While the EDB dataset reported the number of ethnic minority students at primary and secondary level were 4503 and 2633 respectively (personal communication, 2012), the by-census dataset reported these figures 12,879 and 7036 respectively (Census and Statistics Department 2007).

The inconsistency is also found in datasets from the same source – the personal communication and a Legislative Council's document partly prepared by EDB. The number of ethnic minority children enrolled in primary and secondary schools in the year 2007–2008 were 5583 and 3272 respectively as indicated in a personal communication (2010), whereas Legislative Council's document (Hong Kong SAR Government 2008, pp. 6–7) reported these figures 5671 and 3097 respectively. The 2006 figure reported by by-census data in the previous year was just double the mentioned 2007–2008 dataset, 12,879 and 7036 respectively for primary and secondary level (Census and Statistics Department 2007).

While there are inconsistencies in ethnic minority students' data it is important to note that no further information is available either from EDB or other sources on a breakdown of those born in Hong Kong and those who maybe new arrivals. If data were disaggregated in this way, the inconsistent data sets may be better reconciled. For example, the census data reports the number of people in a household on a specific evening and this may include new arrivals who may not always impact on the school system. The lack of reference to new arrivals in the Chief Executive's 2013

**Table 4.12** Data sources and ethnic minority students in Hong Kong

Level	2006–2007	2007–2008	2008–2009	2009–2010	2010–2011	2011–2012
Pre-primary	6777 <sup>a</sup>	9242 <sup>c</sup>	10,214 <sup>c</sup>	10,013 <sup>c</sup>	11,192 <sup>b</sup>	1,1570 <sup>b</sup> /8517 <sup>e</sup>
Primary	12,879 <sup>a</sup> /4503 <sup>b</sup>	5583 <sup>c</sup> /5671 <sup>d</sup>	6034 <sup>c</sup>	6480 <sup>c</sup>	7237 <sup>b</sup>	7703 <sup>b</sup> /17,467 <sup>e</sup>
Secondary	7036 <sup>a</sup> /2633 <sup>b</sup>	3272 <sup>c</sup> /3097 <sup>d</sup>	3842 <sup>c</sup>	4406 <sup>c</sup>	5236 <sup>b</sup>	6373 <sup>b</sup> /8059 <sup>e</sup>
Upper secondary/Sixth form	737 <sup>a</sup>					5531 <sup>c</sup>
Post-secondary	1293 <sup>a</sup>					2505 <sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Census and Statistics Department (2007)

<sup>b</sup>Mr. C. Yeung, School Development Officer, Education Commission, EDB, (personal communication, 1 June 2012)

<sup>c</sup>Mrs. P. Y. Shek, Education Officer, Education Commission, EDB, (personal communication, 24 September 2010)

<sup>d</sup>Hong Kong SAR Government (2008, pp. 6–7)

<sup>e</sup>Census and Statistics Department (2012, p. 59)

Policy Address (Hong Kong Special Administrative Region 2013, p. 45) may reflect a systemic problem in recognizing the multiple sources of ethnic minority students in Hong Kong.

## 4.6 'Out of School' Phenomenon for Ethnic Minority Students in Hong Kong

The results of the above review on educational statistics on ethnic minority children showing inconsistencies are consistent with earlier (Bhowmik 2013; Kennedy 2011a) but is also reflected in areas other than education (Chung and Leung 2011). The Equal Opportunities Commission (2011) has also asserted the need for using the 2011 population census to capture the information for ethnic minority population in general, and school age children in particular in order to formulate appropriate education policies and support measures. Although there was an urgent call for more, consistent, disaggregated and better quality data in this area it seems that the 2011 census data collection framework was not modified to capture better data. The inconsistencies in datasets are still prevalent as shown in Sect. 4.5.

Nevertheless, in this section ethnic minority educational data from 2011 population Census is examined to try and understand the extent of 'out of school' ethnic minority young people (Census and Statistics Department 2012). In Chap. 3 Sect. 3.1.3, we described 'out of school' construct in detail and this is used in the following analysis. Although there is a real need for more, consistent and better quality data in this area, however, The 2011 Census data for ethnic minority education seems again not to be very helpful.

The data source (Census and Statistics Department 2012, pp. 48–50) raises issues about the consistency of student attendance at school (Table 4.13). Here school attendance rate means the percentage of population attending full-time educational institutions in the respective age groups (Census and Statistics Department 2012, p. 50).

In the year 2011, about 13.1 % ethnic minority children were not attending to school in their pre-primary ages while this rate for whole population was 8.7 %. The

**Table 4.13** School attendance rates of ethnic minorities

Age-group	Ethnic minority			Whole population		
	2011	2006	2001	2011	2006	2001
3–5	86.9	83.9	86	91.3	89.1	94.7
6–11	100	99.5	99.3	100	99.9	99.9
12–16	98	98	96	98.6	98.9	97.5
17–18	75.7	74.3	54.7	86	82.8	71
19–24	13.8	6.7	3.7	43.8	37.3	26.4
25	0.3	0.4	0.2	0.5	0.4	0.3
Aged 3 and over	10.2	9.5	9.7	17.8	20	21.4

Source: Census and Statistics Department (2012, pp. 48–50)

school attendance rates for ethnic minority students and whole population in the age-group 12–16 were 98 % and 98.6 % respectively. There is also considerable gap in the school attendance rates of ethnic minority students in the age-group 17–18 compared to the whole population, being 75.7 % is for the former and 86 % for the latter. The most important statistic is the school attendance rate for ethnic minority students at the ages 19–24 was only 13.8 % where the rate for whole population was 43.8 %. These age groups (17–18 and 19–24) are the time for potentially attending upper secondary and post-secondary education. It indicates that 24.3 % and 86.2 % of ethnic minority young people were out of full time education by the time they reached to upper secondary and post-secondary education respectively.

While in the previous Table 4.13 overall school attendance rates were given for ethnic minority groups, Table 4.14 further disaggregates school attendance rates according to different ethnicities based on the analysis of a 5 % sample dataset from the 2011 population census.

Table 4.14 reveals that in the year 2011 school attendance rate for Pakistani ethnic minority children in the 3–5 age-group was 79.5 % which was far below than that of Chinese (91.6 %), whole population (91.6 %) and even overall ethnic minority (87.3 %). This age-group is the time for attending pre-primary education and it shows more than 20 % of Pakistani children were not attending in any pre-primary education. In the 12–16 age-group there were 4.1 % Pakistani ethnic minority children were not attending any school where these rates for Chinese, whole population and overall ethnic minority were 1.4 %, 1.4 %, and 2.4 % respectively. This age-group is the time for potentially attending junior secondary education and this is to note again that Hong Kong has a policy of compulsory education until the age of 15. The percentages of Indian, Pakistani and Nepalese students in the age-group 17–18 attending full time education were 81.5 %, 72.7 % and 50.0 % respectively. These were far below than the rates for Chinese (86.4 %) and the whole population (86.2 %). This age-group 17–18 is the time for attending upper secondary education and it shows more than one-fourth of Pakistani and half of Nepalese young people were out of full time upper secondary education. In the age-group 19–24 the school attendance rates for Indian, Pakistani and Nepalese were 34.6 %, 21.4 % and 13.1 % respectively. These were considerably below than the percentages for Chinese and the whole population which were 45.6 % and 44.0 % respectively. This age-group is the time for attending post-secondary education and it shows over 65 % Indian,

**Table 4.14** School attendance rates in 2011 by ethnicity

Age-group	Chinese (%)	Indian (%)	Pakistani (%)	Nepalese (%)	Overall ethnic minority (%)	Whole population (%)
3–5	91.6	96.7	79.5	88.6	87.3	91.4
6–11	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
12–16	98.6	100.0	95.9	98.0	97.6	98.6
17–18	86.4	81.5	72.7	50.0	74.6	86.2
19–24	45.6	34.6	21.4	13.1	12.9	44.0

Source: Census and Statistics Department (2012)

about 80 % Pakistani and about 87 % Nepalese young people were not attending any full time post-secondary education.

The proportions of ethnic minority students studying full time courses in Hong Kong were about 4.9 % for the age-group below 15 and 1.9 % for 15 and over in the year 2011 (Census and Statistics Department 2012, p. 59). Referring to the Table 4.9, the census dataset shows that a total of 11,920 students (27 %) in the age-group below 15 were not in any full time courses at school in the year 2011. And the analysis presented at Tables 4.13 and 4.14 clearly shows that the participation of ethnic minority and more specifically South Asian ethnic students at the pre-primary, junior secondary, upper secondary and post-secondary education were disproportionately low compared to the Chinese and whole population.

If we see these entire scenario through 'Five Dimensions of Exclusion' (UNICEF and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2010) in the educational context of Hong Kong (Table 4.15) for ethnic minorities, Dimension 1 (children of pre-primary school age who are not in pre-primary or primary school) and Dimension 3 (children of lower-secondary school age who are not in primary or secondary school) prevail in the case of ethnic minority children based on the data and statistics available (please see Chap. 3 Sect. 3.1.3.1 for details of the framework). It means that there are some ethnic minority children who are not attending any pre-primary school, and also some ethnic minority students who are not attending lower secondary school or dropping out of school before completing their lower secondary forms or even all primary grades. It is not clear whether Dimension 2 (children of primary school age who are not in primary or secondary school) is prevalent, because the particular age-group (6–11) specific population data is not available in the census report, therefore, it is difficult to reach any conclusion. Since some transition issue from primary to lower secondary and lower secondary to upper secondary exists in the Hong Kong school system as analyzed above, it is likely that many ethnic minor-

**Table 4.15** 'Out of school' ethnic minority children in Hong Kong

'Out of School' children	UNICEF and UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2010) 'Five Dimensions of Exclusion'	CREATE's 'Zones of Exclusion' (Lewin 2007)	Ethnic minority children in Hong Kong
Not in pre-primary/primary school	Dimension 1	Zone 0	Prevails
Not in primary/secondary school, dropped out from primary, at risk of dropping out	Dimension 2	Zone 1 Zone 2	Not clear yet due to lack of data
	Dimension 4	Zone 3	
Not in primary/secondary school, no transition to lower Secondary, dropped out from lower secondary, at risk of dropping out	Dimension 3	Zone 4	Prevails
		Zone 5	Prevails
	Dimension 5	Zone 6	Prevails

ity students in primary and lower secondary level are not meaningfully participating in their school and learning activities which ultimately leads to the risk of their dropping out. Therefore, it is fair to say that Dimension 4 (children who are in primary school but at risk of dropping out) and Dimension 5 (children who are in lower-secondary school but who are at risk of dropping out) also prevail in the Hong Kong education system in the case of ethnic minority students.

If 'Seven Zones of Exclusion' (Lewin 2007) framework is now considered (Table 4.15), 'out of school' ethnic minority children can be seen to prevail in Zone 0 (children who are out of pre-primary school), Zone 4 (children who failed to transit to lower secondary school) and Zone 5 (lower secondary children who dropped out before completing the cycle) based on the data and statistics available (please see Chap. 3 Sect. 3.1.3.2 for details of the framework). It does mean that there are some ethnic minority children who are not attending any pre-primary school, and also some ethnic minority students who are not attending lower secondary school or dropping out of school before completing their lower secondary forms or even all primary grades. It is not clear whether 'out of school' ethnic minority children prevail in Zone 1 (children who are never enrolled in primary school) and Zone 2 (primary children who dropped out at the early stage or before completing the cycle), because the particular age-group (6–11) population data was not made available in the census report, therefore, no conclusion can be reached on whether there is any primary aged children not enrolled in school and the dropping out happens in early primary grades. Since some transition issue from primary to lower secondary and lower secondary to upper secondary exists in school, as analyzed above from the census data, it is likely that many ethnic minority students in primary and lower secondary level are not meaningfully participating in their school and learning activities, which ultimately leads to the risk of their dropping out. Therefore, it is fair to say that ethnic minority students also prevail in Zone 3 (primary children who are in school but at risk of dropping out) and Zone 6 (lower secondary children who are in school but at risk of dropping out).

Although both frameworks 'Five Dimensions of Exclusion' (UNICEF and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2010) and 'Seven Zones of Exclusion' (Lewin 2007) provide a good conceptual analysis to understand 'out of school' issues, they appear not to be good empirical tools to identify the extent of 'out of school' ethnic minority students in the context of Hong Kong. The analysis above, however, indicates that it seems a good number of ethnic minority young people are 'out of school' in Hong Kong which includes pre-primary, lower secondary, upper secondary and post-secondary age-group young people. This is similar to what Bhowmik (2013) and Bhowmik and Kennedy (2013) suggested in their previous analysis drawing on ethnic minority educational data from the 2006 by-census report. In addition, the analysis of the school attendance rates above also indicates that 'out of school' issue for ethnic minority young people could be as big as about 25 % and more than 85 % of ethnic minority young people were out of full time education by the time they reached to upper secondary and post-secondary education respectively.

This school used the word 'withdraw students' instead of 'dropout students' in their written communication to the researcher. There was, however, no further defi-



inition of what it meant by ‘withdraw students’ in the communication. During my meetings with the principal and teacher, they mentioned that they had to report back to the EDB if any student had left school or stopped to coming to school, or in other words, dropped out. This is school’s recorded data of the number of dropout students from 2007 to 2012 (see Table 4.20). It is generally believed that schools always report less number of dropout students to EDB for varieties of reasons related to their reputation, funding consequences etc.

Unfortunately, despite all the optimism about 2011 census data, it is clear that there has not been enough data yet available in the public domain to identify the right number of ‘out of school’ ethnic minority young people. Even if data were available there are significant inconsistencies found in some cases. Therefore, it is further urged through this book for more, consistent and better quality data in this area and that data need to be disaggregated so that the extent of ‘out of school’ phenomenon for both Chinese and ethnic minority young people can be determined.

## 4.7 School Data Analysis

While the previous section identified the presence of overall ‘out of school’ young people in Hong Kong, this section deals with the enrolment data for ethnic minority students in three Hong Kong schools to understand the magnitude, and any pattern of the ‘out of school’ phenomenon for them. This has also been augmented by the relevant interview data with the research participants.

### 4.7.1 *Hei-mong School*

Mr. Tung Yuen, the Principal of Hei-mong kindly agreed to participate in the research and allowed the first author to spend 7 days in the school.

In Hei-mong school, interviews were conducted with Principal Mr. Tung Yuen, ethnic minority education support programme staff Ms. Eva Kau, Chinese language teacher Ms. Wing Chow, science teacher Mr. Matthew Chan, and a recent dropout Pakistani boy Morshed Uddin. Mr. Tung Yuen was working as principal at Hei-mong school for the last 2 years. Before that he was the principal for one decade of another school that had traditionally enrolled ethnic minority students. Mr. Yuen said that his previous school was a designated school and ethnic minority students represented 90 % of the total student population. Ms. Eva Kau joined Hei-mong School in 2011. Before that she worked for the Government for 2 years and 1 year for business. She was the leader of ethnic minority education support programme in the Hei-mong School. Ms. Kau said that their support programme actually focused on different areas including languages, learning and motivation, cross cultural attitudes etc. Ms. Kau, was also the coordinator who helped the conduct of the research in her school. Ms. Wing Chow joined the Hei-mong School in 2011 and she had

taught in five different schools in Hong Kong for more than the last 10 years. While she was mainly a Chinese language teacher for non-Chinese speakers, she was also teaching other subjects such as mathematics early in her career. She was teaching Chinese to ethnic minority students in both Forms One and Two at the Hei-mong School. Mr. Matthew Chan taught in Hei-mong School for the last 3 years. He started this job after graduating from a Hong Kong University. He was teaching biology in upper Forms and science in Form One and Two. Mr. Chan was also working very closely with Ms. Kau in the ethnic minority education support programme. In 2011, Morshed Uddin enrolled into Hei-mong School in Form One and dropped out of the school in the following year. A case study of Morshed is provided in the chapter on dropout students.

#### 4.7.1.1 School Background

The Hei-mong school, a non-designated secondary school, was established in 1972, as a girls' school later becoming co-educational in 1995. The school started accepting ethnic minority students only from 2011 for Form One. In 2012 ethnic minority students were admitted in both Form One and Two. The plan of the school was to continue and expand accepting ethnic minority students to other forms as the first cohort of Form One progressed. While medium of instruction between Form Three to Form Six was only Chinese there was a separate arrangement for Form One and Two due to the presence of ethnic minority students. The school had three sections in Form One and Two. The first section had mainly Chinese students and the medium of instruction was Chinese. The second section had mainly ethnic minority students and the medium of instruction was English. And third section had both Chinese and ethnic minority students with some subjects taught in English and some in Chinese.

#### 4.7.1.2 School Enrolment Data

Ms. Kau provided very comprehensive and detailed statistics of the number of students by month within the academic year and by section within the Form from 2008–2009 to 2012–2013. Table 4.16 summarizes this only by year and Form.

**Table 4.16** Total number of students at Hei-mong school from 2008–2009 to 2012–2013 (Form wise)

Year	Forms							Total
	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	
2008–2009	97	149	177	128	125	29	26	731
2009–2010	74	117	157	115	132	35	29	659
2010–2011	39	103	123	123	134	25	33	580
2011–2012	69	56	108	113	115	133	25	619
2012–2013	69	80	67	97	108	110		531

The school faced a constant drop in student enrolment from 2008/2009 to 2012/2013. This is reflected in the S1 enrolments each year and the total enrolments for each year. The decline appears to have been arrested in 2011/2012 coinciding with the admission of ethnic minority students. The Principal Mr. Yuen expressed a concern about the constant drop and, as shared by Ms. Kau, regarded the constant drop of students as a ‘survival’ opportunity for the Hei-mong school to offer placement for ethnic minority students, starting from the 2011–2012 academic year. As the Principal, Mr. Yuen explained:

...if local Chinese schools have a choice they would never admit ethnic minority students. For designated schools it actually varies. Some of them are admitting ethnic minority students since their establishment. It was profitable for them. They expanded and still continued their tradition. But mostly rest of the designated schools have become this type because they were losing the number of Chinese students and schools survived converting to designated schools by admitting ethnic minority students. At present 80 % of the designated schools didn’t have choice but to convert them to designated school for their survival reason... (Mr. Tung Yuen, Principal, 2nd interview, 17 January 2013)

Although Hei-mong school was not a so called ‘designated’ school, nevertheless, it is clear that they had to offer admission for ethnic minority students for survival reasons.

#### 4.7.1.3 Cohort Study

Table 4.17 shows the ethnic compositions of the ethnic minority students at Hei-mong school. Ethnic minority students represented 15.4 % of the total student population in the 2012–2013 academic year. In 2011–2012, the school had 33 ethnic minority students in Form One. The school had 47 ethnic minority students in Form One and 35 ethnic minority students in Form Two in the 2012–2013 academic year. 68.1 % of students in Form One were ethnic minority and 43.8 % in Form Two.

On a first look it may seem that there were two more students admitted in Form Two in addition to the progression of the original 33 Form One students. Yet this

**Table 4.17** Ethnic minority students at Hei-mong school (ethnicity and Form-wise)

Ethnicity	2011–2012	2012–2013	
	Form 1	Form 1	Form 2
Pakistani	20	19	20
Nepalese	1	2	1
Indonesian	1		1
Indian	5	18	6
Thai	1	1	1
Srilankan	1		1
Filipino	4	6	5
Korean		1	
Total (Form total)	33 (69)	47 (69)	35 (80)

was not the case as explained by Ms Kau. Out of 33 Form One cohort 1 ethnic minority students, 27 students progressed to Form Two. Six ethnic minority students could not progress to Form Two in the previous academic year. There were two students repeating Form One and four students were deregistered by the school. The act of deregistration was commonly expressed with the word 'kick out'. It was usually applied for those students who had very poor academic performance, together with serious behavioral problems. The word 'kick out' signaled the power of the school and the powerlessness of students and parents who had little say in the negotiation of the deregistration process. For example, one of the students involved was 'kicked out' in the middle of the 2011–2012 academic year for his 'extreme behavioral problem'. It seems he was always using foul words to both teachers and students. Another three students including Morshed were 'kicked out' by the end of Form One because of their poor academic performance and serious behavioral problems. Ms. Kau said that she was aware that three out of four 'kicked out' students actually went to another school but they were repeating Form One. It was only Morshed who completely dropped out when he was 'kicked out' of Hei-mong School. He didn't try for any school rather but started working instead. Ms. Kau also mentioned that the school had the policy to admit them again for repeating Form One but since no one came for re-admission they did not enroll them. She also admitted that school did not promote this policy with parents.

Ms. Kau identified several ethnic minority students in both Form One and Form Two who were at risk of dropping out. She mentioned one Pakistani girl in Form One who was having serious attendance problems. Another six students in Form Two were also identified as at risk of dropping out. Of them, two Pakistani girls were having behavioral problems; in addition they were involved with gangs. Sometimes they brought some friends from outside to threaten or beat other students. The other four students were having attendance problems. It seems attendance and behavioral problems appeared to be significant among the students at risk of dropping out. Ms. Kau mentioned the drop out or at risk of dropping out phenomenon was also common among the new immigrant Chinese students from mainland China in Hei-mong School. Nevertheless, the school was reluctant to provide their official dropout data for all students in spite of repeated requests to Ms. Kau.

#### **4.7.1.4 The Extent of 'Out of School' Ethnic Minority Students**

Having analyzed the issue of dropout through the school enrolment data, the participants' narratives provide insights about the magnitude of the issue and the patterns of dropout for ethnic minority students in general. Mr. Yuen, with his long experiences in a leadership role dealing with ethnic minority students, indicated in the first interview that the issues of 'out of school' and 'drop out' for ethnic minority students in secondary school was very high in Hong Kong. He remembered from his previous school that it was always the case that in every Form throughout secondary school they were losing students. But the numbers were the greatest after Form Three when the 9 year compulsory education was finished and after Form Five

when students had to sit for the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) in the old system. He stressed that this was very much still the case in those designated schools. He gave the example of Hei-mong School where it only started enrolling ethnic minority students from 2011 with 33 students in Form One and at the end of first year they had already lost four students. As a pattern, he said that Nepalese boys and Pakistani girls were dropping out more than any other ethnic groups. For both cases Principal Mr. Yuen referred to some cultural values such as Nepalese boys were less hard working compared to Nepalese girls, and Pakistani girls married earlier.

Ms. Chow, the Chinese language teacher, when asked to illustrate the extent of 'out of school' ethnic minority students in Hong Kong school in terms of percentage she mentioned that out of 100 ethnic minority students 10–20 % dropped out between Form One and Form Four, then 60–70 % of the rest dropped out around Form Five and chose to work, 10–20 % went to vocational education and less than 10 % would continue Form Six and post-secondary education. She stressed that instead of any specific pattern in terms of any Form, when ethnic minority students turned 15 and were officially allowed to work they started dropping out more. That was typically around Form Five. It gives an indication that dropout might be associated with students' career and future educational aspiration. To explain more about the extent of 'out of school' ethnic minority young people, Ms. Chow shared one of her experiences from one of her previous schools:

One Hong Kong born Pakistani boy was about 14 years old, completed Primary Six from another school, but dropped out for some years in between and applied for a place at one of my previous schools. During the interview I identified that the boy has some tattoo on his neck that typically means he is a member of a gang. Although the boy's English was not good, he was fluent in spoken Cantonese. We finally gave him a place at Form One. The boy stayed at our school only for 2 weeks and then he stopped coming to school. Although the boy was determined to start again school he could not survive and chose not to continue school. (Ms. Wing Chow, Chinese language teacher, interview, 29 November 2012)

### ***4.7.2 Mong-shuen School***

Principal Ms. Susan Tang was one of the very few Principals who responded positively to our request to allow us to access to her school. She responded to the request within 4 weeks, and 6 days were spent in the school.

At Mong-shuen school, interviews were conducted with Principal Ms. Susan Tang, school social worker Ms. Tami Hui, Chinese language teacher Ms. Snow Ngai, and a student of Primary Six named Abdal Rashid who was at risk of dropping out. Principal Ms. Tang had been working at Mong-shuen primary school for the last 30 years. She joined this school back in 1982 as a teacher. She was teaching English. Before that she also taught English for about 9 years in other schools, she clearly remembered that she started her teaching career in 1973. She had been Principal since 1996 and this was about her 16th year as Principal in Mong-shuen school. School social worker Ms. Tami Hui had been working for the Mong-shuen

school since August 2012. This was her second job. After graduating from a local University in social work she started her first job at the middle of the June 2011 in a designated primary school in another district and there she worked for about 1 year before moving to this school. It was only the sixth month of her work at this school during the time of the interview. Chinese language teacher Ms. Snow Ngai had been working for Mong-shuen school since 2006; this was her seventh year at the job. After graduating from a teacher education institute she started this job. She was mainly a Chinese language teacher, teaching Chinese to non-Chinese students only. In the 2012–2013 academic year, she was the class teacher of Primary Six and she was also teaching in Primary Two. Abdal Rashid was a student at Primary Six identified by teacher Ms. Ngai at risk of dropping out. A case study of Abdalis is provided in the chapter on students at risk of dropping out.

#### **4.7.2.1 School Background**

Mong-shuen school, a designated primary school, was established in 1969. It was mainly for Chinese students and medium of instruction was Chinese until 2002. Since then it has been designated school accepting non-Chinese students. After becoming a designated school, at the beginning they had more Chinese students than non-Chinese students, but later 90 % of their total students were non-Chinese.

All non-Chinese students were taught in English, but they had one Chinese language subject. From Primary One to Primary Three, while Chinese language, mathematics and general studies lessons were provided in Chinese for Chinese students, PE, computer studies, arts and crafts were taught in English. From Primary Four to Primary Six, the school policy for Chinese students was to have a separate section, but due to the very little number of Chinese students they did not have any Chinese section in Primary Five and Primary Six. Principal Ms. Tang remembered that there were only one half students in both Primary Five and Six, mainly from Thai and Chinese mixed parents. Those parents wanted their children to be taught in English.

#### **4.7.2.2 School Enrolment Data**

Ms Ngai, the Chinese language teacher provided the numbers shown in Tables 4.18 and 4.19. She kindly organized this by coordinating with the school office staff.

Both tables show that the total number of students at Mong-shuen school has sharply dropped in the last 7 years. The decreasing number of Chinese students in the school mainly accounted for that. In 2006–2007 academic year the percentage of the Chinese students was 72 % which reduced to only 11 % in the academic year 2012–2013. It was not possible to run any cohort analysis with this data mainly due to the absence of the data of number of repeating or newly admitted students in each grade.

**Table 4.18** Total number of students at Mong-shuen school from 2006–2007 to 2012–2013 (grade-wise)

Year	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	Total
2006–2007	74	82	70	136	136	97	595
2007–2008	61	61	71	65	147	129	534
2008–2009	47	65	49	88	77	148	474
2009–2010	57	50	68	61	101	82	419
2010–2011	52	64	54	72	56	96	394
2011–2012	36	58	68	62	68	50	342
2012–2013	56	41	58	77	62	70	364

**Table 4.19** Total number of students at Mong-shuen school from 2006–2007 to 2012–2013 (ethnicity-wise)

Year	Ethnicity																Total	
	P	I	F	N	C	T	B	Eg	J	A	NZ	V	Ind	Can	S	E		It
2006–2007	53	50	30	30	430	2												595
2007–2008	133	94	45	35	210	5	4		3	2	1		1	1				534
2008–2009	151	100	41	40	128	7	7											474
2009–2010	143	107	46	42	66	5	4	2	1			1	1		1			419
2010–2011	160	100	41	40	42	2	7	2										394
2011–2012	159	88	36	26	33													342
2012–2013	170	86	31	26	41	3	2	1	1			2					1	364

*P* Pakistani, *I* Indian, *F* Filipino, *N* Nepalese, *C* Chinese, *T* Thai, *B* Bangladeshi, *Eg* Egyptian, *J* Japanese, *A* American, *NZ* New Zealander, *V* Vietnamese, *Ind* Indonesian, *Can* Canadian, *S* Srilankan, *E* English, *It* Italian

### 4.7.2.3 The Extent of ‘Out of School’ Ethnic Minority Students

Although enrolment data at Mong-shuen school could not give us sufficient information about the ‘out of school’ phenomenon for ethnic minority students, nevertheless, the school provided us dropout statistics (Table 4.20).

This school used the word ‘withdraw students’ instead of ‘dropout students’ in their written communication to the researcher. There was, however, no further definition of what it meant by ‘withdraw students’ in the communication. During my meetings with the principal and teacher, they mentioned that they had to report back to the EDB if any student had left school or stopped to coming to school, or in other words, dropped out. This is school’s recorded data of the number of dropout students from 2007 to 2012 (see Table 4.20). It is generally believed that schools always report less number of dropout students to EDB for varieties of reasons related to their reputation, funding consequences etc.

It looks like the number of dropout students (Table 4.20) was reduced over the period from 2007–2008 to 2011–2012, but at the same the total number of the stu-

**Table 4.20** The number of dropout students at Mong-shuen school from 2007 to 2012

Year	Number
2007–2008	55
2008–2009	29
2009–2010	29
2010–2011	37
2011–2012	19

dents was also reduced. In percentage terms, the dropout rate was between 6 and 10 % in that period. However, during the interview Principal Ms. Tang mentioned that the dropout rate at her school was about 1 % which means about three or four cases every year and they were mainly ethnic minority students. She stressed that it was absolute or complete dropout meaning that there were also some other students who dropped out which she estimated again at another 1 % but they were probably joining other schools. The latter was mainly due to the long distance between school and their residences. She also said that there was not any special pattern of dropout in regards to the ethnicity, gender or grade. She observed that students dropped out from both early and late primary years.

Principal Ms. Tang identified absenteeism a big problem among the ethnic minority students. She commented:

Absenteeism is a serious problem in our school. It's just very common missing school for them (ethnic minority students). The reasons many parents write to me are: "attended relatives' birthday party which went late and could not wake up in the morning", "mother was ill so could not make ready kids" etc. They always take more leave in addition to New Year, Christmas and Easter holidays. Many of them are absent for some days after examinations. Some of them even don't come during the exam. Most of the families go back to their home country in the middle of the academic year, and always ask for leave. I only refused one request once of someone who wanted to bring back her elder daughter to Pakistan. The mother had to bring back her younger child to Pakistan to look after her better and she wanted her elder daughter to accompany her as well while student's father was staying in HK.... Two or three years back I took several initiatives to address attendance problem. It then worked well in the following year. But from this year it seems parents got used to me and again numbers of absentees are going up. (Ms. Susan Tang, Principal, interview, 7 December 2012)

To try and explain make the extent of the number of absentees she showed records of the last 7 days. It was around 35 daily on average. She also said that because of some of her initiatives 2 years back the percentage of absentees went down to 10 % but again this year it went up to averagely 20 %. During the Eid festival or Diwali as more than 100 students may be absent.

In telling the dropout story of the students, Principal Ms. Tang and school social worker Ms. Hui shared a story of a Nepalese boy. The boy enrolled in Mong-shuen school at Primary Four 3 years back, but knew no Chinese at all. The boy's father was a watch man in a wet market. Since last year at Primary Five, the boy had been very irregular and not performing well at all in his study. In his Primary Six he did not turn up even for a single day in school within 4 months since the academic year started. Ms. Tang stressed that this boy completely dropped out. Asking her about



whether from the school side about any contact was made to his family regarding this situation, she mentioned that she had been too busy in the last couple of months to follow up with this boy's family. But she heard from the school social worker Ms. Hui that, the boy said he did not want to study anymore.

Right after her joining the school, Ms. Hui, was assigned with the case of this Nepalese boy who did not show up at all since the start of the new academic year 2012–2013. Ms. Hui spoke to the father of the boy and father told her that the boy would not continue study as he did not have any more interest. The father also told her that the boy was looking for work. When asked about the age of the boy, Ms. Hui replied that she could not fully remember but it was about 15 or 16. Ms. Hui concluded by saying that actually the boy was much older compared to the class; she checked his previous academic records which were not satisfactory at all. The father was happy that the boy could start work and earn money for the family. Ms. Hui also remembered from her previous designated primary school that a few cases of dropout happened during her short time there.

In explaining the dropout phenomenon in her class, Chinese language teacher Ms. Ngai remembered from her Primary Four and Primary Five classes in 2010 that two Nepalese students dropped out as they had gone back to Nepal. She also recalled one of her Filipino students also dropped out in 2011 and went back to Philippines. Moreover, she remembered some of her graduates who later dropped out in the early grades in secondary schools. One of them dropped out from Form 2 in a secondary school last year. She taught the boy from Primary Three to Primary Six during 2006–2009. The boy was a Hong Kong born Pakistani, his father committed suicide when the boy was in Primary Four, and his mother then married his uncle and started living separately. Since then the boy had been living with his grand-parents. He had serious behavioral problems in primary school i.e. using foul language, fighting with others, smoking etc. The boy was always being punished by teachers; and mostly staying in the discipline room. His academic results were very bad, although he was attending remedial classes but it did not help him. Ms. Ngai heard from one of the friends of the boy later that he had been member of a gang. When Ms. Ngai was asked why the boy stopped going to the secondary school, she replied that she heard from the boy's friend that he didn't want to continue study and wanted to work. The boy's younger sister was then a Primary Six student of Ms. Ngai. She (Ms. Ngai) mentioned that although the sister was mostly stable she had some behavioral problems. Ms. Ngai then shared another story of another of one of her graduates, a Pakistani boy from the same class during 2006–2009. The boy was 'kicked out' of the secondary school last year at Form Two. While he should have been in Form Three this year he had to start again from Form One in another secondary school. The boy also had serious behavioral problems in primary school. The boy's mother died when he was in Primary Four and after that he was living with his father.

Ms Ngai identified two of her Primary Six students, Abdal and Kiron of Pakistani ethnic background, as at risk of dropping out. They were also identified at risk of dropping out by both school social worker Ms. Hui and Principal Ms. Tang. Ms. Hui shared the story of Kiron:

He is very irregular. There is confusion about his father's work place; some say Pakistan, some say UK. However, one thing is clear that his father does not live in Hong Kong with them. The boy has an elder brother who is studying in a secondary school; unfortunately, he is now in jail for a theft case. After my counseling with the boy a couple of times for his attendance problem he improved for 1 month in October 2012. After that it went down again. His mother brought him to the school the day before and told us that he leaves home every day to go to school; he even gets into the right public bus in front of his mother, but after one stop he gets off. He passes the whole day with friends probably from the secondary schools, who are not also going to school regularly. He also passes a lot of time at cyber playing video games; he only gets back to home when he is hungry. Sometimes it is midnight when he returns home. He has problems both inside and outside school. If he is in the classroom, he sleeps or makes disturbance for which he is punished. Most of the time he has to stay in the discipline room although he wants to be in the classroom but he cannot because of his disturbing activities. Even now he cannot get into classroom because of his hair style that has followed a certain gang's hair style. Although he was warned to change the hair style several times, he has not changed it yet and even continuously refuses to do it. As a result, he was not allowed to go into the classroom the day before even though he came to school with his mother. The boy also has problems outside the school. He is just roaming around with other boys without doing anything. Although he does not admit but I heard from others that he is involved with gangs. He also has his girlfriend problem. The boy works sometimes distributing leaflets on the street, the owner of those jobs are Pakistani men. With the money he gets from his mother and the money he earns from the work, he spends all for cyber and smoking, many people saw him smoking outside the school. I don't think that he would continue his study in this way, and he is at the huge risk of dropping out at any point soon. (Ms. Tami Hui, school social worker, interview, 11 January 2013)

Actually Kiron's case was first hand proof of his being at risk of dropping out and perhaps he has dropped out later. He didn't come to school for 2 months so there was no chance to interview him. Both Ms. Hui and Ms. Ngai tried to make contact with him or his mother several times but did not succeed. Abdal, the other at risk student, was interviewed, and his case study is reported in the chapter on students at risk of dropping out. Ms. Hui and Ms. Tang shared stories of other at risk students, at least one each of Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Filipino origin.

### **4.7.3 *Woo-ping School***

Woo-ping school was the only other designated secondary school that responded positively to the request for access to conduct research. In the communication phase the Principal's office raised an issue that they have very low numbers of ethnic minority students in their school and whether it would serve the purpose. The reply was positive keeping in mind that recruiting schools to participate in the study was very difficult. The school allowed the first visit in the third week of January 2013. Altogether 5 days were spent in Woo-ping school.

In Woo-ping school, interviews were conducted with Principal Mr. Chris Leung, liberal studies and geography teacher Mr. Tim Jordan, two Form One students Nadia Bashir and Shahid Afridi, and one Form Three student Taufiq Iqbal. All three students were identified as at risk of dropping out by the teacher Mr. Jordan. Principal

Mr. Chris Leung had graduated from a University in Canada and lived there for many years. He moved to Hong Kong in 1995 and started teaching. He worked in different schools run by an educational organization including Woo-ping school. He was mainly teaching economics and liberal studies. Mr. Leung had been Principal in Woo-ping school since 2011. Mr. Tim Jordan started working in Woo-ping school in 2009. This was his first teaching job. Prior to joining the school he worked in sales for 2 years which he commented was very “messy” and thus changed to the teaching job. He mentioned that the school had a very good working environment and he was very happy with his job in the school. He was mainly teaching liberal studies and geography in upper secondary classes from Form Four to Form Six. He mentioned that he had only one or two ethnic minority students in Form Four and Form Five respectively. However, he had to work with all ethnic minority students of the school for his other responsibility. He was responsible for coordinating a university support programme and a student support programme with a Hong Kong University in order to improve the Chinese language skill of ethnic minority students of the school. Nadia and Shahid were Hong Kong born Pakistani. They had been in Woo-ping school at Form One since September 2012. Taufiq was a second generation Pakistani born in Hong Kong, a Form Three student at Woo-ping school. Case studies of Nadia, Shahid and Taufiq are reported in the chapter on students at risk of dropping out.

#### 4.7.3.1 School Background

Woo-ping school, a designated secondary school, and also a direct subsidy scheme (DSS)<sup>1</sup> school, was established in 1954. It started admitting ethnic minority students for the first time in 2005 with 12 students. Although the school had only Chinese as medium of instruction, it opened an English medium of instruction section for the ethnic minority students to support them better. In 2006 the school had about 40–50 ethnic minority students. The school received designated school status in the year 2007. From the academic year 2008–2009 the school stopped its English medium of instruction class for the ethnic minority students. Although the school stopped English medium of instruction class it allowed the first three cohorts of ethnic minority students to continue their study in English until the completion of their schooling. The last cohort finished their school last year in 2012. Therefore, the school had only Chinese medium of instruction classes during the time of the interview and regardless of ethnicity everyone had to attend these classes.

Principal Mr. Leung mentioned that because of two types of classes previously they didn't see any integration between Chinese and ethnic minority students. Ethnic minority students were always using English to communicate with their

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<sup>1</sup> The direct subsidy scheme (DSS) was introduced in September 1991 in Hong Kong, under which schools enjoy greater flexibility in areas such as resources deployment, curriculum design and student admission (EDB 2014). To provide additional support services and school facilities, DSS schools may collect school fees in addition to government subsidies.

peers. Local Chinese students could not use English to communicate with them. “It was an unintentional segregation”, Mr. Leung commented. The school realized that if they continued only with Chinese medium of instruction class it would help ethnic minority students to be better integrated in the school as well as society. Mr. Leung also mentioned that he saw Chinese students were shy in communicating with ethnic minority students in English earlier, however, it was not an issue anymore because of the changes. All ethnic minority students could speak good Cantonese. He further added that he believed their ethnic minority students were doing better and feeling very good with this new arrangement. If it was needed the school provided remedial Chinese classes for the ethnic minority students. The school was participating in an after school Chinese lesson run by a Hong Kong university for the non-Chinese speaking students studying at Hong Kong schools. In terms of resources he mentioned that they had two Nepalese ethnic origin teachers when they had English medium of instruction classes. But later they had allocated these resources to hire more teachers for improving ethnic minority students’ Chinese language. He stressed again that it was important for the ethnic minority students to be integrated into local schools and society if they wanted to be successful in Hong Kong.

#### 4.7.3.2 School Enrolment Data

As requested, teacher Mr. Jordan handed us over the following statistics of Woo-ping school regarding the number of total students and the total number of ethnic minority students for the last 7 years, and the ethnic composition of ethnic minority students in the academic year 2012–2013 (Tables 4.21, 4.22, and 4.23 respectively). He provided incomplete statistics at the beginning because there was no student data for ethnic minority students for the year 2011–2012 and 2012–2013. After following up with him he was able to provide the additional information. The number of drop out students was also requested, but despite several requests this data was not provided.

Like the other two schools, Woo-ping school was also experiencing declining enrolments (Table 4.21). Both Chinese and ethnic minority students accounted for

**Table 4.21** The total number of students at Woo-ping school by Form

Year	Form							Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
2006–2007	116	157	166	261	244	41	37	1022
2007–2008	170	123	172	225	300	71	39	1100
2008–2009	149	170	172	217	222	73	70	1073
2009–2010	105	156	175	171	223	90	73	993
2010–2011	78	125	173	180	180	90	90	916
2011–2012	114	84	149	178	173	174	90	962
2012–2013	137	114	111	173	165	178		878

**Table 4.22** Total number of ethnic minority students at Woo-ping school (Form-wise)

Year	Form							Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
2006–2007	24	19	13					56
2007–2008	8	37	23	13				81
2008–2009	9	2	45	17	11			84
2009–2010	5	8	2	44	15			74
2010–2011	9	5	8	2	39			63
2011–2012	4	9	4	4	2	27		50
2012–2013	2	5	9	5	5	1		27

**Table 4.23** Total number of ethnic minority students at Woo-ping school in 2012–2013 (ethnicity-wise)

Year	Ethnicity			Total
	Pakistani	Indian	Vietnamese	
2012–2013	24	2	1	27

this. The number of ethnic minority students has reduced significantly in recent years (Table 4.22). The reason Principal Mr. Leung mentioned was the school stopped their English medium of instruction class for the ethnic minority students from the academic year 2008–2009. He remembered that they had only two ethnic minority students admitted in Form One in the academic year 2012–2013.

There were only 27 ethnic minority students at Woo-ping school in 2012–2013 academic year which was only 3 % of the total student population. Ethnicity wise, they were from three ethnic minority groups with Pakistanis dominating (Table 4.23).

### 4.7.3.3 Cohort Study

It seems from Table 4.22 that ethnic minority students were dropping out throughout their secondary Forms. For instance, there were eight students in Form One in 2007–2008 which came down to only two in Form Two in the following year 2008–2009. Similarly 23 Form Three students in 2007–2008 came down to 17 Form Four students in 2008–2009. The most striking area is no one actually made it through beyond Form Five in the year 2009–2010 and 2010–2011. In later correspondence with teacher Mr. Jordan, this was confirmed. The entire cohort of Form Five ethnic minority students of the year 2008–2009 and 2009–2010 dropped out after Form Five. He mentioned that none of them did well in the Form Five examinations or HKCEE, therefore, none of them was promoted to Form Six and they all ultimately dropped out. He further added that many of them actually started working. It was also the case that the school did not receive any other application from ethnic minority students for a position in Form Six or Form Seven in these 2 years.

#### 4.7.3.4 The Extent of 'Out of School' Ethnic Minority Students

While the above cohort study shows the dropout scenario at Woo-ping school there was also some important information revealed from the interviews with Principal Mr. Leung and teacher Mr. Jordan. Regarding the extent of dropout ethnic minority students at his school, Principal Mr. Leung mentioned that this was more or less similar to the dropout rate for local Chinese student which was about 5 %. He added, however, that the last cohort of ethnic minority students who was taught in English medium separate classroom, left school last year, were also experiencing a dropout problem. He remembered that there were about 40 students at the beginning but later only 30 students survived in Form Four to Six. This was also supported by teacher Mr. Jordan, as he also mentioned during the interview that in the last cohort of English medium instruction class who left school last year, there were about 45 ethnic minority students in the Form Four, out of them 15 students dropped out by the Form Six.

In terms of any specific pattern, ethnic minority students mainly started dropping out from Form Four, and boys dropped out more than girls, as commented by Mr. Leung:

the dropout phenomenon mainly starts from Form Four, especially because curriculum gets tougher at this stage, and the curriculum does have a relationship for preparing students for the HKDSE which is also difficult. After first terminal examination at Form Four when students get to see less achievement academically, their dropout process starts and many of them drop out within one or two years' time. Therefore, Form Four is the starting point when many ethnic minority students fall into at risk of dropping out... in terms of the ethnic pattern of the dropout, I can remember, from the last cohort of the English medium group, two third of the Nepalese students and one third of Pakistani students dropped out from the total number of the students of respective ethnic groups in that class. (Mr. Chris Leung, Principal, 2nd interview, 18 February 2013)

When Mr. Jordan was asked about the dropout scenario for ethnic minority students in the school, he replied that he did not see any students dropping out between Form One and Form Three, but he observed some students dropped out starting from Form Four to Form Six. Like Mr. Leung, Mr. Jordan also mentioned that the ethnic minority students were more at risk of dropping out when they were at Form Four mainly because the curriculum became harder and the HKDSE curriculum started at this point. The difficulty level of the HKDSE curriculum was another reason for some students dropping out, he further added. The non-attendance problem started at this point for some students as well. In terms of any significant pattern of dropping out, Mr. Jordan did not notice any but he generally commented, "boys are the worst, girls are better".

Both Mr. Leung and Mr. Jordan mentioned that the number of dropout students became low after they stopped providing English medium separate class for ethnic minority students. Teacher Mr. Jordan also remembered that they had only one ethnic minority student drop out last year from Form Five mainly because he was not promoted to the next Form, and then he decided not to continue school and started working. This is to note here again that in the first meeting Principal Mr. Leung said

that they were not getting many ethnic minority students admitted in the school in recent years since they stopped English medium section and the school data also supported this fact.

Mr. Jordan identified two Form One students Nadia and Shahid, and one Form Three student Taufiq at risk of dropping out. He kindly organized the interviews with all of them. The case studies of these three students are given in the separate chapter on students at risk of dropping out.

In terms of dealing with dropout or at risk of dropping out students, Principal Mr. Leung mentioned that the school had its own strategy and mechanism for following up with the students if they were continuously absent for a certain time. Both teachers and school social workers in the school became involved in this process. When the school team did not succeed in bringing back students within a certain time, the school normally reported to the EDB if the student was below 14. Then the responsibility went to EDB to deal with the student and her or his family. If the student was over 14, however, the school did not make a report to EDB. The school did not take any further initiative if the student did not come back after an initial communication made from the school. The issue is that this process of dealing with dropout or at risk of dropping out students clearly shows that even though dropout students aged 14 or below could be traced from the school's reporting to EDB it was not possible to trace dropouts over the age of 14.

#### **4.8 Other Stakeholder's Views on the Extent of 'Out of School' Ethnic Minority Students**

While the previous section provided a comprehensive understanding of the extent of 'out of school' ethnic minority students in three schools through analyzing school enrolment data and interview data, there were also other interview data with participants outside schools revealing some important insights that are worth mentioning in this section. One of them was an interview with social worker and ex-NGO professional, Mr. Andy Xu. His background details are reported here as well his encounters with dropout ethnic minority students in his work that provide very good background information about the extent of 'out of school' ethnic minority students.

Hong Kong UNISON, an NGO working for the education of ethnic minority children in Hong Kong, was approached requesting an interview with one of their staff. They replied that they were not looking at any 'out of school' issue through their work; they were heavily focused on 'in school' Chinese language issue for ethnic minority students. They provided the contact details of Mr. Andy Xu suggesting that he would be able to help. Mr. Xu was contacted and agreed to an interview in the second week of February 2013.

Mr. Xu first came to know about the issues of ethnic minority people through working in an action research project in his third year at the university back in 2003.

The project was about 'labor rights of ethnic minority people in Hong Kong' where he had to speak to adults and students from the ethnic minority community. "Since then I have a passion to work for the ethnic minority community", he asserted. After graduating in social work Mr. Xu joined UNISON in 2004 and worked for about 2 years. The focus of his work was mainly advocacy in the area of the education of ethnic minority students, establishing a linkage with the Vocational Training Council (VTC). He then moved to Yang Memorial Methodist Social Service in 2006 and worked there for 1 year. His working hours were the night shift from 10 pm to 6 am mainly to look after cases and groups for counseling including both Chinese and ethnic minority people. He then went back to his University for an instructor job for 1 year mainly doing some administrative works, organizing summer courses etc. In late 2008 he joined VTC as a social worker and was continuing the same job.

Until 2012 he was working at Youth College under VTC for the 'ethnic minority project'. This was a project that provided opportunity to dropout ethnic minority students making a bridge to continue their education either in a regular school academic track or a vocational track. The vocational track in Hong Kong requires students to have completed Form Three before starting any diploma. Therefore, students coming to this 'ethnic minority project' course were mainly dropout ethnic minority students who had not completed Form Three. This bridging course was for about 3 months mainly teaching five subjects including Chinese, English, Computer, core subjects either business or food production, and whole person development. Upon successful completion of this bridging course, students might go to a secondary school again from Form Four or continue study in different diploma courses and later higher diploma courses run by 14 educational institutes under VTC.

At the time of our interview Mr. Xu was working for the Institute of Vocational Education (IVE) in diploma or higher diploma programmes for ethnic minority students. His main responsibility included organizing activities for students' recreation, their social development and also providing counseling. In all his work with VTC he had to collaborate very closely with schools that had ethnic minority students as well as NGOs who were working for the welfare of ethnic minority students.

Asking Mr. Xu about the number of students in 'ethnic minority project' he replied that they used to get many more students at the first 2–3 years but it reduced later. He mainly blamed many lower quality private schools that were established in the last few years admitting many ethnic minority students who dropped out of public or direct subsidy school. He sounded very unhappy with their quality mentioning that Form Five completers of these schools only have the skills of Form Two completers. In terms of number of students in 'ethnic minority projects' Mr. Xu said that they had over 100 students in three courses in each year for the first 2–3 years but later it came down to 50–80 students each year. Of these, 80–90 % student were high school dropouts while the rest were mainly new comers moving to Hong Kong in the middle of the academic year and waiting for a school for the following academic year. In terms of any significant pattern of the students, they were mainly Form Two or Form Three dropouts and age ranged from 13 to 17. The number of



boys was a little higher than girls. Mr. Xu mentioned that the number of Pakistani girls was less as he heard from many NGO colleagues that Pakistani parents did not want their daughters to continue any study after a certain time, rather they arranged for them to get married. Pakistanis were the largest ethnic group in the ‘ethnic minority project’ followed by Filipino, Indians, Nepalese, Thai etc. He further added, “Nepalese young people directly enter into jobs or become more free style after dropping out than other ethnic minority groups”.

When Mr. Xu was asked what percentage of their ‘ethnic minority project’ graduates continued to any form of study either in regular school academic track or vocational track, he replied:

about 10 % to 15 % students only continued to further study either in school or in vocational school or college. About 15 % to 20 % went to work right away. Some of the rest went back to their home country and some just stayed home and were roaming around. There were about 10 % to 15 % of students kicked out from our course as well due to their attendance and conduct problems. (Mr. Andy Xu, social worker and ex-NGO professional, interview, 14 February 2013)

Mr. Xu also made a point that the number of dropout ethnic minority students became higher after Form Five because of the introduction of HKDSE in 2012, and thereby students were scared to sit for the exam.

Mr. Xu shared two success stories of the students from the ‘ethnic minority project’. One dropout student was continuing a diploma in an institute under VTC. The student did not even complete Form One at the time when he enrolled in the ‘ethnic minority project’ course. Another dropout student was studying at Open University; the student was a Form Seven dropout. Mr. Xu again stressed that only 10–15 % of dropout students who came to their course might have continued any form of education afterwards. He then shared another story of a Pakistani boy who was a Form Two dropout and came to their course. After completion he started his own business of selling old shoes but it did not work well for him. He went back to Pakistan, stayed there for years and then again came back to Hong Kong. He started working in construction and earning about 20,000 HKD per month. Mr. Xu at this very point questioned the interviewer (first author), “is this enough for them”? The first author did not answer anything apart from nodding his head.

Mr. Xu sounded frustrated for not having any night school for dropout ethnic minority young people. He mentioned that there were some night schools for dropout Chinese students but he never heard of any for ethnic minority students.

## 4.9 Summary

The chapter began with investigating the overall ‘out of school’ scenario in Hong Kong and found that ‘out of school’ children do very much exist in Hong Kong context. Through an examination of census data and EDB data sources regarding the number of ethnic minority students the problem of multiple data sources was raised and many inconsistencies were found in datasets. In order to identify the

extent of 'out of school' phenomenon for ethnic minority young people in Hong Kong it examined ethnic minority educational data from the census report. It found that a good number of ethnic minority young people seem to be 'out of school' which includes the pre-primary, lower secondary, upper secondary and post-secondary age-group young people. They exist in all three broad 'out of school' categories such as 'never been to school', 'dropped out of school' and 'at risk of dropping out'. While the available statistics from the census data do not help much in identifying the exact number of 'out of school' ethnic minority young people they do indicate that the 'out of school' issue for ethnic minority young people could be as high as about 25 % and more than 85 % of ethnic minority young people were out of full time education by the time they reached to upper secondary and post-secondary education respectively.

The analysis of school enrolment data and interview data from three schools confirmed that the 'out of school' ethnic minority students prevailed in all three schools. The interview data with the participants both from three schools and outside school further provided a deeper understanding on the magnitude of the 'out of school' phenomenon for ethnic minority young people in Hong Kong. In addition, the analysis of enrolment data from three schools and relevant interview data provided rich insights about the issue that confirms 'out of school' phenomenon for ethnic minority young people is very much prevalent in Hong Kong schools although such knowledge is not available in the public domain. Although the analysis of ethnic minority educational data from the census report could not suggest the presence of 'out of school' ethnic minority children at primary level, however, field work data from the primary school showed that 'out of school' children very much prevail in the studied primary school. This clearly indicates the importance of data at individual school level to understand the dynamics of the 'out of school' phenomenon while the available statistics from census data do not help with this issue.

It was suggested that ethnic minority students dropped out throughout primary and secondary level, and end of Form Three was revealed as the first critical point when many ethnic minority students dropped out of school as it was typically the end of the compulsory education age and start of the working age 15. It also means that when ethnic minority students became eligible to enter the job market dropping out was more prevalent. Therefore, compulsory education age and employment interacted with school failure as was also found in both developing and developed countries' dropout literature (Hunt 2008; Rumberger 2011). Other critical points are at Form Five before or after Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) (according to previous system until 2011) and Form Four upon the introduction of the Hong Kong Diploma in Secondary Education (HKDSE) from 2012.

It was also suggested that new arrival ethnic minority students dropped out more than the ethnic minority students who were born in Hong Kong and had always studied in Hong Kong schools. In terms of ethnic pattern, Pakistani and Nepalese young people dropped out more than other ethnic minorities and gender-wise ethnic minority boys dropped out more than girls. Fieldwork at all three schools also revealed that they had a number of ethnic minority students who were identified at risk of dropping out by their teachers.

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