

Chapter 6

Ethnic Minority Students at Risk of Dropping Out

Abstract Four students at risk of dropping out of their schooling are profiled. All were Pakistani with three born in Hong Kong, and one in Pakistan, who subsequently moved to Hong Kong in his late primary years. At the time of their interview, one student was studying in primary school and the others in secondary school. The primary school student was over-aged and not offered an age-specific grade level when he was admitted to the school. Their lives inside and outside of school are depicted. The case studies report information on their background, schooling, a typical day, and their future plan. Interview data from the teachers who considered them to potentially be at risk of dropping out of school are also included. Factors contributing to their risk of dropping out were at the individual, family and school levels. The individual level included attendance and low academic issues. The family level included poverty and at the school level, low expectations of the teachers towards them. Two factors similarly remarked on amongst the four students were their struggle in learning Chinese and most had experienced some form of racism. The case studies are further explored in a cross case analysis in Chap. 9.

The previous chapter presented case studies of six ‘dropout’ ethnic minority young people with a focus on identifying the reasons for their dropping out and portraying their ‘out of school’ life. This chapter will be concerned with four other ethnic minority students who were at risk of dropping out. The reasons why they were at risk of dropping out, and what their ‘out of school’ life are explored – partly the answers to questions 2 and 3 posed for the research reported in this book.

This chapter draws on the case study with four ethnic minority students who were identified by their teachers in schools that these students were at risk of dropping out. There are five sections in this chapter. Sections 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, and 6.4 present the experiences of Abdal Rashid, Taufiq Iqbal, Nadia Bashir, and Sahid Afridi respectively. While Abdal Rashid was from a designated primary school, Mong-shuen school, the other three participants were from a designated secondary school, Woo-ping school. Abdal was identified by the Chinese language teacher Ms. Snow Ngai at Mong-shuen school, and Taufiq, Nadia and Sahid were identified by liberal studies and geography teacher Mr. Tim Jordan at Woo-ping school. Each case provides student background information, their family, schooling, and life experiences in Hong Kong. We also present in detail the reasons for their

being at risk of dropping out and depict their life outside school. While their case studies provided a vivid picture of their life in both school and outside school, several themes were created from their accounts that explain why they were at risk of dropping out. Each of the four participants was interviewed once in their respective school for about 2 h each. The interview data with Ms. Snow Ngai and Mr. Tim Jordan are also incorporated in presenting Abdal's case as well as the cases of Taufiq, Nadia and Sahid respectively. Ms. Ngai allowed the first author of this book to interview Abdal alone but Mr. Jordan remained present during the interviews with Taufiq, Nadia and Sahid. However, Mr. Jordan did not intervene anything during the interviews with his three students. The chapter concludes by providing a summary in Sect. 6.5. These case studies provide part of the data for the cross case analysis presented in Chap. 9.

6.1 Abdal Rashid

Abdal, a 13 years old Pakistani boy, was a Primary Six student at Mong-shuen primary school. He was interviewed in early February 2013. Abdal had an impressive English language skill but the interview was mostly conducted in Urdu as he requested it. Abdal looked a bit older compared to other Primary Six students. Although his name was Abdal in school, everyone called him Shakil at home, and it was an honor for the first author that Abdal asked the interviewer to call him (Abdal) Shakil.

6.1.1 Abdal's Background

Abdal was born in Pakistan in 1999 and lived there until 2009. He could not tell when his father came in Hong Kong and what for but Abdal remembered that his mother and his other two siblings moved to Hong Kong in July 2009. He also could not tell what his father was doing in Hong Kong before they came; however, Abdal saw his father had not been doing any work since he came. Actually his family was receiving Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA). Five or six months before our interview, his father had a heart attack which almost fully paralyzed him on one side. Therefore, his father had little movement and was using medication. Abdal could not recall anything about his parents' educational background. His mother was a housewife. Abdal's younger sister and youngest brother were studying at Primary Four and Primary Three at the same Mong-shuen primary school. The family was living together in a rented flat in Kwun Tong.

6.1.2 *His Schooling*

Abdal went to a Primary school in Pakistan until the middle of Primary Five before he moved to Hong Kong in July 2009. After coming to Hong Kong he was given a Primary Three place at Mong-shuen primary school in 2009 September. In his Primary Six class there were about 24–25 ethnic minority students, of whom 8 or 9 were Pakistanis, 5 or 6 Indians, 5 or 6 Nepalese, 5 Filipinos and 1 Bangladeshi.

The most interesting things for him in the school were sports, PE class, and his class friends. He liked running and throwing games. He disliked the strict rules of the school. He commented:

even if for talking to other students I get punishment. I had to cut my hair four times in a row in couple of months back because school was not accepting my hair style. Every time I went for a hair-cut I had to pay 50 HKD. The other thing I do not like about the school is we are not allowed to speak in Urdu inside the school. The only languages we are allowed to speak are either English or Chinese...Teaching in this school is so so. I heard about a school in Wan Chai is really good. I will apply for a secondary place there soon.... (Abdal Rashid, at risk of dropping out student, interview, 5 February 2013)

6.1.3 *Abdal's Attendance Issue*

Abdal's attendance problem was raised by Ms. Ngai during the interview with her. Attendance data provided by the school office indicated that he was absent for about 15 days between September 2012 and January 2013. When asked why he had been absent for many days in the last couple of months, Abdal replied that he was actually ill for some days, sometimes school sent him home because of his unacceptable hair style, and sometimes he did not like some of his teachers, such as his mathematics teacher, and left school without attending his class. These all contributed to his higher absenteeism. When asked why he did not like his math teacher he mentioned that the teacher was very strict.

6.1.4 *Teachers' Differential Behavior*

It seemed Abdal received some differential behavior from his mathematics teacher that led to his disliking the teacher. Those differential behaviors were mainly concerned with giving Abdal more punishment compared to other students when he did not finish his homework. Abdal commented – "I don't like my math teacher, he is very strict. I don't find any interest in his class." Abdal shared another example of the differential behaviors that he received from not only his mathematics teacher but

also from other teachers in the past. When teachers were writing on blackboard some other students sitting near to him were talking, but teachers always gave him the punishment. Abdal also shared another example of his fighting with a south Indian student when he was in Primary Three. That boy said some foul words to him, Abdal could not control himself, and he pushed and kicked him. Unfortunately, the teacher only punished Abdal but did not say anything to the other student. These differential behaviors on the part of teachers impacted Abdal so much that he became very angry during the interview for the injustice that he had experienced.

6.1.5 Abdal's Health Problem

While interviewing Abdal it was noticed that he had some red spots on his face and was coughing every 3–5 min. When asked why he was coughing he replied that he caught cold a few days back, although he was taking medicine he was not fully cured. It was suggested that he go to see doctor, he moved his head showing a positive sign and said that he would wait for another 2–3 days, if he would not recover by then he would go to see a doctor. The red spot on his face was a kind of allergy that affected him on a regular basis. Every time he took medicine the spot disappeared but after some days it again came. Ms. Ngai, the Chinese language teacher who was also Abdal's class teacher at Primary Six confirmed later that Abdal had this allergic problem continuously.

6.1.6 His Result

Abdal was progressing well up to Primary Six. When asked about his result in the previous years, he commented:

It was really good. I passed all subjects in Primary Five except only a component in Chinese. This year in Primary Six mid-term I failed in Mathematics. I don't know but I don't like mathematics this year. I like most Chinese, English and General Studies but I don't like Math now. Although in my previous years in Primary Four and Primary Five I was not studying Mathematics that much, but I was always passing. This year it is not working like that way... (Abdal Rashid, at risk of dropping out student, interview, 5 February 2013)

Upon request, Ms. Ngai, Abdal's class teacher, kindly sent his report cards for his final term of the Primary Five and mid-term of Primary Six. The report cards showed that Abdal's result had significantly dropped in Primary Six compared to Primary Five. In Primary Five, Chinese was the only subject in which he did not do well but Mathematics, English, and General Studies were added to the list in Primary Six. His average score 64.60 in Primary Five was reduced to 50.50 in Primary Six. Ms. Ngai associated this drop in his result suspecting that Abdal was not giving enough time to study because of his recent engagement in work. Abdal's grade in

conduct also came down to B⁻ in Primary Six from B in Primary Five. In just one quarter of Primary Six he was absent for 5.5 days. He had been given very positive comments such as ‘responsible English leader’, ‘enthusiastic students’, ‘intelligent’, ‘polite and helpful’, ‘positive attitude’ in the report card. He was also identified as ‘talkative’ and therefore recommended to improve his behavior, manner, and discipline in classroom.

6.1.7 Peer Factors

Abdal mentioned that most of his classmates were his good friends. When asked about one of his Pakistani classmates at Primary Six who was not longer coming to school coming and who was a candidate for interview in this study Abdal commented:

we are studying together for three years. We were good friends earlier but not now. I even don't talk to him over phone... He has been changed a lot. He does not come to school. He smokes, he has bad friends. He is involved in gangs and fights for money. I don't know whether he is working now but earlier he was working in places like Shum Shui Po, Mong Kok etc. distributing leaflets. (Abdal Rashid, at risk of dropping out student, interview, 5 February 2013)

This former friend of Abdal's did not appear in school at all during the field work for this study. He had been identified as at risk of dropping out and he actually dropped out during the field work period. Abdal knew at least 20–30 other boys who were not going to any school. Most of them were kicked out of secondary school from either Form One or Two. There were about 20 of them, Pakistanis, Nepalese and Indians. Abdal knew them through other friends and met them in places such as Mei Foo and other Kowloon sites when he went out with those friends. Abdal heard that many of them were involved with gangs and he silently asked the interview whether he followed news about fights between different gangs in any local newspapers. The interviewer positively with a nod.

6.1.8 Racism

Abdal encountered some racist behavior in his life in Hong Kong. Once he and some of his Pakistani friends were playing basketball, the ball went out of the court and it hit one Chinese adult person who was passing by the field. The person started scolding them very badly. Although they said sorry to him and explained that it was not intentional the person continued to scold them for at least 20 min. Abdal also remembered that some Chinese people said bad words about him without any reason while he was walking on the street.

6.1.9 *Abdal's Work*

Abdal was identified by his Chinese language teacher Ms. Ngai at risk of dropping out mainly for his involvement in work. Ms. Ngai commented:

Abdal has financial problem, so he has started working in a restaurant. Although he is not yet 16 but probably he works under the arrangement of pay in cash, so he does not face any obstacles because of his age. The main problem of the boy is he is always sleeping in the classroom because he probably works until middle of the night and sleeps late. Most of the time he now sleeps in class, missed school many days in the last couple of months and his performance is getting worse in the examination...The boy used to be in the group 1 at Primary Five but now he is in group 3 at Primary Six in my Chinese class where group 1 is the best group and group 4 is the weakest one. (Ms. Snow Ngai, Teacher, Interview, 11 January 2013)

When asked about his work, Abdal immediately responded that he left it already. He admitted that he only worked during the summer vacation and for some weeks in December for earning money mainly to buy electronics products like mobile, computer etc. which he needed. He also contributed some of his earnings to his family. He was working in a Pakistani restaurant in Chung King Mansions. His main job was taking orders from the customer, serving food etc. He used to work there 3 h maximum in a day with a payment of HKD 28 per hour. He was always paid in cash. He mentioned that he actually liked the job, especially because he was able to meet many people there from different countries and taking orders and serving food was actually fun. It sounded he was well aware of the fact that it is illegal to work in Hong Kong if someone is under 15. Therefore, he said that he left his job.

Coincidentally however, on the same evening of the interview the interviewer went to see one of his friends at Chung King Mansions and decided to have some take-away. They randomly went to one Pakistani restaurant to buy chicken biryani. The interviewer was really surprised when he saw Abdal talking over his mobile just outside the restaurant. He was not sure whether Abdal noticed him then or not. After making the order to other waiter of the restaurant the interviewer accompanied his friend to another place for some minutes. When they came back to pick up their parcel and pay money, Abdal was inside the restaurant managing the cash area. They greeted each other. Abdal estimated HKD 120 but offered a discount and asked for that it would be alright if the first author would pay only HKD 100. However, Abdal was paid the amount in full. Abdal explained that this was his Uncle's restaurant; he was out of the restaurant for some other business, therefore, his uncle called him to be there to look after the restaurant in his absence. The interviewer smiled and tried his best to give the expression that he fully trusted him. Then they said bye to each other. It was noticed that Abdal was wearing the same dress as other waiters of the restaurant. Abdal continued to work at the restaurant as he was seen there on subsequent visits by the interviewer. Every time they saw each other they exchanged greeting in the normal way.

6.1.10 *A Typical Day for Abdal*

Abdal's typical day started at 7.00 am in the morning when he got up. He stayed at school from 8.00 am to 4.30 pm. After coming back home he helped his mother in household work, he sometimes went out for buying things if his mother asked. Then he played basketball or went to run with friends. After that he came back home, finished his homework, took dinner, and went to bed. He did not mention about his work when describing his typical day as he had already indicated that he had left the job, so his daily routine shown here might not be strictly accurate.

6.1.11 *His Future Plan*

Abdal's future plan was to continue study as much as he could. He was aiming for completing a first degree from a university. He mentioned that his father told him not to worry about money but to continue his study. He further added that he could start doing a part-time job again alongside his study when he would be 18. His long term ambition was to be a PE teacher in a school. The interviewer reminded him that he would need to achieve a University qualification if he would like to be a PE teacher and wished him good luck.

6.2 Taufiq Iqbal

Taufiq Iqbal, a 14 year old Hong Kong born Pakistani boy, was a student in Form Three at Woo-ping school. He was interviewed in February 2013. Taufiq looked very thin and had a mild voice. His English was good. The interview was conducted both in English and Urdu.

6.2.1 *His Background*

Taufiq was a second generation Pakistani born in Hong Kong in 1999. He could not remember when his father moved to Hong Kong but he mentioned that his father was brought to Hong Kong by his father's uncle when his father was only 16 years old. Since then his father was mainly working in Hong Kong. After many years working here his father went back to Pakistan, married Taufiq's mother and brought her to Hong Kong as well. Again Taufiq could not recall the year when his parents were married and his mother came in Hong Kong.

Taufiq's father was a primary school graduate from Pakistan. After working in different jobs for many years in Hong Kong, his father had been running his own business for the last several years where he mainly collected old electronics such as television, washing machine, refrigerator, and many old newspapers from individuals or homes, then stored it to his rented yard. He drove his own wagon for carrying those collected materials to his yard. After doing some sorting in the yard he sold and supplied most of the items to the recycling factory or to other factories. Taufiq's mother went to a primary school for 5 years in Pakistan. She had always been a housewife. Taufiq had two younger sisters and one younger brother. One younger sister was studying in Form Two at an English medium school, and his brother was studying at an English medium of school in Primary Four. His youngest sister was at a Chinese medium kindergarten in K1. The family was living in government housing in Tin Shui Wai.

6.2.2 Taufiq's Schooling

Taufiq started his school life from kindergarten. He went to a kindergarten in Yuen Long for 3 years. He was taught in the kindergarten in both Chinese and English. He then went to an English medium school for Primary One and Primary Two. In 2005 the whole family went back to Lahore in Pakistan and lived there for 3 years. Taufiq again started school in Pakistan from Primary One and continued up to Primary Three. The school in Pakistan had Urdu as a medium of instruction and English was taught as a separate language subject. The family came back to Hong Kong in 2008. In the same year Taufiq went back to his previous primary school from Primary Five and completed both Primary Five and Primary Six. He had to study a Chinese language subject in the primary school in Hong Kong.

Taufiq was allocated a Form One place at Woo-ping school in the 2010–2011 academic year. The school started admitting ethnic minority students in 2005 and received designated school status in 2007. Since 2005 the school had offered English medium of instruction classes for ethnic minority students but this was which the school later stopped offering from 2008 to 2009. Therefore, Taufiq had been taught in Chinese since his Form One at the Woo-ping school. During the time of the interview Taufiq was in Form Three. In his section 3C there were about 30 students including 26 Chinese students, 3 Pakistanis and 1 Indonesian.

In the secondary school Taufiq's favorite school subjects were English and Computer Studies and not surprisingly Chinese was the least favorite. He liked all activities in the school; actually there was nothing that he did not like about his school. Taufiq remembered, however, that at the beginning he was feeling bad when he was not allowed to speak in Urdu with other Pakistani students in school but later Taufiq knew that it was done for their Chinese language improvement and then he did not feel so bad for not being able to speak Urdu in school.

6.2.3 *Taufiq's Academic Result*

In the primary school Taufiq was always failing in half of the subjects. He could not remember any single term when he passed all subjects. The subjects he was failing in primary school were Chinese and General Studies. He passed in English and Mathematics. In the secondary school things had not changed much as he mentioned that he was failing most of the subjects. His worst subjects were Chinese, Mathematics and Liberal Studies and his best subjects were English and Computer Science. When his lower performance in Mathematics in secondary school compared to primary school was pointed out, he mentioned that everything was taught in Chinese for Mathematics in the secondary school and he did not understand what was being taught. Simple mathematics in Chinese at primary school was easier to understand but when difficult mathematics came it was really complicated to make sense, he further added.

Mr. Jordan, geography teacher at Woo-ping school, was asked to share Taufiq's school result. He kindly sent us Taufiq's Form One and Form Two annual examination results and the result of his first terminal examination in Form Three. It showed Taufiq's academic result was not good at all. His average marks in these 3 years were only 28.52, 28 and 29.42 respectively, Taufiq scored very low in major school subjects except English. His low performance ranked him at the bottom 10 % of the students in the respective Forms in all 3 years.

6.2.4 *Taufiq's Struggle in Chinese*

Taufiq developed some Chinese speaking skills but very little reading and writing in Primary Five and Six. In the secondary school the medium of instruction was Chinese. Therefore, Taufiq was being taught only in Chinese. When asked whether he was facing any problem being taught in Chinese in the secondary school, Taufiq commented:

Here every subject is in Chinese. It is very difficult to understand many things. Then I ask help from teachers or some students in my class. With their help sometime I understand, sometime I do not understand anything. The situation was very bad in Form One, but now it is slowly getting better... (Taufiq Iqbal, at risk of dropping out student, interview, 18 February 2013)

Taufiq claimed that his speaking and listening in Chinese were good, but his reading and writing were not good. He did not have any private tutor to help him out with Chinese or Mathematics. He mentioned, however, that the after school Chinese language class that he was attending was very beneficial especially the worksheets and activities they used for the class were very useful for the improvement of his reading, writing and speaking skills in Chinese. He also added that speaking to

Chinese friends in the class helped him a lot for improving his Chinese. Of the other three non-Chinese students in his class, he recognized that one of them was also having problems in Chinese but the other two students did not have much problem as they went to a Chinese medium primary school. At Taufiq's home his father and sister could speak some Chinese but his mother and other two siblings could not speak Chinese at all.

6.2.5 *Teacher's Low Expectation*

Mr. Jordan identified that Taufiq was at risk of dropping out. Mr. Jordan had known Taufiq since Form One being the coordinator of the Chinese language support programme for ethnic minority students at the school. It seemed Mr. Jordan had low expectations about Taufiq's school success. When asked why he thought that Taufiq was at risk of dropping out, Mr Jordan commented:

Taufiq's Chinese is bad. Although he speaks Chinese quite well, but his reading and writing are not good. Moreover, his academic result is very low throughout the last three Forms. He also has some bad peer influences like most of his friends in the school do not like study. He does not have yet any attendance problem though. Although he wants to finish his HKDSE, I fear that he would not get promoted to Form Four and will have to repeat Form Three mainly because of his academic result. Therefore, his target may change when he will have to repeat his Form. All in all, Taufiq has a strong possibility for dropping out... (Mr. Tim Jordan, teacher, interview, 18 February 2013)

6.2.6 *Racism*

Taufiq only faced racism once in his life in Hong Kong from a Chinese man. One weekend, Taufiq with some of his Pakistani friends went to a Chinese restaurant to have noodles after playing cricket. While they were eating noodles one old Chinese man started scolding them from another table without any reasons. Fortunately the Chinese restaurant owner went to the old man and stopped him.

6.2.7 *A Typical Day for Taufiq*

A typical day of Taufiq started getting up around 5.00 am. After freshening up the first thing he did was complete morning Prayer. Then he took breakfast and studied for some time before arriving at school around 8.00 am. He stayed at school until 4.00 pm. After returning home he usually had some afternoon snacks. Then he sometimes went out to play basketball with friends or sometimes just stayed at home watching television. He did his homework at the evening, had dinner at

9.00 pm and went to bed around 10.00 pm. He prayed at least one more time at the evening. During the weekend he played cricket with friends.

6.2.8 His Future Plan

Taufiq was asked what he would do if the school asked him to repeat any Form in the near future given he was failing continuously in four to five subjects and passing only in one to two subjects. He confidently replied that the school would not do so as he was scoring about 5 or 10 in those failed subjects in his early secondary Forms but later he was scoring about 25 or 30. Taufiq saw this as a good progress. Moreover, he also mentioned that he did not have attendance or any behavioral problem which were also considered in making decisions whether one student should be promoted to the next Form or not. He sounded very optimistic in saying that his problem in Chinese was slowly improving, the problems about Mathematics and Liberal Studies were mainly because of Chinese which he hoped would be alright as his Chinese would get better in the future.

In regard to the future plan Taufiq commented:

If I can complete HKDSE and then can get chance in the university I will continue study there. If I do not get chance in University, I will start working if I find a better job. If I do not get a better job I will probably join my father at his business. My father has also told me to do so. (Taufiq Iqbal, at risk of dropping out student, interview, 18 February 2013)

In terms of any aim in life whether to be any specific professional Taufiq said that he did not have any particular aim, he just would like to do some good work. The interviewer wished him very good luck for his future life.

6.3 Nadia Bashir

Nadia Bashir, a 12 year old Hong Kong born Pakistani girl was a student at Form One in Woo-ping school. She was interviewed in late January 2013 in the presence of the teacher Mr. Tim Jordan. The interview was conducted in both English and Urdu.

6.3.1 Nadia's Background

Nadia was born in Hong Kong in 2001. She could not remember when her parents first came in Hong Kong. But she mentioned that it was long time ago when her father first moved to Hong Kong for work purposes, and then he went back to Pakistan, married Nadia's mother and also brought her to Hong Kong. Nadia's

father was working in a construction company; again Nadia could not tell what exactly he was doing in the company. Nadia's mother had always been a housewife. In terms of her parents' education Nadia only recalled that she once heard that both of them only completed some primary grades from schools in Pakistan. Nadia had two elder brothers, one elder sister and one younger sister. All the elder brothers and sister were studying in local secondary schools while the younger sister was going to a local primary school. Nadia mentioned that her father could speak a little Chinese but her mother spoke none. The whole family was living in a rented flat in Tuen Mun.

6.3.2 Her Schooling

Nadia had not been to any Kindergarten in Hong Kong. She started her schooling in a local primary school from Primary One where the medium of instruction was Chinese. In her Primary class there were about 30 students where she was 1 of the 3 ethnic minority students. The other two ethnic minority students were also of Pakistani origin. After finishing primary school Nadia was allocated a place at Form One in Woo-ping secondary school in the 2012–2013 academic year. Therefore, it was only the fifth month of her time at the Woo-ping school during the time of the interview.

In Nadia's Form One class there were 27 students where she was the only ethnic minority student. In the whole Form there was one more ethnic minority student who was also of Pakistani origin. The rest of the students were Chinese. Nadia mentioned that she had some friends in the Woo-ping school with whom she had studied previously in primary school and she had already made good friendships with some other classmates in her current school.

At her primary school Nadia most liked her English ambassador role where she was helping other students in improving their English. In the secondary school, Nadia mentioned that she liked all her teachers so far. She specially mentioned Mr. Jordan, who helped her in with the Chinese language programme, and her English teacher Mr. Alan David, an American.

6.3.3 Nadia's Academic Results

Although Nadia had been studying in the Woo-ping school only for 5 months at the time of our interview, teacher Mr. Jordan selected her at risk of dropping out mainly because of her lower academic results in primary school.

Nadia had not passed any subjects in her primary years. Nadia mentioned that her average score in the primary school was between 40 and 45. English was the only subject where Nadia consistently scored highly in the primary school whereas she

could never do well in Mathematics. Although Nadia was failing continuously she did not repeated any class in primary school and was promoted on a regular basis.

6.3.4 Her Problems in Mathematics and Chinese

It seemed Nadia was really worried about her Mathematics because of continuous under-achievement despite her hard effort. She commented:

I was always doing the worst in Mathematics. I can't remember any single primary year that I passed in Mathematics. I don't know what happens, I always try hard to do well in Mathematics but it never works out. During the mathematics examination I just cannot solve problems, I forget everything. I really want to fix my problems in Mathematics... (Nadia Bashir, at risk of dropping out student, interview, 21 January 2013)

In addition, Nadia also had problems in Chinese just like many other ethnic minority students in Hong Kong schools. She was finding Chinese reading and writing difficult in the secondary school compared to primary. The main problem for her in Chinese was she struggled in remembering so many Chinese characters. As a result she could not always follow lessons.

6.3.5 The Spoken Language Policy of the School

In her short-time in the secondary school, Nadia was highly attracted by the English speaking week which the school had once since she came to the school. In this week there were many events organized with a view to enhancing students' English language skills. And students were allowed to speak in English for the whole week whereas they were only speaking in Chinese usually. Nadia commented:

I don't speak much in English in school as I am not allowed to speak in English with my friends. All my Chinese friends prefer to speak in Chinese, and also the classes are all in Chinese. Although I understand Chinese but I am not much fluent in speaking. I am not allowed to speak Urdu at all even with other Pakistani students of other classes. Therefore, in the English speaking week I could speak more about myself. I shared many of my stories in that week to my Chinese friends. We have another two English speaking weeks in the rest of the year for which I am really looking forward to very much. (Nadia Bashir, at risk of dropping out student, interview, 21 January 2013)

When asked about the spoken language policy Mr Jordan mentioned that from the academic year 2008 to 2009 when the Woo-ping school stopped offering English medium of instruction classes they also formulated a spoken language policy in the school. Generally it was only Chinese throughout the school year. However, in the English language lesson it was always English. In addition, there were three English speaking weeks observed in an academic year when students were required to speak in English for the entire week. The home languages of ethnic minority students

were not allowed at all in anytime of the year. Mr. Jordan wanted to rationalize their policy by making the point that in this way ethnic minority student had the opportunity to enhance their Chinese language skills.

6.3.6 Racism

Nadia faced some differential behaviors from some of her Chinese classmates in primary school. She mentioned that some of them always avoided her whenever she went to talk to them and some of them never played with her. In the secondary school, however, she had not yet faced any such behaviors.

6.3.7 A Typical Day for Nadia

Nadia woke up around 6.00 am. She took breakfast and went to school staying until 4.00 pm and then coming back home. After taking some rest in the afternoon she finished her homework. Then it was her television watching time for an hour or so. Nadia took her dinner around 8.00 pm and finally went to bed before 10.00 pm. During the weekend Nadia with other family members went out to attend a get together kind of programme that usually happened at every weekend in any of the family's house among some of Pakistani families living in Hong Kong.

6.3.8 Her Future Plan

Nadia's aim in life was to be a Doctor. She hoped to overcome her problems in Mathematics soon and pass successfully in the HKDSE. She also expressed her strong will to get a chance in one of the universities in Hong Kong to study medical science. The interviewer passed his best wishes for her bright future.

6.4 Sahid Afridi

Sahid Afridi, a 13 years old second generation Pakistani boy in Hong Kong, was a Form One student at Woo-ping school. Sahid was the only other ethnic minority student at Form One in addition to Nadia. Sahid was interviewed in late January 2013 in presence of Mr. Jordan. While most of the interview was conducted in English, Urdu was also used.

6.4.1 *Sahid's Background*

Sahid was born in 2000 in Hong Kong. Although he could not remember exactly when his father first moved to Hong Kong, he mentioned that his father had been living in Hong Kong for more than 30 years. In the early days in Hong Kong Sahid's father was working in Chungking Mansions, later he started his own business in partnership with another Pakistani man where they were supplying some cheap electronics to Pakistan. Sahid's mother moved to Hong Kong right after her marriage back in 1990. She had always been a housewife. Sahid's parents were primary graduates from Pakistan. Sahid had one elder brother studying at Form Four, one elder sister studying at Form Two and one younger sister studying at Primary Three. All the brothers and sisters of Shahid were going to local schools that used Chinese medium of instruction. Sahid and all his siblings spoke Chinese while his father could speak a little and but his mother could not speak Chinese at all. The family was living in a rented flat in Tin Shui Wai.

6.4.2 *His Schooling*

Sahid went to an English medium kindergarten for 3 years. Then he went to a Chinese medium primary school from Primary One. In the primary class there were 25 students where he was the only ethnic minority student. After finishing primary school he was admitted into Woo-ping school at Form One in the 2012–2013 academic year. In his class there were 28 students where Sahid was the only ethnic minority student. In the whole Form there was only one more ethnic minority student – Nadia, whose case study was presented in the previous section. Like Nadia, Sahid also mentioned that he found some friends in his Form One class with whom he had studied in the same primary school.

In the primary school Shahid had most liked PE class as he mentioned that he could do many sports there. His favorite sport was Cricket, a very popular game in Pakistan. In his 5 months at the Woo-ping secondary school Sahid liked the English speaking week most. As with Nadia, Sahid also reasoned that he was allowed to speak in English for the entire week that enabled him to communicate better with his friends. He also won a prize in the story telling competition during the English speaking week.

6.4.3 *Sahid's Academic Results*

In terms of academic results in primary school, Shahid could remember that once in the Primary Two final examination he had passed all the subjects. But since then his results had been very mixed. Although Sahid was failing continuously, he was never

asked to repeat any class and he was promoted on a regular basis. His average score was between 30 and 40 throughout the primary school. The subjects he mostly passed were English, Mathematics and the subjects he mostly failed were General Studies and Chinese. Sahid commented:

My Chinese result was not that bad, sometimes I passed, sometimes I did not. But 'General Studies' was very bad. I never passed in 'General Studies'. It was really difficult for me to remember 'General Studies. In the exam I could not answer most of the questions, which is why I could not pass. (Sahid Afridi, at risk of dropping out student, interview, 21 January 2013)

6.4.4 *His Struggle in Chinese*

Sahid claimed that his Chinese was not 'that bad' in primary school, however, he mentioned that he was finding Chinese writing and reading difficult in the secondary school compared to primary school. Mr. Jordan's comment was insightful in this regard when he explained why he selected Sahid as at risk of dropping out student:

Sahid apparently speaks good Chinese; he is also a very good English speaker. But when it comes about writing and reading Chinese, he struggles a lot. I know he was not continuously failing in Chinese in primary school but the 'General Studies' where he was failing continuously I think it was mainly because of his poor Chinese language skills in reading and writing. In the secondary school he will suffer most in Liberal Studies and other subjects as well if he can't fix his problems in Chinese. Since the curriculum in secondary is tougher, so, I fear it will be difficult for him to survive with only basic Chinese skill. (Mr. Tim Jordan, teacher, interview, 18 February 2013)

6.4.5 *Racism*

Sahid encountered some differential behavior in the primary school from some of his classmates especially during the play time. His account:

I liked always playing in school. I don't know why a group of my classmates never wanted to take me in their group. So, I was always playing against them. Whenever I was playing well they called me many foul words, including 'Ah-Cha'. They were only doing this with me not anyone else. At the beginning I felt very bad, but later I was avoiding their words by only focusing on play. (Sahid Afridi, at risk of dropping out student, interview, 21 January 2013)

6.4.6 *A Typical Day of Sahid*

Sahid's typical day started with getting up around 7.00 am and then taking breakfast and starting for school. Sahid stayed in school from 8.00 am to 4.00 pm. After coming back from school he ate some afternoon snacks at home and immediately went out to play cricket or football or basketball. Sahid completed his home work after

coming back from play and had dinner around 9.00 pm. He watched television if there was any cricket tournament going on, and if especially Pakistan was playing. Sahid went to sleep around 11.00 pm. During the weekend, he passed whole day mainly playing cricket with other Pakistani friends.

6.4.7 His Future Plan

Like many other Pakistani young people Sahid was also highly influenced by the sport cricket. It was apparent when he shared his plan that he would like to be a professional cricketer in the future. He recognized that cricket was not a popular sport in Hong Kong compared to Pakistan or India; however, he wished that it would be more popular in the future. In terms of education Sahid hoped to finish HKDSE successfully and then if he would get chance in the university he would continue study. The interviewer wished him good luck.

6.5 Summary

The chapter presented four case studies of Abdal Rashid, Taufiq Iqbal, Nadia Bashir, and Sahid Afridi who were at risk of dropping out. Their accounts as well as the accounts of the respective teachers in their schools provided a clear understanding of the reasons that led them to be seen as at risk of dropping out. Their lives outside of school were also depicted.

The case study with all four at risk of dropping out ethnic minority participants revealed that three of them Taufiq, Nadia and Sahid were born in Hong Kong while Abdal was born in Pakistan. Abdal moved to Hong Kong in his late primary school years with his mother in order to join his father. While Abdal was studying in a designated primary school the other three participants were studying in different forms at a designated secondary school during the time of the interviews. Only Abdal was found over-aged compared to his other classmates in school as he was not offered an age specific grade on admission.

All four participants were identified by their respective teachers in the schools that they were at risk of dropping out. A number of factors emerged from the case study that actually led them to be seen as at risk of dropping out. It was also found that often several factors together pushed individual student to be at risk of dropping out. While there were factors at the individual level such as lower academic achievement, attendance issue, overage, struggle in Chinese language, employment, health issue, peer factors etc. affected them, there were also factors at family level such as family poverty etc., and at school level such as teachers' low expectation, spoken language policy also influenced them to be at risk of dropping out. In addition, racism was experienced by most of the students.

Among all four participants, only Abdal was found working even though he was at below the local job market entry. Although he denied this during the time of interview, however, he was several times seen working in a restaurant later. The other three participants were passing their time beyond school-time mainly staying at home like other students.

These case studies will be revisited in Chap. 9 as part of the cross case analysis.