



Exploring ethnic minority students' perspectives on anxiety in learning Chinese as an additional language: an interpretative phenomenological analysis

Kevin W. H. Tai & Xinyi Wang

To cite this article: Kevin W. H. Tai & Xinyi Wang (27 Jun 2024): Exploring ethnic minority students' perspectives on anxiety in learning Chinese as an additional language: an interpretative phenomenological analysis, Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, DOI: [10.1080/01434632.2024.2368053](https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2024.2368053)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2024.2368053>



© 2024 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 27 Jun 2024.



[Submit your article to this journal](#)



Article views: 750



[View related articles](#)



[View Crossmark data](#)

Exploring ethnic minority students' perspectives on anxiety in learning Chinese as an additional language: an interpretative phenomenological analysis

Kevin W. H. Tai and Xinyi Wang

Academic Unit of Language and Literacy Education, Faculty of Education, The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

ABSTRACT

Existing research on ethnic minority students in Hong Kong (HK) has documented their struggles in learning Chinese-as-an-Additional-Language (CAL) and the linguistic challenges for ethnic minority students to learn CAL at school can be the source of their anxiety, which may prevent them from integrating into HK society. The paper aims to explore ethnic minority students' perceptions of how their Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) affect their learning of CAL. The data, from semi-structured interviews with ethnic minority students of varying CAL anxiety levels and fieldnotes from classroom observations and informal teacher interviews, were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. The findings illustrate that while FLA can certainly influence students' CAL learning experiences, other personal and sociocultural factors, such as students' motivation to learn CAL, the prevalence of English-as-a-Lingua-Franca in society, and the impact of examination policies, also contribute significantly. This paper argued that the perceived relevance and importance of CAL in students' lives are closely linked to FLA and can contribute to the lack of motivation observed in students with high or mid-level FLA. Thus, there is a need for teachers to attend to the interplay between other sociocultural factors and FLA when understanding ethnic minority students' CAL learning behaviours.

ARTICLE HISTORY


Received 1 May 2024
Accepted 10 June 2024

KEYWORDS

Chinese as an additional language; foreign language anxiety; language minority students; interpretative phenomenological analysis; student perceptions; Hong Kong

Introduction

Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) is an emotional reaction when learning or employing a second language (L2) in the classroom. It is connected to a complicated set of linguistic inferiority complexes, which includes feelings of embarrassment and lack of self-confidence regarding L2 learning and use in classrooms (Daubney, Dewaele, and Gkonou 2017). Existing research on ethnic minority (EM) students in Hong Kong (HK) documents their struggles in learning Chinese-as-an-Additional-Language (CAL) and the insufficient provision of Chinese is often considered to be a cause of limited social mobility and intergenerational poverty for immigrant families (e.g. Gu and Patkin 2013; Tam and Tsang, 2023). A significant number of EM students face challenges in learning Chinese, both in its spoken form (Cantonese) and written form (Modern Standard Chinese) (Ku et al., 2005). In their homes, heritage languages and occasionally English are

CONTACT Kevin W. H. Tai  kevin.tai@hku.hk

This article has been corrected with minor changes. These changes do not impact the academic content of the article.

© 2024 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

predominantly used, leading to limited parental involvement and support in the students' Chinese learning journey. Therefore, the linguistic challenges for EM students to learn Chinese at school can potentially be the source of their anxiety, which may prevent them from integrating into HK society.

Previous research has delved into the ways EM students in HK construct their identities concerning culture, heritage, and language attitudes (e.g. Hue, 2010; Gu, Mak, and Qu 2017). Additionally, prior research has examined EM students' CAL proficiency (e.g. Wong 2018a, 2018b) and the relationship between their CAL proficiency and motivational development (e.g. Wong, 2020). However, there is a noticeable gap in research exploring HK EM students' FLA and their perceptions of anxiety towards learning CAL. With the increasing number of South Asian EM students studying in HK (e.g. Gao et al., 2019), it is essential to understand the individual and contextual factors associated with their anxiety in learning CAL. Addressing this research gap, this paper aims to explore EM students' perceptions of how their FLA is influenced by various factors in their CAL learning experience.

This study uses the Short-Form Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (S-FLCAS) on 24 Year 7, 10 Year 8, and 16 Year 11 students from two HK secondary schools offering CAL education to EM students. Using S-FLCAS, students are grouped into three anxiety levels. The study then employs Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to analyse audio-recorded interviews of 14 representative students with varying anxiety levels, along with fieldnotes from classroom observations and informal teacher interviews. Since few empirical studies examine EM students' perceptions of FLA's impact on CAL learning, this study addresses this research gap by providing insights into EM students' perspectives on anxiety during CAL learning. Furthermore, this investigation can help identify students' diverse learning needs and enhance our understanding of EM students' CAL learning experiences in other global contexts.

Literature review

Foreign language anxiety

Learning an L2 can potentially be intimidating for students as they experience FLA (Horwitz 2010). FLA refers to 'a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process' (Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope 1986, 128). Scholars (e.g. MacIntyre 2007) have characterised different types of anxiety, including trait anxiety (i.e. relatively stable personality trait), state anxiety (i.e. temporarily experienced at a specific moment), and situation-specific anxiety (i.e. anxiety related to a specific context). According to Horwitz (2010), FLA is distinct from state and trait anxiety and is a context-based anxiety reaction depending on specific interactional situations.

FLA can lead to various emotional effects which may negatively impact L2 students' emotional wellbeing in multiple ways. For example, students may feel embarrassed which may reduce their confidence (e.g. Dovchin 2021), they may feel restricted or diminished when they are using L2 and they may have a low self-perception of their linguistic and academic ability (Gundarina and Simpson 2021). Thus, it is possible that L2 students may withdraw themselves from communicating in a particular L2 and they are less likely to have the motivation to respond or communicate in the L2. Consequently, FLA can prevent them from having effective interpersonal communication, destroy peer relations or negatively affect group solidarity (Tenzer, Pudelko, and Harzing 2014).

A great majority of the quantitative studies have demonstrated the use of self-report questionnaires to identify certain variables that directly affect learners' FLA and their L2 learning (e.g. Dewaele 2007; Ganschow and Sparks 1996; Jiang and Dewaele 2019). However, qualitative researchers (e.g. De Costa 2015) have challenged the validity of the questionnaire findings mainly in the following aspects. First, it is difficult to determine a specific relationship between the types of FLA and specific individual or contextual factors since different learners have their own unique learning experiences. Second, quantitative questionnaire findings are challenged in terms of the generalisability of the findings to other contexts since FLA is a multifaceted phenomenon and

questionnaires cannot capture the complexity of the past of all learners and the veracity of the learners' responses. The findings yielded by the qualitative studies (e.g. Saghafi et al., 2017) illustrate that FLA is not a static trait but instead, it is a dynamic and social phenomenon, and the relationship between FLA and other individual and contextual variables can be reciprocal instead of unidirectional.

Educational challenges confronted by HK EM students learning Chinese-as-an-additional-language

Over the past decade, there has been a surge of 70% in the population of ethnic minorities from 342,198 in 2006–584,383 in 2016 (HK Census and Statistics Department 2017). This accounts for 8% of the overall population of HK's 7.43 million population. South Asians constitute 29.7% of the non-Chinese population in HK and the Filipinos and Indonesians are the largest EM groups. From 2005 to 2013, EM students were allowed to choose between either 'mainstream schools' in the public sector or 'designated schools' which receive funding from the Education Bureau to support EM students in learning CAL. Since the 2013/24 academic year, the HK government has eliminated its system of 'designated schools', due to the widespread criticisms of its racial segregation effects (Tsang 2021). The government has adopted a mainstreaming policy which encourages EM students to choose mainstream schools in the public sector. Such a policy has led to an increasing number of EM students in mainstream schools of HK.

Research studies have documented HK EM students' low literacy in Chinese (e.g. Tsung, Zhang, and Cruickshank 2010). Existing research has explained why HK EM students have consistently lagged behind mainstream Chinese students. Linguists (e.g. Li 2017) have highlighted the linguistic demands for EM students to acquire Cantonese as a tonal language and standard written Chinese in traditional scripts. It is reported that EM students struggle to identify and enunciate morpho-syllables with the tone contour in Cantonese which has six distinctive tones (Li 2017). It should be clear that Chinese is written with a non-alphabetic and morpho-syllabic script. This means that the pronunciations of Chinese characters cannot be directly derived from the way they are written, whereas alphabetic writing (e.g. English) is deduced from syllables (Xing 2006). Hence, the lack of romanisation in Chinese prevents EM students from bridging the link between the logographic characters and Cantonese pronunciation (Li and Chuk 2015).

In order to address the diverse learning needs and provide equal opportunities for further studies and career pursuits, the Education Bureau of the HK Government offers an alternative pathway for eligible non-Chinese students who may have had a late start in learning Chinese or have not had sufficient opportunities to study the local Chinese Language curriculum. Alongside the HK Diploma of Secondary Education Examination (HKDSE) Chinese Language qualification, these students are given the option to obtain other recognised Chinese Language qualifications, such as the General Certificate of Education (GCE), General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), and International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE). To meet the general entrance requirements of Universities Grant Committee-funded universities and most post-secondary institutions, students need to achieve a minimum grade of C in the GCSE examination, which is considered equivalent to Level 3 of the local HKDSE Chinese Language qualification. It is important to note that this policy specifically grants non-Chinese students exemption from taking the HKDSE Chinese Language qualification. However, it does not provide incentives for EM students to further enhance their Chinese language proficiency. Regardless of whether these students achieve higher grades in the GCSE, GCE, or IGCSE examinations, universities only consider them to have met the minimum requirement for Chinese language proficiency (i.e. HKDSE Level 3 Chinese language). Consequently, the policy does not actively encourage or support EM students in their pursuit of greater proficiency in the Chinese language.

Previous studies have shown the impact of EM students' CAL proficiency on their motivational development. Wong's (2020) research indicates that students' self-perceived Chinese proficiency

significantly affects their L2 learning motivation. Additionally, Wong (2018b) emphasises the influence of the ideal L2 self on L2 Chinese achievement. In essence, motivated EM students are more likely to make progress in their CAL learning. It is advised that EM students become aware of their strengths and weaknesses in CAL learning to build self-confidence and pinpoint areas for improvement. However, research has also revealed that EM students often have limited opportunities to utilise their multilingual and multicultural resources in the learning process (Gu and Patkin 2013; Tsung and Gao 2012), as CAL teachers typically do not share the same first language (L1) or cultural backgrounds as their students. Consequently, the challenges faced by EM students in learning CAL may negatively impact their emotional well-being in various ways, such as feelings of discrimination, devaluation, loss of self-esteem, and lack of belongingness. It can also be inferred that students' anxiety towards CAL learning may hinder their progress, as it could potentially lower their motivation to learn CAL (e.g. Dryden, Tankosic, and Dovchin 2021; Yan and Horwitz 2008). Since there is a dearth of research exploring EM students' perceptions of how their FLA may affect their CAL learning, this study aims to address this research gap and answer the following research question:

How do HK EM students make sense of their CAL anxiety and its role in their CAL learning experience?

Methodology

Participating schools

Schools A and B are representative of institutions that provide education to a significant number of EM students, with approximately 80% of their student population classified as South Asian. These schools were chosen for this research based on their well-established reputation, as reported in the news, for providing high-quality CAL education to EM students consistently overtime. School principals of Schools A and B are renowned for advocating multilingual and multicultural education at their schools by delivering public lectures. Both schools have also admitted a small group of local HK students. These institutions employ English-Medium Instruction for teaching content subjects, excluding Chinese. Both institutions provide supplementary resources, including tutoring and extracurricular activities, to enhance students' overall learning experience and foster academic and academic development. The first author obtained approval from the school principals to conduct ethnographic data collection at these schools, potentially offering fresh insights into CAL learning for EM students.

Participating students

To comprehend the role of anxiety in CAL learning, it was essential to include students with varying anxiety levels. Therefore, the first author developed a questionnaire (see Appendix). The initial section of the questionnaire gathered students' demographic information, including questions about their age, ethnicity, native language, place of birth, length of stay in HK, and kindergarten and primary education. Tables 1 and 2 present the demographic information of the participating students in School A and School B. The participants' ages ranged from 11 to 19 years, with an average of 15 years of age. Of the total participants, twenty-six were born in HK and twenty-four immigrated to HK from other geographical regions. The participants' length of stay in HK exhibited considerable variation, spanning from 1.5–17 years, with a notable portion of individuals residing in the region for 10–13 years. The participant pool in this study comprises a diverse group of individuals from various ethnic backgrounds, as shown in Table 3. The majority of the participants come from South Asian countries, specifically India, Nepal, and Pakistan. Additionally, the sample also includes students from Southeast Asia, such as the Philippines and Indonesia, as well as participants from Russia and Nigeria. The participants demonstrate a diverse linguistic background, with varying levels of proficiency in multiple languages, such as Nepali, Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, Tagalog,

Table 1. Participating students in school A.

Student	Grade level	Age	Place of birth	Ethnicity	Native language(s)	Length of stay in HK
S1	Year 8	14	Hong Kong	Nepalese	Nepali	14 years
S2	Year 8	13	India	Indian	Gujarati	13 years
S3	Year 8	13	Hong Kong	Nepalese	Nepali	13 years
S4	Year 8	12	Hong Kong	Pakistani	Urdu	12 years
S5	Year 8	13	India	Indian	Hindi	5 years
S6	Year 8	14	Hong Kong	Indian	Hindi	1.5 years
S7	Year 8	14	Pakistan	Pakistani	Urdu	1.5 years
S8	Year 8	12	Hong Kong	Nepalese	English	12 years
S9	Year 8	14	Nepal	Nepalese	English	7 years
S10	Year 8	12	India	Indian	Punjabi	8 years
S11	Year 7	12	India	Indian	Hindi	10 years
S12	Year 7	12	Hong Kong	Pakistani	Hindko	12 years
S13	Year 7	11	India	Indian	English	11 years
S14	Year 7	12	Hong Kong	Pakistani	English	12 years
S15	Year 7	12	Hong Kong	Nepalese	English	10 years
S16	Year 7	12	Hong Kong	Nepalese	Nepali	12 years
S17	Year 7	13	Hong Kong	Nigerian-Chinese	English	13 years
S18	Year 7	12	Hong Kong	Nepalese	Nepali	12 years
S19	Year 7	12	USA	American	English	10 years
S20	Year 7	13	Hong Kong	Indian	English	13 years
S21	Year 7	12	India	Indian	Hindi	12 years
S22	Year 7	12.5	Hong Kong	Nepalese	English	12.5 years
S23	Year 7	13	Russia	Russian	Russian	4 years
S24	Year 7	13	Hong Kong	Indian	English	13 years
S25	Year 7	13	Hong Kong	Indian	Punjabi	11 years
S26	Year 7	12	India	Indian	Hindi	8 years
S27	Year 7	13	Hong Kong	Nepalese	English	13 years
S28	Year 7	12	Philippines	Filipino	Tagalog	4 years
S29	Year 7	14	Philippines	Filipino	Tagalog	7 years
S30	Year 7	13	India	Indian	Gujarati	6 years
S31	Year 7	12	Hong Kong	Nepalese	English	12 years
S32	Year 7	12	Philippines	Filipino	English	10 years
S33	Year 7	13	Nepal	Nepalese	Nepali	10 years
S34	Year 7	13	Hong Kong	Nepalese	Nepali	13 years

English, and among others. The second part, adapted from the S-FLCAS (Botes et al. 2022), focused on the anxiety L2 students experience during classroom interactions with their teachers. The questionnaire consisted of eight items, each featuring a standard 5-point Likert scale to enable robust analysis while minimising participant fatigue (Dörnyei 2007).

Table 2. Participating students in school B.

Student	Grade level	Age	Place of birth	Ethnicity	Native language(s)	Length of stay in HK
S1	Year 11	17	Canada	Chinese	English	10 years
S2	Year 11	16	Hong Kong	Pakistani	Urdu and Punjabi	16 years
S3	Year 11	17	Hong Kong	Pakistani	English	17 years
S4	Year 11	16	Pakistan	Pakistani	Urdu	15 years
S5	Year 11	16	Hong Kong	Nepalese	Nepali	16 years
S6	Year 11	18	Indonesia	Indonesian	Indonesian	2 years
S7	Year 11	16	Philippines	Filipino	Tagalog	7 years
S8	Year 11	16	Hong Kong	Indian	English	16 years
S9	Year 11	19	Philippines	Filipino	Tagalog	7 years
S10	Year 11	16	Pakistan	Pakistani	Urdu	14 years
S11	Year 11	18	Pakistan	Pakistani	Urdu	11 years
S12	Year 11	16	India	Indian	Punjabi	13 years
S13	Year 11	16	Hong Kong	Filipino	Tagalog	16 years
S14	Year 11	16	Hong Kong	Chinese-Pakistani-Filipino	English	16 years
S15	Year 11	17	Hong Kong	Pakistani	English	17 years
S16	Year 11	17	Hong Kong	Pakistani-Filipino	Punjabi	17 years

Table 3. Student ethnicity distribution.

Ethnicity	Percentage
Indian	28%
Nepalese	26%
Pakistani	20%
Filipino	12%
Others	14%

The questionnaire was administered to twenty-four Year 7 students and ten Year 8 students in School A and sixteen Year 11 students in School B. The selection of Year 7 and Year 8 students in School A and Year 11 students in School B was primarily due to convenient sampling (Babbie 2020) and the availability of parental consent. This approach allowed for efficient data collection while ensuring that the research adhered to ethical considerations by obtaining the necessary permissions from parents. Students were classified into high, moderate, and low anxiety levels based on their S-FLCAS scores, with the 25th and 75th quartiles serving as cut-off points for classification. Table 4 displays the mean S-FLCAS scores for each anxiety-level group. Students with high ($n = 4$), moderate ($n = 6$) and lowest ($n = 4$) level of CAL classroom anxiety, as determined by the questionnaire, were interviewed respectively.

Data sources

The primary sources for this study included (1) semi-structured interviews with selected students ($n = 14$) and (2) fieldnotes from classroom observations and informal teacher interviews. These sources aimed to examine students' perceptions of their CAL anxiety and its role in their CAL learning experience. Conducted in English by both authors, the semi-structured interviews utilised an interview schedule as guidance. Participants were encouraged to discuss their experiences freely, with researchers occasionally posing spontaneous questions in response. Interviews typically lasted an hour.

Fieldnotes from classroom observations and informal teacher interviews contributed valuable context and further insights into students' experiences. These notes informed our interpretation of interview data, providing a comprehensive understanding of students' perspectives on CAL anxiety and its influence on their learning process.

Interpretative phenomenological analysis

IPA, a qualitative approach created to examine personal lived experiences, was utilised to analyse data obtained from semi-structured interviews conducted with selected students. IPA delves deeply into personal experiences, focusing on how individuals comprehend and interpret their experiences (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin 2013). The goal is to examine participants' experiences on their own terms, without excessive influence from external psychological theories or the researcher's personal biases. A two-step interpretation process, known as the 'double hermeneutic', is employed in the analysis, enabling researchers to comprehend how participants interpret their world. This involves researchers making sense of participants' efforts to make sense of their world (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin 2013), necessitating a balance between emic and etic perspectives. By adopting an emic

Table 4. Descriptive statistics of the anxiety-level groups.

	N		Percentiles		
	Valid	Missing	25	50	75
Anxiety scale (S-FLCAS)	47	3	17.5	23	28

Note. The 8-item adapted FLCAS score ranges from 8 to 40.

perspective, researchers can inductively analyse participants' accounts of their experiences. Conversely, an etic perspective encourages researchers to connect external theoretical concepts to explain psychological phenomena, thereby enriching the emic analysis of participants' lived experiences. The double hermeneutic perspective is apparent in interpretive statements such as 'it can be argued', 'may be understood as', 'may explain why', and so forth. To maintain transparency, we have emphasised these interpretive statements throughout the analysis (Ai, Stelma, and Baratta 2022; Tai 2023a).

The interview data analysis followed the stages recommended by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2013), transitioning from focusing on individual experiences to a shared understanding, as well as moving from a descriptive level to a more interpretative one. Initially, the first case was examined line-by-line, with notes made to concentrate on the content. Exploratory comments were then documented on the transcript, covering content (descriptive), language use (linguistic), and researchers' interpretations (conceptual). During this stage, researchers posed questions about the data and developed a conceptual understanding of the issues raised from the participant's perspective. Emergent themes were subsequently identified, reflecting the meanings of the comments. This process involved researchers interpreting and re-labelling exploratory comments to develop concise and resonant themes derived from the participant's account. Techniques such as subsumption and abstraction (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin 2013) were employed to recognise patterns among the emergent themes, resulting in several superordinate themes for each participant. After analysing one participant's data, the process was repeated for the remaining transcripts, treating each case individually to develop new themes. Researchers' field notes from classroom observations and informal teacher interviews also informed the analysis, in accordance with the use of IPA.

Results

Two superordinary themes are presented below with excerpts from representative students' own words illustrating the relevance of each theme.

Anxious indifference: the intersection of anxiety and lack of motivation in CAL learning

In the interviews, it became evident that several students, identified as having high or mid-level FLA, reported experiencing anxiety while learning Chinese in class. However, one notable finding is that these students lack the motivation to actively improve their CAL skills. In this section, we will present three subordinate themes that demonstrate the factors that lead to students' lack of motivation despite experiencing FLA.

The difficulty of learning CAL

The difficulty of learning CAL has been identified by students as a significant challenge that hampers their motivation to improve their Chinese proficiency. Students have recognised the complexities inherent in the language as a primary factor that contributes to their lack of motivation in furthering their Chinese language skills.

Extract 1

I usually like, I just give up like some word like I can read like basic words like “我鍾意踢波” (I like to play football), like colours, like, you know, like Primary 1 Chinese, I know how to do that. But if you give me like Primary 3 Chinese, I can't able to read any of those. And also writing, right? I know how to write it, but I wouldn't like remember how to write it back again. Dictation also, yeah. (Student 1/School A/High-level FLA)

Student 1, who was a Year 7 student at School A, had a multicultural background, being half Chinese and half Nigerian. Initially, he attended a mainstream primary school for five years where the medium of instruction was Chinese for all subjects, except English. However, due to his struggles in keeping up with the local Chinese language curriculum, he had to transfer to an

ethnically-concentrated primary school that offered education specifically tailored for EM students. At the new school, English was adopted as the medium of instruction, allowing him to effectively learn content subjects. He remained at the ethnically-concentrated primary school for a duration of two years. In the interview, Student 1 indicated that while he had a basic understanding of Chinese words at the primary 1 level, he faced difficulties in keeping up with the Chinese words taught at the primary 3 level. Specifically, he mentioned his struggles with reading and writing Chinese words, as well as memorising them, particularly during dictation exercises. These challenges posed obstacles for him in learning and retaining Chinese vocabulary. Based on the S-FLCAS scores, Student 1 was identified as having a high-level of anxiety.

In the subsequent part of the interview, Student 1 was asked to further elaborate on the reasons why he felt anxious about the process of learning Chinese:

Extract 2

Probably I feel like this is too hard for me. I want to give up [...] Because I don't usually read Chinese books. I don't enjoy that in Chinese because I think it's very hard. I usually guess like if you give me like 10 min to test out, I will do some, like if you give a test right now, the first minute I will try. Oh, I give up already. So, I actually don't enjoy Chinese that much I think writing and reading. (Student 1/School A/High-level FLA)

Student 1 believed that he had no motivation to improve his Chinese proficiency as 'it's very hard' and he did not enjoy reading and writing Chinese. Therefore, it can be argued that Student 1's high-level FLA in the CAL learning process may unconsciously avoid reading Chinese books and writing Chinese words and texts that trigger his anxiety. By avoiding learning Chinese, he temporarily alleviates his anxiety but this also means that he missed out on valuable learning opportunities during the classroom interaction. Based on the classroom observation, it is noticeable that Student 1 did not pay attention in class as he constantly talked to his peers while the teacher was teaching or he might be browsing different websites using his iPad (Fieldnotes). This avoidance behaviour reinforces his lack of motivation, as he does not actively engage in classroom activities that could help him to improve his CAL skills.

Student 2, who was a Year 8 student at School A, was from Pakistan and he spoke Urdu as his L1. He arrived in HK in 2022 and he has been living in HK for 1.5 years. He received his primary education in Pakistan and his primary school adopted Urdu as its medium of instruction. Pursuing a secondary education is a challenge for Student 2 as he was expected to learn CAL and he has never learnt Chinese before. Based on the S-FLCAS scores, Student 2 was identified as having mid-level of anxiety. In the interview, Student 2 shares his feelings regarding the learning of CAL:

Extract 3

For Chinese, I'm not sure because like I love learning languages [...] So I guess the hardest one is Chinese. And you know, I'm kind of not interested to learn it because it's so hard to read, write and understand Chinese. Yes, the hardest one I've ever seen [...] You know, you need to write it differently. You need to speak even the speaking, you know, Cantonese, you need to learn Mandarin in school, and then you need to speak Chinese and you know also you need also Cantonese. I mean, you also need to learn a bit of Cantonese, you know, if you need to talk to people. And there is also written Cantonese, you know, written Mandarin, spoken Mandarin. Oh yeah, that's so confusing part of the Chinese. And that makes people really anxious at how would I be able to learn this language because it also contains the four languages inside one language. (Student 2/School A/Mid-Level FLA)

Student 2 raises an important issue regarding the challenges of learning Chinese in HK, where Cantonese is the dominant spoken language. EM students in HK face the additional task of learning standardised Chinese writing, which is based on Mandarin, while also attending Putonghua classes for spoken Mandarin. The discrepancy between standardised Chinese writing and written Cantonese creates confusion for these students, as their exposure to spoken Cantonese outside of the classroom does not align with their learning of standardised written Chinese (Tam and Tsang, 2023).

This confusion is further amplified by the widespread use of written Cantonese in various domains within contemporary HK society. While the primary objective of Chinese lessons in schools is to teach ‘Standard Chinese’, a standardised form of written Chinese based on Mandarin vocabulary and grammar from Northern China, the pronunciation of Chinese characters and the medium of instruction remain in Cantonese. As a result, it can be argued that the CAL curriculum in schools may not adequately prepare local EM students for authentic language use and cultural engagement in modern HK, thereby increasing their anxiety towards learning CAL.

The prominence of English in HK

In HK, English holds significant economic value as the official language during the colonial era and remains an important international language. This has resulted in a strong preference for English-Medium Instruction (EMI) among parents and students (Choi 2003). Within this context, a recurring theme observed in the data is that some EM students do not perceive the necessity of improving their Chinese proficiency. They hold the belief that being proficient in English alone is sufficient for securing employment and making a living in HK. This perspective can be attributed to the prominence of English in various professional fields, such as finance, commerce, and international business, where English fluency is highly valued. As a result, EM students may perceive English as the primary language required for career success and economic opportunities in HK. Consequently, they may prioritise developing their English language skills while overlooking the importance of enhancing their Chinese proficiency.

Extract 4

R: During your language learning process, do you think your Chinese proficiency will affect your academic life or your future? Like just now you mentioned that you want to pursue your career on YouTube, right? Do you think your Chinese proficiency will affect your future career?

S3: Maybe not. I mean, cuz when I’m playing games, I definitely, when I encounter people online who are Chinese, I don’t know, of course I don’t know Chinese, right? So I think, how am I gonna talk with them if they don’t know English? So that’s difficult on YouTube. It’ll be hard.

R: So you just want to like communicate with a group of people who have good proficiency in English. What about your other followers? If they are some locals in Hong Kong and they don’t know much about English, but they really like your videos. Like how do you communicate with them?

S3: Would likely use Google Translate. (Student 3/School B/High-level FLA)

Student 3, a Year 11 student at School B and an Indian, exhibited high levels of anxiety according to the S-FLCAS scores. Born in HK, Student 3 had previously attended an international school where English-Medium Instruction was adopted. As a result, he primarily used English to communicate with his classmates, reserving Chinese only for Chinese lessons. During the interview, Student 3 expressed a lack of confidence in speaking Chinese in class, often resorting to English when responding to the teacher’s questions during Chinese lessons. Notably, when discussing his interest in pursuing a career in social media, Student 3 acknowledged the potential challenge of communicating with Chinese individuals online due to his limited Chinese proficiency (Lai and Tai 2021). However, he did not consider this to be a significant obstacle, expressing reliance on tools such as ‘Google Translate’ to compensate for his language limitations. This response indicates a lack of motivation to improve his Chinese proficiency despite experiencing high levels of anxiety. Student 3 firmly believed that he could thrive in HK by relying solely on English, considering it as a form of symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1991) that offers greater economic value for his desired career in social media. This belief aligns with the views of Student 4, who shares the same perception:

Extract 5

I don't really think like in the future, if they're gonna get jobs like that, like Chinese would be really affected cuz like there are other jobs which like have English and stuff. Like mostly now like there is also English jobs and Chinese jobs. (Student 4/School B/Mid-level FLA)

Student 4, a Nepalese student born and raised in HK, was a Year 7 student at School A. Based on the S-FLCAS scores, Student 4 was identified as having a mid-level of anxiety. During the interview, Student 4 expressed that he primarily converses in English and believes that having a low proficiency level in Chinese would not significantly impact his life in HK. According to Student 4, he could rely on English to communicate with local citizens in HK. When asked about the potential for achieving higher social mobility in HK through attaining a high level of Chinese proficiency, Student 4's perspective reflects a belief that the importance of Chinese proficiency in terms of future job prospects is not as significant as it may have been in the past. Student 4 suggested that there is a growing trend of job opportunities in HK that require proficiency in English, alongside those that require proficiency in Chinese. This viewpoint implies that being proficient in English alone may be sufficient to secure employment and lead a successful life in HK. Thus, *it can be suggested that* Student 4's statement indicates a perception that English proficiency holds economic value and can provide access to a range of job opportunities, thereby influencing his motivation to prioritise developing his Chinese language skills.

Washback effect of CAL exit-point assessments

External assessments play a significant role in triggering students' anxiety when learning an L2 (e.g. Dryden, Tankosic, and Dovchin 2021). The interview data indicates that while some Year 11 students are classified as having high or mid-level FLA when learning Chinese in class, the assessment policy implemented by the HK Education Bureau can influence students' motivation to improve their CAL skills. The implementation of alternative exit-point assessments by the Education Bureau appears to have created a short-term objective for students to meet the requirements of overseas Chinese qualifications, which assess fundamental Chinese language skills below the grade-norm standards. This is particularly evident in the accounts of Year 11 students who have taken the GCSE Chinese Language, a UK-based Chinese language examination, in Year 10. The GCSE examination serves as a high-stakes exit-point assessment and is a key requirement for pursuing higher education in HK (see section 3).

Consequently, EM students in Years 11 and 12 who have already passed their GCSE examination in Year 10 no longer feel the pressure to worry about their school-based Chinese language examination grades, as these grades do not impact their final grade in the HKDSE examination. As a result, students' motivation to enhance their CAL skills appears to be dampened, despite exhibiting high or mid-level FLA in their pursuit of learning CAL. Student 5 from School B has further elaborated on the washback effect of the exit-point assessment:

Extract 6

R: Yes. Okay. So, what do you do in order to improve your reading and writing skills?

S5: Personally, I don't really do anything yet, but at school we have practice. So I can, I do learn from that because I have much more pressure about DSE than learning more words in Chinese language. I don't really need to read much, but I have to like mostly in daily life, you just need to speak Cantonese.

R: So naturally that motivation or really advancing your Chinese language proficiency is not that high.

S5: Yes, I guess so. (Student 5/School B/Mid-level FLA)

Student 5 was a Year 11 student who was born in HK and belonged to the Punjabi ethnicity. He spoke Urdu, Punjabi, and English at home. Based on the S-FLCAS scores, Student 5 was identified as having a mid-level of anxiety. During the interview, it became evident that although Student 5

experienced anxiety in learning CAL, he lacked the motivation to improve his Chinese reading and writing skills. He stated that he had ‘much more pressure about DSE than learning more words in the Chinese language’. This statement may explain why Student 5 did not perceive the importance of advancing his Chinese language proficiency. It is worth noting that Year 11 and 12 EM students, like Student 5, who have already passed the GCSE examination in Year 10, strategically devote their time to preparing for the high-stakes HKDSE examination, which may explain their limited focus on improving Chinese reading and writing skills. Thus, the pressure associated with the upcoming HKDSE examination, which holds significant weight in determining future educational opportunities, seems to overshadow the importance of CAL proficiency development.

Additionally, Student 5’s perception that speaking Cantonese is sufficient for daily life in HK further diminishes the perceived importance of developing Chinese reading and writing skills. This perception may stem from the practicality of Cantonese as the dominant language of communication in HK.

Therefore, Student 5’s lack of motivation to invest in improving Chinese reading and writing skills can be attributed to a combination of examination pressure and the perception that Cantonese proficiency is sufficient for daily life. Student 6, who was a classmate of Student 5 in the Year 11 Chinese class, initially expressed her worries about the GCE Chinese examination as it was more challenging than the GCSE examination that she took when she was in Year 10:

Extract 7

I think mostly around the exam period this year because the level has jumped a lot because last year we did the GCSE, right? So we were preparing for that and that was pretty easy. But since we’re preparing for the GCE this year, like the level has suddenly jumped a lot. So like the last test, I was pretty nervous about what will come in the exam because most of the content has suddenly turned from like daily conversation to a lot of things about like historical things and more about like the society. So it’s got it harder. So I was pretty stressed about that. (Student 6/School B/Low-level FLA)

Student 6 was born and raised in HK and she was Nepalese. Her L1 was Nepali and she used to attend Chinese-Medium Instruction kindergarten and primary schools and her Chinese proficiency was deemed as advanced by her Chinese teacher and school principal. Based on the S-FLCAS scores, Student 6 was identified as having a low level of anxiety. In the interview, Student 6 pointed out her interest in watching Chinese TV shows and that she enjoyed engaging in conversations in Cantonese with her local HK friends. In Extract 7, it is evident that Student 6 was worried about her GCE examination as School B requires Year 11 students to prepare for the GCE Chinese examination despite having completed the GCSE examination in Year 10. Student 6 explained that she felt nervous regarding the upcoming GCE examination as the difficulty of the exam was so much ‘harder’.

Nevertheless, when we observed the classroom interaction in semester 2, we noticed that Student 6 showed no interest in learning Chinese in class as she always rested her head on her desk and often took a nap during class (Fieldnotes). When we asked her Chinese teacher about her learning attitude, the teacher explained that Student 6 had already lost her motivation to learn Chinese due to the washback effect of the exit-point assessment:

Extract 8

T: It appears that Student 6 has lost interest in learning Chinese recently. She has become aware that achieving good grades in the GCE examination holds no significance, as it would only be converted into HKDSE Level 3 Chinese Language. Consequently, she fails to see the purpose of further enhancing her Chinese language proficiency. I have tried to encourage students by emphasizing the positive impact of performing well in the GCE examination on their university applications. However, the students are well aware that the GCE examination would not make a difference in their applications. As a result, they have chosen to focus more on other HKDSE subjects.

R: It seems that Student 6’s perspective aligns with that of the majority of the students.

T: Absolutely. The students collectively recognize the limited significance of the GCE examination. I completely understand their reasoning behind this decision.

(Fieldnotes by the Researcher)

During the informal interview with Student 6's Chinese teacher, it was revealed that she had lost interest in learning Chinese. It can be suggested that this lack of enthusiasm stems from her realisation that achieving good grades in the GCE examination holds no significance, as the resulting grade would only be converted into HKDSE Level 3 Chinese Language. Despite the teacher's efforts to motivate students by highlighting the positive impact of taking the GCE examination on university applications, students are well aware that it would not make a difference. As a result, they have chosen to prioritise their focus on other HKDSE subjects. Hence, it can be observed that while certain students may feel anxious about learning CAL, the washback effect of the exit-point assessment diminishes their motivation to prioritise the acquisition of CAL skills.

Transforming FLA into motivation for CAL learning

While certain students may adopt a passive approach to CAL learning, avoiding opportunities to practice and improve their Chinese language skills (section 5.1), it is worth noting that some EM students are able to transform their FLA into motivation for enhancing their Chinese proficiency. In this section, I will introduce two subordinate themes that provide insights into the factors that contribute to this transformation.

Willingness to learn CAL

Students' extrinsic motivation is the most common form of motivation among successful students when learning CAL. This is evident in some of the student's responses as they explain their reasons for motivating them to acquire a high level of CAL proficiency.

Extract 9

Because like sometimes in life when I look at people, maybe more ethnic minorities who speak Cantonese like way better than me or something, then that also motivates me to learn. I'm like, if they can learn, I can also learn more, something like that. (Student 5/School B/Mid-level FLA)

Extract 9 reveals Student 5 was being inspired by individuals from ethnic minorities who spoke Cantonese better than him. This observation appears to be a motivation for the student, as he believed that if others could learn, he could also improve his language skills. This highlights the intrinsic motivation for Student 5's desire to enhance his Chinese language abilities. Student 5 continued to explain his motivation to learn Chinese:

Extract 10

S5: I can definitely see improvements, but I'm, I still wanna learn more. I wanna get more fluent with that.

R: So what do you do to improve your Chinese?

S5: I think if I'm talking more in Chinese or if I'm watching more Cantonese movies or yeah, I used to watch Cantonese movies to learn Chinese and it also helped like in normal conversations.

R: Do you feel the pressure that you have to reach a certain level of Chinese language proficiency?

S5: I wouldn't say I have a pressure like compare to DSE or other subjects I have to focus on. Chinese is pretty chill. Not really like need to focus because I've already finished GCSE.

R: So no pressure.

S5: Yeah, not that much. (Student 5/School B/Mid-level FLA)

This extract reveals that Student 5 did not feel considerable pressure to enhance his CAL skills. This is primarily due to the fact that he has already completed his GCSE and he was focusing on other subjects in preparation for the upcoming HKDSE examination in 2025. As a result, Student 5 adopted a more relaxed approach towards improving his Chinese language proficiency. The extract also highlights Student 5's proactive approach to CAL learning outside of the classroom. He mentioned engaging in activities like watching Cantonese movies in order to further develop his Chinese skills. Thus, it can be argued that this demonstrates his commitment to self-directed learning and his recognition of the benefits of informal CAL acquisition methods.

Washback effect from school-based CAL examination

A recurring theme observed in the data was the washback effect resulting from school-based CAL examinations. This finding holds particular significance for junior secondary level students, as their promotion to the next academic year often relies on passing all subjects. Consequently, the data reveals that students experienced anxiety regarding the school-based Chinese examination, which served as a motivating factor for them to enhance their CAL proficiency in order to successfully pass the school Chinese exam.

Extract 11

Like for the exam, like we also like we always prepare like before the exams, like a one month before the exam. So I always choose first as Chinese. I have to prepare Chinese first and then I prepare other subjects in between. Then I prepare again Chinese at last. That's why I don't forget anything. (Student 7/School A/ High-level FLA)

Extract 11 showcases Student 7's approach to exam preparation, particularly with regard to CAL learning. Student 7, who was born in India and had Punjabi as his L1, faced the challenge of learning Chinese as a newly-arrived immigrant in HK. The student's S-FLCAS scores indicate a high level of anxiety. In order to ensure promotion to Year 8, where passing Chinese is a compulsory requirement, Student 7 adopted a strategic approach to exam preparation. He prioritised Chinese by choosing it as the first subject to prepare for, dedicating time to consolidate his Chinese knowledge. He then allocated time for other subjects before revisiting Chinese once again. This approach is intended to ensure thoroughness and minimise the risk of forgetting important information. We argue that the extract highlights the washback effect of the school-based Chinese school exam on Student 7's study habits. The exam's significance in determining promotion to the next academic level creates a sense of importance and urgency for the student, which in turn motivates Student 7 to strategically prioritise CAL preparation to fulfil the requirement and solidify his Chinese knowledge. It is also noted that Student 2 was worried about his school-based Chinese exam preparation:

Extract 12

It's gonna mess up my whole grade because the promotion criteria is the three main subjects, right? Math, English, Chinese. So I was a bit nervous and how to say it, I was a bit scared to, you know, because of my result, what would be the result and would I be able to promote or not? That is, because I failed everything in first term. (Student 2/School A/Mid-level FLA)

Extract 12 sheds light on the concerns and anxieties of Student 2 regarding his CAL proficiency and its impact on his academic performance. Student 2 was a newly arrived immigrant who had no prior experience with learning Chinese. He expressed worry about the potential consequences of his Chinese exam grades on his overall academic performance. He recognised that the promotion criteria in their school were based on the three main subjects: Math, English, and Chinese. Failing to meet the required standards in any of these subjects could jeopardise his promotion to Year 9. Student 2 admitted feeling nervous and scared about his results, as his previous term's performance was unsatisfactory.

Similar to Student 7, Student 2's motivation to improve their CAL proficiency stems from the pressure to meet the promotion requirements. Thus, it can be suggested that the promotion criteria and the fear of not being able to advance to the next academic year serve as a driving force for them to enhance their CAL skills. It is also observed that Student 8 experienced stress throughout the exam period, which served as her motivation to study Chinese for the exam:

Extract 13

In academic, there would be a Chinese speaking exam oral exam. I try my best; I'd only get half. So that's like I wouldn't really pass. [...] I only get stressed during exam or UT periods. Because I need to be able to read the questions and answer them in Chinese again. I feel stressed because I need to study. Not depressed. I don't really think about Chinese that much. (Student 8/School A/High-level FLA)

Extract 13 underlines Student 8's exam results and stress during exams. Student 8, who was in Year 7 at School B, had Tagalog as her L1. Originally from the Philippines, Student 8 immigrated to HK with her family in 2015 and has been living here for 7 years. During the interview, Student 8 recognised the importance of learning Chinese for daily use and acknowledged its widespread use as the local language in HK. However, she admitted to having limited Cantonese proficiency and primarily using English and Tagalog in her daily life. Her S-FLCAS scores reflect a high level of anxiety. Despite her best efforts, Student 8's struggled to achieve high scores in exams, which led to increased stress. The challenges she faced in preparing for exams in Chinese contributed to her anxiety. It can be argued that the pressure to perform well in exams drives her to make more efforts in studying Chinese, despite the difficulties and apprehension.

Discussion

This study investigates how EM students in HK secondary schools, where English is the medium of instruction, make sense of their CAL anxiety and its impact on their learning experiences. Previous research has shown that these students' ethnic and cultural backgrounds, limited Chinese proficiency, and the public's stereotyped views of them create barriers to their integration into mainstream society (Francis et al., 2009; Gao et al., 2019; Gu and Patkin 2013; Gu, Mak, and Qu 2017). Moreover, studies have found that EM students are not given enough opportunities to fully utilise their multilingual and multicultural resources to support their CAL learning in the classroom (e.g. Tam and Tsang, 2023; Tsung and Gao 2012). Based on the review of the literature, it can be suggested that the challenges faced by HK's EM students in learning CAL can increase their FLA and potentially hinder their CAL learning progress. The results of this study indicate that some students, even those with high or mid-level FLA, still experience anxiety when learning CAL. These students often lack the motivation to actively improve their CAL abilities. As a result, they may adopt a passive approach to CAL learning, avoiding chances to practice and enhance their language skills. The first superordinate theme from the findings shows that while FLA can impact students' CAL learning experiences, other personal and sociocultural factors also contribute to their lack of motivation to improve CAL learning, despite experiencing FLA. These factors include (1) the difficulty of learning CAL, (2) the widespread use of English-as-a-Lingua-Franca in HK society, and (3) the washback effects of CAL exit-point assessments.

Regarding the first subordinate theme, the challenges faced by EM students in learning CAL have been well documented in existing literature (e.g. Wong, 2018a; 2020; Tam and Tsang, 2023). The interview data in this study supports previous findings that highlight EM students' unsatisfactory performance in Chinese language tests (e.g. Tsung, Zhang, and Cruickshank 2010; Wong, 2018a) and their low self-assessment of their Chinese proficiency (e.g. Ku et al., 2005; Li and Chuk 2015). This aligns with earlier studies that have reported similar outcomes for these students in the current study.

In terms of the second subordinate theme, it emphasises the tendency of EM students to prioritise the English language over Chinese, viewing English as a symbolic capital for obtaining

economic benefits (Gu and Patkin 2013). These students, perceiving themselves as more proficient English users, accentuate the dominant status of English in HK and attempt to downplay the importance of learning Chinese as a means of integrating into HK society and achieving occupational and career mobility. This perspective provides a rationale for why students with mid – or high-level FLA may lack the motivation to improve their Chinese proficiency in order to become more integrated into HK society. They view English as a more valuable asset, believing that their English proficiency can serve as a key to greater opportunities and success in their lives. Such an explanation underscores the complex relationship between language preference, proficiency, and the perceived value of different languages in the context of EM students in HK. We argue that the perceived relevance and importance of CAL in students' lives are closely linked to FLA and can contribute to the lack of motivation observed in students with high or mid-level FLA.

With regard to the third subordinate theme, it emphasises the washback effects of the CAL exit-point assessment policy implemented by the HK Education Bureau. As mentioned earlier, there is a significant gap between the standard of GCSE Chinese and the local mainstream Chinese curriculum (see section 3). Many believe that an alternative Chinese curriculum should be developed for EM students to more accurately and fairly reflect their CAL proficiency for educational and employment purposes (e.g. HK Unison 2013; Tam and Tsang, 2023). The implementation of alternative exit-point assessments has led to a short-term objective for EM students to meet the requirements of a UK-based Chinese qualification, which assesses only basic language and literacy skills. This outcome has evidently diminished students' motivation to enhance their CAL skills, even though they exhibit high or mid-level FLA in their pursuit of learning CAL. As a consequence, this situation arguably contradicts the government's long-term objective of facilitating better integration of EM students into HK society by equipping them with satisfactory Cantonese and written Chinese proficiency.

The second superordinate theme highlights that some EM students are able to transform their FLA into motivation for enhancing their Chinese proficiency. Two subordinate themes provide insights into the factors that contribute to this transformation: (1) students' willingness to learn and (2) the washback effect of school-based CAL assessments. The ability of students to convert FLA into motivation signifies a constructive change in their mindset and attitude towards CAL learning. By reframing anxiety as a driving force for improvement, students demonstrate the potential for FLA to serve as a catalyst for positive transformation in CAL learning.

Regarding the first subordinate theme, it reveals students' intrinsic motivation to improve their Chinese proficiency. This finding supports Yan and Horwitz's (2008) argument that students' anxiety and motivation interact with each other, and both factors are perceived to affect L2 learning. In this case, the students' willingness to learn and their intrinsic desire to improve their CAL skills help them channel their anxiety into a productive force that drives their learning process.

In relation to the second subordinate theme, it illustrates the dual impact of the washback effect of school-based CAL assessments on heightening students' anxiety while concurrently motivating them to improve their CAL proficiency. This subordinate theme is connected to the previous subordinate theme on the washback effect of the CAL exit-point assessment policy, emphasising the significant role of CAL assessments in shaping students' motivation towards CAL learning. The findings of the study have illustrated that school-based CAL assessments for Year 7 students can act as both a source of anxiety and a motivation booster for EM students. On the one hand, the pressure to perform well in these assessments and achieve promotion to the next academic level may increase students' anxiety levels, particularly if they perceive their CAL proficiency as inadequate. On the other hand, the assessments can serve as a reminder of the importance and relevance of mastering Chinese in their academic career, given that Chinese is a compulsory subject in the school curriculum and is a crucial criterion for advancing to the next level. This realisation further motivates students to strive for better performance in their pursuit of CAL learning.

The findings of this study challenge the perspective that FLA alone is solely responsible for negative effects on students' L2 learning processes (e.g. Chou; 2022; Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope 1986;

Tsui and Cheng 2022). These findings underscore the existence of a complex network of learning factors in which FLA operates (De Costa 2015; Yan and Horwitz 2008). While FLA can indeed influence students' L2 learning experiences and potentially reduce L2 users' motivation in learning the L2 (e.g. Liu and Jackson 2008), other personal and sociocultural factors, such as students' motivation to learn CAL, the prevalence of English-as-a-Lingua-Franca in society, and the impact of examination policies, also contribute significantly to CAL learning processes. The findings support the claims of several qualitative studies, which illustrate that FLA is not a static trait but rather a dynamic and social phenomenon (e.g. Saghafi et al., 2017; Dryden, Tankosic, and Dovchin 2021). Although the findings of this study cannot be generalised to all CAL learning contexts, this study provides empirical evidence illustrating various factors related to EM students' FLA within the interaction of student and contextual factors, instead of making generalisable predictions regarding the effects of students' FLA on CAL learning. A larger comparative case study that investigates EM students from various educational settings, including mainstream local schools in HK, could enhance our comprehension of how to tackle the concerns emphasised by this research.

Pedagogically, the findings can allow educators to consider variables collectively rather than studying them separately, in order to determine the processes by which individual and contextual variables affect students' levels of FLA. We argue that there is a need for teachers and researchers to attend to the interplay between other sociocultural factors and FLA when understanding EM students' CAL learning behaviours. By recognising the complexity and interplay of these factors, educators can develop more targeted and effective strategies for supporting EM students in their CAL learning journey, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and equitable learning environment. It is recommended that CAL teachers incorporate translanguaging as a scaffolding strategy to facilitate students' CAL learning and acknowledge the diverse linguistic, multimodal, and sociocultural knowledge of EM students (Tai 2023a; 2023b). Implementing translanguaging in the CAL classroom enables both teachers and students to utilise their varied linguistic and multimodal resources, such as body language, eye gaze, visual images, or objects, to enhance their meaning-making processes (Garcia and Li 2014; Tai 2022; Tai, 2024). It can be argued that creating a safe translanguaging space in CAL classrooms can potentially equalise the hierarchy of named languages in the CAL classrooms, relieve EM students' anxiety in learning CAL and create an inclusive learning environment for all students.

In regard to the implications for CAL policy development, we argue that it is imperative for the government to carefully revise the existing policy regarding alternative exit-point assessments in order to facilitate the integration of EM students into HK society. This policy condition serves as a significant factor contributing to the lack of motivation among students to enhance their CAL skills, despite displaying high or mid-level anxiety towards learning CAL. By addressing this issue, the government can effectively work towards the long-term objective of transitioning EM students into mainstream Chinese classes, thereby fostering greater integration and social cohesion.

Conclusion

This study has examined the experiences of EM students in HK secondary schools with English-medium instruction, focusing on their perceptions of how FLA influences their learning of CAL. The findings highlight that while FLA can influence EM students' CAL learning, personal and sociocultural factors also play a significant role in shaping their motivation to learn CAL. These factors include the perceived difficulty of CAL, the dominance of English in HK society, and the effects of assessment policies. Interestingly, some students can transform their FLA into motivation for enhancing their Chinese proficiency, demonstrating the potential for anxiety to act as a catalyst for positive change. The findings emphasise the need for educators and policymakers to consider the interplay of these factors when developing strategies to support EM students in their CAL learning journey. By doing so, they can foster a more inclusive and equitable learning environment and promote better integration of EM students into HK society.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was supported by Early Career Scheme, Research Grants Council of Hong Kong, University Grants Committee [grant number 27616923].

References

- Ai, D., J. Stelma, and A. Baratta. 2022. "The Multilingual Lived Experience of Mongol-Chinese in China." *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*. Advance online publication
- Babbie, E. R. 2020. *The Practice of Social Research*. Boston, MA: Cengage AU.
- Botes, E., L. van der Westhuizen, J. M. Dewaele, P. MacIntyre, and S. Greiff. 2022. "Validating the Short-Form Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale." *Applied Linguistics*. Advance online publication
- Bourdieu, P. 1991. *Language and Symbolic Power*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Census and Statistics Department. 2017. *2016 Population by-Census: Summary Results*. Hong Kong: Census and Statistics Department. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.
- Choi, P. K. 2003. "The Best Students Will Learn English?: Ultra-Utilitarianism and Linguistic Imperialism in Education in Post-1997 Hong Kong." *Journal of Education Policy* 18 (6): 673–694. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0268093032000145917>.
- Chou, M. H. 2022. "Investigating the Mediating Role of Foreign Language Anxiety in Students' Task Goal Orientations, Perceived Communication Competence, English Ability, and Willingness to Communicate in EMI Classrooms." *English Teaching & Learning* 46: 235–254.
- Daubney, M., J.-M. Dewaele, and C. Gkonou. 2017. "Introduction." In *New Insights Into Language Anxiety: Theory, Research and Educational Implications*. *Multilingual Matters*, edited by C. Gkonou, M. Daubney, and J.-M. Dewaele, 1–10. Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- De Costa, P. L. 2015. "Reenvisioning Language Anxiety in the Globalized Classroom. Through a Social Imaginary Lens." *Language Learning* 65 (3): 504–532. <https://doi.org/10.1111/lang.12121>.
- Dewaele, J. M. 2007. "The Effect of Multilingualism and Socio-Situational Factors on Communicative Anxiety and Foreign Language Anxiety of Mature Language Learners." *International Journal of Bilingualism* 11 (4): 391–409. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13670069070110040301>.
- Dörnyei, Z. 2007. *Research Methods in Applied Linguistics: Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Methodologies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dovchin, S. 2021. "Translanguaging, Emotionality, and English as a Second Language Immigrants: Mongolian Background Women in Australia." *TESOL Quarterly* 55 (3): 839–865. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.3015>.
- Dryden, S., A. Tankosic, and S. Dovchin. 2021. "Foreign Language Anxiety and Translanguaging as an Emotional Safe Space: Migrant English as a Foreign Language Learners in Australia." *System* 101: 102593. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2021.102593>.
- Francis, B., L. Archer, and A. Mau. 2009. "Language as Capital, or Language as Identity? Chinese Complementary School Pupils' Perspectives on the Purposes and Benefits of Complementary Schools." *British Educational Research Journal* 35: 519–538.
- Ganschow, L., and R. Sparks. 1996. "Anxiety About Foreign Language Learning among High School Women." *The Modern Language Journal* 80 (2): 199–212. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.1996.tb01160.x>.
- Gao, F., C. Lai, and C. Halse. 2019. "Belonging Beyond the Deficit Label: The Experiences of 'non-Chinese speaking' Minority Students in Hong Kong." *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 40 (3): 186–197.
- Garcia, O., and W. Li. 2014. *Translanguaging: Language, Bilingualism and Education*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gu, M., B. Mak, and X. Qu. 2017. "Ethnic Minority Students from South Asia in Hong Kong: Language Ideologies and Discursive Identity Construction." *Asia Pacific Journal of Education* 37 (3): 360–374. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02188791.2017.1296814>.
- Gu, M., and J. Patkin. 2013. "Heritage and Identity: Ethnic Minority Students from South Asia in Hong Kong." *Linguistics and Education* 24 (2): 131–141. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2012.12.008>.
- Gundarina, O., and J. Simpson. 2021. "A Monolingual Approach in an English Primary School: Practices and Implications." *Language and Education*. Advance online publication
- Hong Kong Unison. 2013. Why Do We Need a "Chinese as a Second Language" Curriculum for Ethnic Minority Students? <http://www.unison.org.hk/DocumentDownload/infographics-CSL-English.pdf>.
- Horwitz, E. K. 2010. "Foreign and Second Language Anxiety." *Language Teaching* 43 (2): 154–167. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S026144480999036X>.

- Horwitz, E. K., M. B. Horwitz, and J. Cope. 1986. "Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety." *The Modern Language Journal* 70 (2): 125–132. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.1986.tb05256.x>.
- Hue, M. T. 2010. "Educational Planning for School Guidance: Teachers' Narratives of the Diverse Needs of Ethnic Minority Students in Hong Kong Secondary Schools." *Educational Planning* 19: 34–45.
- Jiang, Y., and J.-M. Dewaele. 2019. "Language Anxiety in Chinese Dialects and Putonghua among College Students in Mainland China: The Effects of Sociobiographical and Linguistic Variables." *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 40 (4): 289–303. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2018.1515213>.
- Ku, H. B., K. W. Chan, and K. K. Sandhu. 2005. *A Research Report on the Education of South Asian Ethnic Minority Groups in Hong Kong*. Hong Kong: Centre for Social Policy Studies, Department of Applied Social Sciences, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University and Unison Hong Kong.
- Lai, C., and C. P. Tai. 2021. "Types of Social Media Activities and Hong Kong South and Southeast Asians Youth's Chinese Language Learning Motivation." *System* 97: 102432. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2020.102432>.
- Li, D. 2017. "Writing Chinese: A Challenge for Hong Kong Chinese and Ethnic Minorities." In *The Tyranny of Writing*, edited by K. Juffermans, and C. Weth, 149–163. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Li, D., and J. Chuk. 2015. "South Asian Students' Needs for Cantonese and Written Chinese in Hong Kong: A Linguistic Study." *International Journal of Multilingualism* 12 (2): 210–224. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14790718.2015.1009375>.
- Liu, M., and J. Jackson. 2008. "An Exploration of Chinese EFL Learners' Unwillingness to Communicate and Foreign Language Anxiety." *The Modern Language Journal* 92 (1): 71–86. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2008.00687.x>.
- MacIntyre, P. D. 2007. "Willingness to Communicate in the Second Language: Understanding the Decision to Speak as a Volitional Process." *The Modern Language Journal* 91 (4): 564–576. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2007.00623.x>.
- Saghafi, K., S. M. R. Adel, and G. Zareian. 2017. "An Ecological Study of Foreign Language Writing Anxiety in English as a Foreign Language Classroom." *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research* 46: 424–440.
- Smith, J. A., P. Flowers, and M. Larkin. 2013. *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method, and Research*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Tai, K. W. H. 2022. "Translanguaging as Inclusive Pedagogical Practices in English Medium Instruction Science and Mathematics Classrooms for Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Students." *Research in Science Education* 52 (3): 975–1012. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11165-021-10018-6>.
- Tai, K. W. H. 2023a. *Multimodal Conversation Analysis and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: A Methodological Framework for Researching Translanguaging in Multilingual Classrooms*. London: Routledge.
- Tai, K. W. H. 2023b. "Documenting Students' Conceptual Understanding of Second Language Knowledge: A Translanguaging Analysis of Classroom Interactions in a Primary English as a Second Language Classroom for Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Students." *Applied Linguistics Review*. Epub ahead of Print.
- Tai, K. W. H. 2024. "Transcending the Boundaries of Mode in Online Language Teaching: A Translanguaging Perspective on ESL Teachers' Synchronous Small Group Online Tutorials." *System*. Epub ahead of Print. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2023.103185>
- Tam, H. W., and S. C. S. Tsang. 2023. "Towards a Reconceptualisation of the Cantonese Lexicon in Contemporary Hong Kong: Classificatory Possibilities and Their Implications for the Local Chinese-as-an-Additional-Language Curriculum." *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 26 (4): 428–456. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2022.2116267>.
- Tenzer, H., M. Pudelko, and A. W. Harzing. 2014. "The Impact of Language Barriers on Trust Formation in Multinational Teams." *Journal of International Business Studies* 45 (5): 508–535. <https://doi.org/10.1057/jibs.2013.64>.
- Tsang, S. 2021. "An Exploratory Study of Chinese-as-an-Additional-Language Teachers' Agency in Post-1997 Hong Kong: An Ecological Perspective." *Current Issues in Language Planning* 22 (1-2): 19–40. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14664208.2020.1725331>.
- Tsui, A. B. M., and Y. S. Cheng. 2022. "Foreign Language Anxiety and English Medium Instruction Classrooms: An Introduction." *English Teaching & Learning* 46 (3): 203–212. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42321-022-00122-9>.
- Tsung, L., and F. Gao. 2012. "What Accounts for the Underachievement of South Asians in Hong Kong? The Voices of Pakistani and Nepalese Parents." *Educational Research* 54 (1): 51–63. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131881.2012.658199>.
- Tsung, L., Q. Zhang, and K. Cruickshank. 2010. "Access to Majority Language and Educational Outcomes: South Asian Background Students in Postcolonial Hong Kong." *Diaspora, Indigenous, and Minority Education* 4 (1): 17–32. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15595690903442256>.
- Wong, Y. K. 2018a. "Exploring the Reading–Writing Relationship in Young Chinese Language Learners' Sentence Writing." *Reading and Writing* 31: 945–964. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11145-018-9820-2>.
- Wong, Y. K. 2018b. "Structural Relationships Between Second-Language Future Self-Image and the Reading Achievement of Young Chinese Language Learners in Hong Kong." *System* 72: 201–214. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2017.12.003>.

- Wong, Y. K. 2020. "Effects of Language Proficiency on L2 Motivational Selves: A Study of Young Chinese Language Learners." *System* 88: 102181.
- Xing, Z. J. 2006. *Teaching and Learning Chinese as a Foreign Language: A Pedagogical Grammar*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Yan, J. X., and E. Horwitz. 2008. "Learners' Perceptions of how Anxiety Interacts with Personal and Instructional Factors to Influence Their Achievement in English: A Qualitative Analysis of EFL Learners in China." *Language Learning* 58 (1): 151–183. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9922.2007.00437.x>.

Appendix: Student Questionnaire

Part 1: Students' Demographic Information

Name: Age:

Ethnicity: (E.g. Chinese and/or Indian)

Place of Birth:

How long have you been living in Hong Kong?: _____ years

What languages do you know?

Please write 1 for your First language, and 2 for your Second language in the box:

- Bengali (বাংলা) Bhojpuri (भोजपुरी) Cebuano (Bisaya) English Hindi
 Indonesian Maithili (मैथिली) Marathi (मराठी) Nepali Pashto (پښتو) Punjabi Sindhi (سنڌي)
 Tagalog Telugu (తెలుగు) Thai Tharu (थारु) Urdu Cantonese Mandarin Other:

Part 2: Adapted from the Short-Form Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (Botes et al. 2022)

5-point Likert Scale (SA = strongly agree; A = agree; N = neither agree nor disagree; D = disagree)

- (1) Even if I am well prepared for Chinese class, I feel anxious about it.
- (2) I always feel that the other students speak Chinese better than I do.
- (3) I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in Chinese class.
- (4) I do not worry about making mistakes in Chinese class. (Reverse coded)
- (5) I feel confident when I speak in Chinese class. (Reverse coded)
- (6) I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my Chinese class.
- (7) I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in Chinese class.
- (8) It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my Chinese class.