**Cultural Identity, language policy, and educational access: A cross-cultural competition between the UK and HongKong**

**Abstract**

**Purpose-** The paper aims to examine the process of accessing education through cultural identity and language policy by making a competition of two distinct regions, Hong Kong and the United Kingdom. It uses a systematic literature review to evaluate the factors and understand the effectiveness of language policy in driving educational outcomes and establishing cultural identity.

**Method-** The paper collected relevant journals through different electronic databases like Emerald Insight, Wiley Online Library, Science Direct (Elsevier), SAGE Journals, and Scopus. A PRISMA method was applied for proper screening of 3175 literature and identified the most relevant ten journals from the last five years.

**Findings-** Secondary information was collected and it is represented in a tabular form to know the ideologies of diverse authors. The results draw a thematic analysis to categorise ideas to know the outcome of language policies, role of education in building cultural identity with evaluating the interplay of education and society by focusing on the UK and Hong Kong.

**Conclusion-** The study has limitations for regarding quantitative information and the knowledge gained from participants. A future study should focus on mixed methods with taking different language journals for improved ideas. The paper explained the use of language policy and its outcome in education and preserving cultural values. In diverse settings, both the UK and Hong Kong are focused on building an inclusive environment to value diverse cultures.

**Keywords-** Educational access, Cultural Identity, Language Policies, Systematic Literature Review.

# Introduction

## 1.1. Background and aim of the study

In shaping the trajectory of nations, language policy, cultural identity, and educational access are the three correlated factors. The study aims to evaluate how educational access can be achieved through language policy and cultural identity by making a comparison of two regions, the United Kingdom and Hong Kong. Both of the regions have different situations, and educational inequalities are common due to ongoing political conflicts, multicultural population, and colonial legacies. Razmjoo Moghadam and Barani (2025) stated that, worldwide dominance of English has a threatening effect on marginalized and local languages that results in transforming cultural identities, social inequalities, and evoking colonialism and educational neo-imperialism. The policies are deeply connected with cultural identity, and the governments are aware of developing inclusive policies for respective social cohesion and linguistic diversity. Language policies have a key impact on the educational system and generate social stratification by considering diverse cultures.

## 1.2. Research Questions

RQ1: What is the impact of language policies on getting access to educational opportunities for students in the UK and Hong Kong?

RQ2: What is the role of language policies in improving social stratification and mobility?

RQ3: How does educational access shape the identity of students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds in the UK and Hong Kong?

## 1.3. Significance of the study

The educational system in the UK and Hong Kong serves as a significant avenue to access opportunities with influence cultural identity. Language policy and cultural identity in the UK make a strong impact on accepting multiculturalism and protecting national cohesion. It is observed that the stakeholders have a positive attitude toward using dominant languages to complement English-only instruction, and they are unwilling to support minority languages (Sah & Kubota, 2022). It emphasizes that English takes a dominant position, and there is a growing recognition of diversity in languages. The government initiative promotes multicultural education and community language by focusing on inclusive practices. Besides, language policies in Hong Kong reflect border struggles over governance, identity, and autonomy. The dimension of educational access is relevant in the two contexts, and it is related to cultural identity and language policies.

# Literature Review

## 2.1. Relationship between language policy and the establishment of cultural identity

Language policies hold significant value by carrying social norms and histories of the community. In building cultural identity, the role of language policies is notable for different societies, including postcolonial Hong Kong and the multilingual United Kingdom. The policies have an impact on access to education and transforming and preserving identities for various social classes. The colonial era imposed a domination of the English language, with diminishing Chinese language, which severely affected the cultural identity. In 1997, a reform of the language policy reflected a transformation on the education system due to social injustice of ethnic minorities for a long-time (Wang, 2021). This imposition built a new linguistic landscape by creating a tool for social status and identity. The UK is the abode of various regional languages like Irish, Scottish, with other community and migrant languages for its imperial and immigration history. Inclusive language policies are highlighted for supporting a multicultural society. 'Welsh Language Act 1993' and subsequent regulations ensure the use of both Welsh and English in public life (UK Public General Acts, 2025). It establishes a pride and distinct identity for the Welsh speakers. In Hong Kong, language has become a battleground in the discussion of education politics and identity. Shift of language policy for promoting Putonghua raises public concern as they acknowledge Cantonese as a sign of resistance, heritage, and local identity. Li (2022) states that the people of Hong Kong strongly value Cantonese heritage, and they are upset about Cantonese culture; opera would be imperilled by their use of Putonghua. Language policy in Hong Kong is highly influenced by the political situation. The decisions and instruction policies of language shape the cultural identity of the people in these regions.

## 2.2. Educational access in shaping cultural identity

In shaping collective and individual identity, education is the central point, and access to education includes inclusivity, quality, and availability. It builds the cultural identity irrespective of historical narrative, social roles, and languages. As a multilingual and multicultural country, the UK makes a place for diverse population immigrant communities, ethnic minorities with white British. Eden et al. (2024) claim that identifying systematic inequalities, making community partnerships, and adopting inclusive practices and diverse perspectives, promoting equity and cultural diversity in education, is important. In different urban areas of the UK, like Birmingham, Manchester, and London, there is a vast presence of immigrant populations with various languages. Students are facing different problems and linguistic assimilation due to the dominance of English, which leads them to abandon their native languages, and it affects their cultural identity. Besides, Welsh-medium school supports Welsh speakers to live their lives by engaging in linguistic networks (Hodges, 2024). It considers cultural practices and local history to instil a pride in their culture and heritage while building a sense of belonging. Eurocentric white perspective that dominated the curriculum still makes the students from ethnic minority backgrounds feel excluded.

In Hong Kong, the broader political scenario is connected with cultural identity and educational access. The region holds a distinct identity with blending British colonial influences, Cantonese language, and modern traditions of China. Language-in-education policies have significantly transformed after the 1997 handover from the United Kingdom, and it became a 'special administrative region of China' (Liu, 2024). It introduces 'biliteracy and trilingual policy' by focusing on Chinese and English as written and Mandarin, English, and Cantonese as spoken languages (Liu, 2024). The students from non-native languages face pedagogical and cultural challenges by diminish their home culture. According to Liu (2022), the implementation of 'National Security' emphasizes the 'a sense of Chinese Identity' and in 2001, the Council of Curriculum Development enacted 'Learning to Learn—The Way of Curriculum Development' for highlighting the cultivation of national identity for students through Chinese cultural elements. The focus on Chinese patriotism is condemned by the educators as it limits ideological diversity and restricts educational access. Besides, socio-economic status also reflects this educational access that makes the elite choose English-medium while the other groups use Mandarin-medium, which makes a fragmented identity. However, in the multicultural setting, the UK is focused on developing inclusive practices, and Hong Kong is struggling for cultural autonomy in education to develop cultural identity.

## 2.3. Cross-cultural comparison between the UK and Hong Kong

In the unique context of the UK and Hong Kong, cultural elements are a driving force to engage individuals and build their identity, using languages and perceiving the educational system. A complex cultural mosaic is established in the UK due to waves of immigration, and it is layered with Irish, Welsh, Scottish, and English. The diversity creates numerous problems and opportunities for inclusive identity in society and educational scenarios. The colonial history shaped the hybrid cultural identity of Hong Kong, with a tension between Chinese and local Hong Kong culture. MacLehose reforms made a significant impact on building the cultural identity of the region by advancing the infrastructural development and introducing civilized concepts with new forms of social welfare, political participation, and education (Sio, 2023). It helps to create community pride and local identity by distinguishing the region from mainland China and its colonial past. In the UK, inclusive education is promoted by evaluating and understanding teaching practices with the responsibility of teachers (Schuelka, 2018). The environment highly values multiculturalism, with accommodating different learners. Thus, the UK is focused on managing diversity, and Hong Kong emerges to establish values and identity through language and educational choices.

## 2.4. Research Gap

The association of cultural identity, language policy, and educational access is an under-researched area. Studies so far have focused on the cultural identity and language policies in different contexts. Besides, most of the studies mainly highlighted the Western culture and educational settings, ignoring the transformation and shifts of language in Hong Kong that have a deeper impact on education and establishing cultural identity. There is a gap in discussing the importance of the large diasporic community of Hong Kong that establishes a broad culture and deep connection with the global community (Manning, 2023). The studies hardly examine the comparison of two regions in understanding the impact of language policy on gaining educational access and shaping cultural identity. Therefore, making the comparison and connecting the factors would be significant to know the cultural situation and educational environment of these two distinct regions.

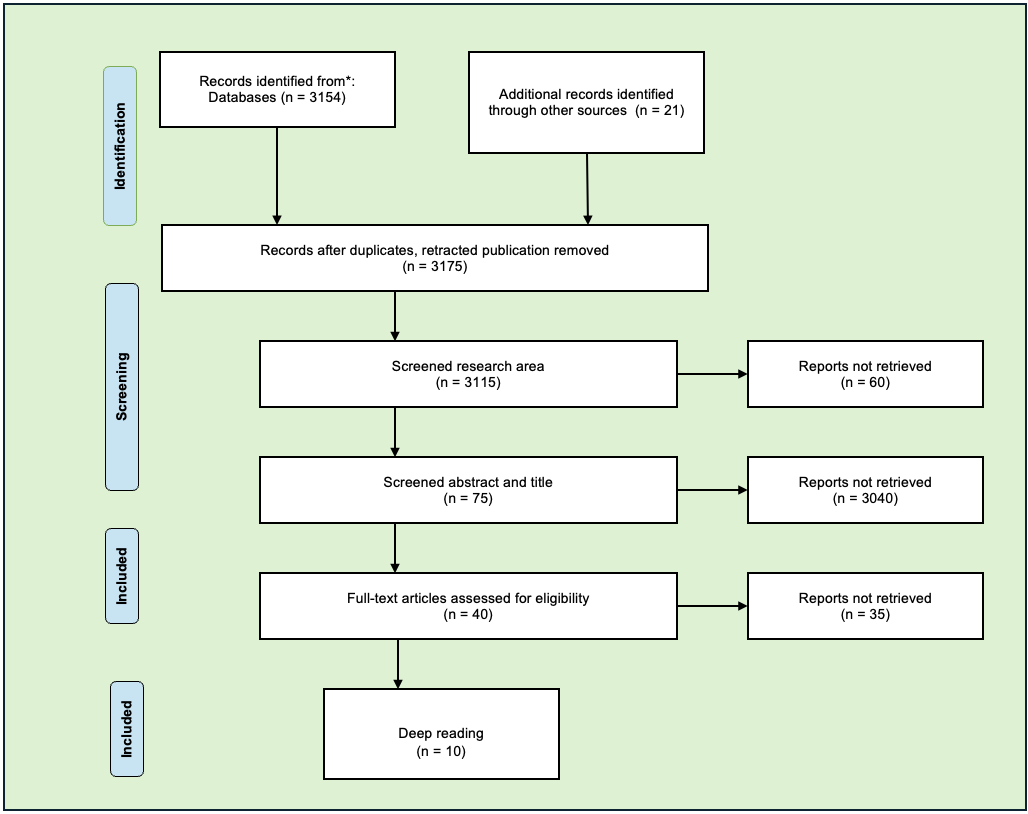
# Methodology

## 3.1. Research Design

In this research to understand the correlated factors of language policy, cultural identity, and educational access, a qualitative design was considered. As opined by Muzari et al. (2022), it is beneficial for deeply gathering and analysing individualistic data. A systematic literature review is considered to gather information regarding the three factors by knowing the base objectives and ignoring irrelevant information. In this study, the SLR focused on understanding how educational access can be gained through language policy and cultural identity. It is key to answer research questions by taking key insights about the subject (Van Dinter et al., 2021). The paper adopts thematic analysis for gathering information through the proper selection of articles. It conceptualizes the themes as systematic patterns to make a concrete idea and concept with shared meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2024). The analysis assists in categorising information by collecting ideas from relevant journals. The paper uses a descriptive way to discuss the impact of education and society, the role of language policies in getting educational access, with a comparison of two distinct settings. Thus, SLR with proper thematic discussion offers in-depth knowledge to answer questions and formulate ideas.

## 3.2. Data Collection

The data were collected from online sources using relevant phrases and keywords to gather accurate and specific knowledge about cross-cultural comparison. In ensuring quality, the most updated and peer-reviewed English journals are considered to document actual knowledge. The data were taken after a specific review and identification process by considering the literature available till March 2025. In terms of retrieval, the researchers take information from common databases like Wiley Online Library, Scopus, ScienceDirect (Elsevier), SAGE Journals, and Emerald Insight. These databases offer ample ideas from different literature to gain knowledge about the subject. The retrieval way is using keywords like 'cross-cultural competition between the UK and Hong Kong', 'language policy impact on educational access', and 'educational access shaping cultural identity'. Initially, 3175 literatures were collected, and then after removing retracted and duplicate pieces, it came to 3115 literatures. An inclusion and screening criterion has been followed to consider the actual number of the literature. It is mainly concerned with higher education, cross-cultural aspects, language policy, educational access, and cultural identity. It also considered current information to meet the validity of the study. The selected literature is full text, and after this review, ten valid literatures were taken. This screening process is clearly represented in Figure 1.



### Figure 1: PRISMA flow diagram for collecting data

# Results

The main focus of the SLR is to know the interconnection of language policy, educational access, and cultural identity while focusing on Hong Kong and the UK to make comparisons. The analysis was written with ten articles. The literature was carefully reviewed to explore information and understand the relationship between these factors. To make a comparative study and basic understanding of the subject, Table 1 is presented by categorising four sections: 'author, sample, methodology, and Cultural identity, language policy, and educational access'.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Author** | **Sample** | **Methodology** | **Cultural identity, language policy, and educational access** |
| Danping Wag and Linda Tsung | 38 empirical studies | Qualitative research and Thematic analysis | Decolonisation of the education system of Hong Kong to reach social justice and educational equality, focusing on ethnic minorities. |
| Akmaral Karabay and Naureen Durrani | 1522 publications in the Scopus database | Comprehensive bibliometric analysis | Emergence of EMI in education and its dominance in the curriculum |
| Jonas R. Kunst | 37 studies | Meta analysis | Considering minority and immigrant cultures by the majority groups, societal changes, and cultural orientation. |
| Xiao Lan Curdt-Christiansen, Li Wei, and Zhu Hua | A questionnaire involving 470 transnational families in the UK. | Descriptive analysis using interview data | Transformation of socio-cultural context impacts 'family language policy' (FLP), Social values, migration trajectories, linguistic loyalty, and sociolinguistic policing in schools shapes the decisions of families about using and preserving language. |
| Androula Yiakoumetti | British-born Chinese students and teachers of two Chinese community schools in Cambridgeshire and Oxfordshire | Qualitative analysis | Proper employment of English for enhancing Mandarin learning, Problems of teachers in explaining Mandarin to low proficiency levels of students. Trained heritage-language teachers are required to leverage the linguistic repertoires of students. |
| Lucía Torres-Zaragoza, Vicente Llorent-Bedmar | 24 articles | Systematic Review and Meta Analysis | Limited support, discrimination, and cultural issues are the main barriers to Western schools for Muslim students. Social and academic inclusion is hindered by a lack of inclusiveness and language difficulties that affect educational outcomes. |
| Edward Brooks, Samson Tse, Jessie Yue Wright, and Emily Burdett | 62 students with a control group of 29 students | Exploratory, quasi-experimental longitudinal study, Quantitative (psychometric) and qualitative survey | Universities and leadership play crucial roles in shaping society through intellectual understanding, Higher education supports developing leadership to represent society. |
| Leonie Rowan, Terri Bourke, Lyra L'Estrange, Jo Lunn Brownlee, Mary Ryan, Sue Walker, and Peter Churchward | 209 peer-reviewed journals | Qualitative analysis | Diversity teaching, problems in teaching diverse learners, and preparedness of teaching to adjust to intersecting and multiple differences. |
| Sumie Chan and Noble Lo | 533 scholarly articles | Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis | Importance of knowing cultural nuances to meet diverse needs of students, cultural values about social expectations, and educational practice shape the attitude of students. |
| Noble Po-kan Lo, Pauline A. M. Bremner, and Katrina E. Forbes-McKay | 201 students and staff | Both qualitative and quantitative analysis | Societal expectations and career advancement influence the Hong Kong students, while intrinsic interest and personal development drive the UK students. |

#### Table 1: Summary of the selected literature

# Discussion

## 5.1. Effectiveness of language policies for developing cultural identity

In constructing identity and valuing culture, language policies are of paramount importance. In Hong Kong and the United Kingdom, the language policies develop a deeper social system to preserve cultural values. Colonial past deeply influenced the language policy of Hong Kong, and the recent shift to Mandarin raised concerns among the people about undermining their cultural identity by ignoring Cantonese. Advocacy groups take part to control the scenario by reducing the threat of a limited space for Cantonese in education and public spaces. Wang and Tsung (2022) proposes a theory-based multilingual policy to recognise cultural and linguistic repertoires of students while reflecting the social reality of Hong Kong. Coexistence of three languages creates linguistic complexities with the dominance of English and Cantonese as international and prestige languages, resulting in linguistic duality. The multilingual language policies in education assist in developing cultural hybridity by accepting real-life practices to shape the broader linguistic landscape of the country. The UK is also concerned about developing inclusive literature to support diverse citizens in the country. It is observed that language loss, language death, and language changes are common in communities and families in the UK (Curdt-Christiansen et al., 2023). Linguistic loyalty, social values, and policies in the school curriculum led the family to make decisions on language use and preserving their culture. Complementary schools provide core instruction to make community-driven solutions for preserving culture and heritage languages in the UK. These language schools ignore the useless thoughts of 'monolingual majority language' and serve necessary education (Yiakoumetti, 2022). The school creates a space for language maintenance and cultural heritage by prioritising minority languages. It considers bilingualism as a key tool to adjust to linguistic diversity. Thus, in preserving cultural values, balancing an inclusive environment, effective language policies are essential to build identity.

## 5.2. Education as a key medium of cultural resistance

Education is considered a significant tool for cultural resistance, control, and negotiation in different regions. It has become a battleground to challenge diverse ideologies and thoughts regarding globalization or colonialism. It is a factor of cultural resistance that makes students and individuals reserve their cultural identities and values. Emergence of 'English medium instruction' creates a multifaceted and complex landscape in higher education (Karabay & Durrani, 2024). In the UK and Hong Kong, English takes a dominant position that diminishes other languages. The citizens of Hong Kong take education as a battleground for establishing cultural autonomy and identity. In the UK, minority communities, immigrant groups consider education to value their cultural experiences and histories by challenging mainstream culture. Mutual respect and deep engagement make genuine adaptation of culture that leads the majority groups to understand cultural elements supporting the minority group to develop 'a framework of equality' (Kunst, 2025). Educators and activists are initiating different campaigns for a decolonized and inclusive curriculum by aligning with the needs of diverse communities. The activities are concerned with challenging Eurocentric narratives by focusing on the experiences and contributions of marginalised communities. According to Torres-Zaragoza and Llorent-Bedmar (2024), effective development of policies is essential for supporting migrant students by engaging teaching staff through the facilitation of personal, material, physical, and economic resources. The migrant students in Western countries face language issues and barriers that severely affect their cultural values and identity. In pedagogical innovation, curriculum reform, education advocates for an inclusive environment to create identity.

## 5.3. Interplay of education and society in the UK and Hong Kong

In establishing societal structure, values, and norms, education is the main force in different contexts, including Hong Kong and the United Kingdom. Under different political and historical circumstances, society and the educational system have evolved consistently. According to Brooks et al. (2024), in this challenging time, higher education needs to support the new leaders through leadership development, especially by promoting responsibilities in educating students for constructing a better society. Responsible leadership is able to establish an inclusive environment by considering different social values and cultural norms to promote equality. Social priorities and values are reflected in the education system of the UK to maintain multiculturalism. Clear leadership of educators assists future teachers in implementing and conceptualizing educational interventions to develop new educational infrastructure in the future for creating an opportunity to success for all learners (Rowan et al., 2024). The schools are implementing a cultural curriculum by considering different backgrounds and cultures. The inadequate representation of culture in the curriculum still remains, which creates barriers for foreign learners to establish their cultural identity. Another study about the gamification strategies in learning found that understanding cultural nuances is necessary to respond to the different needs of learners in diverse educational settings (Chan & Lo, 2024). Cultural context in Hong Kong effectively influences the educational outcome of students. The educators are responsible for designing the curriculum to meet diverse needs, to create positive behaviour in students to reach academic excellence. It is also observed that career development and academic attainment are prioritised by the students of Hong Kong, and it influences them to adopt independent learning outside the classroom (Lo et al., 2024). Students have different mindsets about education, and it creates a deeper impact on their behaviour and ways to carry societal values, norms, and build cultural identity. Moreover, education and societal structures are interrelated in both the contexts of the UK and Hong Kong.

# Conclusion

## 6.1. Limitations and future research areas

The paper has some limitations in examining the interplay of the factors in two distinct scenarios. Only peer-reviewed literature is taken, and the study only focuses on the literature on cultural identity, education, and language policy to compare the settings of the UK and Hong Kong. There is a possibility of missing other unpublished or unavailable studies of other languages. Another major limitation is the lack of quantitative information that gathers responses from participants. However, further research could highlight a mixed method using both quantitative and qualitative information, and consider the studies on different languages to represent in-depth ideas.

## 6.2. Key findings

In diverse contexts, language policies influence the opportunities for education for students and establish social identities. The paper makes a broader discussion to examine the factors by comparing two distinct contexts, the UK and Hong Kong. A rigid educational structure is reflected in the UK, while British colonial rule influences the educational system of Hong Kong. In the UK, prestigious universities and elite schools were reserved for students from privileged society. At the time of British Colonial rule, the education system was designed in Hong Kong by prioritizing academic examination and English medium instruction. Colonial Government and new liberal meritocracy influence education in these regions with reproducing social stratification. Identifying the needs and demands of diverse students, the regions are focused on building an inclusive educational environment by implementing language policies. The dominance of English diminishes local languages, and the people of Hong Kong focus on preserving their cultural values through language policies. It is observed that the foreign students negotiate with their cultural identity to adopt a national language and continue their education in the UK. The study collects secondary information from online databases to gather knowledge and make a comparison between countries. It presents a PRISMA framework to provide clarity of the screening process to select literature. The results extract core ideas from different authors to take their thoughts on this area. Ten articles are gathered about the effectiveness of language policy and the impact of education in establishing cultural identity. The results draw a thematic analysis to understand the effectiveness of language policy, education as a significant medium for cultural resistance, and the interplay of education and society. It gives a deeper insight into reaching objectives with detailed knowledge.

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