



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

**Internationalization of Hong Kong's
Primary School Education Curriculum in
the Intercultural Teaching Context**

Yi Tang

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Faculty of Arts and Social Science

University of Sydney

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Author's Declaration

I declare that this thesis represents my original work to the best of my knowledge and has not been submitted for any degree or other purposes. No content generated by generative AI tools has been used in the preparation of this thesis. I confirm that the intellectual content within this thesis is entirely my own, and any assistance received during its preparation, as well as all referenced sources, have been appropriately acknowledged.

This thesis adheres to the guidelines established by the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) of the University of Sydney for the ethical conduct of research.

Yi Tang

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the internationalization of education in two Hong Kong primary schools: a local school with a developing international section (School X) and an established international school (School Y). Through a comparative case study approach, the research utilizes qualitative semi-structured interviews with 18 teachers engaged in curriculum internationalization, an interview with one senior government official, classroom observations, and document analysis of curriculum frameworks, policies, and reform documents. The study investigates the motivations behind curriculum internationalization, the alignment of reforms with international narratives, and their effects on primary education. Results reveal that local schools pursue internationalization to boost regional competitiveness and adapt global trends to local values, shaped by factors such as leadership, teacher innovation, and resource limitations. School X incorporates blended learning and technology, while School Y employs project-based and inquiry-driven approaches, both promoting teacher agency, intercultural competence, and 21st-century skills such as critical thinking and collaboration. These reforms enhance primary education by aligning with global standards, though challenges like exam pressures and local expectations persist. Addressing a gap in research on primary education internationalization, this study provides practical insights for Hong Kong's educational policy and practice.

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Glossary

BTP Policy

The Biliterate and Trilingual policy (BTP) is an educational initiative in Hong Kong designed to promote language proficiency among students. Launched by the government, the BTP policy focuses on ensuring that students become proficient in Cantonese, English, and Mandarin. This policy reflects Hong Kong's unique cultural landscape and its role as a bridge between Eastern and Western societies. By integrating these languages into the curriculum, the BTP policy aims to equip students with essential communication skills and cultural awareness, preparing them for future opportunities in a globalized environment. As a result, the BTP has become a cornerstone of language education in Hong Kong's schools, influencing teaching practices and language policies across the region.

Direct Subsidy Scheme

The Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS), launched in 1991, is a public policy initiative by the Hong Kong government aimed at promoting the development of high-quality direct subsidy schools. The scheme offers students and parents an alternative to public sector schools, which include government and aided schools. Schools participating in the DSS, known as 'DSS schools', differ from aided schools in that they receive government funding based on the number of eligible students while maintaining greater autonomy. They are free to design their own curricula, set tuition fees, establish admission policies, and decide whether to join the centralized allocation system for school placements.

English Schools Foundation

The English Schools Foundation (ESF) is a statutory non-profit organization in Hong Kong, founded in 1967 under the *English Schools Foundation Ordinance* (Cap. 1117). Originally established to offer English-medium education for expatriate students, it now serves a student body where over 70% of families are Hong Kong permanent

residents. As the largest provider of English-medium international education in Hong Kong, ESF manages five secondary schools, nine primary schools, five kindergartens, two through-train schools, and a school for students with special educational needs.

HKDSE

The Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) is a public examination in Hong Kong introduced in 2012 to replace the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination (HKALE) and the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE). It plays a central role in the 3-3-4 education system, offering students qualifications for higher education or career opportunities. The HKDSE provides flexibility, allowing students to retake specific subjects the following year if they wish to improve their results. Universities consider the highest scores obtained within two consecutive years for admission purposes. Beyond Hong Kong, HKDSE results are internationally recognized. As of January 1, 2021, more than 370 universities globally, including institutions in Singapore, Japan, the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and Malaysia, accept HKDSE scores for admissions.

Hong Kong Policy Address

The Hong Kong Policy Address is an annual speech given by the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. It highlights the government's main policies, priorities, and initiatives for the coming year, addressing sectors such as economic growth, education, housing, healthcare, and social welfare. The address serves as a roadmap for governance and public service, aiming to address pressing issues and set future directions for the city's development. Typically delivered in October, it reflects both local needs and Hong Kong's role within the broader framework of One Country, Two Systems.

Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR)

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) is a distinctive region of China, created on July 1, 1997, when sovereignty was transferred from the United Kingdom to China. It operates under the One Country, Two Systems principle. This remains the case to this day: HKSAR maintains its own legal, economic, and political systems, separate from mainland China, with high degrees of autonomy in most areas except defense and foreign affairs. It has its own currency, legal framework, and immigration policies, and is a major global financial hub. This arrangement is set to last until at least 2047.

IGCSE

The International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) is a globally recognized academic qualification designed for students aged 14 to 16. Developed by Cambridge University, the IGCSE is widely accepted by universities and employers around the world. Exams are held biannually, in May/June and October/November. Cambridge Assessment International Education, headquartered in the United Kingdom, administers the IGCSE and offers its programs in numerous countries worldwide.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

As globalization advances, the education sector is adapting to the needs of a more interconnected world. Many schools and educational institutions worldwide are integrating internationalization into their core strategies, seeking to foster internationally minded students and enhance their competitive standing. Although internationalization is not an entirely new concept in higher education as Mok (2007) acknowledges, it is described in the recent literature as “a relatively new and complex educational phenomenon shaped by a blend of political, economic, sociocultural, and academic motivations” (De Wit and Altbach, 2021, p. 35). This is particularly relevant in Hong Kong, where internationalization has become central to educational development, preparing students with the competencies needed for a connected future and reinforcing the city’s unique role serving as a link between the East and the West. In addition, while the author outlines broad definitions of educational internationalization, this study defines it as the deliberate incorporation of global perspectives into Hong Kong’s primary education system, focusing on enhancing cultural awareness and pedagogical innovation alongside structural reforms. Although educational reforms in Hong Kong’s schools and curricula have been advancing incrementally over many years, it was only in the early 1990s that efforts toward administrative restructuring started to demonstrate a thorough, organized, and cohesive approach. Dimmock (2014) notes “an over-concentration on structural administrative, governmental, and managerial concerns at the expense of the cultural-symbolic and pedagogical” dimensions (p. 61). However, current scholarly discussions predominantly prioritize the internationalization of higher education, whereas investigations into the internationalization of primary education remain notably underrepresented, as evidenced by the focus of policy reforms and research agendas in Hong Kong and beyond.

In the age of globalization, the internationalization of education is seen by many countries and regions, including Hong Kong, as essential for nurturing minded individuals and driving development strategies. Through international curricula, cross-border cooperation, and exchanges, educational internationalization not only enhances students' competitiveness but also supports the economic, cultural, and research development of nations and regions. Despite Hong Kong's historical ties to the British education system, significant changes have occurred since its return to China in 1997 (Ball, 2012; Hughes & Stone, 1999; Mok & Cheung, 2011). Policy and curriculum reforms have allowed Hong Kong to integrate with mainland China's educational framework while maintaining an international outlook. For instance, the growing emphasis on Mandarin education and Chinese history highlights Hong Kong's distinct role under One Country, Two Systems, striking a balance between local identity and integration. In 1999, the Education Commission of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region launched educational reforms aimed at improving various areas of education, including the curriculum, assessment methods, and teacher training. With population growth, the demand for diverse primary schools also surged (Cheng et al., 2015; Mok, 2007; Poon, 2010).

This reform, combined with the increasing influence of mainland China on Hong Kong's economy and culture, has given rise to numerous primary schools that integrate both Eastern and Western cultural elements. Catholic, Protestant, Taoist, and Buddhist schools are among the key examples of this model (Chief Executive's 2018 Policy Address, HKSAR). These schools incorporate a multicultural perspective into their curricula, preserving traditional Eastern culture while drawing on Western educational principles. Meanwhile, the rapid advancement of internet technology has further expedited the fusion of education and culture. As Ortiz-Rajo and Finardi (2022) note, "the rapid development of information and network technology has further promoted the integration of education and culture, making internationalization a key aspect of

education modernization” (p. 44). Technological advancements have not only transformed teaching methods but also expanded opportunities for students to access international resources, helping them adapt to a connected world. Through education with an international perspective, students not only develop cross-cultural communication skills but also cultivate diverse ways of thinking, enabling them to face complex challenges on a broader stage. This process has enabled Hong Kong’s education system to strike a distinct balance between localization and internationalization, effectively equipping students for success in a multicultural society.

In this context, internationalization has evolved from a mere trend into a strategic priority for many educational institutions. De Wit (2024) critically reflects on “understanding the past and the present state of the internationalization of higher education, which in turn will have an impact on its future direction” (p. 5). Knight (2003) describes the internationalization of higher education as the “integration of various elements, including curriculum, teaching methods, faculty, research, moral education, and communication, all within the framework of international and cross-cultural education” (p. 2). This comprehensive approach emphasizes the importance of an education system that not only imparts knowledge but also fosters international competencies, cross-cultural understanding, and ethical values.

In Hong Kong, primary education has made significant strides in line with these trends. As the city embraces internationalization, it has introduced diverse curricula aimed at enhancing students’ competencies. Chan and Dimmock (2008) note that the primary goal of internationalization for Hong Kong’s case universities is naturally to become “a gateway between mainland China and the global community” (p. 193). Their research on the internationalization of education in Hong Kong introduces the concepts of the ‘internationalist’ and the ‘translocalist’ (p. 198), highlighting different perspectives on how global and local influences shape educational frameworks.

However, as Morris (2010) points out, the introduction of “international curricula has brought challenges related to curriculum goals, management, structure, and implementation” (p. 1). Despite these challenges, they have also opened new opportunities to improve educational quality and strengthen students’ competitiveness.

Since the handover in 1997, along with the implementation of the Bilingualism and Trilingualism policy, Hong Kong has witnessed a substantial population influx, resulting in a marked rise in the demand for internationalized education. This increasing demand has sparked a reconsideration of educational content and methods, with a stronger focus on incorporating international and cross-cultural elements into educational practices. As a result, successfully integrating these elements into educational practice is not only crucial in practical terms but also lays the foundation for enhancing the standardization and quality of primary education in Hong Kong. This integration seeks to ensure that primary education in Hong Kong upholds high standards during the process of internationalization, fostering the ongoing development of the education system. While much of the focus on educational internationalization tends to be directed toward universities and higher education, the role of primary education is often overlooked. By introducing internationalized teaching philosophies and practices, local primary schools can cultivate students with a broader perspective, enabling them to better adapt to future challenges in a multicultural environment. Additionally, this integration will help enhance teachers’ professional abilities and qualities, equipping them to effectively address the emerging opportunities and challenges brought by educational internationalization, ultimately promoting the comprehensive enhancement of education in Hong Kong.

Prior to Hong Kong’s handover to China in 1997, the city’s education system was heavily influenced by its colonial history, influenced by British educational models and practices. This resulted in a system that, while fostering academic rigor, often leaned

heavily on Western ideals and structures. Before 1997, Hong Kong's education system was predominantly modeled on the British system, with only a small number of schools maintaining Chinese cultural traditions (Postiglione, 2017). After the transition of sovereignty in 1997, Hong Kong's education system experienced rapid development, focusing on how to preserve Chinese culture within the framework of British education while effectively achieving educational internationalization. As a bridge between Eastern and Western cultures, Hong Kong embodies elements of both Chinese and Western traditions; therefore, the internationalization of education in Hong Kong not only benefits the local community but also plays a key role in contributing to educational reform in mainland China. Prior to the 1990s, most primary schools in Hong Kong primarily used Cantonese as the medium of instruction, with basic English taught as a supplementary subject, largely shaped by parental expectations (Government Secretariat, 1981). A small number of long-established church schools chose to adopt English as the language of instruction. As Mandarin was designated as the official language of the People's Republic of China, instruction in Mandarin was relatively limited before the 1990s (Adamson & Lai, 1997; Zhang et al., 2005). However, since the transfer of sovereignty in 1997, Hong Kong has strongly advocated for Mandarin (Adamson & Lai, 1997; Zhang et al., 2005). This initiative is primarily led by the government's Biliterate and Trilingual policy (BTP), which emphasizes that students should be proficient in Cantonese, English, and Mandarin (Education Bureau, 1997). As a result, the BTP has effectively become the language policy for schools and civil servants.

To adjust to a multilingual learning environment, educational institutions in Hong Kong have increasingly focused on hiring teachers from varied cultural backgrounds to offer cross-cultural teaching experiences. This approach aims to enhance students' language abilities and cultural literacy, while also guiding the direction of future educational development in Hong Kong. However, since 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the retention of foreign teachers, with attrition

rates reaching 16% and 18% in the 2021–22 academic year (Hong Kong Education Bureau data). In response to this challenge, the Hong Kong government has sought to improve English language teaching by launching the Native English-Speaking Teacher Program in both public primary and secondary schools during the 1998–99 and 2002–03 academic years. This initiative was designed to increase students’ exposure to English and enhance the quality of English education. Furthermore, the promotion of Mandarin within the Bilingual Trilingual Proficiency (BTP) framework reflects Hong Kong’s efforts to bridge cultural gaps and equip students with crucial abilities for a multicultural world. As a result, the growing emphasis on internationalization and cross-cultural education is anticipated to significantly influence the future direction of education in Hong Kong.

Teachers play a central role in educational internationalization by integrating diverse perspectives into their teaching and shaping students’ learning experiences. Kahn and Agnew (2017) highlight that teachers contribute significantly to educational internationalization by adopting a “new set of pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning” that emphasize creativity, critical thinking, and cross-cultural understanding (p. 56). This curriculum integration includes “setting clear objectives, designing inclusive curricula, ensuring access to diverse resources, and fostering broad thinking” (Zhou, 2016, p. 1). However, the implementation of curriculum internationalization is not without challenges; it requires sustained and deliberate efforts (Hudzik, 2013).

Bosio and de Wit (2024) highlight in their interviews that teachers are under “severe pressures”, which ultimately do not “allow for new initiatives to change the curriculum and the teaching process” (p. 6). These pressures further complicate efforts to integrate cultural perspectives into the curriculum, even though studies have shown that “cultural pluralism can promote integration at the classroom level”, underscoring the necessity of culturally relevant teaching (Schachner et al., 2016, p. 1187). In Hong Kong’s multicultural classrooms, teachers must possess the skills and sensitivity needed to

effectively engage with diverse cultural perspectives, as their role extends beyond facilitating academic achievement to fostering intercultural understanding and inclusivity.

The research also highlights that curriculum participants are “invited to explore a transformative, rather than liberal, discourse of internationalization, aimed at designing curriculum to develop” (Clifford & Montgomery, 2015, p. 52). This approach emphasizes a deeper engagement with internationalization by moving beyond surface-level frameworks to foster meaningful and impactful curriculum development. These initiatives not only expand students’ learning opportunities but also play an essential role in the wider internationalization of the education system. Lee et al. (2022) point out that “specifically, the influx of the IB into local education systems depends mainly on the presence of legality for the introduction of the IB to local schools” (p. 143). Within the framework of primary education in Hong Kong, they further argue that obtaining international accreditation is not necessarily a prerequisite for curriculum internationalization. This suggests that schools have the flexibility to explore diverse approaches to integrating international elements into their curricula, focusing on innovative teaching methodologies, culturally enriched content, and global perspectives without depending solely on formal accreditation processes. Instead, existing curricula can be reformed and enriched to incorporate broader perspectives. The success of curriculum internationalization largely depends on the involvement and support of teachers. Kahn and Agnew (2017) suggest that “just as a global classroom builds knowledge around encounters with difference, so too should an institution develop its approach to internationalization” (p. 61). To facilitate this process, teachers must have a clear understanding of what internationalization entails and how to integrate it into their teaching practices. This process of internationalization involves not only “defining and selecting the international content to be included in the syllabus but also ensuring that teachers are empowered to make informed decisions in the curriculum development process” (De Wit & Hunter, 2015, p. 58).

While obtaining international accreditation may not be the immediate goal, teacher-driven efforts to incorporate global perspectives into the curriculum can still greatly enrich students' educational experiences. The process of embracing internationalization involves not only "incorporating diverse perspectives into teaching practices but also adapting pedagogical approaches to reflect the diversity of today's world" (Kahraman & Sezer, 2017, p. 67). Furthermore, advances in technology and the accelerated dissemination of information are shaping "attitudes and behaviors towards multicultural education" (Kahraman & Sezer, 2017, p. 67). Therefore, adopting an international curriculum perspective is crucial for understanding the concept of educational internationalization. As globalization drives greater regional integration, personal mobility, and cultural exchange, the education sector must prioritize the development of international curricula, invest resources, recruit and train capable teachers, and innovate in curriculum design.

While definitions of educational internationalization may vary among scholars, there is a consensus on its core concept, which emphasizes the "inclusion of an international, intercultural, and global dimension into the curriculum and learning process" (Knight, 2004, p. 6). The success of internationalized curricula depends on well-trained teachers. Through training in internationalized curricula, teachers can enhance students' understanding of international trends and issues.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Research on the internationalization of education in Hong Kong has primarily focused on the higher education sector, leaving a notable gap in the study of internationalization at the primary school level. Although higher education institutions have received considerable attention due to their outreach and academic partnerships, the process of internationalization within local primary schools remains relatively underexplored.

However, the ambiguity and inconsistency in the strategies and practices employed in the internationalization of curriculum within local primary schools highlight a significant research gap that needs to be addressed. Specifically, little research compares the internationalization processes between local private schools, which independently adapt curricula amidst diverse constraints, and international schools, which leverage established global frameworks, leaving unclear how these distinct approaches shape educational outcomes. Gregersen (2021) emphasizes the pivotal role of teachers in the process of curriculum internationalization, noting that “their coaching needs to be interculturally sensitive and inclusive, and at the same time transparent as to their own cultural values and worldviews” (p. 476). This highlights the importance of educators navigating cultural complexities with sensitivity while maintaining transparency about their own perspectives, fostering a balanced and inclusive approach to curriculum design and implementation. De Wit and Altbach (2021) propose strategies for advancing educational internationalization, emphasizing the need to “integrate internationalization into the curriculum, make use of new technological opportunities, and stimulate carbon-neutral forms of mobility” (p. 44). These approaches highlight the importance of embedding global perspectives within educational content, leveraging technology to enhance accessibility and collaboration, and adopting environmentally sustainable practices to facilitate international engagement. While international schools often excel in curriculum internationalization by introducing globally recognized programs and obtaining official accreditation, local primary schools face challenges in defining and executing their approach. This is particularly evident in areas such as curriculum development, integration of global perspectives, and the consistent application of internationalization practices. Addressing these gaps is essential for advancing the internationalization of curriculum at the primary school level in Hong Kong.

Wadhwa (2016) contends that maintaining competitiveness in the marketplace requires a sustained focus on the integration of curriculum, pedagogy, educational practices, and

operational procedures. This insight emphasizes the necessity for schools to adopt a strategic and ongoing approach to curriculum internationalization if they aim to enhance competitiveness. In Hong Kong, the primary education system comprises public schools, private schools, and international schools. Among these, private schools have been especially proactive in capitalizing on the financial incentives associated with internationalization. Many private schools have established international departments, recruited foreign teachers, and undertaken self-reforms aimed at developing internationally oriented curricula. These reforms are not only driven by the desire to enhance educational quality but also by the need to attract a diverse student body and generate higher financial returns. This study focuses on local private and international schools because they exhibit greater autonomy and variability in internationalization approaches compared to public schools, which predominantly follow standardized Education Bureau guidelines, offering less scope for comparative analysis of independent strategies.

International schools in Hong Kong, such as those adopting the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme (IB PYP), typically follow well-established international curricula that are recognized and accredited by global educational authorities. These schools are often better equipped to provide an internationally oriented education, supported by resources, expertise, and institutional frameworks that align with international standards. However, while international schools are often regarded as the benchmark for educational internationalization, local private schools adopt a more fluid approach, with each institution interpreting what constitutes an internationalized curriculum in its own way. Wright (2016) found that this variation may partly stem from the high proportion of private international schools in the Asia-Pacific region, which operate in an increasingly competitive sector and face “the corresponding need to provide evidence of academic success and rigour to attract fee-paying students” (p. 13). This highlights the pressures on schools to demonstrate academic excellence and distinguish themselves in a highly competitive educational

market, a challenge that local private schools may experience differently from their international counterparts.

To fill the gap in the current literature on the internationalization of primary education in Hong Kong, this research aims to conduct a comparative analysis of the internationalization processes between local private schools and international schools. Specifically, this study will focus on how these schools approach curriculum internationalization, examining the strategies, challenges, and opportunities they encounter. It compares specific issues such as curriculum design flexibility, teacher recruitment and training for intercultural competence, and the integration of global vs. local perspectives, aiming to uncover how these processes influence teaching practices and educational quality. A key objective of this research is to examine teachers' views on education and curriculum internationalization within their schools, as teachers play a pivotal role in the effective implementation of internationalized curricula. Shahjahan (2024) found that “teacher–student relationships, and/or application of knowledge shape what and how of curriculum internationalization” (p. 278). This insight highlights the significant influence of interpersonal connections and the practical application of knowledge in determining both the structure and implementation of an internationalized curriculum.

This study aims to explore how educators perceive their role in the internationalization of education by examining their efforts to integrate intercultural competence into teaching and addressing the challenges of curriculum internationalization. Interviews with teachers from local private schools and international schools in Hong Kong will provide insights into how these processes are conceptualized and implemented. Focusing on teachers is essential, as they play a central role in implementing curricula and navigating the opportunities and obstacles of incorporating international perspectives. The research will compare approaches between international schools, which may follow structured frameworks, and local private schools, which might adopt

more flexible but less defined strategies. This comparison will shed light on the broader trends and challenges of internationalizing primary education in Hong Kong.

This study will address the gap by concentrating on the under-explored area of curriculum internationalization in local primary schools. The research findings will contribute to the ongoing discussion about educational internationalization in Hong Kong, providing practical recommendations for policymakers and educators. Specifically, the focus on teacher perspectives will highlight the pivotal role educators play in shaping internationalized curricula, emphasizing the need for professional development and support to ensure the successful integration of global perspectives into primary education. The comparative analysis of local private and international schools will offer important insights into the strategies, challenges, and opportunities involved in curriculum internationalization, thus contributing to future policy debates and educational reform initiatives in Hong Kong.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The internationalization of education has become a key trend in education systems globally, and Hong Kong is no exception. Various educational institutions in Hong Kong are actively promoting this process by establishing international departments, hiring foreign teachers, and integrating internationally recognized curricula. However, implementing educational internationalization at the primary level has proven to be more complex than in higher education. While much research has explored internationalization in higher education, the specific role of intercultural teaching in primary settings—particularly how teachers foster intercultural competence amidst diverse cultural and linguistic contexts—remains underexplored. The varied cultural and language backgrounds of Hong Kong students, coupled with varying capacities of local schools to adapt to internationalization, present unique challenges. These challenges include difficulties in conceptualizing and implementing internationalized

curricula, adjusting teaching methods to accommodate cross-cultural contexts, establishing effective school management practices, and developing appropriate assessment mechanisms for international curricula. While public schools largely rely on guidelines from the Education Bureau for curriculum internationalization, private and other schools, driven by financial incentives, have established their own international departments or developed independent international curricula to attract foreign teachers and students, aiming to improve teaching quality and increase financial returns. These differences further emphasize the complexity of the internationalization process in primary education.

The current study seeks to investigate these challenges by focusing on curriculum internationalization in local primary schools in Hong Kong. The primary goal of the research is to understand how local schools are navigating the process of internationalization, what obstacles they face, and how they are adapting their curricula to meet international standards while retaining local cultural values.

Two schools in Hong Kong serve as the primary case-studies for this study: X Local School and Y International School. X Local School is a government-funded local primary school that has begun to explore internationalization by integrating international perspectives into its curriculum, recruiting teachers with international backgrounds, and modifying its teaching philosophies to reflect international trends. Y International School, on the other hand, is an established international school that follows an internationally accredited curriculum, such as the IB Primary Years Programme, and has a long-standing tradition of employing teachers from varied cultural and educational contexts. The research compares these two schools' development histories, curriculum designs, and teaching philosophies to uncover differences in how they conceptualize and implement education internationalization.

In addition to curriculum design, the research will examine the intercultural teaching practices of both schools, with a particular focus on how they incorporate intercultural competence into their pedagogies. Intercultural competence, which refers to the ability to navigate and engage meaningfully in cross-cultural contexts, is a key aspect of education and central to the successful internationalization of curricula. The research aims to analyze how teachers from both X Local School and Y International School perceive their roles in developing intercultural competence among students, the strategies they use to incorporate international perspectives, and the obstacles they encounter in doing so. The findings are anticipated to provide meaningful insights into the process of educational internationalization, especially in the context of intercultural teaching, and enhance the understanding of how primary schools can effectively integrate international perspectives into their curricula.

It will build on established theories of curriculum reform and intercultural education, applying them to the context of both local and international primary schools in Hong Kong. Ultimately, this research aims to contribute to the discourse on primary education internationalization by offering a deeper understanding of how schools can effectively integrate international and intercultural perspectives into their curricula. In doing so, it seeks to inform future policy decisions and support educators in their efforts to implement international education.

1.4 Research Questions

This study seeks to investigate the internationalization of the curriculum in local primary schools in Hong Kong by examining the following three key questions:

RQ1 What aspects contribute to the motivation of local primary schools in Hong Kong to pursue curriculum internationalization?

The first research question aims to explore the aspects contributing to the motivation of local primary schools in Hong Kong to implement an internationalized curriculum. It seeks to uncover whether these motivations are driven by the desire to equip individuals with broader perspectives, enhance their intercultural competence, or improve their ability to navigate the complexities of a changing environment. The question also explores whether there are external pressures or trends, such as pressures from government policies, parental expectations, or international trends, that contribute to this pursuit of internationalization.

RQ2 How has curriculum reform in these schools engaged with international design narratives, including encouraging new teacher agency and philosophies?

This question examines how local primary schools have incorporated elements of international educational frameworks into their curricula. It seeks to explore the degree to which international design narratives, such as those from recognized education systems, shape the educational practices and structures in these schools (e.g., International Baccalaureate or Cambridge International) and contribute to curriculum reforms. Additionally, it investigates how these reforms have fostered teacher agency, empowering teachers to play a more proactive role in shaping their instructional methods and teaching philosophies, and how these changes have affected teaching methods and approaches in the classroom.

RQ3 How has this reform connected with international narratives to strengthen primary education in these Hong Kong schools?

The third research question aims to explore how curriculum reforms aimed at internationalization and the broader international reform narratives in education. It focuses on how the adoption of internationalized curricula has the quality of education delivered in local primary schools, considering how these reforms have the teaching

and learning environment and align with educational trends while addressing Hong Kong's specific needs.

Table 1 outlines the research questions guiding this study, categorized into three thematic areas: Intercultural Teaching and Curriculum Perspective, Practical Exploration of Curriculum Internationalization, and Achieving Curriculum Internationalization Goals. Each area focuses on specific aspects of curriculum internationalization, such as its motivations, challenges, and implementation strategies. The table also highlights key points of investigation, including curriculum design, teacher, and differences in international practices, culminating in questions about the outcomes of these reforms and potential methods for improvement in local primary schools in Hong Kong.

Table 1: Research Questions

Thematic Area	Focus Points	Research Questions
Intercultural Teaching and Curriculum Perspective	Reasons for Curriculum Internationalization	RQ1: What aspects contribute to the motivation of local primary schools in Hong Kong to pursue curriculum internationalization?
N/A	Challenges of Curriculum Internationalization	What challenges do the two schools face in internationalizing their education curricula?
Practical Exploration of Curriculum Internationalization	Curriculum Design	RQ2: How has curriculum reform in these schools engaged with international design narratives, including encouraging new teacher agency and philosophies?
N/A	Teacher International Background	How do the teachers' international backgrounds influence the curriculum internationalization process?
N/A	Teacher Teaching Philosophy	How are new teaching philosophies being encouraged as part of the curriculum internationalization process?
Achieving Curriculum Internationalization Goals	Differences in International Curriculum Practices	RQ3: How has this reform connected with international narratives to strengthen primary education in these Hong Kong schools?

N/A	Method of Improving Curriculum Internationalization	How can curriculum internationalization in local primary schools in Hong Kong be improved?
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To investigate these questions, this study adopts a qualitative theoretical framework grounded in interpretivism, which emphasizes understanding curriculum internationalization through the lived experiences of educators and the contextual meanings they attribute to their practices (Merriam, 1998). Informed by case study design principles (Yin, 2014; Stake, 1995), it examines how motivations, curriculum reforms, and international narratives manifest in the real-world settings of Hong Kong primary schools, providing a theoretical lens to explore the interplay of teacher agency, curriculum design, and local educational contexts.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study holds particular importance as it fills a notable gap in the current body of research by examining the internationalization of primary education in Hong Kong, an area that has been largely neglected in favor of research on higher education internationalization. By concentrating on this underexplored domain, the research makes valuable contributions to our understanding of the internationalization process in primary schools, as outlined in the problem statement.

As Marginson (2013) aptly observed, education has evolved into a central driver of globalization and a breeding ground for its key participants. Building on this perspective, our research examines the developmental trajectories of internationalization within Hong Kong's primary education sector. Specifically, the study compares the approaches to curriculum internationalization between a well-established international school and a local school with a newly developed international department. This comparative analysis delves into crucial aspects such as curriculum design, teacher qualifications and backgrounds, teaching philosophies, and

the intercultural challenges encountered when implementing international curricula in local settings.

Existing research emphasizes the advantages of faculty engaging in overseas teaching, participating in international travel, and experiencing cross-cultural immersion in fostering competence and a broader prospect (Kopish, 2016). Additionally, “it is critical for teachers and administrators to have a clear understanding of curriculum internationalization” (Kopish, 2016, p. 2). Robertson and Blasi (2017) further argue that effective internationalization depends on incorporating diverse cultural perspectives into the curriculum, while Logvinova and Ivanova (2016) note that positive educational outcomes are often tied to a strong focus on diversity and cultural education. Building on these findings, this study seeks to thoroughly explore the critical factors shaping the internationalization of education in Hong Kong, such as curriculum development, teacher professional development, and the implementation of effective management strategies.

The case study approach is particularly well-suited for examining such complex issues. Yin (2013) highlights the implications of assessing problems within a realist framework, noting that “at a minimum, it is worth examining whether a useful procedure for a new study might involve speculating on the type and length of the likely items before deciding whether to proceed with a case study or consider an alternative method” (p. 329). Furthermore, this study’s comparative case study design offers methodological significance by providing a structured perspective on educational internationalization. By analyzing two distinct school contexts—a local school and an international school—it enables a cross-case comparison that reveals variations and commonalities in internationalization practices, enriching methodological approaches in comparative education research (Yin, 2014). Internationalization of education requires a concerted effort across various sectors of the educational system, including support from community leaders, institutional resources, curriculum reforms, faculty

development, and student exchanges (Harder et al., 2012; Robertson & Blasi, 2017). This study will examine these dimensions within the context of primary schools in Hong Kong, offering actionable insights for enhancing the internationalization process. By analyzing the contrasting approaches between local and international schools, this research aims to recommend strategies for enhancing the incorporation of international perspectives into primary education.

De Wit (2016) emphasize the importance of fostering self-awareness and developing a broader understanding among students as key strategies for enhancing communication and interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, “global education is more orientated towards creating an alternative future” (Standish, 2014, p. 180). The current research seeks to investigate how teachers, as pivotal agents in this process, incorporate international and intercultural components into their curricula and instructional practices, thereby advancing the overarching objectives of education internationalization.

In summary, this study seeks to enhance our understanding of the internationalization of primary education in Hong Kong. By scrutinizing the curriculum design, teacher backgrounds, and teaching philosophies in different school settings, it seeks to provide practical insights for developing effective internationalization strategies. The findings aim to inform local policies while contributing to wider discussions on education internationalization in mainland China and beyond, providing valuable insights into addressing the challenges and leveraging the opportunities associated with internationalized primary education.

1.6 Methodology

Given that this study examines the intricacies of teaching and learning within the context of curriculum internationalization in local primary schools in Hong Kong, the

research questions are most effectively addressed from a qualitative perspective. This research utilizes a comparative case study approach, providing detailed descriptions of relevant practices in two primary schools that are actively engaged in the internationalization of their educational curricula. Interviews will be conducted with 18 teachers from these schools to explore their motivations for adopting an internationalized curriculum, how curriculum reforms align with global educational trends, and the potential effects on the quality of primary education. This method enables the collection of detailed, descriptive data that can shed light on the complexities of educators' experiences and the challenges they encounter.

In addition to interviews, relevant policy documents and curriculum materials will be analyzed to understand the schools' conceptualizations of internationalization and their intentional efforts in this direction. This document analysis will help clarify the alignment between policy intentions and the actual practices observed in the schools. To further triangulate the data, observations of classroom activities and interactions will be employed, enhancing the understanding of how these internationalization efforts manifest in everyday teaching and learning.

The qualitative data collected will be analyzed using thematic analysis methods inspired by the Miles and Huberman (1994) framework, which focuses on data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The software NVivo 11 will be used to help organize and analyze the data, facilitating a systematic approach to uncovering themes and patterns related to curriculum internationalization.

1.7 Operational Definition of Terms

This research identifies and defines the key terms most relevant to the internationalization of education, particularly within the context of Hong Kong's

primary education sector. These definitions lay the groundwork for further exploration, which will be expanded upon in the review of related literature.

Internationalization: Internationalization refers to the process of integrating international and intercultural perspectives into the fundamental operations of an institution, such as teaching, research, and community service. As Knight (2004) explains, it involves “teaching/training, research and scholarly activities, and service to the society at large” (p. 12). In the field of education, internationalization has gained increasing importance, driven by factors such as economic development and technological advancements (DeCuir, 2017). As a result, schools and institutions are compelled to equip individuals with the skills needed for a more integrated world, which requires focused efforts on areas like cultural diversity, innovative pedagogical strategies, curriculum reform, and teacher training (Reynolds et al., 2013).

Globalization: Knight and de Wit (1997) emphasize the importance of “the flow of technology, economy, knowledge, people, values, [and] ideas... across borders. Globalization affects each country in a different way due to a nation’s individual history, traditions, culture and priorities” (p. 6). Globalization is a dynamic force that shapes how educational institutions approach internationalization. As globalization reshapes industries and economies, it also places pressure on education systems to adapt, making the internationalization of curricula more urgent.

Internationalization of curriculum: The internationalization of the curriculum involves integrating intercultural understanding and international content into educational programs. Rizvi (2007) argues that internationalized curricula should be grounded in core values, including innovation, flexibility, and a strong emphasis on fostering intercultural understanding. Nilsson (2000) highlights that such curricula aim to provide students with the necessary competencies and understanding to navigate a global and multicultural environment. In this study, curriculum reform is viewed as a

vital strategy for local schools in Hong Kong to conform to international standards and foster high-quality and competent students.

Intercultural: Intercultural competence is defined as the ability to interact effectively and appropriately across cultures. According to Whaley et al. (2007), it encompasses a person's ability to engage meaningfully with diverse cultural backgrounds. Hammer (2003) defines intercultural competence as the capability to think and behave in ways that are culturally appropriate in different intercultural contexts. In a similar vein, Johnson et al. (2006) emphasize the “importance of employing a set of knowledge, skills, and personal attributes to successfully collaborate with individuals from various national and cultural backgrounds” (p. 530). Within the framework of Hong Kong's education system, intercultural competence is particularly relevant due to the city's unique blend of Eastern and Western cultures. As local schools progressively implement international curricula, teachers and students alike are required to navigate a variety of cultural norms and practices. Although the terms ‘intercultural’ and ‘cross-cultural’ are frequently used interchangeably, they carry distinct meanings in various disciplines. Cross-cultural psychology typically examines individual differences in varying environments, while intercultural communication focuses on how group norms influence interpersonal interactions. In this study, the term Intercultural will be employed to investigate how group normative patterns affect communication and collaboration within educational settings (Bennett, 2001). This focus is crucial as Hong Kong schools strive to incorporate global and intercultural viewpoints into their curricula, fostering an environment where students and teachers can effectively navigate cultural differences and engage in meaningful intercultural dialogue.

1.8 Chapter Structure

This study is structured across eight in-depth chapters, with each focusing on exploring

the internationalization of education in Hong Kong's primary schools through a qualitative research approach.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter establishes the foundational background for the study, highlighting the increasing importance of internationalization in education, particularly within Hong Kong's unique sociocultural framework. It articulates the statement of the problem, identifying the challenges that local primary schools face in adapting to international educational standards. The chapter also details the purpose of the study, its significance, the research objectives, and the methodology applied, offering readers a clear framework for the research. Key terms are operationally defined for clarity, and an overview of the complete thesis structure is provided.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter critically examines research on internationalization and intercultural education, distinguishing between globalization and internationalization and their respective implications for education. It explores the concept of curriculum internationalization and examines challenges faced in this process, using the International Baccalaureate as an illustrative model. Additionally, the chapter addresses government and institutional initiatives promoting internationalization, providing a broad context for understanding how these concepts manifest within Hong Kong's education system.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter describes the qualitative research approach, with a focus on case studies of two primary schools: School X, a high-achieving local private school, and School Y, a well-regarded international school. It details the participant selection process and data collection methods (including documents, interviews, and observations), and data analysis methods. The chapter also discusses research ethics, rigor, and the role of the

researcher. Triangulation methods used to enhance the reliability of the findings are discussed.

Chapter 4: School Profiles

Chapter 4 offers detailed profiles of the two case study schools. It presents an overview of each school's educational philosophy, curriculum frameworks, teaching methodologies, and internationalization strategies. School X's journey toward internationalization is explored in depth, focusing on its international department and specialized courses. Similarly, School Y's adoption of international curricula and its innovative dual principal and double-teacher system are emphasized. The chapter concludes with an examination of key government policies that support international education in Hong Kong.

Chapter 5: Results of Horizontal Analysis

This chapter outlines the findings derived from the analysis of data collected through document analysis, interviews, and member checking. It begins by offering a summary of the data collected, alongside an examination of ethics, data security, and study limitations. The chapter then explores a comparative document analysis of two schools—School X and School Y—offering insights into their respective journeys toward internationalization. Following this, the case comparison analysis highlights differences and similarities in educational approaches, curriculum design, cultural integration, teacher training, and student outcomes. Key themes, such as each school's strategies for promoting internationalization and fostering diverse student qualities, are explored in detail. The chapter concludes with insights from a key educational figure in Hong Kong, providing an overview of the opportunities and challenges associated with educational internationalization in the region.

Chapter 6: Results of Vertical Analysis

This chapter offers a thorough analysis of the data, exploring the motivations, challenges, and impacts of introducing international education in Hong Kong's primary schools. It explores the underlying market demands, financial incentives, and mission-driven shifts that drive schools toward international curricula. The analysis also highlights specific challenges faced by local and international schools, including limitations in curriculum development, teacher involvement, and administrative support. Finally, the chapter discusses how embracing international education can enhance existing educational frameworks in Hong Kong, addressing the limitations of traditional models and fostering broader sociocultural impacts on students, educators, and the community.

Chapter 7: Discussion

This chapter explores the main findings of the study in detail in the context of existing related research, addressing the motivations for curriculum internationalization in primary schools and how the implementation of international curricula has influenced educational practices. It explores the reasons behind the adoption of international education, considering market demand, historical influences, and government policies. The chapter also examines the role of school leadership in curriculum reform, focusing on strategies for selecting international curricula, designing reform systems, and fostering collaboration between Chinese and Western teachers. It further discusses whether curriculum reform has strengthened primary education in Hong Kong, improved academic results, and supported efforts to localize internationalized education. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the study's limitations, its impact on the field, and offers recommendations for future policy, curriculum reform and teacher education, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

The final chapter summarizes the key findings of the study as a contribution to new understandings. The chapter also outlines the study's limitations, and offers

suggestions for future research, policy improvements, curriculum reforms, and teacher education. It concludes with reflective comments on the broader implications of internationalized education in primary schools.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is to examine the internationalization process within Hong Kong's primary education system, with a specific focus on curriculum internationalization and the challenges teachers encounter in implementing these changes, to provide a theoretical underpinning for the current study. By analyzing existing research, this review explores the influence of internationalization on curriculum design, teaching practices, and learning outcomes. It draws on peer-reviewed journal articles, policy documents, and educational reports to bridge the gap between theoretical frameworks and their practical application in the local context, offering insights and identifying gaps to guide future research.

The search for relevant peer-reviewed literature primarily involved accessing articles through Google Scholar, which is recognized for its extensive collection of academic resources. In addition, resources provided by the University of Sydney library, including journals, books, and digital archives, were utilized to broaden the scope of this review. This comprehensive approach ensured that a broad range of literature from various academic disciplines, such as education, sociology, and cultural studies, was incorporated to offer a thorough understanding of education internationalization. The use of these resources facilitated the recognition of important themes and discussions in the field, which are essential for framing the current study.

Curriculum internationalization focuses on embedding international perspectives and content throughout the teaching and learning environment: "the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education" (Knight, 2003, p. 2). Hudzik and Stohl (2012) emphasize that placing students at the center of internationalization efforts integrates these initiatives into the core of educational institutions. This approach equips students with essential knowledge and skills to navigate the challenges of the 21st century.

The literature review explores several key areas, including the difference between globalization and internationalization, the internationalization of education, and strategies for curriculum internationalization. Specifically, it examines the concept of curriculum internationalization, and the challenges associated with its implementation. Additionally, it explores the International Baccalaureate (IB) as a model for curriculum internationalization, offering insights into how this global framework is applied in schools, including those in Hong Kong. The review also investigates intercultural education and its significance in fostering competencies among students. The literature review examines the role of government and institutional initiatives in promoting the internationalization of education, highlighting various policies and strategies that support this transformation. It also explores key areas such as the internationalization of education, the distinction between globalization and internationalization, and strategies for curriculum internationalization. By examining these core areas, the study seeks to identify the motivations, challenges, and advancements of internationalization in Hong Kong's primary schools, especially in relation to curriculum reform. While significant progress has been made, further research is required to understand how Hong Kong's schools are responding to educational trends, particularly in terms of internationalized curriculum development.

2.1 Internationalization

As globalization continues to grow, the field of education has increasingly focused on preparing individuals to meet the demands of internationalization. "Educational institutions worldwide have increasingly concentrated on the theory of internationalization, particularly over the past two decades" (Deardorff, 2011, p. 65). While international engagement offers numerous advantages for individuals, institutions, and educational systems, it is essential to recognize that the global competitive landscape is inherently uneven. Well-funded institutions generally have

more options and opportunities to determine the scope and methods of their internationalization efforts. They often lead the way by pioneering innovative practices and strategies that become benchmarks for others. However, as Anderson (2015) highlights, differences in resource availability can result in substantial disparities in the quality and scale of internationalization activities across institutions. This variation poses challenges in applying findings from this study to other educational settings with differing resource levels.

Scholars have developed various frameworks to interpret internationalization in education. Knight (2004) notes that “traditionally, the rationales driving internationalization have been presented in four groups: social/cultural, political, academic, and economic” (p. 21). In her research, Knight noted that institutions regarded this activity-based perspective as central to their understanding of internationalization efforts. Effective internationalization encompasses not just curriculum modifications but also expanding opportunities for student mobility overseas and fostering external partnerships (Olson et al., 2008). For instance, the 2017 longitudinal survey conducted by the American Council on Education (ACE) on higher education institutions identified several key priorities, such as faculty development, curriculum internationalization, international student recruitment, study abroad programs, and partnerships with foreign institutions. According to Brajkovic and Helms (2018), these priorities underscore the strategic efforts that institutions deem vital for creating a more dynamic and globally engaged academic environment.

However, viewing internationalization solely as a series of independent activities can lead to uncoordinated measures within institutions, which is a significant drawback of the activity approach. Although many institutional environments have central offices responsible for coordinating international activities, the tendency to focus on isolated actions can result in resource wastage, missed opportunities, and inconsistent understandings of internationalization goals. Therefore, for a more effective

internationalization strategy, it is crucial to integrate and coordinate various activities. This holistic approach ensures that all components of internationalization work synergistically, leading to a more cohesive and impactful educational experience.

2.1.1 Differences between Globalization and Internationalization

As globalization continues to transform societies worldwide, its impact is both extensive and profound. Thomas Friedman (2000) describes globalization as a significant phenomenon that has become a defining force in shaping the global landscape of the 21st century. He explains that this force interacts with traditional institutions, power structures, and cultural tensions, driving substantial change in the post–Cold War era. Friedman (2000) also highlights how advancements in technology and communication have enabled unprecedented connections, allowing information, people, and goods to move rapidly across borders. This global integration affects numerous dimensions of life, including economic, political, cultural, and academic spheres, fostering greater interdependence among nations and individuals.

Friedman’s concept of globalization aligns with Coatsworth’s (2019) definition, which emphasizes the movement of individuals, goods, and ideas across nations and regions. Similarly, Knight et al. (2003) highlight the flow of technology, knowledge, values, and people as central to understanding globalization. Fischer (2003) further adds that “globalization is an ongoing process of deepening interdependence between nations and their citizens” (p. 2). This global web of connections is crucial to understanding how societies are becoming increasingly intertwined, especially as technology enhances access to information and facilitates cross-cultural interactions (Castell, 2010; Stromquist & Monkman, 2014).

However, the broad scope of globalization makes it difficult to settle on a singular definition. Globalization encompasses diverse and complex themes, which often lead to disagreements regarding its implications and whether it should be embraced or resisted.

Gough (2014) suggests that, instead of focusing on defining globalization, researchers should examine how it operates and influences various sectors, such as education. Globalization's reach is considered inevitable, and this has prompted responses in education through policies and practices aimed at addressing its influence.

In contrast, internationalization can be viewed as an active response to globalization. It refers to the strategic policies, partnerships, and processes that institutions—especially universities and governments—adopt to engage with the globalized world (Deardorff, 2006). Internationalization, in this context, involves the deliberate actions taken to internationalize curricula, foster student mobility, and develop cross-border collaborations. While globalization is a broad, systemic process, internationalization is a more focused set of actions and strategies within educational institutions.

In higher education, internationalization is a complex concept that can be examined from multiple perspectives. Knight (1997) identified four main approaches to internationalization, categorizing its driving rationales into social/cultural, political, academic, and economic groups. However, as Knight (2004), noted, “rationales are more closely linked to the political and economic categories of rationales” (p. 25). Additionally, Knight (2004) emphasized that “the term internationalization strategies were deliberately used to go beyond the idea of international activities” (p. 13), highlighting the need for a more comprehensive and integrated approach.

Although these approaches provide a framework for understanding internationalization in higher education, their applicability to primary education systems, especially in Hong Kong, may be limited. In primary education, internationalization is not just about increasing mobility or building capacity but also about reshaping curriculum and pedagogy to reflect broader perspectives. Therefore, the focus on internationalization in Hong Kong's primary schools requires a more nuanced examination, considering how these influences are integrated into local educational practices.

2.1.2 Internationalization of Education

Over the past two decades, higher education institutions have increasingly prioritized the internationalization of education as a key focus area (Deardorff & Arasaratnam, 2017). It represents an intentional process by which educational systems incorporate international perspectives, practices, and opportunities into their frameworks. Internationalization in education includes a wide range of activities, such as curriculum development, student exchanges, study abroad programs, and partnerships with international institutions (Deardorff, 2006). Hans de Wit (2002) highlights that the concept of internationalization is often ambiguously defined because it is associated with various related terms, each emphasizing different aspects of global engagement in education:

- Internationalization refers to integrating international dimensions into educational practices, allowing students and educators to engage with global perspectives and diverse cultures.
- International Education typically involves programs like study abroad, international student exchanges, and partnerships between institutions, providing students with direct exposure to different cultural and academic environments.
- Intercultural Education focuses on enhancing understanding, mutual respect, and meaningful dialogue among individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds while developing intercultural competence and effective communication skills.

Despite the potential benefits of internationalization, the playing field remains uneven. “Well-resourced institutions often have more opportunities and options to internationalize, setting standards and practices that other institutions may try to replicate or adapt” (Rumbley, et al., 2012, p. 26). Such resource disparities may result in significant variations in both the quality and scope of internationalization efforts among institutions. For instance, wealthier institutions can more easily attract international students, develop cross-border partnerships, and offer robust study abroad programs, while institutions with fewer resources may struggle to participate fully in

these activities. This unevenness creates a challenge for adapting best practices to different institutional contexts, as highlighted by Anderson (2015).

Furthermore, internationalization gives rise to intricate debates within the education sector. Institutions grapple with essential questions regarding the scope and objectives of their internationalization initiatives. Should they fully commit to internationalization, and, if so, how should they prioritize resource allocation while addressing potential drawbacks? For instance, concerns have been raised about the erosion of distinctions between international and local cultures, the risks of cultural and linguistic homogenization—especially the dominance of English—and the effects of rapid, technology-driven communication on sustained academic engagement (Stromquist & Monkman, 2014). As the discourse around internationalization evolves, there is a need for educational institutions to carefully balance engagement with the preservation of local identities and priorities. This balancing act requires thoughtful policymaking, the allocation of appropriate resources, and an understanding of the broader implications of integrating international perspectives into educational practices.

Table 2. Terminology related to the internationalization of education.

Category	Terminology
Frequently Used Concepts in the Internationalization of Education	Internationalism, Globalization of Higher Education, International Education, International Studies, Transnational Education
Concepts Involving Regional and Internationalization Fields	International Exchange, International Cooperation, Academic Mobility, Study Overseas
Terminology for International Courses	Cross-Cultural Education, Intercultural Education, Multicultural Education, Global Education, Area Studies in Education, Peace Education, Education for International Understanding, Transnational Studies, International Studies, Global Studies
Competency-Related Terms	Global Competence, Transnational Competence

Source: de Wit & Altbach (2021, pp. 34-44)

Table 2 categorizes key terms related to the internationalization of education. It includes frequently used concepts like Internationalism and Transnational Education, terms for regional activities such as International Exchange and Academic Mobility, course-related terminology like Global Education and Peace Education, and competency terms such as Global Competence. This summary highlights essential language in the field.

Knight (2003) is known for adopting a process-oriented view of internationalization. In this perspective, the educational objectives, functions, and provisions of institutions are integrated with intercultural and international processes. Another widely recognized definition of internationalization emphasizes the integration of international or intercultural elements into the service functions, teaching and research of educational institutions. This definition is among the most frequently cited in the research community.

Raby and Valeau (2007) define international education as “a set of programs and curricula that institutions can utilize to globalize students, faculty, and the surrounding communities” (p. 138). While this definition is broad, it does not precisely clarify what ‘globalizing’ students entails. The authors acknowledge the ongoing “confusion over terms such as international, global, and globalization” (Raby & Valeau, 2007, p. 138). To provide clarity, Raby and Valeau (2007) distinguish between ‘international education’ and ‘global education’. They draw upon definitions provided by the American Council on International Intercultural Education (ACIIE) and the Stanley Foundation (1994), describing global education as “an umbrella term describing a range of activities that encompass intercultural, multicultural, and international education” (Raby & Valeau, 2007, p. 138).

They further elaborate that international education “emphasizes the need to understand various perspectives (geographical, racial, cultural, and gender) by acknowledging

similarities and respecting and preserving differences among nations” (Raby & Valeau, 2007, p. 138). This conclusion underscores the differentiation between global and international, suggesting that “the international community seeks to establish perspectives among nations”, while “the global highlights universal perspectives” (Raby & Valeau, 2007, p. 138). Additionally, Raby and Valeau (2007) argue that globalization is often uncontrollable, whereas internationalization represents education’s strategic adaptation to globalization. This distinction underscores the necessity of curriculum internationalization as a proactive response, emphasizing that, whether we embrace it or not, globalization is occurring, and education must prepare individuals to thrive as capable citizens in a global society.

Green (2007) identifies key institutional obstacles that hinder the advancement of internationalization in education, including that it “requires leadership, faculty engagement, resources, and structures to support this effort” (p. 24). These challenges are exacerbated by insufficient structured planning and personal obstacles, such as disinterest, negative attitudes, or resistance, hindering educators from incorporating broader perspectives into their teaching practices. Several scholars have made notable contributions to the field of internationalization. Bennell and Pearce (2003) analyzed student mobility trends, revealing a significant increase in international student enrollment in developed countries. Huang (2014) categorizes internationalization activities in education into three primary areas: educational input, educational output, and simultaneous output and import. This framework provides valuable insights into how educational systems can integrate international dimensions into their curricula, teaching, and student experiences. Teichler (2004) explored multiple dimensions of internationalization in higher education, emphasizing international curricula, innovative teaching approaches, intercultural communication competencies, and equipping students for international certifications.

Dewey and Duff (2009) explored internationalization through case studies in specialized institutions, such as architecture schools and art institutes, highlighting its implementation across different disciplines. Moshtari and Safarpour (2024) identify four major categories of challenges in their study on the internationalization of education in East African countries, including “lack of clear policies and guidelines; the inefficiency of the organizational structure of internationalization; financial, infrastructure, and equipment problems; weaknesses in scientific, skill, and language competences; cultural differences” (p. 89). These challenges underscore the complexity of implementing internationalization effectively across diverse educational contexts.

These scholars emphasize the importance of integrating international and intercultural dimensions into educational missions and activities. This integration fosters broader perspectives and intercultural competencies among students and educators while providing frameworks for practical implementation. Knight (2004) and de Wit (2002) suggest that internationalization should be viewed as a strategic and comprehensive process, involving all aspects of education, from programs and organizational structures to curriculum reform and teacher training. However, Hoai (2023), through interviews with leaders from 12 universities, found that internationalization efforts are often approached with a temporary mindset, with limited resources being the primary barriers and challenges to their effective implementation. This highlights the need for a more sustainable and resource-driven approach to internationalization initiatives.

In primary education, internationalization is equally crucial for preparing students to navigate a rapidly changing world. A key aspect of this process is curriculum reform, which broadens students’ perspectives, deepens their understanding, and “offers scope for more creative teaching” (Bunnell, 2010, p. 477). Beyond curriculum changes, internationalization emphasizes initiatives such as diversifying faculty and building international partnerships, which collectively foster a more globally aware learning environment. Furthermore, internationalization in education addresses key areas,

including “objectives, organizational issues, curriculum and faculty internationalization, foreign institutional arrangements, and satisfaction with progress achieved” (Kwok & Arpan, 2002, p. 571). Fortuijn (2002) advocates for mutually beneficial internationalization efforts, including joint curriculum development, student exchanges, and staff exchanges. These initiatives not only enrich the educational experience but also foster a culture of engagement. An essential component of these initiatives is the incorporation of English as the primary medium for international communication in primary school curricula, widely regarded as pivotal to the internationalization process (Dronkers, 1993). English language acquisition equips students with essential skills for effective engagement in a changing world. By learning English early on, students gain valuable tools for cross-cultural communication and collaboration, preparing them to participate confidently in diverse international contexts.

2.2 Internationalizing the Curriculum

The internationalization of the curriculum in primary education encompasses a range of initiatives designed to integrate international and intercultural perspectives into both teaching and learning practices. This can include the integration of themes into subject matter, cross-cultural exchanges, and teaching methods that reflect diverse cultural experiences (Bremer & van der Wende, 1995). Within the setting of primary schools in Hong Kong, internationalization is becoming increasingly relevant as the region seeks to align its education system with standards and enhance students’ awareness. The curriculum in Hong Kong’s primary schools is undergoing changes to incorporate intercultural and international elements, reflecting a broader commitment to enhancing educational competencies. However, internationalization in this context involves more than just content updates; it requires a transformation in teaching and learning approaches to foster inclusion and engagement among diverse student populations (Bond et al., 2017; De Vita & Case, 2003; Leask, 2001). Bond et al. (2017) highlight

this curricular transformation as a shift in both “teaching and learning, and the provision of positive feedback” (p. 53), signaling a move toward a more outward-oriented educational framework.

In higher education, van den Hende (2023) explores the process of curriculum internationalization through the lens of organizational change. The study sheds light on strategies for engaging employees in the transformation process within educational institutions and underscores the importance of achieving meaningful implementation outcomes. Together, these perspectives highlight how curriculum internationalization, whether in primary or higher education, demands not only structural adjustments but also active participation from educators to create inclusive and globally oriented learning environments. As Hong Kong’s schools continue to enroll students from a wide range of cultural and linguistic backgrounds, Leask and Carroll (2011) point out the importance of “stimulating meaningful cross-cultural engagement” (p. 655). This is particularly crucial in Hong Kong, where such diversity necessitates adjustments to the curriculum to cultivate intercultural skills, equipping students to navigate and succeed (Khalideen, 2006).

Numerous researchers emphasize that curriculum and teaching processes are central to internationalization efforts (Russell & William, 2009), as they play a key role in shaping students’ international perspectives and intercultural competencies. Knight (2003) described curriculum as “the backbone of the internationalization process” (p. 2). In the Hong Kong primary school context, this means integrating broader perspectives and intercultural competencies into core subjects, as well as using pedagogical approaches that are inclusive of diverse ways of learning. These changes are seen as vital to ensuring that individuals are equipped with the skills needed to navigate the complexities of society (Leask & Carroll, 2011).

The role of the curriculum in shaping students' values and worldviews is critical (Khalideen, 2006). In Hong Kong, where Western educational frameworks often dominate, there is a risk that the ethnocentric values embedded in the curriculum may alienate students from non-Western backgrounds (Jin & Cortazzi, 1998; Kennedy, 1995). Research suggests that imposing a Western-centric learning culture on students from diverse backgrounds may negatively affect their identity and engagement with the curriculum (Saad et al., 2012; Mestenhauser, 2002). An optimal learning environment in Hong Kong's primary schools should reflect the cultural and linguistic diversity of the students, fostering a sense of inclusion and belonging (Banks, 2004).

The challenges of internationalizing the curriculum in Hong Kong's primary schools are intensified by the diverse cultural backgrounds of the students. Mestenhauser (2002) contends that an individual's thinking, reasoning, and interaction with knowledge are shaped by their cultural context. As a result, students from diverse cultural backgrounds may face difficulties reconciling the expectations of Western teaching methods with their own educational traditions. This issue is particularly relevant in Hong Kong, where students from Mainland China, Southeast Asia, and other regions bring diverse perspectives to the classroom (Peelo & Luxon, 2007).

2.2.1 Concept of Curriculum Internationalization

These activities may encompass study abroad programs, foreign language courses, interdisciplinary projects, and initiatives that have an international, cross-cultural, or comparative focus (Bremer & van der Wende, 1995). In academic contexts, curriculum internationalization is defined as the incorporation of diverse cultural perspectives into both course content and teaching methods. Research suggests that the curriculum involves not only the subject matter but also the teaching methods employed in the learning process. Thus, curriculum internationalization aims to fundamentally transform both the content students learn and the methods through which they learn it (Bond et al., 2017). This approach is especially crucial in higher education, as it

promotes an inclusive academic environment that addresses the diverse cultural learning needs of international students (Leask, 2001).

However, the implementation of curriculum internationalization presents challenges. Education and curriculum play critical roles in shaping students' values and identities (Khalideen, 2008). If the curriculum overlooks the diverse cultural contexts and learning preferences of international students, it may lead to a sense of exclusion and hinder their academic performance (Cortazzi et al., 2019; Freedman, 1998; Kennedy, 1995; Khalideen, 2008). Moreover, Western educational institutions often emphasize teaching methods, such as lecture-style instruction and seminar-based discussions, which may not resonate with international students. This neglect of diverse learning approaches can create barriers to effective cross-cultural engagement and knowledge exchange (Mestenhauser, 2002). To create an optimal learning environment that celebrates cultural diversity and fosters mutual understanding, curriculum internationalization efforts must be thoughtful and inclusive. They should aim to bridge gaps between different cultural perspectives and teaching methodologies, acknowledging and valuing the contributions of international students (Mestenhauser, 2002; Peelo & Luxon, 2007).

The aim of internationalizing the school curriculum is to modernize the educational system, drive reform and innovation, and cultivate highly skilled individuals who meet international standards. The internationalization of primary education focuses on curriculum reform and innovation, serving as a foundation for enhancing the overall development of primary education and improving curriculum quality. Nonetheless, the process of curriculum internationalization faces numerous challenges. Institutional barriers, internal structures, and various factors contribute to hindering the progress of curriculum reform. Furthermore, teacher reluctance to engage in curriculum reform complicates advancement efforts. These challenges highlight the necessity for

comprehensive strategies to navigate the complexities of curriculum internationalization and facilitate meaningful progress in educational reform initiatives.

2.2.2 Challenges of Curriculum Internationalization

The process of curriculum internationalization faces several challenges, including faculty resistance to participating in curricular reform, institutional barriers, and internal structures. To conduct a comprehensive research comparison of local and international schools in Hong Kong, it is crucial to consider several factors, including the schools selected for comparison, their mission and values, student demographics, and the broader educational context. This approach provides a comprehensive insight into the similarities and contrasts in curriculum design, teacher backgrounds, and teaching philosophies between local and international schools.

Institutional Policies and Support

Effective institutional policies and support are essential for successful curriculum internationalization. Research highlights that internationalization is a multifaceted process impacting the entire educational institution (Paige, 2003; Schoorman, 2000). In primary schools in Hong Kong, it is essential to develop well-defined policy statements and strategic frameworks. These measures not only clarify the institution's internationalization goals but also provide a structure for their effective implementation (Knight, 1994). As Knight (1997) emphasizes, internationalization entails “any systematic effort aimed at making higher education responsive to the requirements and challenges related to the globalization of societies, economy and labour markets” (p. 18). Although Knight's focus is on higher education, the principles of a systematic and long-term approach apply equally to primary education. By embedding internationalization into the institution's overall development strategy, schools can ensure it becomes a sustained and integral element of their educational mission rather than a short-term initiative.

A significant barrier to curricular reform is the lack of structured review and assessment processes in many Hong Kong primary schools. While there are some mechanisms in place within the local education system, systematic evaluation of internationalized curricula remains insufficient. Often, the responsibility for advancing the internationalization of the curriculum falls on individual teachers or specific subject departments, leading to limited collaboration and communication among schools regarding internationalized curricula.

Furthermore, studies have shown that teachers in Hong Kong often experience a lack of support and motivation for curriculum reform at both the departmental and institutional levels. Despite the push for internationalization, faculty members often struggle with the structural and institutional barriers that hinder the effective implementation of new initiatives. As Schuerholz-Lehr et al. (2007) note, faculty members often feel “limitations placed on instructors by the infrastructure, policies, and procedures of their departments and the institution in general” (p. 67), which complicates efforts to implement internationalized curricula. This lack of support not only hinders the incorporation of broader perspectives into the curriculum but also restricts educators’ ability to fully engage with the goals of internationalization.

Funding and Resources

Insufficient funding and resources present significant challenges to curriculum internationalization in Hong Kong primary schools. As educational budgets tighten, the development of international curricula and programs must vie for funding alongside other institutional priorities (Knight, 1994; Taylor, 2013). Additionally, time constraints on teachers—exacerbated by larger class sizes, administrative duties, and increased teaching loads—further hinder the successful design and delivery of an internationalized curriculum (Bond et al., 2017; Schuerholz-Lehr et al., 2007). Without sufficient release time or financial incentives, teachers may be reluctant to engage in the demanding process of curriculum reform (Taylor, 2013). The extent to which schools

prioritize funding and resources for internationalization will significantly affect their ability to implement comprehensive reforms and deliver competitive education.

Faculty Autonomy and Academic Freedom

Faculty autonomy and academic freedom are also crucial factors in shaping the process of curriculum internationalization in Hong Kong's primary schools. While teachers are often required to follow top-down mandates for internationalization, many may perceive these directives as intrusions into their professional autonomy. Williams and BC (2008) highlight that the fear of losing control over what is taught, or the methods of teaching, can act as a significant barrier to reform. Similarly, Khalideen (2006) points out that faculty members may be reluctant to relinquish their authority over the curriculum, especially when they feel that the status quo benefits them or when curriculum changes are perceived as criticisms of current practices.

Furthermore, as Castaneda (2019) observes, there is a need for increased institutional support in addressing diversity within curricular and pedagogical practices. Without such backing, faculty may view mandated reforms as threats to their academic freedom. Knight (2011) observes that academic freedom plays a dual role in internationalization: it empowers teachers to incorporate international perspectives into their teaching, yet it can also lead to resistance when they perceive new international curricula or teaching methods as being imposed upon them. This dual role of academic freedom highlights the importance of finding a delicate balance within Hong Kong's primary school system, where fostering innovation while respecting teacher autonomy will be crucial for the successful internationalization of education.

To enhance organization, these challenges can be summarized across three levels: micro (e.g., teacher resistance and time constraints, as noted by Bond et al., 2017), meso (e.g., institutional policies and departmental support gaps, per Schuerholz-Lehr et al., 2007), and macro (e.g., funding shortages and broader educational priorities, per

Knight, 1994). This framework highlights how individual, organizational, and systemic factors interplay in hindering curriculum internationalization in Hong Kong primary schools.

2.2.3 International Baccalaureate as a Model for Curriculum Internationalization

The concept of ‘international education’ is complex and multifaceted, with no single universally agreed-upon definition (Cambridge & Thompson, 2004; Gunesch, 2007; Hayden & Thompson, 1995; Cambridge & Simandiraki, 2006). Cambridge and Thompson (2004) describe international education as inherently ambiguous, reflecting the diverse interpretations it has across various educational settings. In some cases, it is perceived as catering to mobile elites or expanding educational access in developing countries. In others, it promotes international-mindedness and awareness through specialized curricula, as seen in schools that adopt international frameworks (Hacking et al., 2018). The International Baccalaureate (IB) exemplifies this diversity, offering a comprehensive approach to education that is widely recognized for its commitment to fostering intercultural understanding and academic rigor.

The origins of the IB can be traced to the early 1900s, evolving in response to the growing demand for a standardized curriculum to support expatriate students and those in international schools. Its development reflects broader historical movements towards international cooperation and education, influenced by thinkers like John Dewey and Jean Piaget, and institutional initiatives like the League of Nations and the United Nations (Hill & Charalambous, 2012). The IB Diploma Programme, introduced in 1968, was designed to offer an internationally recognized qualification that transcended national education systems and catered to students seeking admission to universities across the globe (Cambridge & Thompson, 2004; Tarc, 2009).

The International Baccalaureate’s growing influence has positioned it as a ‘gold standard’ in international education (Hill & Charalambous, 2012), with its programme

expanding to encompass primary and middle years, thereby offering a continuous educational pathway from early childhood through to high school graduation (La Porte, 2016). The IB's holistic approach, which emphasizes critical thinking, intercultural understanding, and engagement, aligns with broader trends in education, particularly as educational systems respond to the demands of globalization and technological advancements (Bryant et al., 2016; Tarc, 2009). Hameed and Lingard (2023) explore the integration of the International Primary Curriculum (IPC) and the International Baccalaureate (IB) with local curricula, using case studies from an international school in Singapore and a private school in Australia. This hybrid approach illustrates how educational institutions blend global frameworks with local elements to create internationalized curricula that align with global agendas while meeting specific regional needs.

In Hong Kong's primary school curriculum internationalization, the IB model provides valuable insights. Although many local schools still adhere to traditional curriculum frameworks, the increasing interest in international education has prompted some to adopt aspects of the IB's inquiry-based, interdisciplinary approach. This shift aligns with efforts to promote intercultural competence and a global perspective, moving beyond a narrow focus on local academic performance and examination results.

A compelling example of this integration is Y International School in Hong Kong, one of the case studies in this research. By implementing the IB curriculum, the school combines global perspectives with local educational values, exemplifying how curriculum internationalization can be practically realized. The IB's Middle Years and Primary Years Programmes (introduced in 1994 and 1997, respectively) offer a structure that inspires reforms in Hong Kong primary schools, fostering a holistic, student-centered approach to learning (La Porte, 2016). As internationalization shapes Hong Kong's education system, the IB's principles provide a model for merging local

curricular requirements with global educational trends, enhancing the competitiveness and cultural relevance of Hong Kong's primary education.

Furthermore, the IB's expansion into over 140 countries and its acceptance by thousands of universities worldwide underscore its role in shaping a new standard for international education. For Hong Kong, situated at the intersection of East and West, incorporating the IB framework into local schools could accelerate the internationalization process, nurturing a new generation of students with both local and global knowledge. This would not only benefit students but also help schools in Hong Kong to compete in the education market while maintaining their unique cultural identities.

2.3 Exploring Intercultural Education

Intercultural education plays a crucial role in the curriculum, particularly within Hong Kong's primary education system. Originating from the fields of anthropology and ethnology, this educational approach has developed to address the growing interactions between individuals from various cultural backgrounds. In the age of globalization and internationalization, promoting cross-cultural understanding has become essential, especially in societies like Hong Kong, where cultural diversity is a key feature.

2.3.1 Theoretical Foundations of Intercultural Education

Intercultural education gained traction in the mid-20th century, beginning with Edward Hall's introduction of 'intercultural communication' in the 1950s. Hall's work laid the foundation for understanding how cultural differences influence communication and interaction, a concept that is essential for education systems in a globalized world. Building on this, Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961) and Hofstede et al. (2005) further developed theories to explain variations in cultural values across societies. Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory has had a profound impact on how educators approach

cross-cultural interactions, providing a framework to understand cultural differences in aspects such as power dynamics and the contrast between individualism and collectivism. Within the educational setting, Bennett's (1998) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) highlights the significance of intercultural competence, arguing that individuals must develop cultural self-awareness and empathy to successfully navigate cultural differences. This model is particularly relevant to Hong Kong's diverse educational landscape, where students and teachers come from various cultural backgrounds.

2.3.2 Intercultural Education in Hong Kong's Schools

Hong Kong's multicultural environment has led to a gradual integration of intercultural education in both international and local schools. The arrival of immigrants from Mainland China, coupled with a significant expatriate population, has transformed the student demographic, rendering intercultural education crucial for fostering an inclusive learning atmosphere. Several international schools in Hong Kong, especially those that offer the International Baccalaureate (IB) programme, prioritize intercultural education by promoting international-mindedness and cross-cultural understanding among their students. This aligns with the broader goals of curriculum internationalization aimed at cultivating citizenship.

Since the mid-1990s, local schools have begun incorporating intercultural education to address the increasing cultural diversity within the city. However, challenges persist in adapting pedagogical methods and curriculum content to cater to the varied needs of students, particularly new arrivals from Mainland China and non-Chinese-speaking students (Yuen, 2004). As Hong Kong's student body has become more diverse since the city's return to Chinese sovereignty in 1997, the importance of intercultural education in local schools has gained recognition.

Research indicates that Hong Kong's diverse population has led to the emergence of an intercultural society. Many expatriate families enroll their children in international schools, which often have students from as many as 50 nationalities. These schools emphasize curricula that offer an international perspective and foster intercultural interactions. Furthermore, since 1995, local schools have gradually adopted similar diversity initiatives, presenting new challenges and opportunities for Hong Kong's educational institutions (Yuen, 2004).

2.3.3 Teaching-Centered and Student-Centered Approaches

Research on intercultural education can be broadly classified into two main approaches: teaching-centered and student-centered. Teaching-centered research examines how educators design curricula and adapt teaching methods to implement intercultural learning in classrooms (Ippolito, 2007; Leask, 2015). This body of work explores the roles and strategies employed by teachers in facilitating cross-cultural understanding among students from different backgrounds.

Conversely, student-centered research focuses on students' experiences, beliefs, and perceptions regarding intercultural education (Montgomery, 2009; Ryan & Louie, 2007). Understanding how students navigate cultural differences and the effects of these experiences on their learning is crucial in this perspective. This study aligns with the teaching-centered approach, aiming to investigate teachers' perspectives and experiences in Hong Kong's primary schools regarding curriculum internationalization. By examining how teachers incorporate intercultural education into their teaching practices, the research seeks to enhance understanding of how primary schools in Hong Kong are navigating the challenges associated with internationalizing education.

2.3.4 The Role of Teachers in Intercultural Education

Teachers play a crucial role in the success of intercultural education. Their intercultural competence is directly tied to their capacity to create an inclusive classroom

environment and effectively meet the needs of students from diverse cultural backgrounds (Banks, 2004). However, many teachers in Hong Kong encounter challenges when adapting to the complexities of a culturally diverse environment, particularly when integrating new immigrant and non-Chinese-speaking students into mainstream classrooms. Studies emphasize the importance of professional development programs that enhance teachers' intercultural awareness and provide them with the skills and resources needed to support cross-cultural learning effectively (Yuen, 2004; Yuen & Grossman, 2009).

Intercultural education not only promotes mutual understanding and appreciation but also helps teachers address the academic and behavioral challenges faced by minority-group students, which are often rooted in low expectations and a lack of intercultural awareness (Yuen, 2010). Research suggests that teachers' intercultural competence is strongly linked to their effectiveness in the classroom, particularly in diverse learning environments (Banks, 2004; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). In the case of Hong Kong, there is a prevalent notion that immigrant students should independently adapt to the educational system (Yuen, 2004). However, Yuen (2004) and Yuen and Grossman (2009) argue that teacher education in Hong Kong must address the issue of school diversity, ensuring that educators are fully prepared to navigate its complexities. This emphasizes the critical need for teacher education programs to equip teachers with the necessary knowledge, skills, and cultural awareness to effectively engage with and assist students from a variety of cultural backgrounds.

The literature on intercultural education underscores the vital role of teacher training and ongoing professional development in cultivating intercultural competence in the classroom. This research aims to enrich the existing body of knowledge by exploring how teachers in Hong Kong's primary schools understand and implement intercultural education within the framework of curriculum internationalization. With a focus on

teaching-centered approaches, the study seeks to identify the challenges educators encounter and the strategies they adopt to foster intercultural understanding among their students.

2.4 Government and Institutional Initiatives

In the field of international education, government and institutional initiatives are crucial in advancing the internationalization of curricula, especially within Hong Kong's primary education system. These initiatives provide the foundation for achieving world-class educational quality by creating an environment in schools that fosters competencies and intercultural understanding. As Croom (2012) notes, "institutions are balancing interests in internationalization, rankings, prestige, and revenue generation with their core mission" (p. 111). This complex balancing act is critical to the ongoing development of internationalization in education. This section explores the motivations behind these initiatives, the strategies employed, and the challenges faced by both the government and educational institutions in their efforts to internationalize primary education in Hong Kong.

Theoretical Perspectives on Internationalization

The process of internationalization in education is a multifaceted phenomenon that has become increasingly significant in recent years, reflecting the growing need for educational systems to respond to global interdependence. As Knight (2003) explains, there is a "process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education" (p. 2). Altbach (2002) emphasizes that internationalization offers a range of benefits, including commercial advantages, the development of knowledge and language skills, and the enhancement of curricula through international content, underscoring the positive impact it has on both students and institutions. Hudzik and Stohl (2012) further identify several key motivations behind internationalization in higher education,

which encompass the quest for truth and knowledge, the fostering of socio-cultural or cross-cultural understanding, the strengthening of political influence to protect national interests, and the enhancement of economic power to improve local or national competitiveness in the economy.

Role of Government in Educational Internationalization

The government plays a crucial role in the internationalization process. As highlighted by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2012), government policies can either facilitate or hinder educational internationalization. In Hong Kong, the Education Bureau is instrumental in shaping policies that foster the integration of international standards and practices within the primary education system. These policies include support for international curricula, teacher training programs focused on intercultural competence, and initiatives that encourage student mobility and international collaborations.

Government motivations for internationalization often include attracting skilled workers, exporting educational services, promoting national development, and exercising soft power (Henard, Diamond, & Roseveare, 2012). In Hong Kong, these motivations align with the city's strategic position as a financial hub and its aim to maintain competitive educational standards. By fostering international partnerships and facilitating the adoption of recognized programs like the International Baccalaureate (IB), the government enhances Hong Kong's educational attractiveness on the world stage.

Institutional Initiatives and Support

Educational institutions in Hong Kong are the second pillar driving curriculum internationalization. Schools, both local and international, strive to cultivate academic excellence and provide international learning opportunities. Institutions implement various strategies to integrate international elements into their curricula, such as

adopting the IB programme, offering foreign language courses, and facilitating student exchange programs.

A significant barrier to curricular reform is the lack of structured review and assessment processes. Unlike Canadian universities, where only a small proportion have created curricula specifically tailored for international students (Taylor, 2013), Hong Kong's primary schools are increasingly adopting international curricula but often face challenges in systematic evaluation and implementation. Knight (1994, 2000) highlights the importance of having dedicated international offices staffed by leaders with the necessary cross-cultural, academic, and administrative skills to facilitate curricular development and review.

Studies show that the absence of sufficient support and encouragement for curricular reform at both the departmental and institutional levels significantly obstruct the internationalization process (Bond et al., 2017; Schuerholz-Lehr et al. 2007). Faculty members often face limitations imposed by institutional infrastructure, policies, and procedures, which can stifle innovative teaching practices and the inclusion of international perspectives in the curriculum.

Funding and Resource Allocation

Insufficient funding and resources present significant challenges to curriculum internationalization in Hong Kong's primary schools. The development of new international programs and curricula must vie for resources against other institutional funding priorities, especially during times of financial constraints (Knight, 1995; Taylor, 2013). Additionally, time constraints on teachers—resulting from larger class sizes, increased teaching loads, and administrative duties—further hinder the successful design and delivery of an internationalized curriculum (Bond et al., 2017; Castaneda, 2019; Schuerholz-Lehr et al., 2007). Without sufficient release time or

financial incentives, teachers may be reluctant to engage in the demanding process of curriculum reform (Taylor, 2013).

However, some institutions have successfully allocated resources to support internationalization efforts. For example, certain schools have implemented dedicated funding streams and provided financial incentives for faculty to develop international projects or integrate perspectives into their curricula. In Hong Kong, prioritizing funding for internationalization initiatives is crucial. Schools must secure support from top management and government bodies to ensure that adequate resources are available for professional development, curriculum development, and the implementation of international programs. Through strategic resource allocation, educational institutions can overcome financial and logistical challenges, facilitating the successful internationalization of their curricula and improving the overall educational standards.

Faculty Autonomy and Academic Freedom

Faculty autonomy and academic freedom play a vital role in determining the effectiveness of internationalization initiatives within schools. Teachers must feel empowered to adapt and modify their curriculum to incorporate international perspectives without feeling that their professional integrity is being undermined. In Hong Kong, as elsewhere, teachers may view top-down directives to internationalize curricula as encroachments on their professional autonomy (Khalideen, 2006). This resistance often stems from concerns about the loss of control over course content and the perception that external pressures to reform imply a critique of their current practices (Castaneda, 2019).

Knight (1995) points out that academic freedom can serve both as a facilitator and a barrier to internationalization. On the one hand, it grants educators the freedom to experiment with content and teaching strategies. On the other hand, faculty might

resist curriculum changes if they feel these changes are being imposed upon them, undermining their academic independence. In Hong Kong's context, a balanced approach that values faculty input while promoting internationalization is key. Schools can accomplish this by cultivating a collaborative culture, providing professional development opportunities, and offering incentives that encourage teachers to actively participate in curriculum reforms. These strategies increase the likelihood that teachers will perceive internationalization as an opportunity to enrich their teaching rather than as a threat to their professional independence.

Strategic Implementation and Planning

Effective internationalization requires comprehensive planning and strategic implementation. According to Olson et al. (2008), educational institutions must undertake thorough reviews and assessments to establish a clear vision and set achievable goals for internationalization. This involves aligning internationalization efforts with the institution's mission, fostering an environment conducive to internationalization, and developing strategic approaches that include clear structures, policies, and procedures.

For Hong Kong's primary schools, this means defining specific internationalization objectives, allocating resources effectively, and establishing monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track progress. Schools must also create curricula that incorporate perspectives while maintaining relevance to the local context. Facilitating study abroad opportunities, internships, and partnerships with foreign institutions are also critical components of a robust internationalization strategy.

Government and institutional initiatives are fundamental to the successful internationalization of Hong Kong's primary education curriculum. By fostering supportive policies, allocating necessary resources, and ensuring faculty autonomy, these initiatives create an environment where internationalization can thrive.

Addressing challenges such as funding constraints, faculty resistance, and the need for strategic planning is essential for advancing internationalization efforts. Through coordinated efforts between government bodies and educational institutions, Hong Kong can enhance the quality and competitiveness of its primary education system.

2.5 Summary of the Chapter

As Hong Kong continues to merge Chinese and Western cultural influences, its education system has shifted focus from the internationalization of higher education to incorporating international perspectives into primary and secondary education. In this evolving landscape, curriculum internationalization has become a key strategy for Hong Kong's primary schools, supported by cross-cultural teaching approaches introduced by teachers from diverse backgrounds. These efforts are not only reshaping school strategies but also influencing broader institutional policies that are critical to advancing the internationalization agenda.

This study adopts a qualitative theoretical framework grounded in interpretivism, emphasizing the exploration of curriculum internationalization through educators' lived experiences and contextual meanings (Merriam, 1998). Informed by case study design principles (Yin, 2014; Stake, 1995), this framework guides the research by linking the literature to the motivations for internationalization (RQ1), the engagement with international design narratives and teacher agency (RQ2), and the enhancement of educational quality through global-local alignment (RQ3) in Hong Kong primary schools. This chapter examines key concepts, including the difference between globalization and internationalization, the definition of educational internationalization, and the critical elements of curriculum internationalization (Knight, 2004; Altbach & Knight, 2007). It also examines cross-cultural education models, government and institutional policies that facilitate internationalization (OECD, 2012), and theoretical frameworks for comparative research. These discussions establish the groundwork for

understanding how Hong Kong's primary schools are navigating the complex process of internationalization.

Internationalization in education is driven by external political, economic, and social forces, and is particularly significant in the context of Hong Kong's unique status as an international hub (Hudzik, 2011). Given the growing demand for internationalized education in Hong Kong—driven by its robust economy and diverse immigrant population—primary and secondary schools are playing a pivotal role in providing students with exposure to a wide range of perspectives and cross-cultural experiences. For students, these internationalized curricula are their primary means of engaging with broader national and international issues.

This chapter has also outlined key areas of literature that support the study's focus. By reviewing current academic discourse on internationalization, government policies, and institutional strategies, the literature analysis underscores the complexities and challenges of implementing internationalization at the primary school level (Knight & de Wit, 1997). The discussion highlights how previous studies have contributed to understanding the intersections between educational reforms and international trends, offering valuable insights for this research.

The research methodology, which will be discussed in the following chapter, is designed to explore these issues through qualitative interviews with teachers and school administrators from two primary schools. This qualitative approach seeks to obtain comprehensive insights into the internationalization of the curriculum, focusing on its effects on teaching practices, institutional policies, and student outcomes. Additionally, document analysis will provide insights into how these schools have incorporated internationalization strategies into their formal policies and curricular reforms.

By integrating literature analysis with empirical research, the study will explore how internationalization is influencing the educational landscape of Hong Kong's primary schools, providing a thorough examination of both theoretical frameworks and practical implementations of this process.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach grounded in the social constructivism paradigm, utilizing a multiple case study design to investigate the internationalization of the primary school curriculum in Hong Kong. The chapter justifies the research strategy and methods, detailing how they align with the study's objectives. It begins by outlining the research design, followed by an explanation of participant selection and sampling techniques. The procedures for data collection and analysis are outlined, with a focus on ensuring the methodological rigor of the study. Additionally, this chapter addresses delimitations, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations, all of which contribute to the reliability and integrity of the research.

3.1 Research Paradigm

The purpose of this study is to explore the process of educational internationalization within two primary schools in Hong Kong. By conducting interviews with 18 teachers from these schools, the study aims to gain insights into the significance of educational internationalization and to examine whether teachers perceive themselves as effectively integrating international perspectives into their teaching practices to achieve curriculum internationalization. Additionally, we aim to explore the perspectives of general education teachers regarding administrative management and other resources to determine if they receive adequate support for incorporating intercultural competence into the curriculum.

3.1.1 Research Questions

This chapter outlines the research design used to address the following research questions:

1. *What aspects contribute to the motivation of local primary schools in Hong Kong to pursue curriculum internationalization?*

2. How has curriculum reform in these schools engaged with international design narratives, including encouraging new teacher agency and philosophies?

3. How has this reform connected with international narratives to strengthen primary education in these Hong Kong schools?

3.1.2 Constructivist Paradigm and Qualitative Approach

Grounded in a constructivist paradigm, this study recognizes that knowledge is actively constructed through individual experiences and interactions, rather than existing independently of the learner. This perspective suggests that individuals develop their understanding of the world through active interactions and reflections on their experiences, shaping knowledge in a dynamic and personal way (Dewey, 1986). While some studies have employed questionnaires to collect insights into the definitions and pedagogical approaches of teachers and stakeholders, this study focuses on more in-depth qualitative methods to explore the nuanced perspectives and practices related to curriculum internationalization (Law, 2007), and this research emphasizes the necessity of in-depth qualitative data. Such qualitative insights are invaluable for capturing the complexities of educational practices, particularly in the context of internationalization.

Paradigms are fundamentally belief systems that inform a researcher's choices regarding methods and approaches, shaping the research process from ontological and epistemological perspectives (Lincoln & Guba, 1994). Different beliefs influence how research is conducted and interpreted (Creswell, & Creswell, 2018). As articulated by Dewey, knowledge is not an external entity but is constructed by individuals as they learn, suggesting that learning is inherently a social and contextual process.

In line with the principles of social constructivism, this study acknowledges that individuals' interactions and knowledge construction are shaped by the specific historical, cultural, and social contexts in which they operate. These contexts influence

how they interpret and respond to educational practices, including curriculum internationalization (Jarvie & Zamora-Bonilla, 2011). By adopting a qualitative approach, this research aims to explore the lived experiences of teachers as they navigate the integration of international elements into their curricula. This approach provides a deeper understanding of the challenges they face and the support systems that influence their teaching practices. The in-depth data collected through qualitative methods is crucial for gaining insights into the nuances of this process and offers a valuable perspective on how internationalization is unfolding in the classroom (Torney-Purta et al., 2001).

3.2 Research Methodology

3.2.1 Overview of Research Design: Postpositivist Grounded Theory

Research design can be categorized based on characteristics relevant to various disciplines. Singleton et al. (2012) outline four main social research strategies: experiments, surveys, field research, and the analysis of existing data. In educational research, it is essential to distinguish research designs based on the study's objectives, as outlined by Adams and Schvaneveldt (1991). Their framework includes exploratory and descriptive designs, field studies, and experimental-causal designs, all of which are crucial for understanding the nuances of human behavior and educational contexts. This research on the internationalization of the education curriculum in Hong Kong's primary schools utilizes an exploratory and descriptive design. This approach provides an opportunity for a comprehensive investigation into the various complexities of curriculum internationalization and the diverse factors that impact its execution.

Central to this research design is the application of postpositivist grounded theory, a methodology characterized by its iterative relationship between data collection, analysis, and theory development (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). Grounded theory, originally introduced by Glaser and Strauss (2017), has undergone development within

different epistemological paradigms, such as objectivist, postpositivist, and constructivist approaches (Charmaz, 2006; Denzin, 2007). The choice of postpositivist grounded theory is particularly apt for this study, as it employs structured methodologies that are flexible enough to adapt to emerging data and changing conditions (Charmaz, 2006).

Postpositivist grounded theory acknowledges that reality is fluid and subject to change. This perspective facilitates the integration of both a priori theoretical frameworks and a posteriori experiential insight, making it suitable for exploring the perceptions and experiences of teachers regarding educational internationalization (Charmaz, 2011). The ability to adapt to new information and contexts aligns closely with the study's aims. Moreover, employing postpositivist grounded theory fosters an equitable partnership between the researcher and participants. Stenhouse (1975) emphasizes the significance of collaboration between researchers and educators, advocating for a partnership that enables a critical examination of educational practices. Such a partnership is essential for effectively implementing curriculum innovations, ensuring that the perspectives of both researchers and educators are represented and valued.

In summary, the choice of postpositivist grounded theory as the methodological framework for this research is based on its alignment with the study's aims, its adaptability in terms of data collection and analysis, and its emphasis on creating a collaborative research setting. This approach not only deepens the investigation but also ensures that the findings are rooted in the real-world experiences of educators engaged in the challenges of curriculum internationalization.

3.2.2 Utilizing a Comparative Case Study Approach

This theoretical framework informs the selection of research methodologies. For this study, a comparative case study approach was chosen, in line with an interpretivist perspective (Crotty, 1998; Hammersley, 2010; Lapan et al., 2011), as it best addresses

the qualitative nature of the research questions. These questions focus on understanding the contextual, unique, and evolving perspectives, concepts, and practices of individuals (Miovský, 2006). The qualitative research design utilizes interviews and group discussions, incorporating ethnographic techniques for data collection. Unlike quantitative research, which emphasizes hypothesis testing, qualitative methods and an interpretivist stance are better suited to capture the nuanced meanings within the research context (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Mioviský, 2006). However, presenting the findings as constructed should not imply they are devoid of representing social phenomena (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). Walford (2009) describes key components of qualitative research as involving “observation, interviewing, document gathering, systematic recording of all this, and systematic analysis of all the data generated” (p. 274). These elements collectively provide a structured approach to data collection and analysis, ensuring depth and rigor in the research process. While there’s debate on the effectiveness of these characteristics, it’s important to consider the relationship between labeling a study as ethnographic and its methodological approach. As this study does not fully embody all ethnographic characteristics, it’s described as employing qualitative research with interview-based data collection methods that incorporate some ethnographic elements.

This study employs a case study approach as its research design, which is well-suited to addressing the complexities and unique aspects of curriculum internationalization in Hong Kong primary schools. As Stake (1995) highlights, a case study entails an in-depth exploration of the detailed and complex elements of a single case within its contextual framework. Curriculum implementation in Hong Kong is shaped by a multi-dimensional framework, influenced by both regional factors and the autonomy of school-based management. The internationalization of the education curriculum in Hong Kong takes place within a distinctive context shaped by local educational policies, societal expectations, and the dynamic nature of the education system. This study will center on the experiences and perspectives of educators as they navigate these

complexities. Since the process of internationalization is neither uniform nor standardized, the case study approach is especially effective, enabling a detailed examination of the unique circumstances within individual schools while acknowledging the subtle differences across various contexts.

The choice of this research method was influenced by several factors. For this study, I selected ethnographic data collection techniques, committing significant time to fieldwork to gain an in-depth understanding of the context and participants' experiences (Riemer, 2012), to reduce the potential biases commonly linked to isolated formal interviews or single observations. The process of scheduling interviews and gathering various materials spanned six months in total. Building trust and establishing close relationships with participants, practices endorsed by many research institutions, allowed them to divulge highly sensitive information (Biklen, 2010; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). Moreover, there is a risk, as Norwood and Lusk (2011) note, that "they are misrepresenting their true feelings to provide a socially desirable answer" (p. 528), which could compromise the authenticity of the data collected. However, participants may be more inclined to respond truthfully and openly, knowing that their statements could be verified through observation or informal inquiries with others (while respecting confidentiality) (Neuman, 2014). In essence, "Situating behaviors themselves serve as a 'validity check' against the reports of subjects" (Jerolmack & Khan, 2014, p. 195). Using ethnographic methods in the data collection process provides the potential for gaining unique insights into the interview and group discussion data presented in this study.

The case study approach provides a strong methodology for investigating the intricate process of curriculum internationalization in Hong Kong primary schools. It allows for a thorough exploration of individual cases while considering the wider implications of these localized practices, thereby offering a richer understanding of the dynamics involved in the internationalization of education. The multiple case study approach

aligns well with the objectives of this research, as it seeks to explore how teachers perceive and implement internationalization initiatives within their curricula. As Yin (2013) highlights, “the data source and method types in particular are likely to strengthen the validity of a case study evaluation” (p. 324), underscoring the importance of methodological rigor. Rather than seeking to generalize findings across all Hong Kong primary schools, this approach focuses on gaining in-depth insights from specific cases that reflect broader trends in educational internationalization. Moreover, the multiple case study design strengthens the study's external validity by integrating a range of perspectives and experience. As Creswell (2011) points out, qualitative research is emergent and flexible, allowing for adjustments in data collection methods as themes and patterns emerge throughout the research process. This flexibility is crucial for capturing the dynamic nature of curriculum internationalization in Hong Kong primary schools.

In this study, data will be gathered through interviews with teachers from two primary schools in Hong Kong, some of whom also hold administrative roles, who are integral to the development and execution of curriculum innovations. These interviews will be supplemented by document analysis, including curriculum frameworks and educational policies, to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing curriculum internationalization. Additionally, observations of classroom practices and school activities will enrich the data, facilitating a deeper understanding of how educators interpret and apply internationalization efforts in their everyday practices. Framed within an interpretivist perspective, comparative education research typically employs qualitative research methodologies to explore and understand the nuances of educational systems, practices, and policies across different contexts (Cropley, 2004). Scholars advocate for delving into micro-levels and employing ethnographic approaches to bridge educational research findings with practitioners’ everyday experiences (Cropley, 2004). Masemann (1982) echoed similar sentiments, stressing

the necessity for comparative education research to be grounded in classroom realities, with ethnographic methods proving especially valuable for this endeavor. In line with this call, this research project embraces various ethnographic data collection methods to explore the perspectives of 18 teachers from two schools (at the micro-level), shedding light on their lived experiences and practices. This teacher-centric focus was deliberate to capture their role as primary implementers of curriculum internationalization, thus excluding students and parents—key stakeholders—from the current data collection to maintain a clear scope; however, future research will explore internationalization from the perspectives of parents and students to offer a more holistic view.

3.3 Design Framework

Qualitative research aims to understand the distinctiveness of a situation within its context, emphasizing the environment, participants, and the meanings they attribute to their experiences (Merriam, 1998). This approach is well-suited for exploring the perspectives, thoughts, and underlying beliefs of individuals (Hatch, 2023), in alignment with the objectives of this study. The chosen case study design facilitates a thorough investigation of contemporary phenomena within real-world contexts, especially when the boundaries between the phenomena and their environment are not distinctly defined (Yin, 2014). Case studies offer flexibility to investigate phenomena through participants' experiences, enabling a detailed understanding of their activities within significant contexts (Stake, 1995). In this study, the case study design is used to investigate the internationalization of education in two primary schools in Hong Kong: a local school (School X) and an international school (School Y).

3.3.1 Triangulation and Methodology

Triangulation, as Rossman and Wilson (1985) suggest, enables new insights by resolving contradictions that emerge from various data sources. By combining multiple methods—interviews, observations, and document analysis—this study

enhances the richness and validity of its findings (Denzin, 2004). The interviews provide direct insights into teachers' perspectives, while observations allow for an understanding of classroom practices. Document analysis adds depth to the understanding of existing internationalization practices.

3.3.2 Contribution and Significance

This study explores primary education internationalization in Hong Kong by comparing approaches in a local school and an international school. It examines differences in curriculum design, teacher preparation, and classroom practices, offering recommendations to strengthen internationalization efforts. Table 3 highlights three key dimensions: School Education as a carrier of internationalization, Curriculum for transferring global knowledge, and Teacher Background and Teaching Philosophy as crucial factors in fostering internationalization. The findings provide valuable insights for policymakers, school administrators, and educators aiming to enhance students' global competencies.

Table 3. Three dimensions of internationalizing primary schools

Dimension	Description
School Education	Important carrier of internationalization
Curriculum	Transfers international knowledge, awareness, and competence
Teacher Background	Teachers' educational background supports internationalization
Teaching Philosophy	Appropriate teaching methods foster a more conducive environment for the internationalization of education.

3.4 Sample and Participant Selection

This section describes the two primary stages of sampling in this study: selecting schools and choosing individual participants from those schools. A purposive sampling

approach, as supported by Merriam (1998) and Patton (2002), was used in both stages to target information-rich cases relevant to curriculum internationalization.

3.4.1 School Selection

According to data from the Hong Kong Education Bureau, there are approximately 591 primary schools in Hong Kong, which are categorized into four types based on financial support, religious affiliation, school network, and student gender: government schools, aided schools, Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) schools, and private schools.

- **Government Primary Schools:** These schools, making up about 6% of all primary schools in Hong Kong, offer six years of free education, are co-educational, and have no religious affiliation. Enrollment is subject to the government's Primary One Admissions Coordination Scheme.
- **Aided Primary Schools:** Aided schools make up about 80% of primary schools in Hong Kong. These schools receive most of their funding from the government, which is managed by the school's governing committee. They share many characteristics with government schools, and enrollment also requires participation in the Primary One Admissions Coordination Scheme.
- **Operating DSS Schools:** Comprising less than 5% of primary schools in Hong Kong, these schools receive government grants based on student enrollment but are also allowed to charge tuition fees. Like aided schools, they are managed by the school's management committee.
- **Private Primary Schools:** Comprising about 10% of schools in Hong Kong, private schools are self-financed and managed independently by sponsoring bodies. They do not receive government subsidies, typically charge higher tuition fees, and offer more flexibility in educational models and curriculum management. Many private schools provide non-local courses.

International schools in Hong Kong cater predominantly to foreign students, following diverse academic systems and offering curricula from various countries, including the International Baccalaureate Organization.

The selection for this study focused on the comparison between local private primary schools and international primary schools, as government schools, aided schools, and operating DSS schools often have limitations regarding curriculum reform and the

introduction of international courses. In contrast, private and international schools have greater autonomy in implementing curriculum reforms and integrating international courses.

Merriam (1998) justifies purposeful sampling by stating that “the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight, and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 61). This study employs purposive sampling to ensure a rich understanding of the internationalization processes in different school contexts. As Stake (2006) emphasizes, “qualitative understanding of cases requires experiencing the activity of the case as it occurs in its contexts and in its particular situation” (p. 2). By adopting this approach, the research seeks to capture the complexities and subtleties of the internationalization efforts in local primary schools in Hong Kong.

Research objectives: By comparing local private primary schools with international primary schools, this research seeks to offer a thorough understanding of the internationalization process in local primary schools in Hong Kong. This comparison will highlight the strategies, challenges, and outcomes of internationalization efforts across different school types, facilitating an in-depth analysis of how private and international schools have approached and implemented these initiatives. Based on specific selection criteria, the following distinctions were made:

Table 4. School Selection Criteria

Criteria	X Local Private Primary School	Y International School
<i>International Department</i>	Must have an international department	Must have an international department
<i>Teaching Staff</i>	Primarily employs foreign teachers for instruction	Requires cooperative teaching between Chinese and English teachers
<i>Language of Instruction</i>	All subjects taught in English, except for Chinese	All subjects taught in English, except for Chinese
<i>Curriculum</i>	Must offer an international curriculum	Offers an IB or IB PYP curriculum
<i>Language Demographics</i>	Over 50% of students speak Chinese as their first language	Over 50% of students speak Chinese as their first language
<i>Secondary School Entrance Rate</i>	High entrance application rate to secondary schools over the past 10 years (applicants/admissions ratio)	High application rate to international secondary schools over 10 years (applicants/admissions ratio)
<i>Performance Metrics</i>	Based on secondary school entrance exam scores over 10 years	Based on average IB or IB PYP scores over 10 years

3.4.2 Participant Selection

In qualitative research, the researcher acts as the primary tool for collecting and interpreting data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This highlights the importance of carefully selecting participants who can offer valuable and relevant insights into the research questions. Like the school selection process, participants were purposively chosen at each school site. As Chein (1981) illustrates, the logic of selecting a purposeful sample lies in the idea of choosing individuals “precisely because of their special experience and competence” (p. 440). This approach ensures that the participants provide valuable insights drawn from their unique backgrounds and experiences, particularly in the context of educational internationalization.

The participants in this study included teachers from two primary schools in Hong Kong, some of whom also held administrative roles. Specifically, the focus was on teachers of Chinese, English, and Mathematics from first grade, third grade, and sixth grade. This selection was deliberate, as it encompassed different levels of primary

education, enabling a thorough understanding of the internationalization of the curriculum across various age groups. By examining teachers from these distinct grades, the study seeks to capture a wide range of experiences and perspectives, reflecting how internationalization efforts vary at different developmental stages in a child's education.

A thorough analysis was achieved by employing a vertical approach, selecting one class from each grade level. This selection facilitated an in-depth examination of the teaching practices, curricular implementation, and pedagogical strategies employed by teachers within those specific contexts. In parallel, a horizontal analysis was conducted, prioritizing the three core subjects—English, Chinese, and Mathematics. These subjects were chosen for their consistent teaching hours, and the close interactions teachers have with their students, making them pivotal in the educational experience. This choice allowed for a detailed investigation of how these subjects are approached regarding internationalization within the school context, enabling the study to identify patterns, challenges, and effective practices that contribute to fostering a broad mindset.

A total of nine teachers, three from each grade, were interviewed, leading to 18 in-depth interviews across the two schools. The selected teachers represented a variety of countries, ethnicities, and backgrounds, offering a rich diversity of perspectives on the internationalization of education and curriculum. This diversity not only enhanced the data collected but also illuminated the different challenges and strategies experienced by educators in various contexts. Maintaining objectivity and reducing potential biases required selecting schools, teachers, and students without any prior affiliation with the researcher. The absence of prior connections was intended to enhance the impartiality of the research findings. Additionally, transparency about the researcher's focus and values was maintained throughout the study to ensure credible and reliable interpretations of the collected data.

Data collection began only after receiving approval from the University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). Following HREC approval, consent was sought from the participants, after which interviews were scheduled. The purposive sampling method not only ensured that the sample size was appropriate but also allowed for saturation of phenomena relevant to the research objectives (Patton, 1990). Ultimately, this meticulous selection process was crucial in gathering comprehensive data that could inform the research on the internationalization of primary education in Hong Kong.

3.5 Data Collection

The data collection for this study was carried out in three distinct phases, in accordance with the framework outlined by Lincoln et al. (1985). These phases consisted of orientation and overview, focused exploration, and member checking, which together provided a comprehensive understanding of curriculum internationalization in the selected primary schools. Data collection took place from late June 2022 to June 2023.

3.5.1 Study Procedures

The first phase commenced in late June 2022 with the main goal of obtaining sufficient background information on the selected schools. This phase was critical for establishing access to the schools and understanding their educational environments. The researcher gathered preliminary data from the Hong Kong Education Bureau's official website to inform the initial contact with potential schools. In total, two schools—a local primary school and an international primary school—were approached through the contact information listed on their official websites. The process involved reaching out to administrative staff, who facilitated introductions to the school principals or relevant decision-makers, such as academic affairs directors. After several rounds of discussions and introductions, both schools consented to participate in the study.

In this phase, the researcher provided a Letter of Introduction in both Chinese and English to ensure that school staff fully understood the study's objectives and requirements. In line with ethical guidelines, the principals were informed about the purpose of the research, the roles of participants, and the data collection methods. Teachers from each school, particularly those teaching Chinese, English, and Mathematics across grades 1, 3, and 6, agreed to participate in individual interviews and classroom observations. The first phase also involved informal data collection, such as field notes documenting initial impressions of the school environments. Document collection commenced, concentrating on school policies and curriculum frameworks related to internationalization perspectives. Relevant documents were gathered from the schools' websites and from academic affairs directors.

The second phase of data collection took place from September 2022 to April 2023 and involved more structured interactions with participants. This phase included one-on-one interviews with the selected subject teachers, classroom observations, and informal observations of student activities. The interview questions were tailored to align with the research objectives and were refined based on preliminary insights from the first phase. Each interview was conducted individually, lasting between 40 and 50 minutes. The researcher recorded interviews with participant consent, which were subsequently transcribed for analysis. Most interviews took place in private settings, such as teachers' offices or empty classrooms, providing a conducive environment for discussion. Due to the impact of COVID-19 and the need to prioritize student safety, classroom observations were adapted. Teachers recorded their teaching sessions and provided the videos to the researcher. This approach ensured unobtrusive data collection while maintaining a focus on student activities. The recorded sessions, captured at various points throughout the semester, offered valuable insights into both formal and informal curriculum practices.

The final phase of the study, conducted in late June 2023, focused on enhancing the credibility of the collected data through member checking. This critical step involved presenting participants with key insights drawn from their interviews and observations to verify accuracy and understanding. The researcher provided summaries of the findings and facilitated discussions to confirm participants' perspectives. After completing the fieldwork, all interview transcripts and observational notes were sent to participants via email, inviting them to review and provide feedback. Revisions were made based on their responses to ensure the data accurately captured their views and experiences.

3.5.2 Documents

A range of documents was collected from each school to address the research questions and facilitate data triangulation. These included the school mission statement, curriculum frameworks, and materials related to school culture, which were obtained from school websites and available publications. The researcher also sought permission to access additional documents, such as school policies, school-based curriculum outlines, and subject-specific textbooks. Furthermore, teacher syllabi and examples of student work were collected for analysis.

Analyzing these documents provided two key benefits. First, it allowed the researcher to identify how both formal and informal curricula were designed to achieve specific educational objectives, with a particular focus on informal activities, which can vary significantly between schools. This insight helped guide the selection of activities for observation. Second, the documents provided detailed, corroborative information that supplemented data from interviews and observations, thereby strengthening the credibility and depth of the research findings.

Content analysis was employed to systematically examine the content within the documents, identifying patterns and themes relevant to the research questions (Merriam,

1998). Coding techniques facilitated the analysis by helping to identify and organize key themes and patterns within the content (Merriam, 1998). Furthermore, the collected documents served to validate, reinforce, and authenticate evidence obtained from other sources, such as interviews (Yin, 2014). By integrating data from various sources such as documents, interviews, and observations, a more thorough understanding of the research topic was gained.

3.5.3 Interviews

Individual interviews were conducted with subject teachers to examine their perspectives on curriculum internationalization and its integration within their schools' educational practices. The purpose of the interviews was to understand how teachers perceive and implement curriculum reforms focused on internationalization, and to examine how these efforts align with the schools' overall educational goals. Special emphasis was placed on the challenges teachers encountered, the strategies they used, and the values they associated with integrating international perspectives into their teaching.

The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format, with a set of key questions centered on the research topic, while also allowing for flexibility to explore new insights as they emerged during the conversations (Becker et al., 2012). The interview protocol consisted of 15 open-ended questions, intended to guide 40–50-minute discussions (Appendix A). These questions were developed based on the study's conceptual framework and tailored to align with each teacher's background and professional role.

After gaining access to the schools, the researcher reached out to the participants to arrange the interview sessions. The interviews were conducted in Mandarin, Cantonese, or English, based on the participants' language preferences, and were recorded with their consent. The recordings were subsequently transcribed for analysis, with key

quotes translated into English by the researcher as needed. A bottom-up analysis method was used to uncover emerging themes from the interview data, following Hatch's (2023) framework. This process involved starting with the specific details in the data and identifying patterns and relationships that surfaced throughout the interviews. Coding techniques were employed to organize recurring themes, following the methodological guidance of Yin (2014). The researcher systematically reviewed the interview data, coding the content to highlight consistent themes and patterns, as outlined by Bradley et al. (2007) and Curry et al. (2009).

Additionally, the inductive analysis drew from the participants' shared knowledge and insights, as described by Azungah (2018). During the coding process, key themes were extracted, categorized, and analyzed to gain a deeper understanding of the research questions. This comprehensive analysis allowed for the categorization of emerging patterns and the identification of connections between different themes (Hatch, 2023). Data security and confidentiality were maintained by saving all interview recordings and transcripts in encrypted files on a secure computer system, with any hard copies stored in a locked drawer that only the researcher could access. Member checking was carried out to validate the findings, allowing participants to review and offer feedback on the researcher's analysis (Hatch, 2023; Merriam, 1998). NVivo software was utilized to further analyze the transcribed data, facilitating the identification and categorization of themes and relationships, as suggested by Bazeley and Jackson (2013).

3.5.4 Observations

Due to the ongoing pandemic during the research period, classroom observations were conducted remotely. Instead of in-person visits, teachers recorded one lesson each, lasting between 20 to 30 minutes, and sent the videos to the researcher. This approach ensured the safety of all participants while still allowing valuable insights into the curriculum and teaching practices to be gathered. The lessons centered on key

academic subjects and activities pertinent to the research objectives, especially those connected to the internationalization of the curriculum. The researcher reviewed the recorded lessons to observe teacher instruction, interactions with students, and the overall classroom environment. The analysis aimed to understand how teachers integrated international perspectives into their lessons and aligned their teaching with broader educational goals. By utilizing video recordings, the researcher minimized direct contact with students, ensuring a non-disruptive evaluation of teaching practices.

To maintain consistency and authenticity, teachers recorded their lessons as part of their regular teaching schedules without making special adjustments for the researcher's review. Each recording was analyzed using a structured observation protocol to ensure that the evaluation criteria were applied systematically. Field notes were documented following each observation, providing a detailed account of the key insights gathered from the video lessons. In addition to formal video observations, informal discussions with teachers were conducted to clarify any uncertainties regarding the lesson content and to gain further context about the internationalization of the curriculum. This additional information contributed to triangulating the data gathered from other sources.

The analysis of transcripts and documents employed constant comparison, immediate analysis, and repeated examination, essential elements of qualitative research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Data analysis occurred simultaneously and iteratively with data collection, using constant comparison to identify patterns and variations that contributed to generating conceptual ideas. These conceptual ideas were organized into categories, ultimately contributing to the development of theory (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Data collection occurred concurrently across the two schools, with interviews and video observations arranged in advance. Each teacher contributed one recorded lesson, which formed a critical part of the study's comprehensive data collection approach.

3.6 Data Analysis

Participants' qualitative feedback from the semi-structured interviews was captured through audio recordings and subsequently transcribed by the researcher. The data analysis process followed a systematic framework that included conceptualization, coding, memo writing, and outcropping (Neuman, 2014). As Neuman (2014) explains, "the concepts are then aggregated into categories or 'themes', which are the grounding for the theoretical explanations that are the goal of the data-analytic process" (p. 81). To ensure a comprehensive analysis, all qualitative data were systematically imported and analyzed using NVivo 11, while Excel was utilized for processing and analyzing the quantitative data. This combination of tools supported both depth and precision in the analysis.

The analysis closely followed Miles and Huberman's approach of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (1994). Data reduction was carried out after cleaning the data, resulting in condensed transcripts. Using NVivo, data reduction was achieved in three ways:

1. Data with similar meanings were grouped into nodes (codes).
2. Data were organized under headings, which were manually adjusted based on themes identified during the semi-structured interviews.
3. Key nodes were refined into descriptive codes that aligned with the conceptual framework, ensuring they accurately reflected the data context.

These methods facilitated an iterative examination of the data, allowing for both inductive and deductive analysis. Although there was some overlap in the content among the descriptive codes, manual merging eliminated redundancy while ensuring that the relational codes provided nuanced insights into specific categories, and the inductive codes captured broader contextual information. The immediate outcomes of

this reduction included a wide range of ‘messy’ descriptive and interpretive codes derived from inductive analysis, broad over-general codes organized by interview themes, and a smaller set of descriptive codes for deductive analysis, some of which proved more informative than others. All codes were analyzed using NVivo’s mapping functions to establish logical connections and generate interpretive themes and patterns. In the data display phase, the researcher employed NVivo’s ‘framework matrices’ to summarize the data, though the large size of the matrices occasionally impacted readability. As a result, abstract themes were mainly developed through memos referencing printed matrices, beginning with single-case analysis and advancing to cross-case analysis.

Conclusions were drawn throughout the stages of data reduction and display, with initial insights developed through explanation building, pattern matching, and program logic models. During the single-case analysis phase, conclusions were presented in case reports that integrated multiple data sources to address the research questions (Stake, 2006; Tisdell & Merriam, 2015). In the cross-case analysis phase, comparisons of cases highlighted both similarities and differences at a more abstract level, consistent with Yin’s (1994) analysis techniques. This comprehensive approach ensured a thorough and rigorous examination of the qualitative data related to the internationalization of education, emphasizing teachers’ perspectives and experiences in Hong Kong primary schools.

3.6.1 Data Analysis Framework

The table below provides a structured framework for analyzing the internationalization of primary education. It focuses on three critical components: the international curriculum, teachers’ backgrounds, and teaching philosophies. Each dimension highlights essential elements that contribute to fostering a multicultural learning environment, enabling educators to enhance teaching practices and promote citizenship

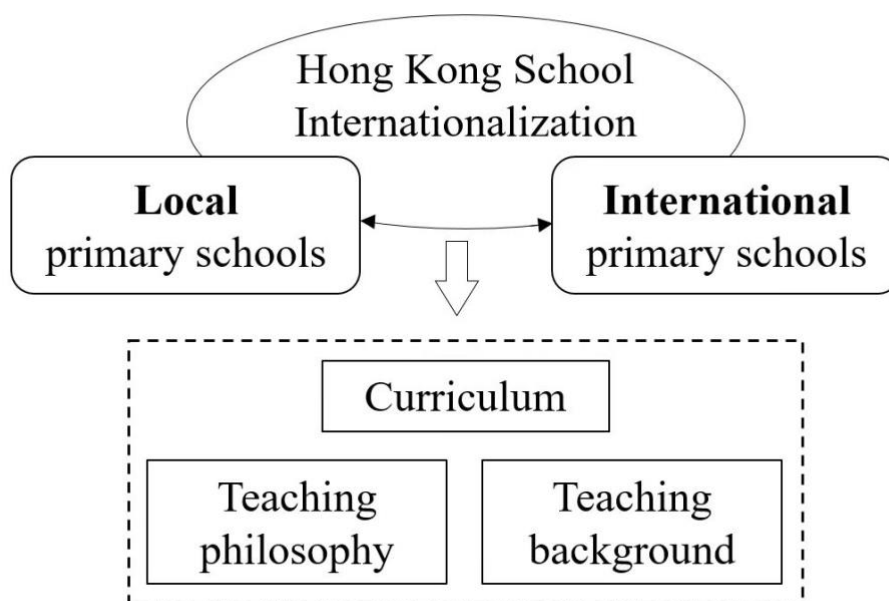
among students. This framework acts as a guiding tool for assessing and enhancing the effectiveness of internationalization efforts in primary schools.

Table 5. Key Components of Primary Education Internationalization

Component	Key Focus Areas
International Curriculum	Design and content that incorporates international elements.
	Preparation of students for international and multicultural contexts.
	Relevance, purpose, and sequencing of international content.
	Inclusion of both domestic and foreign students in curriculum design.
Teachers' Background	Intercultural background and international experience of teachers.
	Impact of overseas experience on understanding multicultural perspectives and addressing international students' challenges.
	Influence of teachers' backgrounds on responses to curriculum internationalization.
	Role of teachers in promoting intercultural understanding and broader perspectives.
Teaching Philosophy	Beliefs, values, and approaches to teaching in the context of internationalization.
	Incorporation of international perspectives into teaching practices.
	Strategies and methods to engage students in multicultural exploration.
	Alignment between teaching philosophy and the goals of primary education internationalization.

The analysis framework serves as a structured approach for examining these critical aspects of primary education internationalization. It facilitates a comprehensive understanding of how various factors influence curriculum internationalization, including the qualifications and experiences of teachers and their teaching philosophies. Moreover, this framework allows for an in-depth exploration of how educators promote intercultural understanding and broader perspectives within their classrooms. By emphasizing the interplay between curriculum design, teacher attributes, and pedagogical approaches, the research will offer valuable insights into improving the effectiveness of international education in primary schools. Ultimately, the findings will inform the development of best practices for creating an inclusive and competent educational environment.

Figure 1. Analytical Framework and Content



The data analysis process outlined here is dynamic, balancing moments of chaos and order, creative and analytical thinking, along with periods of excitement and monotony. It involves continuously adapting and evolving various codes as new insights emerge (Huberman, 2014; Richards, 2020). When descriptive or analytical ideas arise directly from the data, it follows an inductive process or a bottom-up approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Although inductive reasoning dominates the analysis, deductive or top-down methods are also employed to a certain extent (Rierner, 2012).

This study utilizes three main methods for data collection: document analysis, semi-structured interviews, and observations. Document analysis involves reviewing various archival materials such as school policies, curriculum documents, and academic records, which provide historical context and background relevant to the case study. Semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, such as school administrators, teachers, and students, provide another important method for data collection. These interviews allow participants to share their perspectives and experiences in a flexible, open-ended manner. Lastly, observations focus on direct, on-site monitoring of

classroom interactions and school dynamics, offering insights into teaching practices and curriculum implementation.

The use of these multiple data collection methods facilitates methodological triangulation, which strengthens the validity and reliability of the study by cross-referencing data from various sources. This triangulation approach ensures that the research findings are well-supported, credible, and convincing. However, it is important to acknowledge that each method has its own strengths and limitations. As such, careful planning and execution of document analysis, interviews, and observations are essential to maintaining the quality and rigor of the research findings.

3.6.2 Case Analysis

To streamline the analysis, a template for individual cases was created, enabling consistent coding and patterning across the two schools (see Table 6). Table 6 illustrates a part of the database for both School X and School Y, focusing on the matrix for Research Question. This method allowed for the detailed exploration of each school's internationalization efforts while maintaining a clear framework for cross-case comparison.

Table 6 Individual Case Analysis Template

Research Question	Interviews	Document Analysis	Observations
RQ 1			
RQ 2			
RQ 3			

Document Analysis

Collecting diverse documents from the selected schools is a valuable approach for obtaining detailed information. School mission statements, historical records, curriculum materials, and cultural artifacts offer insight into the schools' objectives,

development, and educational strategies. Analyzing documents such as school policies, curriculum outlines, and textbooks deepens the understanding of educational practices and how curricula are implemented. Additionally, historical documents provide context regarding the evolution of educational practices, shedding light on the factors influencing current frameworks. For example, school policy documents were coded for themes like multilingual education goals, revealing priorities in language integration over time.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews with teachers of Chinese, English, and Mathematics allow for an in-depth exploration of their perspectives on curriculum internationalization. By using a prepared interview protocol and conducting longitudinal interviews both before and after academic terms, this method captures how teachers' understanding and implementation of internationalization evolve over time. These interviews provide valuable, firsthand insights into the challenges and opportunities that teachers experience when internationalizing their curriculum. For instance, interview transcripts were analyzed to identify recurring themes such as resistance to intercultural activities, highlighting practical barriers teachers faced.

Observation

Observations complement interview data by offering direct insights into classroom dynamics and instructional practices. Conducting formal observations over the course of an entire semester allows for the tracking of changes in teaching methods and the implementation of curriculum internationalization. By triangulating findings from interviews with classroom observations, the research gains greater validity. Observations are systematically aligned with the conceptual framework to ensure robust data collection and analysis. Additionally, rotating visits between schools facilitate efficient data collection and a comprehensive view of curriculum internationalization efforts. For example, observation notes were coded to track

patterns like use of bilingual prompts, showing how teachers fostered multicultural engagement in lessons. Data from multiple sources provide a well-rounded understanding of its implementation in the selected schools (see Table 7).

Table 7. Research Triangulation Method

Research questions	Document analysis (Intent)	Interviews (Intent & practice)	Observations (Practice)
RQ1: Reasons for curriculum internationalization	School history and mission	Views from Chinese, English, and Mathematics teachers	N/A
RQ2: Practical exploration of curriculum internationalization	- School curriculum structure (English, Chinese, Mathematics) - School administrative settings - Teacher background	Views from Chinese, English, and Mathematics teachers	Teacher role. Teaching method. Assessment mode
RQ3: How to better achieve the goal of curriculum internationalization	N/A	Views from Chinese, English, and Mathematics teachers	N/A

After analyzing individual cases, cross-case analyses were performed to identify theoretical propositions and compare findings across schools. The multiple case study design adhered to the “literal replication” logic (Yin, 2013, p. 57) to enhance the validity of the findings. This approach deepened understanding by examining similarities and differences across cases (Miles & Huberman, 1994), with a specific focus on school types, such as local primary schools and international primary schools, rather than geographical locations. The analysis began with a detailed description of each school’s context, highlighting key factors that influence curriculum internationalization. Using the data display framework from Miles and Huberman (1994), the main themes for each case were organized into a series of tables, each addressing the research questions.

3.7 Ethics and Rigor in Research Evaluation

This section underscores the significance of ethical principles and methodological rigor in the study. By prioritizing participant welfare and employing strategies like member checking and triangulation, the research ensures credible and trustworthy findings.

3.7.1 Delimitations

The delimitations of this study were defined based on the specific objectives of the research, time constraints, and available resources. The focus is intentionally narrowed to two primary schools in Hong Kong that align with the research objectives and demonstrate relevant practices in curriculum internationalization. This geographical limitation allows for a concentrated examination of educational approaches within a specific context.

The study includes a total of 18 participants, comprising experienced teachers across three core subjects: English, Chinese, and Mathematics. These educators were selected for their expertise and familiarity with the curriculum reforms being investigated. In addition, the study incorporates insights from a notable figure in the Hong Kong education sector, referred to by the pseudonym Ant. With extensive experience in both government and education, Ant provides a valuable perspective that enhances the depth of the research.

It is important to note that students were intentionally excluded from this study. The research outcomes primarily center on the teachers' experiences, perceptions, and practices related to the internationalization of the curriculum. This focus enables a more in-depth exploration of educators' insights, without the added complexity of incorporating student perspectives. The primary advantage of employing case studies in

this research is the opportunity for a detailed and nuanced description of the selected cases (Tisdell & Merriam, 2015).

3.7.2 Trustworthiness

In research, the terms ‘effectiveness’ and ‘credibility’ are often used interchangeably, as both reflect the researcher’s commitment to ensuring that their findings accurately capture participants’ experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Achieving recognition and trust in research necessitates a high level of rigor. For a study to be deemed credible, it must address subtle differences and complexities within the data; be reliable, demonstrating consistency over time; be transferable, maintaining richness across various contexts; and be confirmable, indicating that the findings can be independently verified (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

One effective strategy for enhancing the credibility of research findings is member checking, also known as ‘participant validation’. This process enables participants to review and respond to the researcher’s representation of their experiences. In this study, participants were asked to provide feedback on the transcribed interviews to ensure that the accounts accurately represented their perspectives. Some participants offered valuable comments, which contributed to refining the analysis and enhancing the credibility of the findings.

Triangulation was also employed as a strategy to bolster the study’s credibility by examining whether different methods yielded consistent findings. This approach involves evaluating results from multiple advantageous positions, offering a more thorough insight into the phenomenon being studied (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In this study, the researcher analyzed various sources, including school websites and documents, to corroborate the findings obtained from interviews.

A comprehensive overview of the research context, participant behaviors, and observations is essential for ensuring the validity of the research findings (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). This study meticulously documented the interview locations, participants' backgrounds, and the environments in which the research took place, offering a rich narrative that enhances the transparency and trustworthiness of the findings. Rich data, akin to 'thick description', involves a rigorous process of collecting comprehensive and detailed information, allowing for a nuanced understanding of the phenomenon (Maxwell & Josselson, 2021). To accurately capture participants' experiences, the data for this study was recorded and transcribed verbatim. In addition, field notes were made during interviews to document visual and non-verbal cues, further enriching the dataset and enhancing the understanding of participants' interactions and expressions.

3.7.3 Researcher's Role

Qualitative research is inherently interpretive in nature (Creswell, 2011). Therefore, it is crucial for researchers to openly acknowledge and identify their biases, values, and personal interests that could shape the focus and process of the research (Creswell, & Poth, 2018). Providing background and contextual information helps the audience comprehend the subject matter and setting of the study more effectively.

As a researcher, my perceptions have been influenced by my educational experiences in both China and abroad. I am a Chinese national who has studied in China and is now a doctoral student at the University of Sydney. My background enables me to navigate the intricacies of the Chinese education system and understand the pressures faced by both teachers and students. I view myself as a quasi-outsider in this research, as my deep familiarity with the local educational context is complemented by my current international perspective.

Having a wife who speaks Cantonese has significantly facilitated my communication with participants, leading to smoother interactions during the interviews. However, I

encountered challenges due to the sensitive nature of certain topics, especially those related to political views and the education system. Some teachers and principals were hesitant to share insights they felt might negatively impact their institutions.

In some instances, participants tried to determine what they believed to be the ‘correct’ answers to my questions, which occasionally shifted the discussion into a reflection on their own performance. Questions about the identities of other schools involved in the study frequently arose, revealing their concerns about comparisons with their peers. Despite my efforts to emphasize confidentiality and ethical considerations, these dynamics sometimes resulted in reluctance to provide honest responses.

Moreover, my lack of direct experience working within the Hong Kong education system added another layer of complexity. Although I have studied within this framework as a student, I do not have the insider experience of teaching or administrative roles, which can limit my understanding of certain operational aspects. Acknowledging these potential limitations is crucial for maintaining the objectivity and reliability of my research findings.

3.7.4 Ethical Assurances

This research involves data collection from human participants and will rigorously follow the principles outlined in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007). Before the study began, a proposal was submitted to the University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee to obtain the required approvals. The focus of the research is on teachers and school administrators in local primary schools in Hong Kong, ensuring that the mental and physical well-being, rights, and safety of all participants are safeguarded throughout the research process.

To facilitate informed participation, all participants received comprehensive information about the study, enabling them to make well-informed decisions. Data

collection only proceeded after participants provided their consent by signing a consent document, which outlines the research's purpose and potential risks. Ethical considerations were paramount during data collection procedures, including interviews, document analysis, and observations. Measures were put in place to protect participants' rights and safety, with a strong emphasis on anonymity and confidentiality. Pseudonyms were assigned to all participants and their institutions during data analysis to ensure their identities remain protected.

All collected data was transcribed promptly and stored securely to maintain confidentiality. A designated authority figure in Hong Kong, independent of the research, was identified as a point of contact for participants should they have any concerns or complaints regarding the study. Each participant was provided with a study protocol that outlines the purpose, methods, and potential outcomes of the research. Participation was completely voluntary, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason.

To further safeguard participants' identities and ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were assigned to all individuals involved. All collected documents were kept confidential, and interview data was securely stored on a password-protected computer in a locked office, accessible only to the researcher (DeJonckheere et al., 2019).

3.8 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter detailed the research approach and techniques employed in this study to explore the primary research question regarding the internationalization of the curriculum in Hong Kong's primary education. Investigating curriculum internationalization in schools presents complexities due to varying interpretations and practices. Therefore, a thorough examination of the concept and its application in natural settings is essential. This study was conducted within a postpositivist grounded

theory framework, applying a qualitative methodology. By adopting a multiple case study design focused on two primary schools, the research gathered data through semi-structured interviews, document reviews, and observational methods. These methods were deemed effective for exploring the challenges and strategies related to curriculum internationalization. Additionally, employing diverse methods and data sources strengthened the rigor and credibility of the findings through the application of methodological triangulation. Data analysis was conducted following constant comparison and thematic analysis techniques, facilitated by NVivo 11 software.

The following chapter will provide a summary of the two primary schools examined in this case study research.

Chapter 4: School Profiles and Education Policy Landscape

4.1 Overview

This case study investigates the curriculum internationalization process in two Hong Kong primary schools: one local institution and one international institution. The empirical research utilizes various data sources, such as document reviews and semi-structured interviews with teachers. This method aligns with the case study approach, which is ideal for examining contemporary phenomena within their natural settings (Hancock et al., 2021). By leveraging diverse evidence, such as school documents and interviews, the study provides a holistic understanding of how internationalization unfolds within these educational institutions (Yin, 2014).

The schools selected represent contrasting approaches to internationalization in Hong Kong's primary education system. One is a local primary school, and the other is an international primary school. While they differ in funding, student demographics, admission policies, and curriculum frameworks, both schools share a commitment to international education. This commitment underscores the significance of studying both institutions, as their practices offer insights into the localization of educational standards in Hong Kong. Knight's (2003) process-oriented view of internationalization, which emphasizes integrating intercultural and international elements into education, provides a lens to interpret how these schools balance local and global priorities.

This qualitative case study examines the internationalization processes, curriculum structures, teacher profiles, and teaching philosophies in these two schools. By identifying the differences and commonalities between their approaches, the study highlights how the principles of internationalization are implemented within local and

international primary education settings. While each school has distinct characteristics, they embody broader trends and challenges within Hong Kong's education system, offering valuable insights for policy and practice through their comparison. Leask's (2015) framework of curriculum internationalization further aids in interpreting how these schools embed diverse perspectives into their educational practices.

The methodological framework for this case study is grounded in constructivist theory, emphasizing the perspectives of the participants—teachers and administrators—on curriculum internationalization (Creswell & Poth 2018). Through interviews and document analysis, the study captures how these educators perceive and implement internationally oriented learning outcomes, preparing students for a rapidly changing world. The study further examines how teachers' international backgrounds influence their teaching practices and how they tailor their pedagogy to meet the diverse needs of students in an internationalized educational setting.

This chapter begins by outlining the broader Hong Kong education policy landscape, providing context for the subsequent profiles of the two schools, designated as School X (a local institution) and School Y (an international school). These profiles detail each institution's educational philosophy, historical development, and commitment to internationalization. By understanding the schools' contexts—such as location, history, facilities, and student and teacher demographics—the study situates the internationalization process within their specific environments. The data gathered from official websites, school publications, and interviews with educators offer a comprehensive picture of how each school navigates the challenges and opportunities of international education.

The insights derived from these profiles offer a deeper understanding of the practical challenges and support requirements in Hong Kong's progress toward curriculum internationalization. In the sections that follow, the Hong Kong education policy

framework will be presented first, followed by detailed descriptions of School X and School Y, focusing on their key characteristics, curriculum frameworks, and approaches to international education. These school profiles will serve as a foundation for the cross-case analysis in subsequent chapters, where the similarities and differences between their internationalization efforts will be examined in depth.

4.2 Hong Kong Government Policy Documents

The Hong Kong government has implemented several education policies designed to improve the quality and internationalization of the school curriculum. Key policy documents, such as the *Education Blueprint for the 21st Century* and the *School Development and Accountability Framework*, emphasize fostering bilingualism, promoting diverse perspectives, and ensuring a holistic education. These policies provide guidance for schools in adapting their curricula to meet international standards while maintaining a strong foundation in Chinese culture and language. Knight's (2003) process-oriented view of internationalization highlights how such policies integrate intercultural and global elements, offering a lens to interpret Hong Kong's dual focus on local identity and global competitiveness.

4.2.1 Education System of Hong Kong

Hong Kong's education system is structured to provide a comprehensive and diverse learning environment that prepares students with the essential knowledge, skills, and values for their future personal and academic growth. The system is structured into four stages: kindergarten, primary school, secondary school, and higher education. This structure encompasses both public and private institutions, providing various educational pathways for students. Altbach and Knight (2007) argue that globalization drives education systems to balance national priorities with international benchmarks, a dynamic reflected in Hong Kong's tiered structure.

Kindergarten Education

Kindergartens and kindergarten-cum-child-care-centers in Hong Kong serve children aged three to six. The primary goal of kindergarten education is to encourage holistic development, encompassing moral, intellectual, physical, social, and aesthetic growth. Early childhood education aims to establish good habits, foster positive learning attitudes, and stimulate children's curiosity, laying a solid foundation for lifelong learning. This developmental phase is crucial for building the skills and mindset necessary for future academic success.

Primary School Education

Primary education in Hong Kong starts at around the age of six and lasts for six years. The government aims to offer a well-rounded and diverse education that meets students' academic, social, and emotional needs. Primary schools help students build a strong knowledge base, establish core values, and develop essential skills for continued learning and personal growth. Most primary schools in Hong Kong use Chinese (Cantonese) as the main medium of instruction, while English is taught as a second language. Leask's (2015) curriculum internationalization framework suggests that early language integration, as seen here, fosters intercultural competence from a young age.

Since the Basic Education Curriculum Reform in 2001–02, the education system has shifted towards improving students' general skills, values, and attitudes through interactive and student-centered learning. The curriculum aims to develop independent learners and promote holistic education, focusing on critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration. In Hong Kong, English is introduced in Grade 1 of primary school, earlier than in mainland China, where it becomes compulsory in Grade 3. Additionally, English learning activities are incorporated into nearly all kindergarten programs (Nunan, 2003).

Secondary School Education

Hong Kong's secondary education lasts for six years, with the first three years dedicated to junior secondary and the remaining three years to senior secondary education. In 2009, the government implemented a new senior secondary curriculum aimed at addressing the needs of a fast-changing, knowledge-driven society and preparing students for the challenges of the 21st century. The curriculum is flexible and diverse, catering to students with varying interests and abilities, and emphasizing lifelong learning and holistic development. After completing six years of secondary education, students take the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE), which is widely recognized both locally and internationally (Evans, 2000; Kirkpatrick & Liddicoat, 2017). The government provides 12 years of free education through public schools, covering both primary and secondary levels. Additionally, vocational training programs are fully subsidized, offering alternative educational pathways for students. The secondary school system also promotes biliteracy and trilingualism, ensuring students' proficiency in Cantonese, English, and Mandarin.

Higher Education

Higher education in Hong Kong offers diverse pathways for students following their completion of secondary education. HKDSE graduates can either directly enter bachelor's degree programs or choose sub-degree programs that follow a "2+2" articulation model, enabling students to progress from an associate degree to a full bachelor's degree. This system ensures multiple entry points for higher education, catering to students' diverse interests and career goals.

There are 22 higher education institutions in Hong Kong authorized to confer local degrees, including nine publicly funded universities and 13 self-financed ones. In addition to undergraduate programs, students can pursue sub-degree programs, vocational training, and continuing education. The higher education sector also offers

postgraduate programs, providing opportunities for advanced academic and professional qualifications (Bolton et al., 2021; Evans, 2016).

Language Policy

The formulation and implementation of language policy in Hong Kong are influenced by a combination of political, social, cultural, and economic factors (Baldauf, 2006), as well as the agency of various stakeholders (Ricento & Hornberger, 1996). Cantonese is the native language of much of the population and serves as the main medium of instruction in kindergartens and primary schools (Census & Statistics, 2016; Poon, 2010). In contrast, Putonghua is the national language of the People's Republic of China and is the exclusive medium of instruction in schools across the mainland (Kirkpatrick & Xu, 2001; Zhang et al., 2005).

English, however, has historically maintained its position as a language of influence and status in Hong Kong, promoting social mobility and reinforcing the city's role as a global financial hub (Evans, 2000). English continues to be the primary language of instruction in six of the eight government-funded universities, as well as in private universities (Kirkpatrick & Liddicoat, 2017). Additionally, English is the default language for written communication in the workplace (Bolton et al., 2021; Evans, 2016), underscoring its importance in both education and professional settings. By fostering a multilingual education system, Hong Kong positions its students for success, promoting biliteracy and trilingualism proficiency while providing diverse educational pathways tailored to students' individual goals.

International Schools

In response to the increasing number of expatriate families in Hong Kong, the government has supported the expansion of international schools to cater to the educational needs of non-local residents. These schools follow international curricula

and serve both expatriate families and local families seeking an international education. By promoting a multicultural environment, international schools play an essential role in supporting Hong Kong's reputation as a city and its position as a key hub for business and investment. The Hong Kong government continues to focus on policies that enhance education quality and develop biliteracy and trilingualism. The system's flexibility allows students to progress through various educational stages, providing pathways that align with their academic and personal goals.

4.2.2 Policy Documents Supporting the Internationalization of Education

The Chief Executive of Hong Kong's SAR government has consistently highlighted the objective of transforming Hong Kong into a global education hub. The Chief Executive's 2023 Policy Address presented several key initiatives, such as increasing the intake of international students at publicly funded institutions, enhancing scholarship programs, and expanding accommodation facilities. The government remains committed to fostering a diversified and internationalized education sector that aligns with Hong Kong's broader economic and social objectives.

Support for International Schools

The SAR government offers targeted support to international schools through various measures:

- **Allocation of Vacant Premises and Land:** Vacant government premises or land are allocated to educational organizations via an open, competitive process called the School Allocation Exercise.
- **Expansion and Reconstruction Support:** International schools are encouraged to expand or redevelop their existing sites to increase student capacity, often through building new facilities or upgrading existing infrastructure. Schools may receive temporary premises to minimize disruption during reconstruction.
- **Land Rent and Rates Rebate:** Non-profit international schools can apply for rebates on land rent and rates, provided they prove their tax-exempt status under Section 88 of the Inland Revenue Ordinance.
- **Interest-Free Loans for Construction:** Eligible non-profit schools may receive interest-free loans to finance new facilities. Loan amounts match the construction costs

of standard government school buildings, though they exclude costs related to boarding facilities or preschools.

Several schools, such as Kellett School, Hong Kong Academy, and Harrow International School, have benefited from these interest-free loans, receiving a total of HKD616.76 million in 2012. These financial arrangements ensure that international schools maintain financial stability while expanding their capacity to serve non-local students.

Mandatory Requirements for International Schools

To ensure alignment with government policies, international schools must meet specific mandatory criteria:

- **Enrollment Composition:** At least 70% of enrolled students must be non-local or visa-holding students.
- **Non-local Curriculum:** Schools must offer international curricula that align with diverse pathways.
- **Exclusive Use of Allocated Premises:** Land and facilities must be dedicated solely to international primary, secondary, or combined school operations, with preschools allowed only under exceptional conditions.
- **Financial Sustainability:** Schools must operate on a self-financing basis, allocating part of their tuition income to scholarships or financial assistance programs.
- **Tax-Exempt Status:** Non-profit schools must provide audited financial accounts annually to maintain their tax-exempt status, ensuring transparency.
- **Community Engagement:** Schools are encouraged to engage in government and community education initiatives, providing access to their facilities upon request.

In some cases, schools may need to provide letters of recommendation from consulates or chambers of commerce to demonstrate alignment with the interests of specific national or business communities. These requirements foster a high-quality, inclusive education environment for international students.

Government Funding Policy for International Schools

Since 1967, Hong Kong's international school system has grown significantly. Currently, 50 international schools (excluding one special school) operate in the region,

offering a variety of non-local curricula, such as those from the UK, US, Australia, Japan, and the International Baccalaureate (IB) program. In addition, some private independent and Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) schools offer the IB curriculum at the senior secondary level. However, DSS schools must also provide local curricula to ensure students are prepared for local public exams.

Unlike other international schools, the English Schools Foundation (ESF) has historically received recurrent funding from the government, despite recommendations from the *Director of Audit's Report No. 43 (2004)* to review these arrangements. The revised English Schools Foundation Ordinance (2008) restructured the ESF's governance, establishing a board of governors and corporate management reforms. While other international schools operate on a self-financed model, ESF remains the only body receiving recurrent public funding, a divergence from the government's broader policy.

Accountability and Regulatory Framework

International schools receiving government support must comply with the Education Ordinance (Chapter 279) and the Education Regulations (Chapter 279A). Schools must ensure:

- Premises meet building and fire safety standards.
- Teachers hold recognized qualifications and are registered with the Education Bureau.
- Tuition fees are approved by the Education Bureau.

In addition, international schools allocated land or premises through the School Allocation Exercise must sign service contracts with the government. These contracts ensure compliance with submitted school development plans, government education policies, and operational regulations. Contracts have an initial term of 10 years, with renewal options every five years.

International schools that establish operations independently of the School Allocation Exercise must first register as private independent schools. Upon meeting all criteria—such as a sustainable financial plan, accreditation by reputable organizations, and compliance with student enrollment policies—these schools can apply to be recognized as international schools. The Education Bureau guarantees that schools adhere to operational, financial, and governance standards, thereby enhancing the overall quality of education in Hong Kong.

The Hong Kong government plays a vital role in promoting the growth and globalization of education by offering financial assistance and logistical support to international schools. These initiatives support the overarching objective of establishing Hong Kong as a global education hub, drawing talent from both local and international communities. However, international schools must meet stringent regulatory requirements, ensuring that they maintain high educational standards while catering to the diverse needs of the community.

4.3 High-achieving school—X Local Private Primary School

Qualitative research seeks to understand specific situations within their unique contexts by focusing on the interactions, participants, and broader environment (Merriam, 1998). This approach is particularly suited for exploring the perspectives and experiences of individuals in educational settings (Hatch, 2023). Given the research focus on X Local Private Primary School, a qualitative method was chosen to deeply examine how teachers in this school perceive and implement curriculum internationalization. The selection of X Local School is crucial, as it represents a high-achieving local primary school with unique approaches to integrating perspectives within a local context. By examining this school, the study seeks to identify key practices and challenges in the internationalization process, providing insights into how local schools in Hong Kong adapt to emerging educational trends.

4.3.1 An Overview of the X Local Private Primary School

The school's foundation is deeply intertwined with its religious roots, which have shaped its educational philosophy over the decades. Its mission centers on providing students with a holistic education, emphasizing both moral character development and academic achievement, while fostering a supportive and community-oriented learning environment. Dedicated to promoting values that align with its Christian foundation, the school prioritizes student-centered learning, focusing on moral education, communication skills, and the integration of modern technologies like information technology. The institution strives to balance academic rigor with the personal and spiritual growth of its students, aiming to nurture well-rounded individuals equipped for future success.

Educational Philosophy and Vision

The school emphasizes holistic, student-centered education, promoting not only academic rigor but also moral development, communication skills, and information technology integration. Its curriculum is designed to foster multiple intelligences, catering to the spiritual, intellectual, social, and aesthetic needs of students. A strong focus on Christian education and family involvement further enriches its educational environment, ensuring the collaboration between home and school is a priority. This philosophy underscores the importance of nurturing well-rounded individuals equipped to face diverse challenges.

Campus and Facilities

Set in an expansive and well-designed campus, School X provides a dynamic and supportive learning environment for its students. The school is equipped with modern facilities, including versatile spaces for learning, performance, recreation, and exploration, fostering a well-rounded educational experience. The school dedication to modern education is evident through its incorporation of a smart library, a future

classroom, and specialized rooms for STEAM, music, art, and even cooking lessons. STEAM, which stands for Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics, is an educational approach aimed at promoting creativity and innovation by integrating these disciplines, especially in primary and secondary education. This approach encourages students to think critically and solve complex problems through interdisciplinary learning. Cutting-edge technologies, such as electronic whiteboards and automated attendance systems, are seamlessly integrated into daily learning, reflecting a forward-thinking approach to education.

Daily Life and Activities

The school day at X Local Private Primary School is structured around a nine-class schedule, with designated reading times, weekly worship sessions, and “Interest Activity Time” to foster both academic and personal growth. The school emphasizes physical and mental well-being, offering nutritious meals and promoting physical education as part of its commitment to a healthy campus. This holistic approach ensures students are not only academically proficient but also well-balanced individuals.

Academic and Staff Profile

X Local Private Primary School prides itself on the high qualifications and diverse experience of its staff. Among the teachers, all hold an education diploma and a bachelor’s degree, with 36% also possessing a master’s or doctoral degree. Despite being relatively young, with 68% of teachers having fewer than four years of teaching experience, this highlights the school’s proactive approach to recruiting new talent. Additionally, the school maintains an open admission policy, accepting students from across Hong Kong, and does not restrict entry based on residential area or school allocation systems.

Medium of Instruction

X Local School employs a bilingual approach, using Chinese (Mandarin) and English as the main languages of instruction. Mandarin is used specifically for Chinese language subjects, which places the school among the select 25% of Hong Kong primary schools that implement bilingual teaching.

Significance for Research

X Local Private Primary School represents a compelling case for studying the internationalization of education within a local, religious context. Its emphasis on Christian values, state-of-the-art facilities, and innovative teaching practices makes it a model of educational excellence. The insights gained from examining School X's educational environment will contribute valuable data to the discourse on internationalized education in Hong Kong, especially in understanding how traditional and international elements can be harmoniously integrated in the primary education system.

4.3.2 Exploring the Path to Internationalized Education—International Department

School X, nestled within the bustling cityscape of Hong Kong, epitomizes excellence in education through its robust academic curriculum and holistic approach to student development. The institution's commitment to biliteracy and trilingualism, coupled with its focus on academic enrichment and quality assurance, positions it as a prime candidate for scholarly investigation.

Comprehensive Analysis of School X's Educational Framework

School X, situated in the vibrant landscape of Hong Kong, exemplifies educational excellence through its robust academic curriculum and holistic student development. Central to this commitment is the International Department, which provides a distinctive educational pathway for students in Grades 1 to 6, featuring 1–2 classes per

grade. This structure fosters an intimate learning environment, with a smaller class size compared to the mainstream department, which typically accommodates three times the number of students.

Bilingual and Trilingual Education

The International Department adopts a dynamic approach to language instruction, utilizing both Chinese (including Mandarin) and English as mediums of instruction. This bilingual and trilingual education model reflects the school's commitment to fostering language proficiency among its students. The integration of Mandarin as the primary language for teaching Chinese subjects underscores this commitment, while activities designed to promote communication in English, Mandarin, or Cantonese, alongside speech training sessions, further enhance students' language skills.

International Faculty and Diverse Perspectives

A key strength of the International Department lies in its teaching staff. All teachers, except for those instructing Chinese and Mathematics, are foreign educators. This international faculty brings diverse perspectives and teaching methodologies. The varied backgrounds of the teachers foster an environment that values diversity and inclusivity.

Academic Assessment and Enrichment

The school employs rigorous academic assessment strategies, including bi-annual tests and examinations, complemented by numerous individual competitions and awards designed to nurture students' talents. Programs like reading incentives and competitions in mathematics and science provide opportunities for students to excel across different areas. Additionally, the emphasis on external competitions not only enriches the students' educational experience but also instills a competitive spirit and a drive for achievement.

Quality Assurance and Financial Support

School X is committed to delivering high-quality education that is designed to address the diverse needs of its students. The availability of optional fee-based and reward courses caters to students' varying learning abilities and financial circumstances. The school demonstrates its commitment to equity through initiatives like subsidies for economically disadvantaged students and tuition refunds from employers, ensuring all students can access educational opportunities.

The International Department's Role in Curriculum Internationalization

The diverse educational framework of the International Department underscores its pivotal role in the internationalization of the curriculum within the context of School X. By providing an enriching environment that embraces bilingual and trilingual education, it implements rigorous academic assessment strategies and integrates diverse teaching practices. This unique educational setting offers researchers valuable insights into effective pedagogical approaches that promote student achievement and well-being, contributing to the broader discourse on international education practices.

4.3.3 Specialized Courses

School X, a private local school in Hong Kong, has established an International Department that integrates traditional values with a broader perspective, offering a distinctive educational model focused on student-centered learning. The international curriculum is collaboratively designed by experienced teachers from the school's mainstream department and foreign educators, ensuring a unique program that aligns with both the Education Bureau's syllabus requirements and the advanced principles of the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme (IB PYP). This approach emphasizes academic excellence, moral education, cultural awareness, and practical skills, fostering students' intellectual, emotional, and social growth.

Religious Education: Cultivating Faith, Character, and a Broader Perspective

Religious education at School X is uniquely positioned at the intersection of tradition and internationalism, guided by Christian principles while embracing modern educational values. Supported by the school's Christian foundation, the curriculum aims to nurture students' spiritual growth and moral character, fostering both a deep sense of faith and an open-minded outlook.

The curriculum follows a thematic structure aligned with students' developmental stages, progressing from foundational themes such as 'God's Love for the World' in the lower grades to more reflective concepts like 'Following Jesus' in higher grades. This progression ensures that students grow intellectually and spiritually, building both religious knowledge and personal faith. The use of The Today's Bible Textbook offers a structured framework for reflection, helping students connect Christian values to their personal experiences and to real-world challenges. What makes this program distinctive is how faith-based education seamlessly integrates with the school's international outlook. While the core religious teachings are rooted in the Christian tradition, students are encouraged to engage in discussions that promote empathy and intercultural awareness. This approach supports the school's broader mission of equipping students to navigate a multicultural world, fostering both a strong personal identity and an appreciation for diversity.

Beyond classroom instruction, religious education extends into worship services, devotions, and collaborative community events, providing students with shared spiritual experiences. These activities promote a sense of belonging and emotional well-being, strengthening both personal faith and shared community values. By blending Christian teachings with international perspectives, School X's religious education program equips individuals with moral foundations, as well as the knowledge and skills necessary to engage with diverse cultures and navigate challenges. Through this integration of faith, character development, and broader

awareness, the school cultivates compassionate, responsible individuals who are rooted in their beliefs while being open to diverse viewpoints.

Music Education: Fostering Aesthetic Sensitivity and Collaboration

The music education program at School X stands out by seamlessly blending artistic expression with cultural exploration, helping students develop their musical abilities while fostering a deep, lifelong appreciation for the arts. Conducted in both English and Mandarin, the curriculum promotes inclusivity and ensures that all students can meaningfully engage with music. Starting with foundational activities such as vocal exercises and instrument practice, the program introduces students to music theory and performance skills. It places strong emphasis on creativity and cultural expression, enhancing their understanding of various musical traditions from around the world.

A particularly unique feature of the program is its commitment to international exploration. By incorporating diverse musical styles into the curriculum, students not only develop technical skills but also gain an understanding of the cultural significance of music. This exposure promotes appreciation for diversity and encourages students to connect with peers from different backgrounds. In addition to classroom learning, students are invited to participate in extracurricular groups such as the Choir, Orchestra Ensemble, and Silver Band Team, where they refine their musical abilities through collaborative performances. Special events, such as the School Music Festival, provide students with opportunities to showcase their talents, celebrate their achievements, and strengthen the sense of community.

Visual Arts: Inspiring Creativity and Cultural Identity

At School X, the visual arts curriculum fosters creativity and cultural appreciation through a bilingual approach in English and Mandarin. Students explore local traditions and artistic movements, engaging in hands-on projects that express their emotions and cultural identities. The curriculum evolves in complexity, aligning with students'

developmental stages, and includes the Visual Arts Society, which encourages artistic exploration beyond the classroom. This unique program nurtures innovative thinking and equips students to contribute meaningfully to the arts, preparing them to be culturally aware citizens.

Drama and Communication: Building Confidence, Empathy, and Collaboration

The Drama and Communication program at School X enhances students' interpersonal skills and self-expression through role-play, improvisation, and storytelling. Emphasizing teamwork and effective communication, the curriculum progresses from basic exercises to complex performances. Platforms like the Junior Drama Team provide opportunities for students to showcase their talents at school-wide and inter-school events. This immersive experience not only fosters a passion for the performing arts but also cultivates essential life skills, including confidence and emotional intelligence.

Coding and ICT: Preparing Students for the Digital Era

School X's Coding and ICT curriculum develops digital literacy and a passion for technology through a two-stage program. Younger students learn foundational IT skills, while older students tackle advanced applications through collaborative projects and problem-solving activities. With access to a mobile lab and smart technology, students are well-equipped for both in-person and online learning.

Physical Education: Promoting Health, Teamwork, and Personal Growth

Focusing on physical skills, health and sportsmanship, the program includes group sports, competitions, and annual events like Sports Day. These activities promote teamwork and resilience, fostering a positive attitude toward health and fitness while preparing students for lifelong wellness.

Reading to Learn: Cultivating a Lifelong Love for Reading

The Reading to Learn program at School X instills a passion for reading and enhances literacy skills from an early age. Through themed lessons and engaging activities like Library Morning Reading sessions and inter-class competitions, students develop strong reading habits. Special initiatives, such as the Rainbow Reading Scheme, encourage wide reading and reflection, fostering a vibrant reading culture that equips students for academic success and a lifelong love of literature.

Summary

In conclusion, the creation of the International Department at School X has driven the development of innovative curricula that incorporate a variety of perspectives. This exploration of international education models has driven reforms across multiple subjects, enriching traditional programs with advanced international frameworks. With a unique blend of local values and broad outlook, the school fosters intellectual growth, emotional resilience, and cross-cultural understanding.

4.4 Famous School—Y International School

Y International School, part of a prestigious institution offering education from kindergarten to high school, is renowned for its consistently high IB results and graduates who enter top universities worldwide. This qualitative study explores Y International School's distinctive practices by examining interactions, participant perspectives, and the broader environment (Merriam, 1998), a method ideal for understanding personal experiences in education (Hatch, 2023). Y International School integrates international education models with local values, offering a dynamic curriculum that reflects best practices. By focusing on Y International School, this research aims to uncover key strategies and challenges in curriculum internationalization, providing insights into how Hong Kong's international schools respond to educational trends and navigate success in a competitive world.

4.4.1 An Overview of the Y International School

The curriculum emphasizes bilingual proficiency, awareness, and competitiveness, catering to both local and foreign students.

International Curriculum and Perspective

Y International incorporates advanced global curricula, such as the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) and the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP). Its unique bilingual (English and Chinese) and multicultural teaching model has earned recognition. The school's philosophy bridges Eastern and Western educational principles, promoting the development of well-rounded, open-minded students. This includes not only strong academic performance but also character education, ensuring students grow with a sense of social responsibility, empathy, and care for others. The international curriculum is enriched through collaborations with top educators from over 20 countries, further embedding diverse perspectives into daily learning.

Campus Network and Facilities

Y International School maintains a well-established presence across key areas of Kowloon, with additional campuses operating in other regions, including parts of Mainland China and abroad. Each campus offers a dynamic learning environment with modern educational facilities designed to foster collaboration and experiential learning. Classrooms are equipped with interactive technology, and flexible learning spaces support various teaching methods. The school provides students with access to specialized facilities such as science laboratories, art studios, and performance areas, ensuring a balanced focus on academic and creative development. Sports facilities, including playgrounds, multipurpose gyms, and swimming pools, encourage physical activity and teamwork, promoting students' overall well-being. Through this

comprehensive infrastructure, Y International supports students' holistic growth across academic, artistic, and athletic domains.

Co-Curricular Activities and Student Development

Y International School prioritizes holistic development by offering a broad array of co-curricular activities that inspire students to discover and cultivate their talents. The programs include choir, orchestra, drama, robotics, and environmental conservation, catering to both artistic and scientific interests. Sports activities such as soccer, basketball, and swimming foster leadership, teamwork, and sportsmanship. The school's commitment to community engagement is evident through service programs and charity initiatives, nurturing empathy and social responsibility.

Campus Life and Student Welfare

The school ensures a safe and supportive campus environment with 24-hour security and medical staff. Healthy meals prepared by certified caterers meet students' dietary needs, and a comprehensive bus network covers key areas, promoting environmental sustainability. The school fosters unity and identity by enforcing a mandatory uniform policy, which helps students cultivate a strong sense of belonging within the school community.

A Pioneer in International Education

Over the past century, Y International School has developed a reputation for blending international educational practices with local traditions. The school is accredited by the Council of International Schools (CIS) and the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), reflecting its compliance with recognized educational standards. Its stated mission is to foster lifelong learning and global citizenship, emphasizing skills, knowledge, and character development for navigating contemporary challenges.

In summary, Y International School exemplifies a forward-thinking approach to education, blending academic rigor, character development, and cultural immersion. Its commitment to bilingualism, innovation, and citizenship offers valuable insights into how schools can successfully navigate internationalization, making it a key case study in this research.

4.4.2 International Curriculum

Y International School in Hong Kong takes pride in offering a comprehensive curriculum developed by dedicated educators to address the diverse needs of its students. The curriculum integrates best practices from international education systems rather than being limited to any single national framework. The school places strong emphasis on equipping students with essential skills for the 21st century, including analytical thinking, innovation, solution-oriented approaches, and teamwork. From early years education to secondary school, the curriculum nurtures holistic development, instilling a deep appreciation for cultural diversity and fostering bilingual proficiency in Chinese and English. The school integrates elements from the England National Curriculum while incorporating Chinese language, culture, and character development, creating a balanced educational experience that merges Eastern and Western traditions.

Curriculum Structure across Educational Stages

Early Years (Ages 3–5):

The play-based curriculum in the early years establishes a foundation for continuous learning by fostering curiosity and creativity. Activities focus on language acquisition, motor skills, and social and emotional development. Children engage in exploratory learning that encourages self-expression, teamwork, and early bilingualism.

Primary School (Ages 5–11):

Y International School's primary curriculum emphasizes student-centered,

project-based learning. It is designed to connect classroom learning with important issues, enabling students to grasp the essence of international education. Beyond academics, students develop independence, integrity, and respect in a positive and inclusive learning environment.

Lower Primary (Ages 5–8):

In the lower grades, students engage in bilingual learning with daily Chinese language classes and weekly cultural studies to explore Chinese heritage. Character education, rooted in Christian values, is integrated into everyday learning through storytelling and activities. Music instruction is a key component, with every student introduced to the violin, fostering early musical skills and appreciation. Art classes develop creativity through various artistic techniques and media, while physical education promotes coordination and teamwork through games, dance, and sports. Experiential learning through field trips and excursions enriches students' understanding of the world around them.

Upper Primary (Ages 8–11):

In the upper primary grades, the curriculum focuses on developing critical thinking and preparing students for the transition to middle school. Students receive bilingual instruction in core subjects, with an emphasis on Chinese language proficiency. Music education expands to include performance and composition opportunities, and students participate in competitive sports activities to build sportsmanship and teamwork skills. Art classes explore more complex artistic forms, while excursions, overnight camps, and tours provide opportunities for collaboration and practical learning beyond the classroom.

Secondary School (Ages 11–18):

The secondary curriculum is designed to empower students academically and holistically. The program includes three key stages:

Years 7 to 9: Students follow an English international curriculum that emphasizes skill development, interdisciplinary learning, and bilingualism.

Years 10 to 11 (IGCSE): In these years, students engage with the IGCSE curriculum, focusing on academic rigor across various subjects while continuing to develop their cultural literacy and character.

Years 12 to 13 (IBDP): The final stage of secondary education concludes with the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP). This program challenges students to think critically and independently, preparing them for higher education and future career paths. The secondary curriculum nurtures students' intellectual, moral, social, and cultural development.

Character Education and Co-curricular Programs

Y International School integrates character education throughout the curriculum to foster students' personal growth. Emphasizing values such as kindness, responsibility, and honesty, the school encourages students to embody these principles in their daily interactions. The school offers an extensive range of co-curricular activities to support students' holistic development. Programs include music ensembles, drama productions, robotics clubs, environmental conservation initiatives, and community service projects, allowing students to explore their interests and develop leadership skills. Sports activities such as soccer, basketball, and swimming further promote teamwork, discipline, and resilience.

Admissions and Class Placement

Y International School employs a holistic approach to student admissions and class placement, evaluating factors such as academic performance, English proficiency, skill development, prior education, and social skills. The admissions process includes placement tests, interviews, and additional assessments for students with specific learning needs. The school emphasizes fostering a multicultural environment and aims to maintain a balanced student community. Successful applicants who meet the

admission criteria may be placed on a waiting list if a particular grade is full. Priority is given to siblings of current students and children of alumni. After careful assessment, the school makes a final decision regarding the appropriate grade or program for each child, ensuring they are set up for success. Through its international curriculum, Y International School provides a continuous educational pathway from early childhood to secondary education. The school balances academic excellence with character education, bilingual proficiency, and experiential learning, empowering students to develop into well-rounded individuals and responsible citizens.

4.4.3 Innovative Teaching System—Dual Principals, Double Teacher System

Dual Principal Leadership

Hong Kong Y International School operates under a dual principal leadership model in the primary section, featuring one foreign principal and one Chinese principal at each campus. This collaborative structure enhances academic guidance and oversight of primary education, enriching students' educational experiences through effective leadership and cross-cultural cooperation.

Double Teacher System

To enhance the bilingual learning experience, Y International School implements a double teacher system in its primary classes. Each classroom is staffed with two fully qualified teachers—one from China and one from a foreign country. This cooperative teaching model fosters a bilingual environment, allowing students to learn in both Chinese and English. Teachers share responsibilities for curriculum planning and classroom instruction, fostering a multicultural learning atmosphere. The school is proud of its highly qualified teaching staff, with more than 50% of teachers having over five years of experience, and 18% holding master's degrees or higher qualifications. Specialized Chinese study courses are integrated into the curriculum, supported by Chinese classrooms and field trips. This bilingual education promotes an understanding and acceptance of diverse cultures among students. The teaching staff comes from over

20 countries, all possessing the necessary qualifications. Most foreign teachers come from countries such as Australia, Canada, England, the United States, Ireland, New Zealand, and Scotland, while Chinese language teachers from mainland China contribute to the dual-teacher cooperative model. All teachers must hold a bachelor's degree, teaching certification, and possess at least two years of teaching experience.

Internal Transfers

All Y International Schools follow a consistent teaching philosophy, methodology, and curriculum. Internal transfer applicants must meet local government admission requirements and participate in relevant admission and placement assessments. The network includes schools in multiple countries, providing flexibility for families during their transitions.

Tuition Fees

The full-day program at Y International School is considered relatively expensive, reflecting its focus on providing quality education and resources. The school also offers sibling fee-reduction policies for families enrolling multiple children in the full-day program.

Debentures

New students admitted to the primary section of the school are required to fulfill certain financial obligations as part of the enrollment process. These debentures support the school's infrastructure and educational enhancements specifically for primary education. They do not accrue any interest and can be fully refunded upon withdrawal from the school. Funds raised from these debentures are allocated to various school-related infrastructure projects, including the development of new educational initiatives, innovation in teaching practices, and improvements to campus environments, facilities, and equipment. The debenture amount will be fully refunded

to the registered holder within two months after the student's final day at the school, minus any outstanding tuition or other fees.

It's important to note that debenture payments are non-refundable unless the student withdraws. Additionally, debentures are non-transferable. Families who are unable to fully or partially purchase debentures may have the option to choose deferred payment plans or apply for exemptions through the school's financial aid program. In certain individual cases, debenture payments may be made in installments. All special requests regarding debentures will be subject to the school's review and assessment and must comply with the relevant terms and conditions.

4.5 Summary of the Chapter

Chapter Four provides an in-depth analysis of the two schools featured in the study, highlighting their strategies and initiatives aimed at fostering educational internationalization.

The chapter begins with an analysis of Local School X, a private primary school, emphasizing its journey toward internationalized education. A key element discussed is the creation of the International Department, which plays a pivotal role in embedding diverse perspectives within the curriculum. The chapter also covers the school's mission, location, tuition fees, facilities, faculty backgrounds, bilingual and trilingual education, specialized courses, academic assessments, and other distinguishing features. Furthermore, it explores the curriculum reforms adopted by Local School X, highlighting how changes to teaching methods, curriculum frameworks, and assessments align with international education standards.

The chapter then shifts focus to International School Y, providing insights into its implementation of international curricula and teaching innovations, such as the dual

principal and double teacher system. These practices are analyzed for their ability to foster cross-cultural understanding, enhance student engagement, and improve educational outcomes. The chapter also highlights that International School Y is among the select schools in Hong Kong accredited by both the Council of International Schools (CIS) and the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC). Along with its mission and facilities, the chapter reviews its unique educational programs and offerings.

Additionally, the chapter explores the Hong Kong government's role in advancing school internationalization through policy measures, financial support, and infrastructure development. It highlights collaborations between the government and educational institutions, focusing on initiatives like the allocation of school premises, provision of temporary campuses, land rent rebates, interest-free loans, and other financial incentives. These mechanisms aim to promote best practices in international education.

In summary, Chapter Four offers a comprehensive analysis of the approaches taken by Local School X and International School Y to achieve educational internationalization. It provides valuable insights into how primary schools in Hong Kong implement education frameworks and how government support influences these efforts. The chapter concludes by synthesizing these findings to illustrate the evolving landscape of internationalization within Hong Kong's primary education sector.

The next chapter will present a comprehensive analysis of the data, providing detailed insights into the cross-school findings and facilitating a deeper exploration of the key themes shared by both institutions.

Chapter 5: Results of Horizontal Analysis

This chapter centers on presenting the data gathered from interviews with 18 teachers across two primary schools, along with insights from a key figure in Hong Kong's education sector. The data offers valuable insights into the motivations, approaches, and challenges encountered by these schools in their pursuit of curriculum internationalization. By examining the perspectives of both educators and an industry expert, this chapter reveals how local schools navigate the balance between traditional values and educational demands, highlighting key factors driving the shift towards a more internationally oriented education system.

5.1 Document Comparison

This section examines key policy documents, curriculum frameworks, and institutional reports from the two primary schools to compare their approaches toward internationalization. By analyzing these documents, we can identify the differences and similarities in their educational goals, curricular structures, and implementation strategies. The comparison highlights how each school interprets and adapts internationalization according to its unique context. For example, while both schools emphasize the importance of competencies, School X integrates international elements within a Christian educational philosophy, whereas School Y adopts a more market-driven approach focused on competitiveness and innovation. These differences reflect the varied motivations behind their internationalization efforts.

5.1.1 Pioneering Internationalization: The Journey of School X

This subsection examines how School X's religious foundation profoundly shapes its educational vision and drives its pursuit of internationalization. Established by Christian missionaries, the school maintains a faith-based framework, with all board members serving as volunteer Christians. These board members bring valuable

expertise from diverse fields, including education, religion, technology, law, and insurance, providing comprehensive institutional support that enhances the overall quality of teaching and learning. Central to the school's mission is the commitment to 'spreading the gospel and promoting holistic Christian education'. This philosophy emphasizes creating a joyful and nurturing learning environment that cultivates students across six key pillars: spiritual, moral, intellectual, physical, social, and aesthetic education. By prioritizing this balance, the school ensures that students develop in multiple dimensions, preparing them for a well-rounded future.

To realize its vision of educational internationalization, School X has implemented a dual curriculum model that integrates local and international educational standards. The local division adheres to the Hong Kong curriculum, providing students with a strong foundation in regional knowledge and competencies. Language instruction is delivered by native-speaking teachers, enhancing students' proficiency in English and Mandarin. Students participate in phonetic training during morning assemblies, while additional language booths during breaks promote practical conversation skills. Furthermore, the international division enriches its curriculum by offering French and Japanese courses taught by native-speaking instructors, fostering not only multilingualism but also broader cultural awareness and communication skills. Through these initiatives, School X exemplifies a pioneering approach to educational internationalization, intertwining its religious values with a commitment to academic excellence and cultural competence. This dual focus not only enhances the educational experience but also fosters engagement with a diverse society, effectively connecting local identity with global perspectives.

5.1.2 Innovating Education: The Strategy of School Y

This institution is renowned for implementing advanced and internationally aware education curricula in Hong Kong. Its unique bilingual (English and Chinese) and

multicultural teaching model has gained international recognition, helping students excel in a competitive environment. The CEO and principal emphasize the importance of learning and navigating a constantly changing world. The foundation of this education was established through the visionary foresight of the founder, and the institution has steadily developed and expanded over time. The commitment to education acknowledges the need to shift from narrow conservatism to open-mindedness in response to the evolving world. The institution is dedicated to equipping future generations through international education.

Education, in its essence, involves implementing a broad and meaningful international curriculum that profoundly impacts children from early childhood through primary and secondary education. International education is expected to prioritize the development of diverse skills over the mere acquisition of rigid knowledge. Children are influenced by both their family and learning environments, with teachers playing a crucial role, alongside parental involvement. In today's world, competition is fiercer than ever, presenting unpredictable challenges and new dynamics. Parents feel a strong responsibility to select a good school for their children to help them prepare for the future. The evolving dynamics of the world have endowed the institution with a mission to adapt and make necessary changes, maintaining a commitment to progressive education.

Once students embark on this unique educational journey, they immerse themselves in Eastern and Western cultures while acquiring solid bilingual capabilities in Chinese and English (including English as a second language). This allows students to develop a profound and fresh understanding of both languages and cultures. The institution is responsible for providing a diverse learning environment that welcomes students from various backgrounds. Integral to the commitment to international education is the vision of promoting moral virtues, which contributes to balanced development of intellect and character for future generations. This enables them to navigate life's

complexities confidently, showcasing kindness, honesty, and empathy. The responsibilities taken today will lead to a more stable future world. Ultimately, it is education that influences and transforms the future. The institution believes that the core purpose of education is character cultivation, a shared responsibility between school and home. It recognizes that each child is unique and that their talents should be fully nurtured. Strong teacher–student relationships and meaningful interactions are fundamental to enhancing the teaching and learning experience.

Furthermore, the belief in a ‘learning community’ fosters creative and comprehensive exploration of various knowledge domains, equipping students with essential personal and collaborative learning skills for the 21st century. Graduates are expected to genuinely respect and understand cultures worldwide, mastering both Chinese and English as well as other modern languages, and confidently facing the challenges of the times. The educational philosophy centers on cultivating students’ character, highlighted through a set of virtues emphasized by the founder. The virtues include diligence, frugality, humility, and integrity, extending to eight additional virtues that encompass benevolence, righteousness, loyalty, wisdom, sincerity, respect, harmony, and courage. Each virtue has corresponding qualities and definitions, forming the basis for character education. This institution thrives on family legacy, as the founder’s vision was to establish an international school in Hong Kong, ensuring that future generations receive a comprehensive and internationally focused education.

5.2 Case Comparison Analysis

This section offers a comparative analysis of the two schools’ approaches to internationalization, emphasizing their unique strategies and the philosophies that drive them. Both institutions prioritize holistic education but differ in their implementation and educational frameworks. The following section provides a comprehensive overview of the research participants. Tables 8 and 9 present demographic data,

including participants' pseudonyms, their current teaching fields, affiliated departments, and length of service at their respective schools. This information contextualizes the teachers' backgrounds, providing essential insights into their professional environments and experiences.

Table 8 X Local School Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Nationality or Region	Course	Teaching Experience Years
Zhu	HKSAR	Chinese Teacher	30+
Lindsay	Swedish, HKSAR	English Teacher	20+
Li	HKSAR	Mathematics Teacher	7
Victor	HKSAR	Chinese Teacher	6
Kay	British, HKSAR	English Teacher	15
Cherry	HKSAR	Mathematics Teacher	7
Yuan	HKSAR	Chinese Teacher	7
Riya	India, HKSAR	English Teacher	30+
Kate	HKSAR	Mathematics Teacher	10+

School X weaves its religious foundation into its curriculum, promoting holistic development that encompasses spiritual, moral, intellectual, physical, social, and aesthetic growth. This faith-based approach aims not only to achieve academic excellence but also to instill a strong moral framework in students, preparing them to become citizens while staying grounded in their local identity. Information related to these aspects of School X can be found in Table 8.

In contrast, School Y embraces a secular and multicultural outlook, emphasizing bilingual education and the cultivation of diverse skills and competencies. Its focus on fostering a diverse learning environment prioritizes practical skills over traditional knowledge. Additional details on School Y's approach are available in Table 9.

Table 9 Y International School Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Nationality or Region	Course	Teaching Experience Years
Lisa	HKSAR	Chinese Teacher	9
Lakshmi	India, HKSAR	English Teacher	10+
Betty	HKSAR	Mathematics Teacher	8
Ellen	HKSAR	Chinese Teacher	8
Jason	British, HKSAR	English Teacher	6
Mavis	USA, HKSAR	Mathematics Teacher	10
Nan	HKSAR	Chinese Teacher	9
Jeanie	South Africa, HKSAR	English Teacher	20+
<u>Luman</u>	HKSAR	Mathematics Teacher	11

5.2.1 Educational Approaches: Divergent Paths to Internationalization

This section explores the differing educational approaches taken by School X and School Y in their journeys toward internationalization, focusing on the perspectives of teachers from both institutions. School X, rooted in a strong Christian foundation, integrates local and international educational practices, while School Y is recognized for its advanced, internationally minded education curriculum. Drawing on Knight's (2004) framework of educational internationalization, which emphasizes the integration of global dimensions into institutional purpose and delivery, School X's approach reflects a hybrid model blending cultural heritage with international standards, whereas School Y prioritizes a globally oriented curriculum to foster cosmopolitan competencies. To ensure the validity of the collected data in case study research, multiple measures were implemented. The data was analyzed using NVivo software, which was also reviewed for accuracy through a double-checking process. Additionally, member checking was conducted by holding brief follow-up discussions with faculty to confirm the interpretations of their statements. The use of NVivo software played a crucial role in maintaining data accuracy throughout the analysis (Leedy et al., 2019).

Teacher Perspectives: Insights from School X

Kay, a teacher who joined School X in 2009, shared insights on how the school's religious background significantly influences its internationalization efforts. With a teaching career that began in secondary schools in Hong Kong, Kay has brought extensive professional expertise to her current role. She believes that internationalization enriches the school community by fostering cultural diversity and exposing students and teachers to various educational models. Kay attributes the school's motivation for internationalization largely to its Christian religious foundation:

“The school has a Christian background, which has a big influence on the creation of the international division and the introduction of international curricula. Since Christianity originated in the West, it's natural that there is a cultural alignment. The integration of international elements feels quite reasonable within this context.”

(Kay, Grade 3 English Teacher at X Local School)

Kate, a sixth-grade mathematics teacher at School X who has worked in education for over a decade, also emphasized the importance of the school's religious practices. After earning her master's degree, she stayed in Hong Kong to continue her teaching career. Kate described how religious practices are seamlessly integrated into the school's routines:

“One unique feature of the school is the weekly morning worship sessions, which are essential in a religious school. Given that all the board members are Christians, it's only natural for them to have a strong desire for educational internationalization.”

(Kate, Grade 6 Mathematics Teacher at X Local School)

Classroom observations further illustrate this hybrid approach. In a Grade 3 English lesson, students were observed reciting Christian prayers before engaging in a discussion about global holidays, seamlessly blending religious values with international content. Similarly, a Grade 6 mathematics class showed students solving problems inspired by Western educational standards while incorporating local examples, reflecting School X's effort to maintain cultural roots alongside global perspectives.

This fusion of religious values, academic excellence, and international education highlights School X's commitment to cultivating students with strong moral foundations and competencies. The Christian background not only influences the school's educational goals but also encourages its embrace of internationalization, promoting cultural diversity and inclusivity.

Teacher Perspectives: Insights from Y International School

Y International School is an international educational institution that offers programs ranging from kindergarten to high school, with a particular emphasis on primary education. Currently, the elementary school comprises six grades, with 6–7 classes per grade and 20–25 students per class. Each grade has 3–4 Chinese teachers and an equivalent number of English teachers, maintaining a balanced ratio through the dual homeroom system where Chinese and English teachers collaborate. The school's distinctive educational philosophy, stringent admission criteria, and high tuition fees, supported by ample financial resources, contribute to a continuous influx of students annually. Furthermore, the school consistently achieves high International Baccalaureate (IB) scores among its high school graduates, reflecting the effectiveness of its educational approach. By incorporating the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme (IB PYP) in elementary education, the school provides a strong foundation for students as they transition to secondary school. The combination of

highly qualified teachers and autonomous curriculum design further strengthens the school's commitment to educational internationalization.

Lakshmi, an Indian national serving as a first-grade English teacher at Y International School, shared her optimistic view on the internationalization of education in Hong Kong. She emphasized the enriching experience it has provided for both her and her children, who have been exposed to diverse cultures and knowledge. Lakshmi explained that after moving to Hong Kong, she chose to stay long-term at Y International School because it offers her children a high-quality international education, along with tuition discounts for teachers' children.

"I truly resonate with Y International School's philosophy of international education. This approach not only provides students with a high-quality global education but also creates an enriching environment for teachers. Working in such a cross-cultural setting allows educators like me to learn and adopt diverse teaching methods and models, broadening our professional horizons and enhancing our skills. It's an incredible opportunity to grow alongside the students while contributing to a dynamic and internationally minded learning community."

(Lakshmi, Grade 1 English Teacher at Y International School)

Betty, a first-grade mathematics teacher, praised Y International School for its unique approach to education, emphasizing its integration of professional foreign educators, international curricula, and traditional Chinese cultural values. She particularly appreciated the school's dual-teacher and dual-principal systems, which foster collaboration and ensure a balanced and high-quality learning environment for students.

"Y International School serves as an enabler for children of high-income families in Hong Kong, providing enhanced educational opportunities. The dual-teacher

collaboration and dual-principal system ensure optimal respect for each teacher's rights and maximize educational quality for students."

(Betty, Grade 1 Mathematics Teacher at Y International School)

Ellen, with nearly seven years of experience in the education field, highlights the transformative effects of internationalization on teaching methodologies and the development of a broader perspective among educators and students alike. Her educational journey began in kindergarten, progressing to her current role at Y International School, where she has embraced the opportunities presented by internationalization.

"As you enter our school, you are greeted by a historical display that showcases the school's founding principles, including a statue of the founder. This not only reflects the rich heritage of our institution but also emphasizes our commitment to fostering a broader outlook. The founder's vision was to establish a learning atmosphere that focuses not just on academic excellence, but also on promoting cultural understanding and international awareness."

(Ellen, Grade 3 Chinese Teacher at Y International School)

Classroom observations at Y International School reinforce this globally oriented approach. In a Grade 1 English lesson, students were observed participating in an IB PYP inquiry-based activity, discussing global environmental issues with prompts from both Chinese and English teachers, showcasing collaborative teaching. In a Grade 3 Chinese class, students explored traditional stories alongside international folktales, highlighting the school's effort to integrate local heritage with a cosmopolitan curriculum.

This perspective resonates with the overall ethos at Y International School, where educational internationalization is not merely a response to market demands but is

deeply rooted in the school's identity and mission. Ellen believes that the integration of diverse cultural elements into the curriculum enriches the educational experience, helping students develop the skills needed to engage with society. The focus on citizenship reflects the founder's vision, ensuring that the school's commitment to internationalization aligns with its historical and cultural foundations.

The varying responses to educational internationalization among teachers at both X Local School and Y International School underscore the complexity of this process. Each educator brings their own experiences and insights, shaping how they perceive and implement internationalization in their classrooms. By examining these divergent paths, it becomes clear that while both schools strive for similar outcomes, the methods and motivations can be distinctly different, reflecting their unique identities and educational philosophies.

5.2.2 Curriculum Design: Balancing Local and International Perspectives

In both X Local School and Y International School, curriculum design plays a crucial role in balancing local traditions with the outlook required for educational internationalization. While X Local School integrates international elements primarily through its bilingual curriculum and English-medium instruction, it also maintains a focus on Chinese cultural education. This approach aims to develop students' competencies without neglecting their local roots. Similarly, Y International School's curriculum incorporates international accreditation standards while promoting cross-cultural understanding, ensuring students can navigate both local and international contexts. Drawing on Leask's (2015) concept of curriculum internationalization, which emphasizes embedding global perspectives within a culturally responsive framework, X Local School's bilingual approach reflects a localized adaptation of international standards, whereas Y International School aligns more closely with a globally accredited model to foster intercultural competence. The challenge is still to develop a cohesive curriculum that balances the demands of a

competitive education with the preservation of key local cultural values.

Teacher Perspectives: Insights from School X

Zhu, a first-grade Chinese teacher at X Local School with more than 30 years of experience, reflects on the school's curriculum design and its efforts to balance local traditions with modern educational trends. She highlights the differences between the international and mainstream departments, particularly in the approach to curriculum development, teaching materials, and teacher qualifications.

“In the International Department, Mandarin is the primary medium for Chinese courses, while Cantonese is used for mathematics, and English is taught by qualified English educators. This structure ensures that students remain rooted in local culture while also gaining the skills needed to thrive in an international context.”

(Zhu, First Grade Chinese Teacher at X Local School).

Zhu also notes that the International Department imposes stricter requirements for teachers and significantly higher tuition fees compared to the mainstream department. Despite these efforts, Zhu points out a major challenge:

“Currently, each grade in the International Department only has about a dozen students, which is much lower than the 20 or more students per grade we used to have. This decline in enrollment poses a significant hurdle for the school.”

(Zhu, First Grade Chinese Teacher at X Local School).

Li, the first-grade director and mathematics teacher in the International Department at X Local School, has been working in education for seven years. He has a positive outlook on the school's progress towards educational internationalization, viewing it as a strategic decision likely driven by the administration's aim to remain competitive and

improve the school's reputation. Reflecting on the International Department's curriculum design, he emphasizes the balance between local and international perspectives, noting that the diverse cultural atmosphere creates a dynamic learning environment.

“Since many people in Hong Kong have moved abroad, the government is now actively working to attract international talent, which means families from all over the world are coming to Hong Kong. As a result, education for their children has become a big concern, leading to the development of more internationalized curricula to meet these diverse needs.”

(Li, First Grade Director and Mathematics Teacher at X Local School).

However, he acknowledges that the post-pandemic exodus of residents has created a major challenge for student enrollment. He believes that addressing this issue requires proactive strategies, including increased marketing efforts to attract more students. Classroom observations at X Local School reinforce this bilingual and culturally balanced approach. In a first-grade Chinese lesson, students were observed practicing Mandarin through storytelling rooted in Chinese folklore, followed by a brief English vocabulary exercise led by a native speaker, illustrating the integration of local and international elements. Similarly, a mathematics lesson in Cantonese incorporated real-world problems drawn from both Hong Kong and global contexts, highlighting the curriculum's dual focus.

At School X, Zhu and Li offer important perspectives on the challenges and opportunities associated with educational internationalization. Zhu emphasizes that while the International Department incorporates local languages and qualified educators, the decline in enrollment poses a significant challenge, with only a dozen students per grade compared to previous years. Li echoes this concern, linking the post-pandemic emigration of residents to reduced student numbers. He points out that

as Hong Kong seeks to attract international talent, there is a growing need for internationalized curricula to cater to diverse families. Both teachers stress the importance of implementing effective recruitment strategies to navigate these challenges and enhance the school's international appeal.

Teacher Perspectives: Insights from Y International School

In examining the curriculum design at Y International School, teachers provide valuable insights into how the institution strives to balance local and international perspectives. Their experiences reveal a commitment to fostering an educational environment that respects cultural heritage while simultaneously embracing international standards. The perspectives shared by the educators highlight the challenges and opportunities that arise from this integration, illustrating the dynamic nature of curriculum development in the context of educational internationalization.

Lisa, a first-grade Chinese teacher at Y International School, shares her insights into the essence of educational internationalization. She perceives it as instilling in students the qualities of citizenship. Emphasizing the importance of aligning education with international standards at every developmental stage, Lisa believes that the current international curriculum is key to achieving this alignment.

Reflecting on the recent influx of students transferring to Hong Kong from various countries, she expresses the challenges this brings to her teaching:

“This year, I have many more students who have transferred to Hong Kong from various countries and regions. This is really a challenge for me; some do not speak Cantonese, and some do not understand English, making it difficult to conduct the curriculum.”

(Lisa, First Grade Chinese Teacher at Y International School).

While she acknowledges the advantages of a dual-teacher system that fosters cultural integration among educators, Lisa also acknowledges the practical challenges arising from the varying communication styles and habits shaped by different cultural backgrounds. This awareness is particularly significant when designing international curricula, especially in Chinese language instruction, where conflicts in values can hinder effective teaching. In her own practice, Lisa has embraced innovative approaches to Chinese language instruction, advocating for interactive and collaborative learning methods over traditional rote memorization. This shift not only enhances critical thinking and communication skills among her students but also highlights the necessity of navigating cultural differences and addressing value conflicts in curriculum design.

Jason, a British national and third-grade English teacher at Y International School, shares his insights on the educational landscape in Hong Kong. Having pursued his undergraduate degree in the UK, he relocated to Hong Kong with a commitment to fostering a joyful learning environment, bilingualism, and social interaction among his students. He believes these aspects are essential for effective education and seeks to impart valuable lessons drawn from his experiences in the UK.

Jason emphasizes the importance of communication and trust between students and parents, recognizing that strong relationships contribute to a positive learning atmosphere. He identifies a significant issue in the lack of autonomy among students, advocating for the implementation of Problem-based Learning (PBL) as a potential solution. He describes PBL as a student-centered approach that encourages collaborative problem-solving, which he believes can significantly enhance student motivation and learning outcomes.

In his vision for Y International School, Jason stresses the need for a more structured timetable to provide students with a cutting-edge education. He is excited about the

access to various technological resources at the school and aims to leverage them to integrate different subjects through PBL, providing a holistic learning experience for future challenges.

“I believe these challenges are temporary because it is essential to cultivate students' autonomous learning. Once we find their interests, teaching can be effectively carried out.”

(Jason, Third Grade English Teacher at Y International School).

Classroom observations at Y International School highlight this commitment to balancing local and international perspectives. In a first-grade Chinese lesson, students were observed engaging in a group activity comparing Chinese New Year traditions with global festivals, guided by Lisa's interactive methods, blending local heritage with cross-cultural understanding. In a third-grade English class, Jason was seen implementing PBL, with students collaboratively solving a real-world problem using bilingual resources, reflecting the school's globally accredited approach.

His proactive approach not only reflects his dedication to enhancing the educational experience but also aligns with a broader trend towards innovative teaching methodologies in the education sector.

At Y International School, teachers exemplify a strong commitment to educational internationalization, reflecting a range of perspectives that address the diverse needs of their students. Lisa articulates the goal of instilling citizenship and aligning education with international standards while acknowledging the complexities of cultural differences in curriculum design. Meanwhile, Jason advocates for fostering student autonomy and employing PBL to enhance engagement and motivation. Together, these educators highlight the importance of innovative teaching methods that not only

address the challenges posed by a multicultural student body but also promote a holistic learning experience.

5.2.3 Cultural Integration: Merging Local Traditions with Standards

In the context of educational internationalization, cultural integration plays a crucial role in bridging local traditions with standards. This process involves not only adapting the curriculum to include international perspectives but also honoring and incorporating the rich cultural heritage of the local community. Educators face the challenge of creating learning environments that embrace diversity while promoting a sense of belonging for all students. By blending local customs and values with educational frameworks, schools aim to cultivate the skills and knowledge necessary for students to succeed in both local and global contexts.

Teacher Perspectives: Insights from School X

At School X, educators emphasize the significance of cultural integration as a foundational aspect of educational internationalization. Teachers are committed to merging local traditions with educational standards, creating a curriculum that not only reflects the diverse cultural backgrounds of their students but also enriches their learning experiences. This integration involves a collaborative approach where teachers share insights and strategies to enhance students' education.

Victor, a third-grade Chinese teacher at X Local School with six years of experience, offers insights into the complexities of cultural integration within the school's International Department. He highlights that while X Local School's shift toward English-language instructional materials aligns with broader trends in education, the lack of a well-adapted curriculum limits its effectiveness. *"The current approach just translates mainstream department materials into English, without taking into account the unique needs and perspectives of international students"*, he explains.

Victor also points out the challenges in fostering cultural integration:

“Cultural integration is a challenge for the International Department. While students generally don’t experience many barriers—since most have at least one Chinese parent—the real differences lie in how foreign teachers and local teachers interact. Navigating these cultural differences requires thoughtful communication and understanding.”

(Victor, Third Grade Chinese Teacher at X Local School).

Victor emphasizes that while X Local School’s use of English instructional materials supports its internationalization goals, cultural integration remains a key challenge. He notes that although students adapt well due to shared cultural backgrounds, differences between foreign and local teachers present obstacles. Effective communication and mutual understanding are essential for bridging these gaps and enhancing collaboration within the International Department.

Kay, a third-grade English teacher with nearly 15 years of educational experience, emphasizes the benefits of educational internationalization in fostering cultural diversity among teachers and students. Drawing on her background in both local secondary schools and international teaching contexts, she highlights that X Local School’s Christian heritage plays a role in driving internationalization efforts. However, she identifies a key challenge in recruiting qualified foreign educators, stressing the need to uphold high standards in teacher selection to ensure the effective integration of international curricula.

“We established the International Department not long ago, and there is a shortage of foreign teachers. I was transferred from the mainstream department, and although my overseas work experience helps me communicate with foreign

teachers, some local teachers rarely engage with them—perhaps due to language barriers.”

(Kay, Third Grade English Teacher at X Local School)

Teachers at X Local School recognize both the opportunities and challenges in integrating local traditions with standards. They highlight the benefits of cultural diversity brought by internationalization but note difficulties in recruiting qualified foreign teachers and fostering effective collaboration between local and international staff. Language barriers and the lack of tailored curriculum materials remain key obstacles, underscoring the need for more comprehensive strategies to support meaningful cultural integration.

Teacher Perspectives: Insights from Y International School

Teachers at Y International School emphasize the importance of cultural integration in cultivating a learning environment that not only respects local traditions but also embraces diverse perspectives. Unlike X Local School, Y International School has a diverse community of both foreign teachers and students, enriching the educational experience through meaningful cross-cultural exchange. Educators aim to foster students’ appreciation of their cultural roots while equipping them with the skills needed to succeed.

Lakshmi, an Indian national who has been living in Hong Kong for an extended period, serves as a first-grade English teacher at Y International School. She has a positive attitude toward the internationalization of education in Hong Kong, believing it has been beneficial for both her and her children. Working at Y International School has exposed her children to diverse cultures, knowledge, and information from different countries, which she finds enriching. Lakshmi notes that while Hong Kong residents appreciate this approach, parents in India are generally less concerned about such matters.

Having experience with hybrid curricula from countries such as New Zealand, Australia, the UK, and the USA, she views curriculum internationalization as highly beneficial for children. Lakshmi values the cultural diversity fostered at Y International School, especially through events like International Day, where teachers and students share their cultural customs. She believes that the school's push for internationalization is grounded in historical factors, including Hong Kong's colonial past, and influenced by the vision of the school's founders.

“Both of my children study here, likely due to the tuition waivers and discounts offered by the school, which significantly alleviate the financial burden on families. I believe I will work here long-term, as the tuition can be quite expensive without such support.”

(Lakshmi, First-Grade English Teacher, Y International School)

This statement highlights how financial incentives, such as reduced tuition fees, play a crucial role in retaining teachers, especially in schools with high costs. For Lakshmi, the combination of cultural enrichment and practical benefits motivates her to continue contributing to the school's internationalized environment.

Ellen, who earned her master's degree in Hong Kong, has been active in the education sector for almost seven years. Her career started in kindergarten, and she later worked as a teaching assistant at a private primary school. After obtaining her PGDE in Hong Kong, she joined Y International School as a Chinese teacher for third graders. Ellen recognizes the significant benefits of educational internationalization in her career, including its impact on teaching methods and fostering a broader perspective. She emphasizes that cultural exchange goes beyond just teacher–student interactions, extending to the exchanges that take place among educators themselves.

Ellen believes that culture serves as a vehicle through which teachers convey important lessons, encouraging students to respect diverse cultures and lifestyles. She holds an optimistic outlook on the future, seeing educational internationalization as integral to development. Amidst the backdrop of economic globalization, Ellen envisions a harmonious integration of various cultural educational models and approaches. However, she acknowledges significant challenges, particularly the rise of economic protectionism and nationalism, exacerbated by current political issues, which may hinder the progress of educational internationalization.

Ellen's insights underscore the transformative potential of educational internationalization in fostering cultural understanding. Her recognition of the challenges posed by geopolitical tensions highlights the complex interplay between education and broader socio-political dynamics. Addressing these challenges will require innovative strategies and concerted efforts to promote cultural exchange and collaboration across borders. She mentions,

"I truly appreciate the vibrant multicultural environment here, as it provides me with numerous opportunities to learn and grow. The different backgrounds of both teachers and students really help enrich the overall internationalization of education."

(Ellen, Third Grade Chinese Teacher, Y International School)

At Y International School, cultural integration is fundamental to shaping a dynamic educational landscape that effectively merges local traditions with standards. The school fosters an enriching environment where students engage with a wide array of cultures and educational practices. This vibrant cultural exchange is supported by numerous events that celebrate various customs, promoting mutual respect and understanding among students and staff. Teachers at Y International School actively blend both local and international perspectives into the curriculum, providing a more

well-rounded and relevant educational experience. This dual approach not only enriches students' learning but also equips them with essential cross-cultural competencies needed for future success.

5.2.4 Teacher Training: Preparing Educators for an Internationalized Curriculum

In the context of educational internationalization, teacher training is crucial for equipping educators with the skills and knowledge needed to effectively navigate diverse classroom environments. Both School X and Y International School prioritize ongoing professional development to enhance teachers' pedagogical approaches and cultural competencies. Training programs focus on innovative teaching strategies, curriculum design, and effective communication across cultures. By promoting a collaborative learning environment among educators, these schools strive to ensure that teachers are well-equipped to deliver an internationalized curriculum that adapts to changing needs while respecting local traditions and values. This holistic approach not only improves teaching quality but also fosters a more inclusive and engaging learning experience for all students.

Teacher Perspectives: Insights from School X

At School X, teachers emphasize the importance of comprehensive training programs to equip educators with the skills needed for an internationalized curriculum. They believe that ongoing professional development is crucial for adapting to new teaching methodologies and understanding diverse student needs. By participating in workshops and collaborative training sessions, educators at School X enhance their ability to deliver effective instruction that aligns with educational standards while remaining rooted in local context.

Riya, an Indian female English teacher for sixth grade and the head of the International Department at X Local School, brings more than 30 years of experience in the education field. She views the school's promotion of educational internationalization as

an exploration of various models, emphasizing the importance of integrating excellent international curricula while incorporating local characteristics for effective localization. Although X Local School is a private institution, Riya highlights that its curriculum aligns with the guidelines set by the Hong Kong Education Bureau, making it a school-based curriculum. Compared to the mainstream curriculum, the Chinese language level in the International Department is slightly lower, while English proficiency is set at a higher standard to meet international expectations.

Riya explains that X Local School's promotion of internationalization is driven primarily by market considerations alongside its religious background. However, she expresses concern about the declining interest and proficiency of students in Chinese, stressing the need to maintain a strong foundation in their native language while excelling in other subjects. Reflecting on past initiatives, Riya shares,

"We used to have a lot of exchange programs before the pandemic. The school would fund teachers to visit places like Japan for professional development. It was a great chance for us to get hands-on experience, attend workshops, and connect with other teachers from different cultures. These initiatives really helped us improve our teaching methods and brought back fresh ideas to our classrooms. They were regular events that made learning and growing as educators a big part of our school culture, which really benefited both us and the students."

(Riya, Sixth-Grade English Teacher and Director at X Local School)

Kate, a female mathematics teacher for the sixth grade at X Local School, has accumulated over a decade of experience in education since completing her master's degree in Hong Kong. She expresses a pessimistic view regarding the school's efforts toward educational internationalization, seeing it as a challenging initiative. From her perspective, the establishment of the International Department represents a superficial change lacking a deep cultural core. Kate's dual teaching role in both the international

and mainstream departments gives her unique insight into these dynamics. She believes that the key to sustaining the school's efforts in internationalization lies with the leadership's commitment to continuous exploration and improvement.

Kate also raises concerns about the academic performance of students in the International Department, which she attributes to a reduced emphasis on coursework and homework compared to the mainstream curriculum. Reflecting on past professional development efforts, she shares,

“We used to have a lot of seminars where we brought in well-known experts to teach us. Those sessions were valuable because they opened new ways of thinking about our teaching. We got to learn specialized techniques and ask questions directly to the experts. It was a great chance to discuss the challenges we face in the classroom and pick up best practices that we could use right away. Overall, those seminars not only helped us improve our skills but also built a strong sense of teamwork among the teachers.”

(Kate, Sixth-Grade Mathematics Teacher at X Local School)

At X Local School, teacher training for an internationalized curriculum reflects both opportunities and challenges. Professional development initiatives, such as seminars led by experts and international exchange programs, provide valuable learning experiences, equipping teachers with specialized teaching techniques and insights from education models. However, the integration of these practices faces structural and cultural challenges.

Teacher Perspectives: Insights from Y International School

Teachers at Y International School recognize that effective training is essential for preparing them to implement an internationalized curriculum successfully. They advocate for targeted professional development that addresses the challenges of

teaching in a multicultural environment. By engaging in training focused on innovative teaching strategies and cultural competence, teachers at Y International School strive to create a vibrant learning environment that caters to the needs of their diverse students.

Nan, who earned her master's degree in Hong Kong, has devoted nearly a decade to the education sector and currently serves as a sixth-grade Chinese teacher and head of the Chinese department at Y International School. She emphasizes the necessity of enhanced communication among individuals from diverse nationalities and ethnicities, a trend amplified by population mobility. Nan believes that language is the foundation of learning and communication, highlighting the importance of encouraging English as a common universal language.

One of the most pressing challenges Nan identifies is the integration of the Chinese language curriculum with other subjects. She points out the traditional emphasis on rote memorization in Chinese language instruction, particularly in the learning of classical poetry, which may hinder students' overall language proficiency. Furthermore, conveying classical Chinese poetry accurately to non-native speakers presents a significant obstacle. Nan's insights highlight the urgent need for innovative approaches to language instruction that accommodate diverse learning styles and cultural backgrounds.

Additionally, her observations highlight the need for cultivating cross-cultural awareness and interpersonal skills to navigate different cultures effectively. She advocates for integrating cultural sensitivity into curriculum design and exploring alternative teaching methodologies as vital steps in addressing the challenges posed by educational internationalization.

“Our school has many models for teacher training, including opportunities to study and exchange experiences at renowned universities around the world. Senior

teachers often take students to summer camps, and I know there have been trips to Australia, the USA, and Japan. However, these opportunities tend to favor foreign teachers, while Chinese teachers primarily take students to the mainland, likely due to funding considerations.”

(Nan, sixth-grade Chinese teacher and head of the Chinese department at Y International School)

Luman, a sixth-grade mathematics teacher at Y International School, emphasizes the pivotal role of cross-cultural teaching in the context of educational internationalization. With nearly a decade of experience and a master’s degree from Hong Kong, he advocates for international accreditation through programs like A Levels and the International Baccalaureate (IB) as essential for fostering educational standards.

Drawing on his own experience with IB courses at the University of Hong Kong, Luman supports concept-based teaching as a method to integrate various subjects and promote the overarching idea of internationalization. He identifies a significant challenge in this process: the entrenched mindsets of teachers, particularly in subjects like mathematics where traditional teaching methods prevail. Luman points out that *“there’s a pressing need for pedagogical training to encourage educators to adopt more innovative teaching approaches, moving away from the rote memorization practices commonly found in math education”*.

His insights highlight the critical importance of teacher development in adapting to the changing landscape of educational internationalization. By adopting concept-based approaches and promoting a culture of ongoing learning, schools can successfully address the challenges of cultural diversity and fulfill educational standards. Luman stresses the imperative of investing in teacher training programs that promote pedagogical innovation and cross-cultural competence, ensuring the success of internationalization initiatives at Y International School.

“Our school organizes various seminars and exchange meetings every year, inviting experts to give lectures and hosting many academic forums. These events are fantastic because they not only enhance our professional skills but also foster collaboration among teachers. We get to engage in discussions about innovative teaching methods and share experiences with one another. Plus, learning from industry leaders gives us fresh insights into our practices, which we can bring back to the classroom. Overall, it really boosts our confidence as educators and helps us expand our educational influence in the community.”

(Luman, a sixth-grade mathematics teacher at Y International School)

At Y International School, teacher training is focused on preparing educators for a curriculum that embraces cultural diversity and international perspectives. The school emphasizes continuous professional development through seminars and academic forums to enhance teachers’ skills and expand their educational influence. Additionally, it fosters effective communication among educators of various nationalities while promoting innovative teaching methodologies that accommodate diverse learning styles. By prioritizing equitable access to training opportunities, Y International School is committed to equipping its teachers with the necessary tools to navigate the complexities of educational internationalization.

5.2.5 Student Outcomes: Evaluating the Impact of Internationalization

The process of educational internationalization significantly influences student outcomes, shaping their academic performance, cultural awareness, and overall development. Teachers from both School X and Y International School emphasize the positive effects of an internationalized curriculum on students’ critical thinking skills and citizenship. As educators reflect on their students’ progress, they recognize the importance of continuous evaluation to ensure that the objectives of internationalization are effectively met.

Teacher Perspectives: Insights from School X

As educational institutions increasingly embrace internationalization, assessing its impact on student outcomes becomes essential. At School X, teachers highlight significant advancements in students' academic abilities, cultural understanding, and overall development because of an internationalized curriculum.

Yuan, a sixth-grade Chinese teacher responsible for teaching general knowledge courses, earned her master's degree in 2017 and chose to pursue her career in Hong Kong. Before joining X Local School, she gained experience as a teaching assistant in a secondary school. Yuan believes that the International Department's establishment was a strategic decision made by the school leadership, introducing valuable educational innovations for both educators and learners. She emphasizes the importance of improving English proficiency and integrating its cultural frameworks, in line with the Hong Kong government's objective of promoting biliteracy and trilingualism (Chinese, English, and either Mandarin or Cantonese). Based on her experience, Yuan observes that many parents seek additional after-school classes to expose their children to international educational practices. However, she expresses concern about the growing focus on English, cautioning that it might undermine the quality and significance of Chinese language education.

"I'm quite worried about the students' overall academic performance because, apart from English, the assessment standards for other subjects are lower compared to those in the mainstream department. This is evident in recent district-level rankings—while the students' English scores have improved significantly, the overall performance in other subjects has declined. This is something the leadership may need to reflect on"

(Yuan, sixth-grade Chinese teacher at X Local School).

Cherry, a third-grade mathematics teacher with seven years of experience, pursued her master's and PGDE in Hong Kong and decided to remain in the city. Originally from mainland China, she views educational internationalization as a future trend for Hong Kong. Cherry believes X Local School has successfully integrated internationalization with local teaching methods through years of experimentation. She explains that many parents see the school's International Department as providing a solid foundation, easing students' transition to other international schools after graduation. In her view, the school's leadership promotes internationalization not only to align with educational trends but also to enhance revenue. Cherry is optimistic about the International Department's development, noting,

“In the past, assessments focused heavily on every subject's grade, but students in the International Department now have much less daily and holiday homework. This allows them to break free from the burden of excessive assignments and focus more on developing their interests, which is a great thing.”

(Cherry, third-grade mathematics teacher at X Local School).

The internationalization of education at X Local School has yielded both positive and challenging outcomes for students. Cherry highlights that the International Department offers students more flexibility by reducing daily and holiday homework, allowing them to focus on developing personal interests rather than being burdened by heavy workloads. This shift aligns with parents' expectations, providing students with a solid foundation to transition smoothly to other international schools after graduation. However, the pursuit of internationalization is also driven by practical motives, such as revenue generation and future educational trends.

On the other hand, Yuan expresses concerns regarding how these changes may affect academic performance. While the students' English proficiency has seen significant improvement, the reduction in assessment requirements for non-English subjects has

led to a noticeable decline in overall academic achievement across other areas. Yuan's observations point to a potential imbalance between English language focus and the quality of Chinese education, suggesting that leadership should carefully monitor these trends to maintain educational standards across all subjects.

Teacher Perspectives: Insights from Y International School

Teachers at Y International School emphasize the positive impact of internationalization on student outcomes, particularly in enhancing language proficiency and cultural competence. They observe that students engaged in diverse learning experiences demonstrate increased confidence and creativity. Overall, these insights highlight how an internationalized curriculum fosters the holistic development of students at Y International School.

Mavis, an experienced third-grade mathematics teacher at Y International School, brings nearly a decade of dedication to the education field. Having finished her high school education in the United States and later undertaking both her undergraduate and graduate studies in Hong Kong, she has gained a well-rounded perspective on the internationalization of education. Mavis views this process as an opportunity to integrate various cultural elements into the native educational framework.

Mavis emphasizes the significance of incorporating Western cultural aspects into the Chinese educational context, enriching students' learning experiences across all facets of life. She advocates for additional activities, such as study trips, where both teachers and students could visit western developed countries for learning and exchange. Mavis believes that these experiences not only expand students' perspectives but also deepen their understanding of diverse cultures, ultimately fostering their personal development.

Mavis regards educational internationalization as closely aligned with current and future developmental trends, reflecting one of the core principles of Y International School's educational philosophy. However, she also acknowledges the challenges posed by external factors, including the pandemic and political influences, which have led to significant immigration trends. These obstacles necessitate innovative strategies to sustain the momentum of educational internationalization.

Despite these challenges, Mavis remains optimistic about the future of educational internationalization, emphasizing its relevance in preparing students for diverse cultural and social contexts.

“We generally evaluate every student as excellent unless there are issues with their attitude, which is largely tied to our school's assessment system. On the other hand, parents also tend not to focus solely on a single grade; they place greater emphasis on the overall development of their child's capabilities.”

(Mavis, a third-grade mathematics teacher at Y International School)

Jeanie, a sixth-grade English teacher and head of the English Department at Y International School, brings nearly three decades of teaching experience. She views educational internationalization as an invaluable opportunity for students to interact with different cultures, languages, and ideologies, promoting tolerance and mutual understanding among classmates. The diverse staff at Y International School further encourages learners to think critically and engage meaningfully across different perspectives.

Jeanie believes that equipping students with essential skills—such as cross-cultural competency, effective communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving—is crucial. However, she points out that these competencies are often difficult to assess through traditional evaluations.

“I honestly think what matters most for students is fostering their interests, while also building skills like cross-cultural awareness, effective communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving. These are the kinds of skills that aren’t really captured through just one report card, you know? It’s about so much more than grades; it’s about helping them grow into well-rounded individuals.”

(Jeanie, sixth-grade English teacher and head of the English Department at Y International School)

Despite Y International School’s efforts to foster these outcomes, challenges remain. Jeanie acknowledges common issues faced in educational internationalization, such as limited resources for teacher training, professional development, and technology. Language barriers may also hinder effective communication, while inflexible curricula may struggle to incorporate international content. To tackle these challenges, she stresses the importance of active communication and educational efforts to involve parents and the community in the school’s efforts towards internationalization.

Looking ahead, Jeanie remains committed to aligning the school’s vision with the needs of students and the community, advocating for increased support and flexibility to overcome obstacles and advance educational internationalization efforts.

At Y International School, educational internationalization is viewed as essential for developing students’ critical skills and competencies. Educators highlight the importance of fostering students’ interests while also developing key skills like cross-cultural communication and critical thinking. While academic performance is still a measure of success, teachers advocate for broader assessments that reflect overall development rather than just grades.

Although internationalization positively influences student engagement and enthusiasm for learning, there are concerns about balancing language instruction with the varying evaluation standards between the International Department and regular classes. Overall, educators at Y International School remain committed to refining curriculum design and assessment methods to better align with the goals of internationalization and address its associated challenges. To provide a clearer overview of how these outcomes compare with School X, the following table summarizes the horizontal differences and consistencies between the two cases across key aspects of their internationalization efforts. This comparison highlights divergent approaches to student outcomes and underscores areas of alignment in their pursuit of educational internationalization.

Table 10: Horizontal Comparison of School X and School Y

Aspect	School X	School Y
Educational Approach	Hybrid model	Globally-oriented
Curriculum Design	Bilingual focus	Intl. standards
Student Outcomes	Local + intl. skills	Critical skills

5.3 Insights from a Leading Figure in Hong Kong Education

The research had the privilege of interviewing the renowned educator ‘Ant’ from Hong Kong (a pseudonym because he prefers not to disclose his name in the thesis), whose illustrious career and exceptional contributions to education make him a highly respected figure in the field. Ant has been honored with the prestigious Star Award by the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government, recognizing his decades of dedicated public service and outstanding achievements in the education sector. His esteemed career includes serving in senior leadership positions within the Hong Kong Education Bureau, where he was instrumental in driving educational reforms, shaping

policy, and fostering curriculum innovation to improve the quality and accessibility of education in the region.

Now retired from formal government service, Ant remains deeply committed to advancing education through charitable initiatives that promote equitable learning opportunities across Hong Kong. In addition to his philanthropic efforts, he serves as the chairman of the board of governors and school supervisor for several prominent educational institutions, providing strategic oversight and expert guidance in school development, governance, and management. His continued involvement in education reflects a lifelong passion for nurturing future generations and shaping the evolving landscape of education in Hong Kong.

In engaging with Ant, the research benefited immensely from his wealth of experience and expertise. His unique insights bridged multiple domains—ranging from government policy, curriculum reform, and school governance to international education trends—offering a comprehensive, interdisciplinary perspective on the challenges and opportunities of educational internationalization. Ant's ability to connect frameworks with local contexts provided nuanced reflections that enriched the study's scope. His insights underscored the need to carefully balance the preservation of Hong Kong's local educational identity with the adoption of international standards, stressing the importance of tailoring policies to address the needs of various stakeholders, including students, teachers, and administrators.

These in-depth discussions with Ant transcended surface-level analyses, delving into complex dynamics such as cross-cultural integration, the operational realities of implementing international curricula, and the long-term impact of educational policies on student outcomes. His reflections underscored how schools in Hong Kong must continuously innovate while staying rooted in their core educational values. Furthermore, Ant provided valuable perspectives on the role of leadership in fostering

internationalization within educational institutions, stressing the importance of visionary governance, collaborative leadership, and stakeholder engagement in achieving sustainable growth.

Through these conversations, Ant's reflections added depth and breadth to the study, offering not only practical insights but also strategic foresight into the future trajectory of education in Hong Kong. His experiences and perspectives served as a crucial foundation for understanding the evolving interplay between local traditions and international educational standards, ultimately enhancing the richness of the research findings.

5.3.1 Vision for Educational Reform in Hong Kong

The internationalization of education in Hong Kong is heavily shaped by the city's colonial history, political changes, and the shifting linguistic landscape. As a former British colony, Hong Kong's education system was heavily shaped by British educational models, which emphasized English language education to cultivate individuals aligned with British cultural values and prepared for roles within British institutions (Evans, 2000; Kirkpatrick & Liddicoat, 2017). Schools adopted British curricula and teaching practices, embedding English as a language of prestige and ensuring it played a central role in education and governance.

Simultaneously, Hong Kong's unique geopolitical position has made it a hub for migration, attracting people from mainland China, South Asia, and other regions. Political turmoil and natural disasters on the mainland throughout the 20th century led many to seek refuge in Hong Kong, fostering a diverse cultural and linguistic environment. This historical amalgamation laid the foundation for Hong Kong's modern emphasis on educational internationalization, cultural pluralism, and multilingualism (Baldauf, 2006).

With the handover to Chinese sovereignty in 1997 and the subsequent implementation of the One Country, Two Systems policy, Hong Kong's education system needed to align with new political realities while retaining its unique identity. Educational reforms became essential to balance local traditions, colonial legacies and national identity with the demand to remain internationally competitive. As the world became more integrated, the need for students to develop international perspectives and cross-cultural communication skills became apparent, pushing Hong Kong's education system toward further internationalization (Kirkpatrick & Xu, 2001).

A central aspect of these reforms is the promotion of biliteracy and trilingualism, which seeks to develop proficiency in Cantonese, Putonghua, and English. Cantonese remains the native language for most of the population and serves as the primary medium of instruction in kindergartens and primary schools (Census & Statistics, 2016; Poon, 2010). However, Putonghua (Mandarin), the official language of mainland China, is increasingly playing a significant role in education policy as Hong Kong deepens its cultural and political ties with the mainland (Kirkpatrick & Xu, 2001; Zhang et al., 2005). At the same time, English has maintained its position as a language of power and social mobility, supporting Hong Kong's role as a global financial hub (Evans, 2000). English is also the main language of instruction at six of the eight publicly funded universities, as well as several private institutions (Kirkpatrick & Liddicoat, 2017).

Ant, a prominent educator and former senior government official, described the linguistic and educational evolution:

“During those years, many from the mainland fled to Hong Kong to escape political and economic instability. At the same time, the British worked to solidify their influence by embedding their education system. Hong Kong thus became a place where East and West converged, and schools started preparing students for

both worlds. Today, with China's increasing influence, Hong Kong's education system faces ongoing pressure to adapt and evolve."

The Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) is a result of these ongoing reforms. Introduced to replace previous examination systems, the HKDSE marks the completion of six years of secondary education and is recognized both locally and internationally, showcasing Hong Kong's ability to integrate local and global educational standards (Evans, 2000; Kirkpatrick & Liddicoat, 2017).

"Language policy is key to this evolution", Ant added. "Hong Kong's unique ability to implement biliteracy and trilingualism ensures that students are not only connected to their cultural roots through Cantonese but are also equipped to engage with China through Putonghua and with the world through English."

The development and execution of language policies in Hong Kong are influenced by a combination of political, social, cultural, and economic factors (Baldauf, 2006). Stakeholders—including government officials, educators, and parents—play crucial roles in ensuring these policies remain relevant (Ricento & Hornberger, 1996). English remains dominant in higher education and the professional sphere, serving as the default language for written communication in business environments (Bolton et al., 2021; Evans, 2016).

The biliteracy and trilingualism framework promotes proficiency in Cantonese, Putonghua, and English, allowing students to thrive both locally and internationally. Moreover, the diversity in educational pathways—ranging from local curricula to international programs like the International Baccalaureate (IB)—ensures students can pursue goals aligned with their personal aspirations and career ambitions. Through these initiatives, Hong Kong not only preserves its linguistic and cultural heritage but

also adapts to the needs of the modern era, reinforcing its role as a bridge between East and West.

5.3.2 Shaping International Education in Hong Kong

As the need for students to develop international perspectives and cross-cultural communication skills became apparent, Hong Kong's education system was pushed toward further internationalization (Kirkpatrick & Xu, 2001). The integration of the economy has laid a solid foundation for the internationalization of education in Hong Kong. Mainland China's reform and opening-up policy has fueled cross-border trade, driving the flow of goods, technology, capital, and talent across borders. This economic integration has, in turn, stimulated the demand for a more internationally oriented education system in Hong Kong, positioning the city as both a hub for multinational corporations and international talent. As a melting pot of Eastern and Western cultures, Hong Kong attracts expatriates from around the world, many of whom bring unique educational needs that require tailored international education solutions. Consequently, the intertwining of economic changes and the educational landscape has become crucial in shaping a responsive and inclusive educational framework in Hong Kong.

Ant, a former senior education official, reflected on the roots of this trend:

“At first, British expatriates in Hong Kong faced some challenges when it came to their kids' education. To tackle this issue, they set up the English Schools Foundation (ESF), which really paved the way for international education here. ESF was one of the first to team up with the government to provide a British-style education that met the needs of the expatriate community.

The founding of English Schools Foundation (ESF) schools not only addressed the educational needs of the British expatriate community but also paved the way for international education in Hong Kong. As the expatriate community grew to

include Americans, Dutch, and others, the demand for international schools increased, leading to the opening of more schools, like the French International Schools.”

This historical narrative highlights the pivotal role that expatriates have played in shaping Hong Kong’s education system. ESF schools exemplify how the educational needs of expatriates have driven the development of international education, fostering a diverse landscape that accommodates multiple cultures and languages. This development also reflects Hong Kong’s role as a global hub, where education is not only relevant to local needs but also internationally focused, catering to a diverse, cosmopolitan population.

Ant further explained:

“The idea behind setting up these international schools was to make sure that expat kids could get an education that matched their home country’s standards, so it’d be easier for them to transition back into their own school or work systems later. At the same time, these schools also help spread their home country’s education models and cultural values abroad.”

This statement underscores the dual purpose of international schools in Hong Kong:

- **Educational Continuity for Expatriate Families:** By following home-country curricula, these schools enable students to transition smoothly back into their home countries’ education systems and job markets.
- **Cultural Diplomacy and Influence:** These institutions export educational frameworks and cultural values, promoting the dissemination of diverse educational practices.

Thus, international schools in Hong Kong not only meet the practical needs of expatriate families but also act as ambassadors for their countries’ education systems,

contributing to the exchange of ideas and teaching practices. The leadership within Hong Kong's education system, fostered through collaboration between the government and educational institutions, has been instrumental in promoting internationalization. Government policies have been flexible and open to accommodate the evolving needs of expatriate families, further integrating Hong Kong's education into the international educational network. Leadership at both governmental and institutional levels has ensured that the city's education system remains relevant in a connected economy, offering diverse educational pathways tailored to students' unique goals.

5.3.3 Governmental Attitudes towards Internationalizing Education in Hong Kong

The government's attitude towards educational internationalization has evolved over time, beginning with support during the colonial era under British rule. Back then, the government actively facilitated the establishment of international schools by providing funding, premises, and low-interest loans. After Hong Kong's return to Chinese sovereignty, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) government continued many of these practices, albeit with some changes in priorities.

Today, while the government still offers school premises and low-interest loans to international schools, most of the education funding goes to public schools, excluding the English Schools Foundation (ESF). A key focus of the government is on carefully regulating the establishment and accreditation of international schools to ensure educational quality across the region. Officials are especially wary of low-quality schools entering the market, as they fear such institutions could dilute the overall standard of education in Hong Kong.

Ant shared his thoughts, saying,

“You know, with Hong Kong’s economy booming and more parents wanting their kids to get into top universities—like Ivy League schools in the US or G5 universities in the UK—there’s been a real push towards getting international qualifications. Things like the International Baccalaureate (IB) diploma are becoming popular. That’s why so many schools, even private ones, are now setting up International Departments. These programs aren’t just about exposure—they’re also about getting those high scores needed for the DSE or IB. Parents see these as tickets to those prestigious universities.

But the government isn’t exactly thrilled about every school opening an International Department. They want to keep things balanced and make sure local schools don’t lose focus. They’re also cautious about international schools popping up all over the place—especially some that charge crazy fees but don’t deliver on quality. I mean, just because a school hires native English-speaking teachers doesn’t mean the education is top-notch. The government keeps a close eye on these schools to make sure they’re not just using fancy marketing to justify their high tuition.

At the end of the day, whether students are in the local system or international schools, it’s all about results. You need those high scores if you want to get into the best universities. That’s why international schools love to show off their IB results every year—it’s part of their appeal. And the government knows that too, which is why they’re strict when it comes to approving and regulating international schools. They want to make sure these schools are legit and not just cashing in on the demand for international education.”

This discussion highlights the government’s cautious stance toward the expansion of international schools, emphasizing the importance of maintaining high educational standards across both local and international pathways. The government’s focus on

stringent regulation ensures that international schools are held accountable, providing quality education that aligns with parents' aspirations and academic benchmarks. Additionally, it reflects the delicate balance the government strives to maintain between promoting international education and preserving the quality of the local education system.

5.3.4 Policies Driving Educational Internationalization in Hong Kong

Government policies directly reflect the growing market demand for internationalized education in Hong Kong. As the economy accelerates and Hong Kong strengthens its role as an international financial hub, more families are seeking international education for their children, aiming for higher-quality schooling and broader opportunities. In response, the government has implemented policies that align with these market demands, fostering the growth of international schools and ensuring that educational standards satisfy the expectations of both domestic and expatriate families.

The policies of the HKSAR government support international education through various channels, such as providing school premises, offering low-interest loans, and promoting awareness through education campaigns. These financial and resource incentives motivate more educational institutions to participate in international education. At the same time, the government regulates and audits international schools to maintain high standards, ensuring the credibility of the education system in Hong Kong. Ant explained the situation, saying,

“Hong Kong is super attractive because there's so much financial potential here. A lot of foreign educational institutions see Hong Kong as a great place to set up international schools since they can make good money from it. And it's not just foreigners—plenty of local parents in Hong Kong are willing to pay top dollar for international education too. You also have mainland Chinese families getting involved. Ever since China's reform and opening, more people from the mainland

have been doing business or working in Hong Kong, which means they need schooling for their kids. Honestly, if you look at the numbers, you'll see there's been a big increase in mainland students attending international schools over the last decade.

The way I see it, the government is happy to promote international education because, let's face it, they don't have to spend much of their own money to make it happen. And the best part? All the benefits stay right here in Hong Kong's education system. It's a win-win. The market demand is already there, so the government just steps in to support it without much financial burden on their part. This lets the whole sector grow naturally and keeps Hong Kong competitive on the international stage."

This insight highlights the mutually beneficial dynamic between government policies and the market demand for international education. By leveraging existing demand, the government enables international schools to flourish without heavy public spending. At the same time, the growth of international education boosts Hong Kong's reputation and strengthens its competitiveness as a leading education hub. The ability to adapt to changing needs not only strengthens the education sector but also ensures that Hong Kong continues to attract both local and international families seeking high-quality education for their children.

5.3.5 Pioneering the Future: Prospects of Internationalizing Education in Hong Kong

The drive to internationalize education in Hong Kong encounters several challenges. The government must not only attract high-quality educational institutions but also ensure they meet strict operational standards. This involves rigorous assessments to maintain the credibility and integrity of Hong Kong's education system. However,

bringing in reputable international schools requires careful planning, significant resources, and a nuanced understanding of the evolving education landscape.

On top of the government's efforts, schools themselves are under immense pressure. To survive and thrive, they need to uphold high academic standards, design innovative curricula, and remain competitive in an increasingly saturated education market. With more international schools opening, institutions must constantly enhance their facilities and educational programs to appeal to both local and expatriate families. Many schools invest heavily in recruiting well-qualified teachers and offering a wide variety of extracurricular activities to stand out. Ant explained:

“Competition among schools in Hong Kong is intense. If a school doesn't attract enough students, it's at risk of shutting down. There's a lot more going on behind the scenes than just teaching. The Education Bureau works with advisors from the business world and other sectors, and these people influence how schools operate. In the end, a lot of that pressure shows up as enrollment targets. Schools are basically fighting to stay afloat by keeping their classrooms full.”

The pressure extends to students, too:

“They need to maintain consistently high academic performance and build a well-rounded profile to remain competitive. Good grades, along with participation in extracurricular activities, are often seen as essential for future academic and career opportunities.

This culture of hard work and achievement isn't just a Hong Kong thing—you see it across East Asia, in places like Korea and Japan. Parents here push their kids from a very young age, sometimes even starting in kindergarten. The focus is always on solving problems and getting good grades, but students don't always get the

chance to explore their interests or develop creativity. That's one of the reasons some kids end up feeling disengaged from school.

But I think Hong Kong has managed to find a good balance. We've taken the best parts of international education and combined them with local teaching methods. Our students are not just hard-working—they're also learning how to think critically, solve problems, and come up with creative solutions. That's something we've done well here."

Ant's perspective highlights the complex environment Hong Kong's education system operates in. Schools and students alike are under significant pressure to perform, driven by market demands and cultural expectations. However, Hong Kong's unique blend of international and local education models helps foster not just academic diligence, but also creativity and critical thinking.

Moving forward, the challenge will be to maintain this balance. Schools must keep adapting to meet both local and international expectations, and the government will need to regulate carefully to ensure that the education sector remains competitive while upholding high standards.

5.4 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter presented and analyzed data from various sources to offer insights into the internationalization of education in Hong Kong. The data was organized into several key sections, beginning with document analysis, interviews, and data security measures, followed by reflections on the study's limitations.

The comparison of Schools X and Y revealed their distinct strategies for fostering international education, highlighting differences in their educational approaches,

curriculum design, and cultural integration. While School X has focused on its historical legacy to create a balanced, student-centered model, School Y has adopted innovative strategies to align with international trends. Both schools have contributed to the promotion of international education, though through divergent paths. A cross-case analysis further explored how these schools design curricula that balance local traditions with broader perspectives.

Insights from a leading figure in Hong Kong education provided a deeper understanding of the current landscape, shedding light on the government's attitude toward internationalization, relevant policies, and prospects. These reflections emphasized the complexities of balancing market demand, educational quality, and regulatory oversight. The chapter concluded with a discussion on the future direction of international education, emphasizing the need to uphold high standards while promoting student innovation and critical thinking.

This in-depth analysis has laid the groundwork for understanding the opportunities and challenges linked to the internationalization of education in Hong Kong. The next chapter will provide a deeper examination through a vertical analysis, focusing on key themes such as motivations for adopting international education, challenges in curriculum implementation, and strategies for strengthening primary education in Hong Kong.

Chapter 6: Results of Vertical Analysis

This chapter delves into the motivations behind the push for educational internationalization and examines the challenges and strategies associated with implementing international curricula in primary schools. Drawing on data from one local school (School X) and one international school (School Y) in Hong Kong, the analysis identifies key themes such as market demand, financial incentives, and institutional missions driving international education. It further explores the obstacles schools face in curriculum implementation, including collaboration, training, and leadership support. Finally, the chapter offers insights into ways to strengthen Hong Kong's primary education system, balancing traditional models with the benefits of international education.

6.1 Characteristics of Respondents

A vertical analysis approach was employed, selecting one class from each of the three key grades—first grade, third grade, and sixth grade—to capture insights across multiple developmental stages. This approach ensures a well-rounded understanding of how teaching practices and challenges evolve throughout primary education.

In this chapter, I will continue to build upon the initial data presented in Chapter 5 for a more in-depth analysis and comparison of the schools. To facilitate a clearer understanding, Tables 8 and 9 will again display the demographic information of participants from X Local School and Y International School. This presentation allows readers to easily compare the basic characteristics of the two participant groups, supporting the subsequent analysis in this chapter. The following section provides a detailed overview of the research participants. Tables 8 and 9 present demographic data, including participants' pseudonyms, their current teaching fields, affiliated

departments, and length of service at their respective schools. This information contextualizes the teachers' backgrounds, providing essential insights into their professional environments and experiences.

Table 8 X Local School Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Nationality or Region	Course	Teaching Experience Years
Zhu	HKSAR	Chinese Teacher	30+
Lindsay	Swedish, HKSAR	English Teacher	20+
Li	HKSAR	Mathematics Teacher	7
Victor	HKSAR	Chinese Teacher	6
Kay	British, HKSAR	English Teacher	15
Cherry	HKSAR	Mathematics Teacher	7
Yuan	HKSAR	Chinese Teacher	7
Riya	India, HKSAR	English Teacher	30+
Kate	HKSAR	Mathematics Teacher	10+

The findings revealed intriguing insights into the citizenship status of teachers in both local and international school settings. Among the X local schoolteachers interviewed, it was observed that 33.3% of individuals hold foreign nationality, while the majority, comprising 66.6%, were Hong Kong nationals. This distribution underscores the prevalence of Hong Kong nationals within the local school context.

Conversely, at Y International School, the distribution of citizenship among teachers portrayed a different scenario. Here, 55.5% of the teachers held either local or dual citizenship, with two of Chinese descent. The remaining 44.5% were Hong Kong nationals. This suggests a more diverse composition of citizenship backgrounds among teachers in the international school setting compared to their counterparts in local schools.

Table 9 Y International School Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Nationality or Region	Course	Teaching Experience Years
Lisa	HKSAR	Chinese Teacher	9
Lakshmi	India, HKSAR	English Teacher	10+
Betty	HKSAR	Mathematics Teacher	8
Ellen	HKSAR	Chinese Teacher	8
Jason	British, HKSAR	English Teacher	6
Mavis	USA, HKSAR	Mathematics Teacher	10
Nan	HKSAR	Chinese Teacher	9
Jeanie	South Africa, HKSAR	English Teacher	20+
<u>Luman</u>	HKSAR	Mathematics Teacher	11

The analysis of distribution among teachers sheds light on the multicultural dynamics within educational institutions. The presence of teachers with diverse citizenship backgrounds can enrich the educational experience by offering different perspectives and insights into international issues. Additionally, it highlights the trend in education and underscores the importance of promoting cross-cultural understanding among students. These findings emphasize the importance of embracing diversity in educational settings, fostering a more inclusive and enriching learning environment for all students.

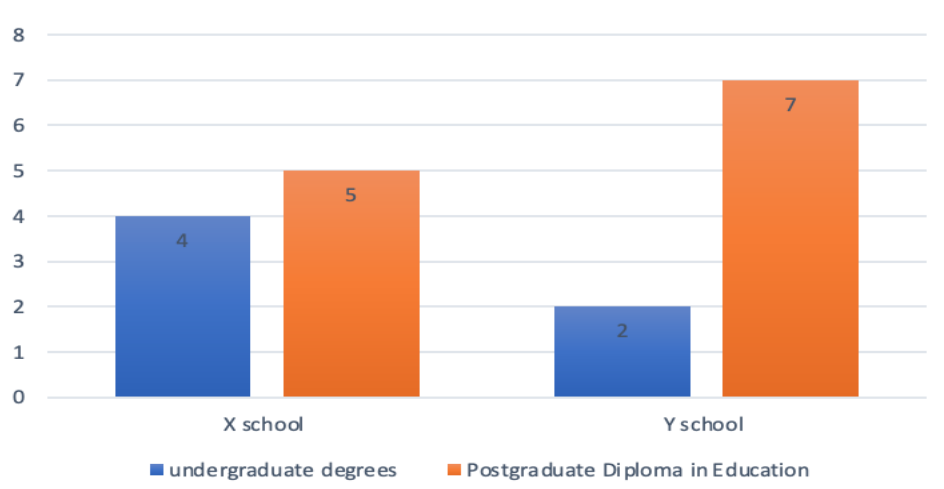
Initially, a comprehensive survey and analysis of the academic qualifications of teachers in both schools would unveil the overall educational proficiency among them. Teachers with higher academic qualifications are likely to possess deeper academic knowledge and professional expertise, thereby positively influencing the teaching quality and academic reputation of the schools. Furthermore, juxtaposing the educational backgrounds of teachers in both schools would shed light on the differences in educational resource allocation. For instance, schools may exhibit preferences in recruiting teachers with international educational backgrounds and experience to

enhance teaching standards and promote internationalization. The degree of internationalization within the teaching staff may closely correlate with the schools' level of internationalization, as teachers with international educational backgrounds are better equipped to meet the demands of international education, provide cross-cultural educational experiences, and enhance students' international perspectives and intercultural communication abilities.

X Local School has a total of nine individuals, with 44.4% holding undergraduate degrees from mainland China, followed by pursuing master's degrees in Hong Kong, and subsequently obtaining the Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) in Hong Kong and engaging in teaching assistant positions. The remaining 55.6% only possess undergraduate degrees. Among them, those aged 50 and above account for 33.3%, those in their 40s make up 11.1%, with the rest being under the age of 30.

In contrast, at School Y, there are also nine individuals, of whom 22.2% hold undergraduate degrees, while the rest, 77.8%, possess master's degrees. The age distribution comprises 11.1% aged 50 and above, and the remaining 88.9% are in their 30s or younger.

Figure 2. Comparing Teacher Education Backgrounds



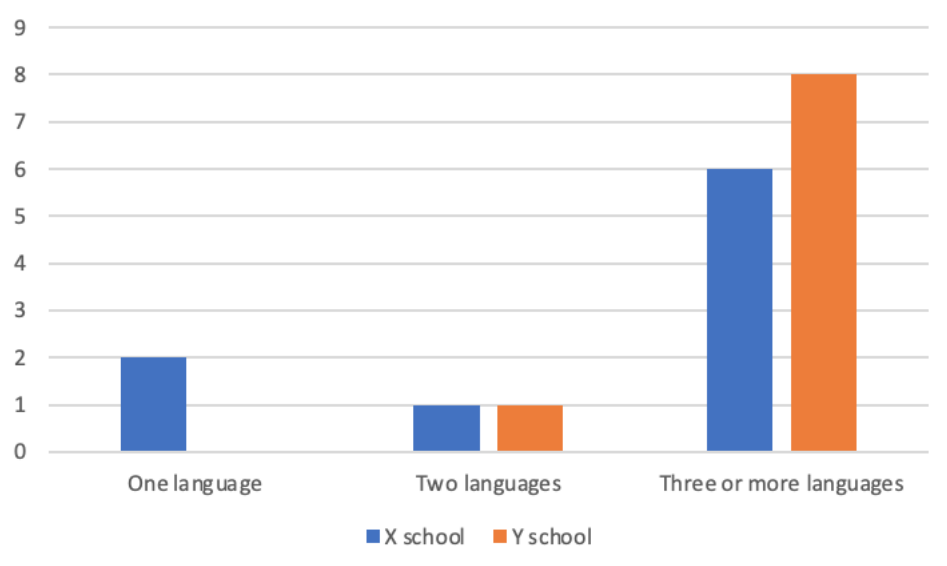
The educational backgrounds and demographics of teachers at the two schools reveal interesting patterns. School X exhibits a diverse mix of educational pathways, with some teachers pursuing further education in Hong Kong after completing undergraduate studies in mainland China. The age distribution is also varied, reflecting a range of experience levels among the teaching staff.

In contrast, School Y has a younger and more diverse teaching staff, with a higher proportion of teachers holding master's degrees, suggesting a focus on recruiting highly qualified educators. This study examines linguistic proficiency and cultural diversity among teachers in the two schools, using interviews for self-assessment and comparative analysis to highlight disparities in educational backgrounds and teacher demographics.

The study explores the linguistic abilities of teachers, recognizing the crucial role that language proficiency plays in enabling effective communication and instruction in diverse classroom environments. By eliciting self-assessment from teachers, the study seeks nuanced insights into their language abilities, including fluency, proficiency in multiple languages, and cultural sensitivity in language usage. Examining teachers' language skills provides insights into their cultural backgrounds and how linguistic diversity influences pedagogical practices. By analyzing differences in qualifications and educational backgrounds, the study explores their impact on teaching approaches, classroom dynamics, and educational outcomes.

Overall, the research aims to contribute to a deeper insight into linguistic diversity among teachers within the context of cultural pluralism in educational environments. Through comprehensive analysis and interpretation of linguistic data, the study aims to shed light on the interplay between language proficiency, cultural diversity, and educational practices in fostering inclusive and effective learning environments.

Figure 3. Linguistic Proficiency



In X Local School, a research survey found that three English subject teachers primarily use English as their common language, with one teacher proficient in Cantonese. The remaining six teachers can communicate in Mandarin, Cantonese, and English. In contrast, at School Y, three teachers are native English speakers, with basic proficiency in Mandarin and Cantonese. The other six teachers are proficient in English, Mandarin, and Cantonese, using English as the primary language for daily communication.

In contrast, at School Y, while three teachers primarily communicate in English, only one among them is proficient in Mandarin. The remaining two English-speaking instructors possess basic proficiency in Cantonese along with some knowledge of other languages. Additionally, the school boasts six teachers fluent in English, Mandarin, and Cantonese, utilizing English as the primary language for daily interactions. This diverse linguistic landscape within the faculty underscores School Y's commitment to embracing multiculturalism, where linguistic diversity is celebrated and utilized to enrich the educational experience.

This comparison highlights the diverse linguistic backgrounds among teachers at the two schools. While most teachers at X Local School can communicate fluently in English, School Y boasts a mix of native English speakers and teachers proficient in multiple languages. This difference may influence teaching methods, communication styles, and overall classroom dynamics at the respective schools. Additionally, it highlights the importance of recognizing linguistic diversity in educational settings and its role in promoting effective communication and cultural understanding between teachers and students.

6.2 Why Choose International Education?

The insights presented here are derived from the qualitative data gathered through these interviews and observations during the research process. The pursuit of educational internationalization is a multifaceted endeavor that extends beyond the confines of individual schools; it also encompasses the diverse expectations and aspirations of school administrators, teachers, parents, and students alike. Through this analysis, we aim to illuminate the motivations, challenges, and opportunities surrounding the implementation of international curricula, highlighting the collaborative efforts necessary for fostering an internationally minded educational environment.

6.2.1 Market Demand

The international education market in Hong Kong is experiencing high demand, driven by an increasing number of immigrants and parents' growing desire for international educational opportunities. In response to this trend, X Local School has established its International Department to attract a diverse student body. A key factor for both X Local School's International Department and Y International School is the provision of superior facilities. These schools tend to adopt a consumer-oriented approach, prioritizing the needs and expectations of their 'clients', which include parents, students, and occasionally teachers. As observed by parents, schools often adapt their

facilities based on these demands, recognizing that improved facilities can enhance educational quality, elevate the school's reputation, and promote business growth. This continuous investment in and enhancement of facilities reflects each school's commitment to educational excellence and their determination to stay competitive in the education market.

However, the investment in equipment for the International Department at X Local School is notably limited. As a result, there is a lack of electronic technology devices, which may hinder learning resources and teaching tools, making its facilities seem outdated compared to other international schools. This situation could have a negative impact on students' learning experiences and the overall quality of teaching, reducing the school's competitiveness in the international education market. To enhance the appeal and competitiveness of the International Department, X Local School will need to increase its investment in equipment to meet the high expectations for quality international education from parents and students alike.

Cherry, a Grade 3 Chinese teacher at X Local School, pointed out,

“In our International Department, all the devices are shared. Each teacher needs to book these electronic devices in advance before class to ensure that students can use iPads. Although the tuition fees in the International Department are much higher than those in the mainstream department, there hasn't been a noticeable improvement in the investment of funds.”

In contrast, Y International School showcases impressive investment in its resources and technology. Each student is equipped with the latest high-performance iPads, and each grade has access to state-of-the-art VR 3D wearable devices, along with other conventional electronic devices.

Lisa, a Grade 1 Chinese teacher at Y International School, stated,

“Our school’s investment in this area is enormous. Students have access to the latest and most advanced technological devices. Sometimes, even before we teachers become proficient in using them, the students are already familiar. This investment also extends to some benefits for teachers, including subsidies provided every two years to update our Mac and iPad devices.”

X Local School’s International Department operates in a fully English-speaking teaching environment, offering an international curriculum at relatively lower tuition fees—only one-third of those at Y International School. Its excellent academic performance serves as a significant attraction, appealing to middle-class families aspiring for their children to pursue international courses in the future. Moreover, X Local School provides a wide range of extracurricular activities and clubs, supporting students’ holistic development.

Kate, a Grade 3 Mathematics Teacher at X Local School, remarked,

“When communicating with many parents, they often praise our school for its excellent academic performance. This might also be attributed to our emphasis on students’ academic workload. Despite being an International Department, we do not make the coursework any less rigorous than that of the mainstream departments.”

Li, a Grade 1 Mathematics Teacher at X Local School, added,

“Our tuition fees are relatively cheap compared to regular international schools, although they are higher than private and public schools. This may also be the

greatest advantage of our school, compensating for families who lack sufficient funds but still want to receive an international education.”

On the other hand, Y International School boasts a highly advanced international curriculum, a dual-teacher homeroom system, exceptional student performance, and multifaceted excellence—its unique strengths. The school emphasizes developing students’ academic abilities, leadership skills, and overall competencies, offering a diverse array of extracurricular activities and clubs to support students’ holistic development. Additionally, Y International School prioritizes faculty development, employing a highly qualified teaching team and advanced teaching resources to provide students with a high-quality educational environment and learning support.

Mavis, a Grade 3 Mathematics Teacher at Y International School, explained,

“Our students can enroll from kindergarten all the way through high school graduation, providing parents with comprehensive educational services. However, this also means that parents need to invest more financially, with annual tuition fees amounting to over 200,000 Hong Kong dollars, along with additional miscellaneous fees for various extracurricular activities and hobbies. This financial burden may not be affordable for typical middle-class families.”

The growing market demand has driven the internationalization of education in Hong Kong. In this context, Y International School, with its long history, exceptional faculty, professional international curriculum, and abundant facilities, provides outstanding international education for affluent Hong Kong families. Its strong reputation in international education is further strengthened by its abundant resources.

Conversely, X Local School’s International Department attracts students through its unique educational style while navigating the path of educational internationalization.

While its history may not be as extensive as that of Y International School, X Local School has gradually gained market share through continuous exploration and innovation. Its lower tuition fees and distinctive teaching methods appeal to some families, particularly those with moderate incomes, offering them more affordable yet equally high-quality options for international education.

The high demand for international education in Hong Kong presents both challenges and opportunities for schools. While Y International School sets a high standard with its advanced facilities and curriculum, X Local School's International Department provides a competitive alternative for families seeking a high-quality education at a more affordable price. Both schools reflect the changing landscape of international education in the region, shaped by the varied needs and expectations of students and their families.

6.2.2 Substantial Financial Returns

One of the primary motivations for many schools to promote international education is the potential for high financial returns. For instance, tuition fees for the International Department at X Local School are more than three times higher than those for the mainstream department. While the cost of hiring foreign teachers is significant, the school does not generate direct investments to offset these expenses.

Kate, a Grade 6 Mathematics Teacher at X Local School, explained,

“Our International Department charges over 70,000 Hong Kong dollars in tuition fees annually, while the mainstream department requires just over 20,000. Parents are happy to spend extra money so their kids can get early exposure to international education and get used to international curricula.”

This substantial investment enables students at X Local School to immerse themselves in a fully English-speaking environment. Nonetheless, many teachers express ongoing dissatisfaction with the current international curriculum, their working conditions, facility improvements, and salary adjustments. Such discontent can arise from various factors, including the pace of curriculum updates, lack of teaching resources, increased workloads, and disparities in salary between local and foreign teachers. These issues may adversely affect teacher motivation and overall teaching quality, ultimately impacting the educational quality and reputation of the school. Thus, it is crucial for X Local School to actively listen to teachers' concerns, address existing problems, and work towards enhancing job satisfaction, which in turn will elevate the overall educational standards of the institution.

Zhu, a Grade 1 Mathematics Teacher at X Local School, voiced his frustrations:

“The tuition fees for the International Department are much higher, yet the increase hasn’t translated into higher salaries for teachers like me. Despite the higher fees, the workload remains unchanged, and in fact we often encounter more challenges. Interestingly, the equipment available to us is on par with what’s provided in the mainstream department. On the other hand, foreign teachers receive significantly higher salaries and numerous additional benefits.”

In stark contrast, the nearly three-fold higher tuition fees at Y International School—compared to X Local School’s International Department—have resulted in a booming demand in the market. Despite the steep costs, parents are eager to invest in their children’s international education, which signals strong financial returns for the institution and fosters further growth and enhancement in educational quality.

Betty, a Grade 1 Mathematics Teacher at Y International School, noted,

“After the epidemic, we were worried about having fewer students. However, unexpectedly, starting from this year, enrollment in the first grade has continued to increase. Compared to previous years, each grade level this year has seen an additional class in the first grade, bringing the total number of classes to seven. Additionally, the higher grades have also admitted many transfer students, resulting in every class being at full capacity. This might show that parents want their kids to get a better-quality international education.”

The substantial financial returns associated with international education present both opportunities and challenges for schools. While X Local School’s International Department generates significant revenue, it also faces critical issues that need to be addressed to enhance teacher satisfaction and educational quality. In contrast, Y International School has effectively used its high tuition fees to cater to the demand for quality international education, strengthening its standing in Hong Kong’s competitive education market. This dynamic illustrates the ongoing interplay between financial investment, educational quality, and market demand in the realm of international education.

6.2.3 Mission Revisited

X Local School, rooted in a unique Christian background, has a distinct religious mission that serves as a primary impetus for its promotion of educational internationalization. The school’s educational philosophy intricately weaves faith and education together, influencing its core values and teaching objectives. This foundation of faith not only inspires the school community to continually pursue educational excellence but also fosters a commitment to holistic development and an international perspective for its students. Consequently, the school’s religious background is a vital driver for advancing educational internationalization, infusing its educational system with distinctive vitality and significance, which fosters continuous innovation and development.

Victor, a Grade 3 Chinese Teacher at X Local School, shared, *“Our school was originally founded within a Christian framework, and this religious background permeates both our teaching style and institutional mission. A portion of the school’s funding comes from religious sources, and many of our activities are closely related to our faith, including prayer and singing hymns”*. This integration of faith into the educational experience not only enhances the learning environment but also reinforces the school’s commitment to cultivating students who are not only academically competent but also morally grounded.

In contrast, Y International School was established as an international institution from its inception, aiming for an organic integration of Eastern and Western cultural education. The founder’s mission has been deeply embedded in the school’s identity, shaping its fundamental approach to promoting educational internationalization. By blending Eastern and Western cultures, Y International School offers a well-rounded education aimed at developing a new generation of leaders with broad perspectives and strong cross-cultural skills. This educational philosophy not only reflects the mission of Y International School but also serves as a foundational requirement for advancing educational internationalization.

Nan, a Grade 6 Chinese Teacher at Y International School, elaborated on the school’s commitment to its mission:

“On the ground floor of our school’s high school teaching building, there are memorial halls dedicated to the founder and the school’s history. These halls aim to showcase the founding history of the school and the contributions of key figures. They are regularly open to the public during open days, allowing more people to learn about the school’s educational philosophy and values, and to carry forward the school’s educational spirit. This initiative not only showcases the school’s

historical origins to students but also provides a platform for students and the public to gain deeper insights into the school's educational mission and vision."

The missions of both X Local School and Y International School significantly influence their approaches to educational internationalization. X Local School's Christian foundation drives its commitment to faith-based education and holistic student development, while Y International School's emphasis on cultural integration shapes its mission to produce capable individuals. Together, these distinct missions illustrate how educational philosophies can uniquely guide schools in navigating the complex landscape of international education, ensuring that each institution remains true to its core values while meeting the evolving demands of the educational market.

6.3 Challenges and Strategies in Curriculum Implementation

Three key themes emerged from the data collected at X Local School: lack of curriculum internationalization, insufficient involvement of foreign teachers, and inadequate curriculum development innovation. In contrast, the analysis of data from Y International School revealed three main themes: lack of collaboration between Chinese and English teachers, insufficient internationalization training for teachers, and lack of support from the leadership team.

X Local School

6.3.1 Theme 1: Lack of Curriculum Internationalization

Participants highlighted that curriculum internationalization should be both relevant and contextualized, connecting with international issues, cultures, and trends. They discussed how educators could design internationalized curricula to tackle the challenges of education. This involves ensuring that curricula not only meet local educational needs but also align with broader international standards. Drawing on Deardorff's (2006) framework of intercultural competence, which underscores the need

for curricula to foster global awareness and adaptability, participants' concerns suggest that the current curriculum at X Local School falls short in embedding such international dimensions, limiting its capacity to prepare students for a globalized world.

Kay, one of the participants, expressed her enthusiasm for internationalized curricula:

"I really appreciate the internationalized curriculum. First, it makes learning more enjoyable for students. And secondly, it encourages them to actively participate, which is crucial. The great thing about an international curriculum is that it matches international standards, making it easier for students as they get ready to navigate the world."

Survey results further supported the idea that having a diverse teaching staff enhances curriculum internationalization. Teachers from different backgrounds can better contribute to a curriculum that reflects diverse perspectives, helping students gain broader views. Classroom observations at X Local School, however, reveal a gap in practice. In a Grade 3 English lesson, students were observed focusing primarily on local vocabulary and grammar drills, with minimal reference to international contexts or global issues, underscoring the limited integration of intercultural elements Kay advocates for.

Zhu, another participant, mentioned some of the difficulties faced by the school's International Department:

"Our International Department is still relatively new. Although our academic performance is strong and we've built a good reputation, there's significant pressure when it comes to student recruitment. This pressure also impacts our resources—teacher allocation, financial investment—and, although we prioritize the International Department's needs, the challenges remain."

Another concern raised was the uncertainty teachers feel about the future, which can affect how well they engage with internationalization efforts. This uncertainty comes from various sources, including unstable education policies, changes in the social and economic environment, and shifting trends. *“This uncertainty affects our confidence in developing and implementing an internationalized curriculum”*, Zhu added, explaining that a lack of clear direction can hinder progress.

Yuan shared a more personal concern about the school’s declining enrollment due to external factors:

“Since the pandemic, our enrollment has really dropped. We now have only one class per grade, and this year our first-grade class has just 17 students compared to 28 in previous years. This creates a lot of pressure on the leadership. We’ve been told about the concerns, and I’m worried about the future of the International Department. If it shuts down, I’m unsure if I’ll be able to return to the mainstream department, and that uncertainty is unsettling.”

Further classroom observations reinforce these concerns. In a first-grade Chinese lesson, students were observed engaging solely with traditional local texts, with no visible incorporation of international stories or perspectives, highlighting the resource and directional constraints Zhu and Yuan describe.

The feedback from teachers at X Local School reveals both optimism and concerns about the process of curriculum internationalization. While many see the value in adopting international elements to enhance student learning and better align with international standards, the school still faces significant hurdles. Issues like student recruitment pressures, limited resources, and uncertainty about the future of the International Department create challenges for both teachers and administrators. Moreover, the lack of clarity regarding long-term educational policies makes it difficult

for teachers to fully commit to these changes. Without more robust support and clear guidance, it will be hard for the school to fully realize the benefits of a truly internationalized curriculum.

6.3.2 Theme 2: Insufficient Involvement of Foreign Teachers

In this section, the focus shifts to the insufficient involvement of foreign teachers in X Local School. Victor shared his thoughts on the lack of collaboration between local and foreign staff. He explained, *“We hardly ever collaborate or communicate with the foreign English teachers. Our offices aren’t even located together, and each subject teacher works independently on their own school-based curriculum.”* He continued, *“Most of our communication happens in Mandarin or Cantonese, except for when we’re teaching in English”*. His comments highlight the challenges caused by this division, which hampers collaboration and limits the exchange of ideas. As a result, there’s less opportunity for the school to deliver a well-rounded, internationalized education.

Yuan further elaborated on the difficulty of attracting foreign teachers, saying, *“It’s tough to bring in high-quality foreign teachers when we don’t offer competitive salaries, enough vacation time, or attractive benefits”*. She noted that while the school had hired some foreign staff, the recruitment process lacked sufficient experience. *“In Hong Kong, teachers with a PGDE certificate are easier to recruit, but foreign teachers have different certification requirements depending on their country of origin”*, she explained. Yuan also pointed out that as a traditional private school, *“We can offer salaries comparable to international schools, but we fall short when it comes to vacation time and work hours. Our teachers generally finish work an hour later than their counterparts in international schools”*.

Despite the efforts made by X Local School to push for educational internationalization, traditional practices like extensive homework remain. Cherry commented on this,

saying, *“Students still have to complete a lot of homework every day when they get home, which adds extra work for us teachers”*. This workload makes it difficult for educators to focus on fostering the holistic development that internationalized curricula aim to promote.

Lindsay also voiced her concerns about the effectiveness of traditional homework. *“I don’t get why students have to do homework every day, even during breaks”*, she said. *“And I’m not sure why we, as teachers, have to keep checking the same answers over and over when grading assignments”*. This situation raises questions about how well current assessment methods align with the goals of internationalization. Lindsay’s reflections suggest that rethinking these traditional practices could make learning more impactful and better suited to an internationalized framework.

The lack of collaboration and communication between local and foreign teachers, compounded by recruitment challenges and traditional assessment practices, presents significant barriers to achieving meaningful curriculum internationalization at X Local School. To foster a truly internationalized educational environment, it is essential to promote integration between diverse teaching staff and reassess the methodologies employed in evaluating student learning. These changes could lead to a more collaborative atmosphere, enhancing both teaching and learning experiences within the school.

6.3.3 Theme 3: Inadequate Curriculum Development Innovation

The establishment of the International Department at X Local School was intended to propel educational internationalization, with the international curriculum serving as its main attraction. The goal is to appeal to parents by promoting English-language instruction, creating internationalized learning environments, and employing modern teaching methods. However, despite adopting the IB Primary Years Programme (PYP)

teaching framework and aligning it with the mainstream curriculum, the absence of formal international curriculum accreditation poses a significant hurdle. The school continues to design its curriculum based on guidelines from the Hong Kong Education Bureau, creating school-specific courses designed to meet the varied needs of its students.

Piya offered her perspective on this challenge, explaining, *“Right now, we’re just picking and choosing elements from different places. We take courses that seem to have benefits, but really, our curriculum is just translated from the mainstream department’s textbooks. Without proper guidance from something like IB or A-level courses, it all feels a bit disjointed”*. Her comments reveal a practical yet patchwork approach to curriculum development, with teachers selecting components they believe are beneficial but lacking a cohesive, standardized structure. The heavy reliance on translating materials from the mainstream department without any formal accreditation from international bodies underscores the fragmented nature of the curriculum. This lack of coherence affects the overall quality of education and its alignment with international standards.

Kay echoed these concerns, adding, *“Our curriculum looks big and varied, but I feel like we’re only scratching the surface of what an international curriculum should be. For one thing, students still rely on us too much for guidance. They haven’t developed the self-directed learning skills you’d expect in a truly internationalized setting. And on top of that, there’s very little collaboration between teachers”*. Her statement suggests that while international elements are present, the core principles of international education, such as fostering independent learning and teamwork, are still underdeveloped. Kay’s observation points to a need for deeper integration of international curriculum methods and a shift in both teaching styles and learning environments to make the internationalization process more effective.

Cherry pointed out the school's leadership priorities, noting, *"In this competitive market, private school leaders are mainly focused on revenue. They're only going to push for real innovation in the international curriculum if they see an increase in enrollment"*. This comment highlights the financial pressures that often dominate decision-making in private schools, where income generation can overshadow the push for educational innovation. As such, the motivation to develop a truly internationalized curriculum may only emerge if there's a clear financial incentive tied to increased student enrollment.

Additionally, the high turnover rate among teachers further limits the potential for curriculum innovation. Yuan explained, *"Most of the teachers in our International Department are older and more experienced, but we're constantly losing middle-aged teachers to international schools that offer better pay, longer holidays, and shorter working hours"*. This high turnover disrupts the continuity necessary for sustained curriculum development, as younger teachers are left without sufficient guidance from more experienced colleagues, stifling the momentum for innovation.

The workload placed on teachers also plays a significant role in hindering innovation. Kate shared her frustration, saying, *"We end up staying an hour longer each day compared to international schools, and we still must grade homework for two classes. We just don't have the time or energy to think about changing the curriculum"*. Li added, *"Both the school and the parents only care about grades. They see it as the most direct form of feedback, so the success of internationalization is judged entirely by student scores"*. This preoccupation with grades and the constant administrative workload detracts from teachers' capacity to engage in creative and innovative curriculum development. The heavy focus on academic results, while providing short-term feedback, undermines the broader goals of holistic education and competency development that international curricula aim to achieve.

The inadequate innovation in curriculum development at X Local School is driven by multiple interrelated factors. The absence of international accreditation, fragmented curriculum design, lack of collaboration between teachers, and high turnover among staff all contribute to the stagnation of internationalization efforts. Furthermore, financial priorities, excessive administrative burdens, and an overemphasis on grades create an environment where genuine curriculum innovation is difficult to achieve. For the school to move forward in its internationalization journey, it will need to tackle these underlying issues and create a more encouraging and cooperative environment for teachers to explore new and innovative ways of developing the curriculum.

Y International School

6.3.4 Theme 4: Lack of Collaboration between Chinese and English Teachers

Participants emphasized the need for greater communication and collaboration between local and foreign teachers. Their discussions focused on co-teaching models and tackled issues such as institutional arrangements, instructional integration, curriculum design, and how to effectively align different teaching approaches.

Ellen shared insights into the practical challenges involved, noting, *“One of the biggest difficulties is how work gets divided. Local teachers often must take on extra responsibilities to support foreign teachers, especially when it comes to talking to parents who don’t speak English”*. Her observation highlights the logistical burden on local teachers, who must bridge both linguistic and cultural gaps to ensure smooth interactions between foreign colleagues and the school community. *“These extra tasks make it hard for us to focus on our own teaching”*, Ellen added. Classroom observations at Y International School corroborate this challenge. In a Grade 3 lesson, the Chinese teacher was observed managing a parent inquiry in Cantonese during class time, while the English teacher continued instruction independently, with no evident

coordination between their efforts. Her perspective underlines how unequal workloads can hinder collaboration, even with the best intentions.

Nan pointed out the importance of instructional integration, saying, *“It’s not just about dividing classes between Chinese and English teachers. We need to build curriculum connections and blend teaching methods from both sides. Otherwise, students will feel like they’re learning in two separate worlds”*. She argued that co-teaching could unlock deeper connections between different subject areas, allowing teachers to embed cultural and linguistic content throughout lessons. *“By weaving cultural elements into subjects like science or history, we create meaningful learning that also promotes cultural awareness”*, Nan emphasized. This integrative approach could enhance both academic and intercultural understanding, giving students more immersive learning experiences.

Jeanie added another perspective, focusing on how curricula can foster cultural diversity and inclusion. *“If we want students to connect with what they’re learning, our curriculum must reflect a variety of voices and perspectives. It shouldn’t just be about international topics—it needs to be grounded in the local environment, too”*. Jeanie believes that curricula incorporating both local and international elements become more relevant and engaging for students. She also stressed the importance of multilingualism, saying, *“Language skills are key if we want our students to be effective global citizens. But teachers need more support and training to teach in ways that encourage intercultural communication”*. Observations in a Grade 1 class further illustrate this gap. The Chinese teacher taught a language lesson in isolation, focusing on local vocabulary, while the English teacher later covered a separate topic with no apparent linkage, reflecting the lack of blended methods Nan and Jeanie advocate for. In her view, professional development and collaboration are key to helping teachers deliver high-quality instruction. *“Partnerships between schools can make a real difference, too”*, she continued. *“They allow teachers to share resources, collaborate on projects, and exchange best practices, which improves learning for everyone”*.

Jason offered positive reflections on his experience with the dual homeroom teacher system, explaining, *“It helped me adapt quickly to the school environment. Having a local and a foreign teacher working together really helps students connect across cultures”*. He also highlighted the value of interactive projects: *“We engage students in discussions on big issues like climate change and human rights. This way, they’re not just memorizing facts—they’re thinking critically about real-world challenges”*. Jason advocated for introducing students to literature from diverse cultures, saying, *“Reading stories from different countries broadens their perspectives”*. He also stressed the importance of celebrating cultural traditions: *“By celebrating festivals from different cultures, we show respect for diversity and help create a more inclusive school environment”*. However, classroom observations reveal inconsistencies with Jason’s ideal. In a Grade 3 English lesson, Jason facilitated a climate change discussion independently, with the Chinese teacher absent from the collaborative process, indicating a disconnect in practice despite the dual-teacher system.

The lack of collaboration between Chinese and English teachers at Y International School reflects a broader challenge of integrating diverse teaching approaches. As participants noted, unequal workloads, language barriers, and fragmented curriculum design hinder effective co-teaching. To overcome these obstacles, schools need to foster a culture of collaboration, provide professional development opportunities, and create structures that allow teachers to share responsibilities more equitably. An integrated curriculum—one that combines local and international perspectives—can bridge gaps between different subjects and promote intercultural understanding. Moreover, building partnerships between teachers and across schools can enrich teaching practices and broaden students’ experiences.

6.3.5 Theme 5: Lack of Internationalization Training for Teachers

Participants highlighted the challenges posed by insufficient training opportunities for teachers, particularly in international curricula. They stressed the importance of collaboration, communication, and a deeper understanding of international education practices within the academic community. Mavis shared, *“Before the pandemic, the school used to organize trips for teachers to study abroad, visit prestigious universities, and observe outstanding primary and secondary schools around the world. But since the pandemic, these opportunities have stopped—maybe due to financial constraints”*. This change has limited teachers’ exposure to diverse educational practices, impacting their ability to effectively implement international education.

Ellen expressed frustration about the disparity in learning opportunities between local and foreign teachers. *“It’s confusing to see that foreign teachers still have chances to study abroad, but local teachers like us don’t get the same opportunities. It’s hard to understand why there’s such a gap”*. Her comment reflects concerns about unequal professional development opportunities, which can lead to a lack of shared knowledge among faculty and hinder the school’s efforts to foster internationalization.

Jeanie added, *“To implement international education, you need more than just ideas—you need funding, trained teachers, and proper infrastructure. Schools in less economically advantaged areas face real difficulties getting the resources they need to support these efforts. And without well-trained teachers, it’s hard to make progress”*. She also pointed out the importance of language proficiency, saying, *“Since English is the dominant language, it can become a barrier for teachers who aren’t fluent. That’s another challenge we need to overcome”*. Jeanie’s insights highlight how resource limitations and language issues can create obstacles to effective curriculum internationalization, especially in less privileged schools.

Jason reflected on the rise of online learning during the pandemic, observing, *“Sure, we had a lot of online conferences and training sessions, but it’s just not the same as meeting people in person. There’s something about those in-person interactions—whether it’s chatting during a seminar or working on a project together—that really helps ideas stick and relationships grow”*. He emphasized that while online platforms offer convenience and accessibility, they lack the richness of direct engagement, which plays a crucial role in building meaningful professional connections and collaboration.

Luman emphasized the importance of continuous professional development, saying, *“We need more opportunities for teachers to keep learning. Schools could invite experts to give lectures or organize workshops and seminars on international education. This would help teachers keep up with the latest trends and new teaching methods”*. Luman stressed that investing in professional development reflects a school’s commitment to continuous improvement and academic excellence. *“When teachers are better equipped, students benefit the most”*, he added.

The absence of internationalization training for teachers continues to be a major obstacle to successfully implementing education. Participants emphasized that teachers need more opportunities to develop their skills through exposure to diverse educational practices, both online and offline. Financial constraints and unequal access to professional development create additional challenges, limiting teachers’ ability to integrate international curricula effectively. A balanced approach that combines online learning with in-person experiences can foster more meaningful connections and collaboration among educators. Schools must also provide ongoing professional development through workshops, seminars, and expert-led sessions to equip teachers with the latest methodologies and strategies. Ultimately, investing in teacher training is essential for cultivating an education system that benefits both educators and students.

6.3.6 Theme 6: Lack of Support from the Leadership Team

Participants highlighted the key role of school leadership in fostering the innovation and growth of international curricula. Luman noted, *“It’s not enough to just use technology to show students things like space-related concepts. Practical experiences are essential. For example, visiting a space museum or engaging in hands-on activities helps students learn more effectively”*. Luman stressed that integrating practical learning activities enhances students’ understanding and makes international curricula more meaningful.

Lisa added, *“While it’s great that each student has access to an iPad, we need to do more than just hand out devices. Schools should stay updated with the latest technologies and find ways to integrate advanced tools into teaching. This requires continuous investment from the school management”*. Her insights highlight that simply providing digital devices is not sufficient. Regular technological updates, along with teacher training on how to use these tools effectively, are necessary for fostering curriculum innovation. However, she noted that technological integration requires significant financial investment, emphasizing the need for leadership support to ensure that both students and teachers have access to cutting-edge resources.

Participants also emphasized how leadership plays a key role in fostering teacher motivation. Ellen remarked, *“When teachers feel backed by school leadership, they naturally get more motivated. It makes a difference when leaders genuinely care about internationalizing the curriculum and give us the resources to make it happen”*. Ellen’s statement highlights the direct impact of leadership involvement on teacher morale and engagement. Without consistent support, teachers may find it challenging to fully commit to innovative practices.

Jason pointed out the importance of professional development backed by leadership. *“Workshops, training sessions, and inviting experts to speak are all ways leadership*

can support us. These things aren't just luxuries—they help teachers improve and better meet the demands of international curricula". He stressed that continuous learning opportunities are essential for teachers to remain effective in a rapidly changing educational environment.

Another challenge raised by participants was the need for financial investment from school leaders. Mavis observed, *"Curriculum internationalization isn't cheap. You need funding not just for technology but also for curriculum development, facility upgrades, and improving working conditions. Without this support, it's hard to keep up with international standards".* Her point underlines that without the necessary budget allocation, efforts to develop international curricula may stall, leaving schools unable to supply the essential tools and resources for both teachers and students.

The absence of strong leadership support presents significant obstacles to curriculum internationalization and teacher development. Practical learning activities, regular technological updates, and teacher training all require management's attention and financial investment. When leaders are actively involved, it not only boosts teacher motivation but also guarantees they have the resources and professional development they need to meet the challenges of international curricula. Providing financial backing for facility upgrades and innovative teaching resources further strengthens these efforts. Ultimately, the commitment of the school leadership team is indispensable in driving sustainable curriculum innovation, fostering teacher growth, and promoting the long-term success of internationalized education. To illustrate how this lack of support compares across the two cases, the following table outlines the vertical challenges and consistencies faced by X Local School and Y International School in implementing internationalization, highlighting the critical role of leadership in addressing these issues.

Table 11: Vertical Comparison of Challenges in School X and School Y

Aspect	School X	School Y
Curriculum Intl.	Lacking intl. focus	Uneven intl.
Teacher Collaboration	Limited foreign teacher role	No Chinese-English teamwork
Leadership Support	Weak innovation	Poor leadership support
Teacher Training	Basic training available	Minimal training support

6.4 Strengthening Primary Education in Hong Kong

The internationalization of education in Hong Kong has sparked significant reforms in primary education, aligning local curricula with international standards and practices. By adopting international curricula and teaching methodologies, schools are not only enhancing educational quality but also equipping teachers for success. This shift has encouraged a more holistic approach to learning, focusing on critical thinking, creativity, and intercultural competence. As schools navigate the complexities of integrating international narratives into their educational frameworks, they also face the challenge of maintaining their unique cultural identity. Ultimately, this reform is contributing to a more robust primary education system.

6.4.1 Supplementing Existing Education Systems

The establishment of International Departments at X Local School and Y International School serves as a crucial supplement to the Hong Kong national education system, particularly in response to perceived shortcomings within it. Many parents express dissatisfaction with the traditional education model, often feeling that it lacks flexibility, fails to address their children's individual needs, or doesn't adequately prepare them for admission to prestigious universities. In an environment characterized by intense academic pressure and overcrowded classrooms, affluent families are increasingly

drawn to alternative educational paths that promise a more tailored and enriching learning experience.

At X Local School, the International Department seeks to fill market gaps by offering an international curriculum that resonates with families who value traditional Chinese cultural education and emphasize the importance of homework and assessments. This approach not only addresses the concerns surrounding the traditional education system but also attracts families who are eager for a more holistic educational experience for their children.

Conversely, Y International School focuses on providing internationally accredited curriculum systems that cultivate students with broad perspectives and competencies. This model is particularly appealing to wealthier families willing to invest significantly in high-quality international education. By catering to different market segments, both schools effectively address the diverse educational needs of families, reflecting the growing demand for personalized education options.

“Every time we have parent–teacher meetings, there are always some parents who provide feedback, stating that they appreciate our school’s teaching model. They have a hard time fully accepting a system that doesn’t focus on homework and assessments, because it makes it tough for parents to track their kids’ academic progress. This aspect may also be considered an advantage of our school”, shares Lindsay, a Grade 1 English teacher at X Local School.

In the context of Chinese cultural norms, parents often prioritize their children’s academic achievements, viewing them as essential indicators of educational success. This mindset persists even at Y International School, where the curriculum may downplay formal assessments and homework. *“During our conversations with parents, it’s common for them to inquire about their child’s current academic progress. While*

these parents may appear to disapprove of the emphasis on exams and grades in public education, it's challenging for them to completely rid themselves of this mindset", notes Ellen, a Grade 3 Chinese teacher at Y International School.

The International Departments at X Local School and Y International School not only supplement the existing education system but also highlight the evolving expectations of parents regarding educational quality and student well-being. As these schools adapt to meet diverse educational needs, they contribute to a broader conversation about the necessity for reform in Hong Kong's traditional education landscape.

6.4.2 Challenges of Traditional Educational Models

The internationalization of education presents a series of challenges to Hong Kong's traditional education system. One of the biggest challenges right away is the cultural impact. While many families welcome the shift towards international education, some still grapple with understanding aspects like academic assessments. As market-driven education becomes more prevalent, the traditional education sector faces increasing pressure to reform its curricula. The Education Bureau is anticipated to revise curriculum guidelines to align more closely with international education trends, hastening the pace of educational reform. Additionally, teacher training models must evolve to meet changing educational needs, which can result in inefficient use of resources and pose management challenges, particularly as schools strive to balance innovation with existing structures.

There's a growing expectation from students for proficiency in English and other academic skills, intensifying competition within traditional education. This places ongoing pressure on schools to elevate teaching standards to meet the expectations of parents and students alike. Consequently, resource allocation becomes a more pressing and complex issue, compelling education managers and policymakers to devise flexible and pragmatic strategies.

In Hong Kong's national education system, a clear hierarchical structure limits interaction between students and teachers. Teachers are often viewed as the sole knowledge bearers, while students are expected to passively absorb information with minimal opportunities for independent learning or critical thinking. Typical classroom scenarios involve teachers lecturing while students read from textbooks and copy notes, emphasizing rote memorization and exam skills at the expense of fostering independent thought.

"I used to work in public schools, and I didn't like that approach. It feels like it creates a barrier between teachers and students in the learning process. Teachers often believe that students should passively receive knowledge, while students are expected to mechanically mimic notetaking, rote memorization, and perform well in exams. However, I believe that children have the right to seek out their own information, form independent opinions, and that education should encourage students' autonomy and critical thinking", reflects Ellen, a Grade 3 Chinese teacher at Y International School.

To address these challenges, education needs to transition away from the Human Capital Theory, which views students merely as assets for national development, towards embracing a more liberatory perspective. Liberation Theory emphasizes the empowerment of individuals through education, promoting freedom and critical thinking skills. Education should aim to cultivate autonomy, creativity, and independent thought rather than mere conformity. By prioritizing liberation, we can nurture individuals who can question the status quo and contribute meaningfully to societal progress (Fagerlind & Saha, 1989).

In international schools, students are encouraged to question and think openly, fostering creativity and freedom. Teachers respect students' preferences and actively

involve them in group activities, teaching in a conceptual manner. *“Now we’re teaching students how to present and work in groups. They can design and implement according to their own ideas, respecting the interests of each student”*, says Luman, a Grade 6 Mathematics teacher at Y International School.

Both X Local School and Y International School have implemented policies to manage class sizes, ensuring an average maximum of 25–30 students per class. This allows for a more favorable teacher–student ratio and enhances personalized attention for each student’s academic and personal development. Mavis, a Grade 3 Mathematics teacher at Y International School, explains, *“This arrangement not only alleviates the workload of teachers but also allows for maximum attention to be given to students’ learning progress. Such a high level of investment in teaching resources is something that regular schools cannot afford”*.

Although this study did not interview any parents, students, or teachers from public schools, the data collected indicates a recognition of the advantages that smaller class sizes and dual-teacher systems provide. The emphasis on individualized attention and support in international schools reflects a commitment to educational excellence and creating optimal learning environments for students.

Another appealing aspect of international schools is their ability to offer personalized academic support. *“We arrange separate tutoring classes to help students who are falling behind their peers in terms of academic performance. Additionally, for each grade level, we design simpler tasks specifically targeting students with slightly lower grades”*, shares Ellen, reinforcing the dedication to helping all students succeed.

The rapid expansion of international education in Hong Kong both supports and challenges the current educational system. While it fulfills the desires of families seeking broader educational experiences, it also puts pressure on the traditional system

to evolve. The current curriculum structure in traditional education requires further internationalization and teacher training to better align with standards. As more families pursue diverse educational opportunities for their children, traditional educational institutions must continuously adapt their teaching methods and curricula to meet these evolving needs. Ultimately, the flourishing of international education in Hong Kong enriches educational options and propels ongoing progress and improvement within the education system.

6.4.3 Embracing International Education and Its Sociocultural Impact

As one of the top three financial centers globally, Hong Kong's economic success has driven the growth of international education. The increasing market demand has fueled the internationalization of education, with more families aspiring for their children to earn degrees from foreign universities and gain international diplomas. Schools are seizing this opportunity by enhancing their offerings, which includes investing in better facilities, recruiting high-quality teachers, and establishing diverse international curricula. In this competitive landscape, schools also need to focus on promoting their brand and strengthening communication with parents and students to meet their needs and expectations, driving further development and growth.

International schools in Hong Kong provide a wide variety of subjects, covering fields such as traditional sciences, business, and arts. This diverse curriculum opens multiple pathways for students, allowing them to explore various interests and develop a wide array of skills. Whether a student is passionate about scientific research, business management, or artistic creation, international schools provide the resources and opportunities to help them pursue their dreams.

“We offer a range of courses designed to meet the needs of the market. One of our most distinctive features is our religious studies program. Additionally, our drama classes

often involve students in community performances”, explains Li, a Grade 1 Mathematics teacher at X Local School.

Cherry, a Grade 3 Mathematics teacher at Y International School, noted, *“X Local School offers many advantageous courses, such as basketball in Physical Education. This is because we hire teachers who have experience with the Chinese women’s national basketball team, so our basketball program has consistently ranked among the top three in Hong Kong”.*

This emphasis on specialized sports education not only highlights the school’s commitment to developing athletic talent but also reflects a broader trend within international schools to recruit qualified instructors who can enhance students’ learning experiences. By leveraging the expertise of former national team members, X Local School not only cultivates a competitive basketball program but also instills values such as teamwork, discipline, and perseverance in its students.

Luman, a Grade 6 Mathematics teacher at Y International School, echoes this sentiment, saying, *“Our school offers a variety of courses to meet the needs of both parents and students, as you can see in our enrollment brochure. We really respect students’ interests and hobbies and provide different courses based on that”.*

The international curriculum also sets a higher standard for teachers. While high-tech facilities and smaller class sizes improve teaching quality, there's a stronger focus on teacher training in international schools. Research indicates that a robust teacher training program and the introduction of high-quality foreign teachers significantly enhance teaching standards. The collaboration between Western and Eastern teachers promotes mutual learning and innovation.

“We adopt a dual-teacher system where both Western and Eastern teachers collaborate to manage a class. I can directly feel the innovation brought about by different cultures, teaching philosophies, and approaches”, shares Ellen, a Grade 3 Chinese teacher at Y International School.

International schools frequently organize workshops and training sessions focusing on innovative teaching methods, curriculum development, and cultural exchange. These initiatives enhance teachers’ pedagogical skills and expose them to diverse perspectives. Collaborative projects with other international schools or educational institutions abroad provide valuable insights into educational practices, contributing to ongoing improvements in teaching quality.

“Before the pandemic, we used to have many studies abroad programs, including visits to renowned schools in Japan. The school would reimburse half of the expenses for teachers”, notes Li, a Grade 1 Mathematics teacher at X Local School.

Nan, a Grade 6 Chinese teacher at Y International School, adds, *“Our study abroad programs are diverse, including summer camps and similar activities. However, they are mainly led by teachers from higher grades, and all expenses are fully reimbursed. The destinations change every year, with past trips including places like the United States, the UK, Australia, New Zealand, and more”*.

Through the curriculum, extracurricular activities, and social networks, students are immersed in diverse cultures. This exposure fosters leadership qualities and enhances interpersonal communication skills, enabling students to lead fulfilling lives and excel academically. As such, international education becomes more than just an academic pursuit; it evolves into a lifestyle choice that encourages interactions with diverse individuals.

For parents wishing for their children to pursue higher education abroad, opting for foreign curricula can expedite this process. It helps children adapt to the academic, social, and linguistic environments of foreign schools, allowing for smoother integration into their new learning experiences. Many parents have varied aspirations for their children's futures. Some students dream of becoming CEOs of renowned companies, and international education may provide them with greater opportunities to achieve these ambitions.

“Most of our students, upon graduation, proceed directly to the secondary division of our school and then go on to enroll in prestigious schools worldwide. This enables them to adapt more easily to foreign educational systems”, says Jeanie, a Grade 6 English teacher at Y International School.

The insights gathered from the interviews reveal that both schools have proactively explored the realm of international education. They have embraced international education concepts through diverse curricular offerings, high standards for teacher qualifications, and varied study-abroad programs. These initiatives not only expose students to a wider range of subjects but also foster their cross-cultural communication and adaptability.

6.5 Summary of the Chapter

Chapter 6 presents a vertical analysis of the findings, beginning with an overview of the respondents' characteristics and motivations for selecting international education. These motivations include factors such as market demand, financial incentives, and a re-examination of the schools' missions. The chapter then discusses the key challenges and strategies for implementing international curricula, specific to each institution. For X Local School, challenges include limited curriculum internationalization, minimal

foreign teacher involvement, and a lack of innovative curriculum development. Y International School faces several challenges, such as limited collaboration between Chinese and English teachers, a lack of internationalization training, and insufficient support from the leadership team.

Furthermore, the chapter addresses the broader context of strengthening primary education in Hong Kong. It proposes enhancing existing systems, tackling the limitations of traditional models, and exploring the sociocultural impact of adopting international education, especially its role in shaping a global perspective among students. These findings not only shed light on the changing educational landscape in Hong Kong but also lay the groundwork for future discussions on enhancing educational practices and policy in an increasingly internationalized context.

This next chapter will analyze and interpret the results considering the broader educational context, drawing connections between the challenges identified here and potential strategies for advancing internationalization in Hong Kong's primary education.

Chapter 7: Discussion

This chapter discusses the findings in the context of existing related literature, examining the effects of the internationalization of Hong Kong's primary school curriculum on teaching practices and school operations. Guided by globalization theory (Marginson, 2013) and the marketization of education framework (Knight, 2006), it addresses the study's research questions through a synthesis of interviews and cross-case analysis. The findings reveal that while the internationalization of education enhances Hong Kong's global competitiveness and aligns the curriculum with international standards, it also requires a nuanced balance between local cultural values and global expectations. This tension, as identified in the empirical data, underscores the opportunities and challenges faced by educators and school leaders. The chapter concludes by situating these insights within broader academic discussions and offering actionable recommendations for policymakers, school leaders, and educators to refine curriculum development and implementation.

7.1 Introduction

In exploring the internationalization of education in Hong Kong's primary schools, it is crucial to examine how educators' beliefs, motivations, and practices intersect with broader international trends while also aligning with local educational goals. As Knight (2006) notes, internationalization is not merely the adoption of international standards but a process of reconciling these with local values—a perspective that frames this chapter's analysis. Guided by globalization theory (Marginson, 2013) and the marketization of education framework (Knight, 2006), this chapter addresses the three key research questions of this study: (1) the motivations driving local primary schools to pursue internationalized curricula, (2) how curriculum reform has integrated international design narratives to foster new teacher agency and philosophies, and (3)

whether these reforms strengthen primary education as schools engage with global standards and practices.

Marginson (2013) posits that the motivations for internationalization in education are often driven by a dual desire to enhance global competitiveness and meet local aspirations, a dynamic evidenced in this study's findings from interviews and cross-case analysis. Through thematic analysis, this chapter organizes these insights into three core themes: motivations for internationalization, engagement with educational narratives, and the impact on educational quality. Each theme illuminates critical dimensions of the internationalization process in local primary schools. As Dimmock and Walker (2000) suggest, internationalization reforms have the potential to reshape teaching practices and curricula, but their adaptation to local contexts requires careful consideration. The analysis demonstrates how these themes collectively inform educators' decisions and strategies, shaping the effectiveness of curriculum internationalization. The following sections delve into these themes, offering insights into the complexities of aligning local practices with international reform narratives and their implications for the future of primary education in Hong Kong.

7.2 Reasons for Curriculum Internationalization in Primary Schools

Through this analysis, seven key reasons were identified as driving the internationalization of education in local primary schools. Guided by globalization theory (Marginson, 2013) and the marketization of education framework (Knight, 2006), these reasons were found to predominantly fall into three broad categories: market-driven factors, historical influences, and policy-driven motivations. The marketization framework informs the analysis of market-driven factors, which reflect schools' efforts to remain competitive in an increasingly diverse educational landscape, as evidenced by interview data with school leaders. Historical influences stem from Hong Kong's evolving role as an international hub, a dynamic consistent with

globalization theory's emphasis on global connectivity (Marginson, 2013), while policy-driven reasons align with governmental strategies to enhance educational quality and meet international standards, supported by policy document analysis. Together, these factors provide a comprehensive understanding of the motivations driving curriculum internationalization in Hong Kong's primary schools, demonstrating how theoretical frameworks integrate with empirical findings to explain educational trends.

7.2.1 Market Choice—Generous Returns

In the post-pandemic era, market dynamics in Hong Kong's education sector have intensified, with international schools facing rising operational costs amid a severe teacher shortage. To address these challenges, many international schools are planning significant tuition fee increases for the 2024—2025 academic year, ranging from 4% to over 8%. Some high school students will encounter annual fees as high as HKD276,000, excluding additional costs such as school bonds. These bonds—typically purchased by parents—can cost up to HKD3 million and are used to fund school infrastructure or development projects, though they do not generate interest.

One key driver behind these tuition hikes is the need to offer competitive salaries to retain and attract qualified teachers, especially given the shrinking talent pool. Schools are passing these higher operational costs directly to parents, reinforcing the financial burden on families. At the same time, the Hong Kong government's 'Talent List' immigration policy, designed to attract skilled professionals, has increased demand for international school placements. However, this influx of skilled immigrants has coincided with a decline in the availability of public and subsidized school places, further enhancing the appeal of international schools (Cheng et al., 2015).

International schools charge tuition fees that are two to three times higher than those of mainstream local schools. This financial model yields substantial returns, allowing these schools to reinvest in various aspects of education, including:

- **Facilities and Technology:** Schools can develop advanced infrastructure, including modern classrooms, laboratories, and sports facilities.
- **Specialized Curricula:** The resources generated support international programs such as the International Baccalaureate (IB) and British or American curricula, ensuring alignment with educational standards (Mok, 2007).
- **Extracurricular Activities:** Schools offer diverse extracurricular opportunities, such as arts, sports, and leadership programs, promoting holistic development.

These higher tuition fees also help keep class sizes smaller, enabling teachers to offer more personalized attention to students. Schools use their financial capacity to recruit highly qualified teachers worldwide, further enriching students' learning experiences through exposure to diverse teaching styles and intercultural perspectives. This internationalized environment helps students develop the skills needed to thrive in various contexts, boosting both their academic success and personal growth.

Despite the financial strain on families, the high-quality education provided by these schools continues to attract parents seeking exposure and future opportunities for their children. This proactive investment model supports the sustainable development of schools by enabling continuous innovation in teaching practices and curriculum design (Mok, 2007; Bryant et al., 2016).

7.2.2 Market Choice—Complementing Traditional Education

Although Hong Kong is a cosmopolitan city where Eastern and Western cultures intersect, its population remains deeply rooted in traditional Chinese cultural values. These cultural influences shape both the psychological and behavioral traits of students and parents, who tend to approach education with seriousness, discipline, and conservatism. This mindset is reflected in classrooms where students demonstrate respect by bowing to teachers and following instructions quietly. The education

system emphasizes academic achievement, with curricula packed with assessments, exams, and performance metrics throughout the year.

A well-established extracurricular tutoring culture further reinforces this focus on exam-oriented learning. A survey conducted during the 2011–12 academic year, involving 1,720 students across 16 secondary schools, found that 54% of Form 3 students and 72% of Form 6 students engaged in private tutoring to improve their academic outcomes (Bray et al., 2003). Parents often view tutoring as a necessary investment to secure admission to prestigious schools and universities, despite limited evidence supporting clear financial returns on these efforts (Kara, 2010). This academic pressure generates concerns among parents and teachers that students with poor performance may struggle to secure future educational and career opportunities (Bray et al., 2003).

With economic changes reshaping the education sector, demand for more diverse learning models has grown. Critics of traditional education argue that it places too much focus on academic performance, often overlooking important skills like creativity, critical thinking, and global awareness. In response, many schools have introduced international curricula, hired foreign teachers, and developed multicultural exchange programs to align with education trends. As noted by Kennedy (1995), internationalization efforts in Hong Kong schools help bridge these gaps, enabling students to engage with diverse perspectives and international issues, enriching their academic and personal growth.

International education broadens students' perspectives by introducing them to diverse cultural viewpoints and issues, enriching both their academic development and personal growth (Kennedy, 1995). According to the findings of Schweisfurth (2015), such educational settings allow students to navigate cultural diversity, develop cross-cultural skills, and gain awareness of international challenges. This type of

education also benefits teachers by providing professional development opportunities through cross-cultural collaboration and specialized training, which enhances their teaching capabilities and adaptability in international classrooms (Hayden & Thompson, 1995). Schools that adopt these internationalization strategies not only respond to changing market demands but also enhance their competitive advantage in the education sector.

Meanwhile, declining birth rates and reduced local demand for education have led many schools to attract non-local students, including expatriates and children of skilled immigrants. This strategy helps maintain stable enrollment numbers, preventing class reductions or school closures while ensuring optimal use of educational resources. By integrating international education, schools can sustain long-term development and offer a richer learning environment that benefits both local and international students (Bray et al., 2003). Internationalization enables students to retain their cultural heritage while acquiring broader competencies (Cheng et al., 2015). This dual approach ensures that students remain grounded in their traditions while preparing them for international opportunities and challenges.

7.2.3 Market Choice—Diverse Options for Middle-Class Families

Hong Kong's education system primarily offers two pathways: the local curriculum and various international curricula, each attracting different groups based on educational goals and cultural preferences. The local curriculum concludes with the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (DSE) examination, overseen by the Hong Kong Education Bureau. This examination determines whether students pursue higher education locally or participate in the Joint Entrance Exam for Overseas Chinese Students—available only to Hong Kong permanent residents—for admission to mainland Chinese universities. Generally, the DSE is regarded as more academically rigorous compared to the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP),

reflecting Hong Kong's emphasis on structured academic preparation and assessment methods (Lai et al., 2014).

Within the local education system, schools are mainly categorized into government schools, aided schools, and Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) schools. Government schools are fully funded and managed by the government, whereas aided schools receive government funding but are run by non-governmental organizations. DSS schools, introduced as part of education reforms in the early 2000s, have more autonomy, are partially subsidized by the government, and can charge higher tuition fees, positioning them as a hybrid model of public and private education. Although most of these schools offer the DSE curriculum, some DSS schools adopt a dual-track system, offering both DSE and international curricula to accommodate varying academic preferences, thus appealing to families with diverse educational aspirations for their children (Forestier, 2016).

Hong Kong secondary schools are divided into three academic bands, with Band 1 representing the highest-performing schools. Each band is further divided into sub-levels (A, B, and C), establishing a structured hierarchy within the system. Admission to Band 1A schools is highly competitive, with these institutions often regarded as the most academically prestigious. Even students with average grades in Band 1A schools have a strong chance of entering Hong Kong's top universities, underscoring the perceived advantages of studying within higher-ranked institutions (Lei & Tang, 2023). For students in Band 1C schools, university admission remains accessible, provided they perform above a certain percentile, typically above the 30th. However, Band 3 schools generally face significant challenges with lower university admission rates, which may reflect the broader disparities in educational outcomes across bands and amplify the intense competition for placement within top-tier schools (Chun et al., 2022).

Additionally, Hong Kong's 'through-train' school system, which connects primary and secondary schooling without requiring reapplication, has become an appealing option for families seeking stability in their children's educational trajectory. Through-train schools allow students to progress seamlessly from primary to secondary education, provided they meet basic academic and behavioral standards. Notably, this system is employed by several prestigious institutions, such as St. Paul's Co-educational College and Diocesan Boys' School and is known to reduce some of the pressures associated with traditional entrance exams.

However, not all through-train schools guarantee automatic advancement. Some, often referred to as 'semi through-train' schools, limit progression to a select percentage of students—typically 70–80%. This partial restriction reintroduces competition, often pushing competitive pressures to earlier stages in students' academic careers, particularly during primary school admissions. The through-train system thus represents a hybrid approach: while it offers continuity for many students, it simultaneously drives increased competition at critical transition points, illustrating the complex dynamics within Hong Kong's educational landscape (Chun et al., 2022).

International curricula, on the other hand, emphasize diverse learning philosophies and academic approaches that prioritize skills such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and citizenship (Patston et al., 2021). These programs are designed to reduce academic pressure and encourage students to engage in experiential learning rather than rote memorization, promoting a more well-rounded approach to education. Many parents and students believe that international curricula not only enrich the educational experience but also strengthen the school's ability to prepare students for higher education and careers abroad (Sinnema et al., 2020). Well-known programs like the International Baccalaureate (IB) are widely recognized internationally, enabling students to build stronger connections with universities worldwide and enhance their competitiveness on an international scale (Fedorova et al., 2021).

For many middle-class families, international curricula offer an appealing alternative to the high-pressure local education system. Some parents enroll their children in international schools from a young age to expose them to different teaching styles and enhance their English proficiency. Others opt for a transition from local to international schools after primary education, often motivated by a desire to provide their children with a more internationally oriented learning environment. Many of these families either have international backgrounds or prioritize exposure to different cultures, aiming to equip their children with cross-cultural competencies and a broader outlook (Sinnema et al., 2020).

In international schools, education is primarily delivered in English, with curricula that encourage critical thinking, creativity, and intercultural understanding. These schools provide a broader learning environment that nurtures independence and fosters academic curiosity (Patston et al., 2021). For parents, the choice to pay higher tuition fees and invest in school bonds reflects a belief in the long-term value of an international education, viewing it as a worthwhile investment despite the financial costs involved.

The growth of international education in Hong Kong provides a variety of options that align with the aspirations of many families, particularly those from the middle class, who seek an education with an international focus. This trend underscores the growing importance of cultural diversity and diverse perspectives within Hong Kong's education system. By emphasizing language development, critical thinking, and cross-cultural understanding, international curricula equip students with the qualities necessary to thrive. As more families recognize the long-term benefits of these educational pathways, the demand for international programs is expected to rise, further enriching and diversifying Hong Kong's educational landscape.

7.2.4 Market Choice—Reputable Schools

The promotion of educational internationalization significantly enhances a school's reputation by raising academic standards and improving educational quality. As Patston et al. (2021) highlight, the introduction of international curricula broadens the academic scope and aligns educational practices with standards, making schools more attractive to parents seeking diverse and comprehensive learning experiences for their children. Furthermore, Chun et al. (2022) emphasize that international programs enhance a school's brand image, positioning it as a forward-thinking institution that equips students with the skills needed for international opportunities. This increased recognition contributes to greater competitiveness in the local education market, as Forestier (2016) notes, and schools engaged in internationalization efforts enjoy enhanced status and reputation, providing them with a competitive advantage.

A key strategy in achieving educational internationalization is by offering internationally recognized curricula. Successful international schools provide comprehensive programs from primary to secondary education, allowing students to obtain international diplomas and certifications. Schools excelling in programs such as the IB, A-Level, and Advanced Placement (AP) often see graduates accepted into world-renowned universities, which elevates the school's standing and creates a positive feedback loop. High university admission rates attract talented students, further boosting the school's reputation. Students educated under international curricula also gain a competitive edge in job markets, which reinforces the school's status (Mittelmeier et al., 2024).

Local private schools have also begun establishing international divisions and introducing international programs to enrich their curriculum offerings. These programs emphasize critical thinking, creativity, and diverse perspectives, complementing traditional curricula and elevating the overall quality of education (De Wit, 2002). Schools often recruit teachers with international qualifications and teaching

experience, enhancing instructional standards and exposing students to diverse cultural perspectives (Knight, 2005; Teichler, 2004). The high tuition fees collected by these divisions support the development of advanced teaching facilities, such as multimedia classrooms, international libraries, and specialized laboratories. These investments create an improved learning environment, benefiting students' educational experiences and academic outcomes (Brajkovic & Helms, 2018; Knight, 1997).

Internationalized schools also establish partnerships with other schools and educational institutions worldwide. These collaborations facilitate exchange programs, teacher training, and collaborative research projects, expanding the international exposure of both teachers and students. By fostering cross-cultural exchange, schools increase their international influence (Friedman, 2000; Deardorff & Arasaratnam, 2017). Additionally, international programs attract financial support through tuition fees, investments, and donations, which help schools enhance their facilities and services (Stromquist, 2002; Coatsworth, 2019). The influx of resources enables schools to maintain a high quality of education and create a virtuous cycle of continuous improvement (Raby & Valeau, 2007).

Exceptional facilities and the prospect of easier access to prestigious universities attract high-performing students, earning the trust and support of parents (Bennell & Pearce, 2003; Bond et al., 2017). These facilities, which often include state-of-the-art classrooms, specialized science and technology labs, international libraries, and multimedia resources, create an optimal learning environment. As such, parents perceive these schools as offering not only academic excellence but also a clear pathway for their children's future success in a competitive landscape (Friedman, 2000). Parental satisfaction and positive feedback further bolster the school's reputation, solidifying its market position and ensuring continuous enrollment. As schools attract higher-performing students from diverse backgrounds, they become more appealing to

other families, creating a positive feedback loop that strengthens their market share in the education sector (Deardorff, 2006).

The promotion of educational internationalization delivers multifaceted benefits, including increased enrollment, enhanced social influence, and sustainable development (Stromquist & Monkman, 2014; Deardorff, 2011). This drives enrollment growth, as students and parents prioritize institutions that offer not only academic rigor but also competencies essential in the 21st century. Enhanced social influence arises as schools expand their networks through international partnerships and exchange programs, raising their profile within both local and international communities (Deardorff & Arasaratnam, 2017).

By continuously advancing internationalization efforts, schools can establish themselves as leaders in the education field, building a robust social reputation and brand image (Leask, 2001). This strategy enables schools to attract a diverse student body and high-caliber faculty, offering innovative teaching practices and diverse engagement opportunities (Brajkovic & Helms, 2018). As schools develop widely recognized curricula and expand their networks, they position themselves for continued success in a competitive educational environment, ensuring adaptability and growth in the ever-evolving education landscape (Peelo & Luxon, 2007).

7.2.5 Historical Reasons—Leadership Vision at Founding

The pursuit of international education is often shaped by the missions and educational philosophies of individual institutions. In the case of School X, a local private school, the principal actively promotes the integration of international curricula to elevate academic standards and enhance the school's competitiveness. In her view, international education enriches the curriculum, fosters diverse perspectives, and enhances students' cross-cultural competence. This vision helps equip students with the skills and knowledge needed to pursue higher education and future career opportunities

(De Wit, 2002; Knight, 2005). The emphasis on competencies aligns with findings by Deardorff (2006), who argues that international education encourages critical thinking and adaptability.

Alternatively, the founder of Y International School places great importance on promoting cultural integration and awareness. His philosophy advocates that international education should not merely replicate Western educational models but should blend the best of both Eastern and Western traditions. This approach aims to develop students with a profound appreciation for cultural diversity and a deep respect for different worldviews. By embedding cross-cultural learning in the curriculum, the school enhances the ability to communicate effectively across cultures and fosters a strong sense of citizenship (Chun et al., 2022; Friedman, 2000). This approach aligns with Knight's (2005) view that international education should be rooted in intercultural learning, which not only promotes mutual understanding but also equips students with the necessary tools to contribute to the broader community.

The commitment of leadership in both schools—School X's principal focusing on academic enhancement and School Y's founder emphasizing cultural integration—demonstrates how leadership vision plays a pivotal role in advancing international education. Their proactive efforts drive the modernization and expansion of school curricula (Raby & Valeau, 2007; Stromquist & Monkman, 2014). This leadership-driven approach is essential in realizing the objectives of international education, as it aligns institutional goals with the evolving demands of society, as emphasized by Deardorff and Arasaratnam (2017), who argue that effective leadership is central to driving educational reform and fostering an internationally oriented curriculum.

7.2.6 Historical Reasons—Unique Religious Background

The unique Christian background of X Local School plays a pivotal role in shaping its efforts toward educational internationalization. Christian education emphasizes universal values, holistic development, and social responsibility, which closely align with the core values of international education and play a key role in the school's approach to nurturing diverse perspectives (Brajkovic & Helms 2018; Peelo & Luxon, 2007).

First, Christian education promotes respect for cultural diversity and inclusivity of different faiths. These values resonate with the core objectives of international education—advancing cross-cultural understanding and awareness. By adopting international curricula and employing multicultural teaching methods, School X enables teachers to engage with diverse perspectives, enhancing their capacity to communicate and collaborate effectively across various cultural contexts (Dewey & Duff, 2009; Deardorff, 2006). As Knight (2005) suggests, such inclusivity is essential for fostering a truly internationalized education.

Second, Christian education prioritizes the cultivation of moral and ethical values, with a focus on social responsibility and citizenship. This philosophy nurtures students to become conscientious participants and leaders with a deep sense of social justice and responsibility (De Wit, 2002; Stromquist & Monkman, 2014). As noted by Raby and Valeau (2007), incorporating ethical education into the curriculum aids students in building a solid moral foundation, which is crucial for tackling the complex social issues of today's world.

Additionally, Christian education promotes the comprehensive development of students, focusing on their intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and physical well-being. This comprehensive approach aligns with the school's internationalization efforts, offering students diverse educational opportunities that foster both academic excellence

and personal growth. Through this well-rounded development, students are better equipped to navigate the complexities and challenges of the modern world (Teichler, 2004; Chun et al., 2022). As Forestier (2016) highlights, such a holistic educational framework not only enhances students' intellectual abilities but also cultivates their personal and ethical growth.

In summary, School X leverages its Christian heritage to effectively promote educational internationalization. The combination of respect for cultural diversity, moral education, and holistic development forms a robust framework for nurturing citizens with integrity and social responsibility. These values reinforce the school's reputation and influence in the field of international education.

7.2.7 Policy Reasons—Government Support

Hong Kong's goal to become a leading international education hub emphasizes the importance of educational internationalization (Hong Kong 2024 Policy Address). This strategy aims to strengthen the city's population structure, cultivate a highly skilled and diverse talent pool, and enhance Hong Kong's overall development and economic resilience. Following the significant emigration wave after the COVID-19 pandemic, Hong Kong faces a critical need to attract non-local students and professionals to offset resource shortages and a declining school-age population (Zhang et al., 2021). By prioritizing educational internationalization, Hong Kong can increase its competitiveness, diversify its student body, and address long-term human capital needs, ultimately supporting the city's social and economic vitality and reinforcing its influence.

However, the education system in Hong Kong faces several significant challenges. Demographic changes have caused a sharp decline in educational demand, leading to under-enrollment in both primary and secondary schools. If left unaddressed, this trend could result in a decrease in the availability of primary, secondary, and higher

education degrees, gradually reducing the overall scale of the education sector (Teichler, 2004; Tan & Dimmock, 2022). In the long run, this decline could negatively affect the overall quality and development of education, reducing the talent pool and weakening the city's competitiveness, potentially triggering a detrimental cycle (Sahlberg, 2011; Raby & Valeau, 2007).

The declining birth rate has further exacerbated the situation, leading to a continuous reduction in the number of students at school age in Hong Kong's primary and secondary schools. Many educational institutions, including primary schools, secondary schools, and kindergartens, are grappling with under-enrollment, making it increasingly challenging to maintain the necessary number of classes. According to data published by the Education Bureau, 50,508 students participated in the Secondary School Places Allocation (SSPA) in 2023, reflecting a slight increase from 2022. However, this figure is noticeably lower than the 52,055 students in 2021 and 54,112 in 2020, indicating a clear downward trend in the school-age population. Additionally, only 43,000 students registered for Primary One Admission (POA) in 2023, marking the lowest figure in over a decade.

Data from the Education Bureau further reveal a continuous decline in student enrollment across all educational levels. In the 2022–2023 academic year, approximately 27,000 primary and secondary students departed from their schools, resulting in a loss rate of about 4%, an increase from the previous year's loss rate of 3.64%. As of September 2022, 63,137 vacant seats were recorded in primary schools, while secondary schools had 26,223 vacant seats, accounting for 16.8% and 8.5% of the total seats, respectively (Hong Kong Education Bureau, 2022).

Moreover, Hong Kong currently hosts 54 international schools (including one special school). In the 2022–2023 academic year, these international institutions offered a total of 46,253 places, enrolling 40,626 students, with an occupancy rate of 87.8%.

According to regulations, these schools are required to enroll no less than 70% non-local students. However, the percentage of non-local students has declined from 75.5% in the 2018–2019 academic year to 65.9%, falling below the contractual requirement (Education Bureau, 2022).

The local student population in Hong Kong is already experiencing structural decline. If measures are not implemented to address this issue, it will inevitably lead to an increase in vacant school places. This situation will strain the sustainability of self-financed institutions, lead to further reductions and closures of primary and secondary schools, and ultimately result in a contraction of the education sector. Over time, this will negatively impact the quality of education in Hong Kong and deplete the talent pool, creating an even more severe and self-reinforcing cycle of decline.

Chief Executive John Lee has identified “comprehensively enhancing competitiveness” as one of his four major policy agendas, with various measures aimed at bolstering Hong Kong’s international advantages, of which educational internationalization is a crucial component. In response, the Hong Kong government has recently introduced several talent recruitment programs aimed at attracting professionals, skilled individuals, and entrepreneurs. By maximizing Hong Kong’s strengths, establishing an international education hub, and actively attracting non-local students—while encouraging them to remain and work in the region post-graduation—these initiatives aim to build a knowledge-based economy (Jung et al., 2021).

Additionally, the government is enhancing its overseas outreach to raise awareness and interest among non-local students regarding education in Hong Kong. Through the 2024 Policy Address, the government has announced plans to ease policy restrictions and expand enrollment limits for non-local students, thereby relaxing constraints on educational internationalization. Consideration is also being given to establishing self-financed programs within public primary and secondary schools to better address

long-term human resource needs. Furthermore, the government, either directly or through partnerships with local chambers of commerce and educational organizations, regularly organizes prominent educational exhibitions and seminars both abroad and in Mainland China. These events highlight the unique characteristics of Hong Kong's educational landscape, positioning it as a viable and attractive option for international students.

This series of policy initiatives provides a strong impetus for advancing educational internationalization at the primary school level. By enhancing the appeal of Hong Kong's education sector to non-local students, these efforts aim to offset the declining local student population, helping to sustain and invigorate the city's educational landscape. In positioning Hong Kong as a global education hub, the government aims to attract a diverse range of students, thereby supporting the city's broader long-term goals for economic growth and social development.

7.3 Curriculum Reform and International Engagements

In exploring how curriculum reform at X Local School and Y International School has engaged with international design narratives, it becomes evident that both institutions have prioritized the integration of broader perspectives into their educational frameworks. This engagement not only emphasizes the importance of developing culturally responsive curricula but also fosters a sense of teacher agency, empowering educators to embrace innovative teaching philosophies that reflect diverse international contexts (De Wit & Hunter, 2015; Knight, 2004). By adapting their curricula to incorporate trends and practices from varied contexts, these schools are not only enhancing the educational experience for students but also equipping teachers with the tools and confidence to navigate complex educational environments.

7.3.1 School Leadership—Selection and Introduction of International Curricula

The selection and introduction of international curricula represent critical steps in the internationalization of education, presenting both opportunities and challenges for educational institutions (Harder et al., 2012). As schools aim to transform their educational offerings, the role of curriculum reform becomes paramount, with teachers acting as key agents in this process (Niehaus & Williams, 2016). The gradual nature of this policy shift often leads to debates among school leadership and departments regarding the most effective strategies for implementation. Qualitative research methods offer valuable insights into participants' experiences, the contextual factors at play, and the dynamics that influence curriculum decisions (Merriam, 1998).

At Hong Kong's X Local School, the decision to base its curriculum on the International Baccalaureate (IB) framework illustrates a commitment to educational standards while also addressing local needs. The IB is a prestigious international qualification that has gained widespread recognition for its rigorous curriculum, particularly the Diploma Programme, which is considered the 'gold standard' for university entrance qualifications in many Western education systems. With over 5,175 schools in 157 countries adopting its curricula by the end of 2019, the IB has positioned itself as a leader in promoting education, although it has faced criticism for perpetuating implicit Western values (Hill, 2001).

In contrast, School Y is a long-established IB World School that has fully integrated the IB curriculum across all grade levels from primary to secondary education. This alignment with the IB framework from its inception allows School Y to provide a seamless educational experience, embedding international-mindedness and critical thinking skills throughout its curriculum (Hayden & Thompson, 1995). The school's leadership highlights the importance of cultivating an inclusive and diverse environment, where students engage with global issues while also gaining a profound

understanding of their local context. This dual focus equips students with the skills needed to tackle both local and global challenges effectively.

The transition to the IB curriculum at School X reflects a strategic approach to fostering international perspectives while integrating local cultural contexts. School leaders understand that adopting an international curriculum is not merely about importing foreign educational models but also involves localizing content and pedagogical practices to resonate with the community and the students' backgrounds. This localization process includes adapting teaching methods, assessments, and materials to ensure they reflect the unique cultural and social dynamics of Hong Kong.

Furthermore, both School X and School Y's leadership must navigate a range of challenges associated with implementing the IB curriculum. Leaders face issues related to isolation, where school principals may lack support networks to exchange best practices with peers, as well as mobility concerns, where high turnover among teachers and students can disrupt continuity in curriculum delivery (Bailey & Gibson, 2020). Cultural differences may also arise, necessitating a nuanced understanding of how to effectively communicate and engage with families from diverse backgrounds.

Walker (2004) highlights the complex interaction between external and internal factors that shape school leadership in the Asia-Pacific region. Their research highlights the importance of context, suggesting that the unique circumstances of each school can significantly impact the success of curriculum implementation. School X's leadership must therefore adopt a flexible approach, ready to adapt strategies based on ongoing feedback from teachers, students, and the wider community, while School Y can draw upon its established IB experience to refine and enhance its curriculum continually.

Additionally, as the landscape of international education evolves, both School X and School Y must remain proactive in addressing market demands and student

expectations. This includes recognizing the growing trend of for-profit educational institutions entering the sector, which may influence curriculum offerings and pricing structures.

The decision to adopt and implement the IB curriculum represents a strategic effort for both School X and School Y to enhance their international standing while remaining responsive to local contexts. By carefully navigating the complexities of curriculum reform and localization, these schools can foster educational environments that promote citizenship while honoring their cultural heritage. Through effective leadership and a commitment to continuous improvement, both School X and School Y can solidify their roles in the evolving landscape of international education.

7.3.2 School Leadership—Reform of Curriculum Systems and Design

Since the beginning of the 21st century, the internationalization of education has manifested in two main forms: outbound internationalization, which involves transnational education, and inbound internationalization, characterized by campus internationalization (Beelen, 2011; Knight, 2008). Both forms of internationalization seek to cultivate engagement, but they approach this goal from different perspectives. Outbound internationalization emphasizes the export of educational programs to other countries, while inbound internationalization focuses on integrating international and intercultural dimensions into domestic educational systems.

A key element of this internationalization process is the creation of inclusive and intercultural curriculum designs. The key elements of this process include cultivating international and intercultural perspectives in educational content, implementing teaching and learning processes that are reflective of diverse contexts, and offering extracurricular activities that engage students with local cultural and ethnic communities. Beelen (2011) stresses the importance of creating a curriculum that blends international and local knowledge. In this sense, educational institutions must

not only teach international content but also ensure that this knowledge is accessible and meaningful within the context of the students' own cultural backgrounds.

Knight (2008) emphasizes that curriculum development is integral to the internationalization of education, serving as a bridge between ideals and local educational practices. Similarly, Beelen (2011) argues that curriculum development is central to inbound internationalization. They assert that it is essential to “purposefully integrate an international and intercultural dimension into the formal and informal curriculum for all students within domestic learning environments” (p. 69). By incorporating these dimensions, schools offer students the chance to engage deeply with diverse perspectives while staying rooted in their own cultural heritage.

To support these inclusive and intercultural approaches, the design of appropriate administrative structures becomes crucial. Crowther et al. (2000) recommend that educational institutions undertake informed and systematic efforts within their administrative frameworks to enhance internationalization initiatives. Administrative structures must ensure the provision of resources and support needed to drive curriculum reforms and maintain the growth of inclusive educational environments. Without adequate structural support, even the most well-designed curricula may fail to be fully implemented or to achieve their intended outcomes. Thus, leadership plays a crucial role in ensuring that both curricular and administrative frameworks are aligned to effectively support the overarching goals of internationalization.

Curriculum internationalization includes a variety of activities, such as study abroad programs, foreign language courses, and academic offerings that emphasize international or comparative perspectives (Bremer & van der Wende, 1995). However, scholars in the field of educational internationalization also highlight the importance of teaching methodologies, which address the ‘how we teach’ aspect of curriculum reform (Bond et al., 2017). This dual emphasis on content and pedagogy highlights

the importance of adopting a holistic approach to internationalization, one that recognizes that how material is presented can be just as important as the material itself.

In driving the reform of local education systems and curricula, school leadership must also consider various motivational factors that influence the process of curriculum internationalization. Jean and Emmanuel (2014) categorize these factors into intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. Intrinsic motivation involves the internal satisfaction educators derive from engaging in meaningful teaching practices that foster students' growth. This can include the personal fulfillment that comes from teaching in an internationally oriented classroom or from facilitating intercultural exchanges. On the other hand, extrinsic motivation relates to the external factors that influence the effectiveness of curriculum internationalization, such as institutional support, professional development opportunities, and the availability of resources. By understanding and addressing both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors, school leadership can create an environment where curriculum internationalization thrives, benefiting both students and educators alike.

To effectively promote the reform of curriculum systems and design, school leadership should focus on several key areas:

1. Developing International and Intercultural Dimensions: Craft curricula that reflect international perspectives and foster intercultural understanding.
2. Designing Inclusive Teaching and Learning Processes: Implement diverse teaching methods that encourage students to participate in intercultural exchanges and collaborative learning.
3. Fostering Research Collaborations and Language Learning: Provide opportunities for students to engage in research initiatives and foreign language courses, boosting their competitiveness.
4. Encouraging Extracurricular Activities and Community Involvement: Promote citizenship awareness among students through diverse extracurricular activities and community service projects.
5. Adjusting Administrative Structures: Establish administrative systems that support inclusive and intercultural education.

In the context of Schools X and Y, these reforms can be seen in action. School X is transitioning to the IB curriculum while integrating local cultural elements, ensuring that the curriculum aligns with students' experiences and interests (Beelen, 2011; Knight, 2008). This approach reflects the growing emphasis on adapting international curricula to local contexts, aligning with the need for intercultural and inclusive teaching strategies (Crowther et al., 2000). The integration of local cultural elements within an international framework ensures that students are exposed to broader perspectives while retaining a connection to their cultural heritage.

Conversely, School Y, as an established IB World School, continuously innovates its curriculum design to align with international standards. The school's long-term commitment to the IB framework allows it to offer a widely recognized education, while also fostering critical thinking and international mindedness (Bond et al., 2017). By maintaining a focus on both content and pedagogy, School Y exemplifies the effective integration of international educational practices and the development of teaching methods that support intercultural understanding and citizenship (Bremer & van der Wende, 1995).

Together, both schools exemplify how effective leadership can navigate the complexities of curriculum reform to enhance educational internationalization in Hong Kong. Their efforts highlight the importance of integrating international and local perspectives within curriculum design, as well as the role of leadership in facilitating these changes. Through these initiatives, both School X and School Y are positioning themselves as leaders in the evolving landscape of international education, while remaining grounded in their local cultural contexts.

7.3.3 Encouraging Collaboration between Chinese and Western Teachers to Explore the Design of International Curricula

Lai, Li, and Gong (2016) conducted a study examining Chinese teachers at 13 international schools in Hong Kong, focusing on their teaching decisions and experiences in a culturally diverse educational environment. Their research highlighted the unique position of Chinese teachers, who, while striving to balance Western student-centered teaching methods with traditional Chinese pedagogical approaches, often faced challenges in gaining recognition for their expertise. The study found that these teachers were highly reflective about their practice, critically engaging with both Western educational philosophies and their own cultural heritage to create an integrated approach to teaching. Despite their efforts, their contributions and teaching skills were frequently overlooked, with Chinese teachers often relegated to roles narrowly defined around Chinese language or culture. This marginalization led them to feel disconnected from broader decision-making processes and limited their opportunities for leadership within the school community.

Moreover, the study noted that Western-trained teachers enjoyed greater visibility and influence, whereas Chinese teachers were often excluded from leadership roles involving curriculum design or pedagogical innovation. Their involvement was mainly restricted to teaching Chinese language or culture—areas perceived as culturally specific rather than central to the broader educational mission of the school. This pattern of marginalization, the study suggests, reflects a larger issue within international schools in Hong Kong, where cultural hierarchies shape professional roles and development opportunities, particularly for teachers from non-Western backgrounds. The research by Lai, Li, and Gong (2016) underscores the importance of more inclusive and equitable leadership structures, ones that recognize the value of diverse teaching methods and provide opportunities for all teachers, regardless of cultural background, to contribute meaningfully to curriculum development and decision-making processes.

In a similar vein, Fimyar (2018) explored identity issues among expatriate teachers, revealing the segregation of local and expatriate teachers into different staff rooms to avoid interference in language use. Fimyar also noted stark contrasts in working conditions: local teachers were paid lower salaries and were required to work six days a week, while expatriate teachers enjoyed higher pay and a five-day workweek. This disparity created a hierarchical dynamic, with expatriate teachers often assuming mentorship roles for local teachers, although they only recognized this responsibility upon arriving in Hong Kong. This dynamic reinforced the perception that expatriate teachers possessed superior skills, even though many did not feel empowered or autonomous in their roles. Teacher autonomy, as Everitt (2020) pointed out, is often tied to the school's leadership style.

Additionally, teacher identity is not fixed but fluid, evolving based on the institutional context of international schools (Bunnell, 2010). For instance, Joslin (2002) highlighted how her professional practices were influenced by both the culture of the international school where she worked and her previous teaching experiences. Similarly, Poole (2020) analyzed the experiences of international schoolteachers in Shanghai, revealing feelings of instability, lack of autonomy, and economic insecurity. These teachers also struggled for professional recognition, as their status and roles often depended on the institutional context in which they worked. These findings collectively illustrate the complexities of teacher identity and the ways in which it is shaped by institutional culture, leadership styles, and broader systemic factors within international schools.

The integration of diverse teaching methodologies in international schools is a critical aspect of modern education. Currently, the curriculum standards at X Local School in Hong Kong align with the International Baccalaureate (IB) framework, which is recognized for promoting international-mindedness and a broad-based education

(Knight, 1997; Deardorff, 2011). However, expatriate teachers at School X often engage minimally in school affairs, leading to curricula developed solely based on their limited understanding of local educational contexts. In contrast, School Y promotes collaborative teaching practices, yet many teachers still feel that such collaboration needs further enhancement. To address these challenges, substantial policy and institutional support are necessary, as the collaborative development of curriculum is a key factor in fostering effective internationalization.

The significance of collaboration between Chinese and Western teachers lies in the blending of diverse perspectives and teaching approaches, which can enhance curriculum content and improve the overall educational experience (Fimyar, 2018; De Wit & Hunter, 2015). Traditional Chinese education emphasizes rote memorization, discipline, and respect for authority, which helps build a solid knowledge foundation and maintain classroom order. In contrast, Western education emphasizes critical thinking, creativity, and student autonomy (Schachner et al., 2016). By fostering collaboration, Chinese and Western teachers can combine these methodologies to create a more balanced and engaging teaching approach (Poole, 2020). For instance, lessons could begin with direct instruction to establish foundational knowledge, followed by inquiry-based activities that promote critical thinking and application of that knowledge, benefiting a wider range of learning styles (Kopish, 2016).

This collaborative approach not only enhances the curriculum but also provides a valuable opportunity for professional development for educators. Chinese teachers can adopt innovative Western strategies, while Western teachers can gain insights into effective classroom management from their Chinese counterparts. To facilitate this mutual learning process, schools should encourage regular workshops, co-teaching opportunities, and joint planning meetings, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and open dialogue that enhances teaching quality.

Practical challenges remain, however, in promoting effective collaboration between teachers. Cultural sensitivity training is essential for raising awareness of cultural differences and fostering mutual respect, thereby reducing misunderstandings and conflicts (Gough, 2014). Additionally, formal collaboration structures, such as co-teaching models and joint curriculum planning committees, should be established to provide communication platforms for teachers (Deardorff, 2006). Schools must also recognize and value cross-cultural collaboration in their policies, rewarding teachers who excel in these efforts to encourage broader participation (Morris, 2010; Poole, 2020).

At School X, specific measures can be implemented to facilitate collaboration between Chinese and Western teachers. First, collaborative teaching projects should be introduced, pairing teachers from both cultural backgrounds to co-design and implement courses. This will not only enhance students' learning experiences but also motivate teachers to integrate their knowledge and skills more effectively. Second, regular evaluation mechanisms should be established to assess the effectiveness of these collaborative efforts, gathering feedback from both teachers and students to inform ongoing improvements (Robertson & Blasi, 2017). Finally, schools must ensure the provision of essential resources and support, such as joint planning time, teaching materials, and professional development opportunities, to strengthen collaborative teaching practices (Olson et al., 2008).

Adopting these measures will allow School X to effectively foster collaboration between Chinese and Western teachers in designing international curricula. This cross-cultural cooperation will not only enhance teachers' professional capabilities but also provide students with a more diverse and comprehensive educational experience, which is essential in preparing them for the world they will inhabit (Standish, 2014; Wadhwa, 2016). Therefore, integrating both Chinese and Western pedagogies is

essential for the successful implementation of international curricula in Hong Kong schools.

7.3.4 Strengthening International Training for Chinese and Western Teachers

Betty Leask (2009) defines curriculum internationalization as the process of incorporating international elements into the curriculum content. This involves incorporating comparative perspectives into the classroom, emphasizing diverse cultures, social groups, and governance systems. However, curriculum internationalization extends beyond merely adding international content; it encourages students to develop critical thinking skills, challenge their viewpoints, and appreciate alternative perspectives (Crichton & Scarino, 2007). By engaging with these diverse viewpoints, teachers can better contextualize course materials in the 21st century (Hudzik & Stohl, 2012).

Leask (2009) further defines curriculum internationalization as integrating “international and intercultural dimensions into the content of the curriculum and the teaching arrangements and support services of a learning program” (p. 209). This encompasses both ‘what is taught’ and ‘how it is taught’ (Bond et al., 2017). Leask characterizes an internationalized curriculum as one that “engages teachers in internationalized research and cultural and linguistic diversity, purposefully developing their international and intercultural perspectives as professionals and citizens” (Leask, 2009, p. 209). In today’s diverse workplaces, cultivating cultural sensitivity and effective communication skills is crucial. Teacher training plays a vital role in the internationalization process, as teachers are key to determining how and to what extent international perspectives are incorporated into their courses (Olson et al., 2008).

At X Local School and Y International School in Hong Kong, teacher development plays a significant role in implementing an internationalized curriculum. These

schools enhance international training for teachers through various measures, including institutional support, cultural exchange, intercultural training, international cooperation, language proficiency enhancement, and information platform development:

1. Institutional Support: Establishing dedicated funds for international teacher training and implementing policies that encourage teachers' participation in international development initiatives can provide vital institutional backing for their involvement in exchange and cooperation projects (Leask, 2009; Olson et al., 2008). Institutional support is crucial for fostering teachers' engagement with internationalization, as it enables them to access training opportunities and participate in professional networks.

2. International Exchange Activities: Regularly organizing activities that invite domestic and foreign experts to deliver lectures and training sessions helps broaden teachers' horizons by exposing them to different educational philosophies and teaching methods (Bunnell, 2010). Such exchanges provide opportunities for teachers to gain new perspectives and broaden their teaching approaches, share knowledge, and develop strategies for integrating diverse perspectives into their teaching practices (Fimyar, 2018).

3. Intercultural Training: Designing and implementing intercultural training courses can enhance teachers' communication skills and cultural sensitivity. These courses may cover intercultural communication techniques, understanding cultural differences, and analyzing international education policies (Odgers & Giroux, 2006). This training helps teachers not only become more culturally aware but also fosters the necessary skills to navigate diverse classroom environments and promote intercultural dialogue among students (Crichton & Scarino, 2007).

4. Partnerships with Foreign Institutions: Encouraging schools to establish partnerships with international educational institutions facilitates the joint development of internationalized curricula and teaching materials. These collaborations provide teachers with practical experience and access to valuable resources that support curriculum design and pedagogy, allowing for more effective teaching of diverse perspectives (Hudzik & Stohl, 2012; Joslin, 2002). International partnerships also offer teachers insights into best practices from different cultural contexts, further enriching the curriculum.

5. Language Training Opportunities: Offering language training, especially in English, is crucial for improving teachers' proficiency in foreign languages, which is essential for engaging in international activities and intercultural exchanges (Leask, 2009). Language proficiency allows teachers to engage more effectively with colleagues and students from diverse cultural backgrounds, enhancing communication and fostering a deeper understanding of issues.

6. International Education Resource Platforms: Developing an information platform that consolidates and shares internationalized teaching resources and experiences enables teachers to access and apply the latest developments and research findings in international education (Bond et al., 2017). This platform could act as a central hub for teachers to share ideas, access curriculum resources, and stay informed about the latest educational trends, promoting a collaborative environment for professional development.

A related area to curriculum internationalization is the teaching of intercultural competence. The term ‘intercultural’ refers to interactions and exchanges between individuals from different cultural backgrounds. While there is consensus on this definition, challenges arise when exploring the nuances of these interactions, such as cultural misunderstandings, researcher biases, and data collection issues (Johnson et al., 2006). The core focus for this discussion is the concept of interaction, which requires teachers to understand not only their own cultural backgrounds but also those of their students and colleagues.

Odgers and Giroux (2006) emphasize that teachers bring different experiences, assumptions, and values that influence their teaching and leadership styles. To cultivate students’ intercultural competence, teachers must understand both their own culture and that of others. Effective communication across cultural boundaries is essential for students to become learners, which necessitates teachers who possess intercultural awareness and sensitivity. By modeling intercultural communication, teachers help students develop the skills needed to engage effectively with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds (Bunnell, 2010).

Strengthening international training for Chinese and Western teachers requires incorporating international elements into the curriculum and providing institutional and cultural support (Fimyar, 2018; Leask, 2009). Through systematic training and multi-level exchanges, educational institutions can effectively promote internationalization, enhance teachers’ international literacy, and cultivate

professionals with intercultural competence. By fostering such an environment, schools can ensure that both Chinese and Western teachers contribute to the development of a truly internationalized curriculum (Crichton & Scarino, 2007).

7.4 Has Curriculum Reform Improved Hong Kong's Primary Education?

This section evaluates whether curriculum reforms at X Local School and Y International School have effectively strengthened primary education in Hong Kong. As international influences shape educational policies, these schools have adopted international frameworks, like the International Baccalaureate (IB), to stay competitive and relevant (Leask, 2009; Hudzik & Stohl, 2012). We explore the impact of these reforms on academic quality, intercultural competence, and student engagement, assessing if they have succeeded in equipping students with skills essential for the future (Olson et al., 2008; Crichton & Scarino, 2007).

Additionally, we examine how these schools balance local traditions with international standards, navigating the complexities of internationalization in education. By integrating local values, such as discipline and foundational knowledge, with Western approaches that emphasize critical thinking and creativity, these schools create a holistic learning experience. This approach highlights the broader discourse on internationalization, illustrating how schools can honor both international competencies and local heritage to enrich students' academic and personal growth (Bunnell, 2010), demonstrating how theoretical perspectives integrate with empirical evidence to assess the effectiveness of curriculum reform.

7.4.1 Strengthening Basic Education

Internationalization has become a focal point in Hong Kong's primary education reforms, aiming to enhance foundational learning while integrating cultural competencies. This study examines how X Local School and Y International School

implement these reforms to strengthen basic education and align with international educational trends (Leask, 2009).

A key aspect of these reforms is the integration of English as the primary medium of instruction. The Hong Kong government views English not only as a skill but as a strategic asset to enhance the region's 'international characteristics' and competitiveness (Chan, 2008). Consequently, English proficiency is prioritized in primary curricula, equipping students with linguistic tools essential for engagement (Olson et al., 2008).

To bolster teachers' international competencies, X Local School and Y International School have implemented various initiatives. These include allocating funds and establishing policies that support teacher participation in international exchanges and collaborations. Additionally, the schools host lectures and training sessions led by foreign experts, exposing teachers to diverse educational methodologies (Crichton & Scarino, 2007). Intercultural training programs further enhance teachers' communication skills and cultural sensitivity, preparing them to work effectively in culturally diverse environments (Odgers & Giroux, 2006).

Collaboration with foreign institutions has also enabled these schools to jointly develop internationalized curricula, providing teachers with access to resources and teaching experiences. Emphasis on English language training enhances teachers' abilities to participate in cross-cultural exchanges, while international education resource platforms ensure that educators remain informed about developments in education (Wadhwa, 2016).

However, significant challenges remain, including the isolation of foreign teachers, occasional tensions between local and expatriate staff, and the predominant focus on English. Addressing these challenges requires active promotion of collaboration,

creating inclusive environments where local and foreign educators contribute meaningfully (Bond et al., 2017).

Ultimately, strong administrative support is essential, but teachers are pivotal in driving these reforms forward. Continuous professional development and collaborative opportunities empower educators with the competencies necessary for a diversified educational landscape. Through these internationalization efforts, Hong Kong's primary schools demonstrate proactive strategies to meet international standards while enhancing the local education environment (Hudzik & Stohl, 2012).

7.4.2 Achieving a Win-Win Situation for Grades and Reputation

In the pursuit of educational internationalization, some schools view it as an end rather than a means to enhance teaching quality and contribute meaningfully to society. This perspective can result in policies that are overly focused on rankings or the exclusive adoption of English as the medium of instruction, often overlooking broader educational objectives. True internationalization, however, emphasizes improving educational quality, fostering holistic student development, and cultivating broader perspectives and intercultural communication skills, which together help schools both advance students' academic success and enhance their reputations (Chan, 2008; Leask, 2009).

School X has shown its dedication to internationalization by establishing an International Department and designating international classes, creating a structure that allows for focused international initiatives. By offering specialized programs that incorporate broader perspectives, School X provides an environment where students can develop competencies aligned with international demands. Research indicates that parents are drawn to School X for its international curriculum, which enriches students' perspectives and prepares them to navigate complex issues effectively (Wadhwa, 2016; Odgers & Giroux, 2006). These programs also contribute to a strong

academic foundation that aids students in transitioning to prestigious secondary schools, benefiting both the school's reputation and student success.

In addition, School X actively recruits foreign teachers to diversify its faculty, enhancing the learning experience through varied teaching methods and cultural insights. Hudzik and Stohl (2012) emphasize that foreign educators bring valuable expertise in language instruction and cross-cultural communication, which are critical for developing students' language proficiency and intercultural understanding. By fostering a diverse, internationally oriented environment, School X not only improves teaching quality but also strengthens its academic offerings and social standing (Crichton & Scarino, 2007).

School X has further developed its school-based international curriculum, which blends local education with international standards. This curriculum includes practical skills that support well-rounded development, encouraging creativity and autonomy in student learning. Such initiatives lead to higher student engagement and performance, while also building community trust and recognition through a commitment to comprehensive, internationally aware education (Standish, 2014).

Similarly, International School Y has established itself as a leading institution in Hong Kong, particularly for its impressive International Baccalaureate (IB) scores. By implementing the IB Primary Years Programme (PYP) across all grades, School Y provides a structured foundation that supports students' adaptation to the rigorous IB curriculum, leading to academic gains in later stages (Bond et al., 2017). This early introduction to the IB framework allows students to excel in middle and high school courses, ultimately enhancing both academic outcomes and the school's reputation.

In summary, both X Local School and Y International School have strengthened their academic performance and reputations through strategic internationalization

approaches. These examples illustrate that authentic internationalization should prioritize enhancing teaching quality, building intercultural skills, and fostering a comprehensive educational approach (Olson et al., 2008).

7.4.3 Localization Plans for Internationalized Education

The strengthening of cultural, economic, and educational exchanges between nations and regions is inevitable. Educational internationalization plays a crucial role in this trend, facilitated by the growth of the internet and the rise of cross-regional online education. The spread of knowledge and scientific advancements has become a collective mission, further accelerating international collaboration in education. However, for internationalized education to be meaningful and sustainable, it must be rooted in the local context, preserving unique cultural identities while adopting best practices (Mok, 2007; Bray et al., 2003).

In Hong Kong's pursuit of educational internationalization, balancing local traditions with influences requires several key strategies:

Emphasizing Humanities to Preserve Cultural Identity

A key aspect of educational localization is nurturing a strong sense of local cultural identity through humanities education. Literature, history, philosophy, and the arts are the fundamental carriers of cultural heritage, offering students a connection to their cultural roots. As Hong Kong embraces international curricula, it is vital to maintain a commitment to cultivating students' understanding of local traditions and history. Schools can achieve this by integrating courses on Hong Kong's history, local literature, and Cantonese traditions alongside internationally recognized programs such as the IB. This dual approach guarantees that students engage with both international perspectives and a deeper understanding of their own cultural heritage, fostering competence while strengthening their local identity.

For example, incorporating local traditions and values into the curriculum helps students better understand the unique cultural dynamics of Hong Kong. Offering courses on topics like Cantonese literature or local history helps bridge the gap between international education frameworks and local knowledge, promoting a sense of pride and belonging among students. This method not only preserves Hong Kong's cultural identity but also equips students with the necessary skills to navigate diverse environments (Chan & Ng, 2008). By merging international educational standards with local content, schools in Hong Kong can strike a balance between maintaining their distinctive cultural identity and meeting the demands of competitiveness. Through this approach, Hong Kong's educational system fosters well-rounded individuals who are culturally confident and competent, capable of contributing to a dynamic society (Bray et al., 2003).

In line with this, Bamberger and Morris (2024) emphasize that the “nature of geopolitics and the various forms and locations of colonialism” play a significant role in shaping the process of higher education internationalization (p. 128). This underscores how global power dynamics and historical colonial influences affect the ways in which internationalization efforts are structured and experienced within educational institutions. The integration of local knowledge with international frameworks in Hong Kong's education system can be seen as a response to these larger geopolitical forces, ensuring that education remains culturally relevant while meeting global standards.

Avoiding Blind Replication of Western Models

The localization of international education requires careful adaptation, not the uncritical imitation of foreign educational systems. While integrating international standards can help maintain competitiveness, it is crucial that Hong Kong's educational system preserves its unique cultural and philosophical identity. Blindly replicating Western models could dilute the region's unique educational character,

transforming local schools into mere extensions of another nation's educational framework.

It is important to strike a balance by selectively incorporating best practices while preserving local traditions, values, and educational strengths. For instance, while internationalization often emphasizes English-language instruction and Western pedagogies, Hong Kong schools can integrate these elements in ways that are meaningful within the local context. By doing so, schools avoid the risks of 'nationalization' and create a hybrid model that is rooted in local values but enriched with international perspectives (Bray et al., 2003).

Furthermore, collaboration between Hong Kong schools and international institutions can stimulate innovation and improve educational quality. By sharing knowledge and teaching methods, and both sides can benefit from cross-cultural exchanges that enrich learning outcomes. In particular, Hong Kong can tailor advanced teaching approaches—such as inquiry-based learning or project-based learning—to align with its own educational context. This approach allows Hong Kong schools to integrate the best of both worlds, creating a dynamic, adaptable, and culturally reflective education system (Mok, 2019; Chan & Ng, 2008).

By avoiding blind replication and fostering innovation through collaboration, Hong Kong's education system remains competitive and locally authentic. This thoughtful balance ensures that local schools contribute to the broader conversation on education while preserving their own unique identity, positioning Hong Kong as a model of how internationalization can coexist with cultural preservation.

Integrating International Perspectives While Honoring Local Values

Effective localization requires blending international educational concepts with local cultural elements to create an environment where both international competence and

local identity are equally valued. Schools in Hong Kong must design curricula and teaching methods that address the linguistic, cultural, and developmental needs of their students, ensuring a seamless integration of both local and international perspectives. Rather than imposing external standards, educators should adopt a flexible, context-sensitive approach that aligns with the students' everyday realities, enabling them to understand and engage with both local and international concerns. For example, teaching English as a common language can complement the promotion of Cantonese and Mandarin, reinforcing the region's policy of biliteracy and trilingualism. In this way, the school system fosters the development of students' language skills, enabling them to be cosmopolitan citizens while also honoring their local linguistic heritage. This dual approach allows students to communicate across cultures while also strengthening their connection to their own cultural roots (Bray et al., 2003).

Similarly, cross-cultural exchanges and projects that engage with international peers can foster awareness, preparing participants to understand and address international challenges. At the same time, these initiatives can ground them in Hong Kong's values and identity, allowing them to contribute to international conversations while drawing from their own cultural experiences. For instance, sustainability challenges could be addressed through the lens of Hong Kong's unique urban environment, providing an opportunity to examine local issues from an international perspective, encouraging them to think critically about how they can contribute to both their community and the wider world (Bray et al., 2003).

Teachers play an active role in developing localized curricula that highlight both international issues and local relevance. By incorporating local knowledge, traditions, and perspectives into the curriculum, educators create a dynamic learning environment that respects Hong Kong's cultural heritage while addressing broader

challenges. Effective localization in education involves not only maintaining local cultural values but also adapting international educational frameworks in ways that resonate with students' lived experiences. By integrating international perspectives while honoring local values, Hong Kong schools can produce students who are culturally grounded and aware of worldwide issues.

Equipping Students for International Challenges with Local Confidence

A strong sense of cultural confidence empowers students to engage meaningfully with diverse perspectives while contributing their unique viewpoints on the international stage (Mok, 2019). Such efforts not only improve students' academic performance but also promote personal growth, civic engagement, and cultural pride (Chan & Ng, 2008). As students build cross-cultural competencies, they become adept at navigating international environments while maintaining a strong sense of connection to their community. This balance strengthens both individual development and social cohesion within Hong Kong.

For Hong Kong to achieve meaningful localization within the framework of internationalized education, it must maintain a careful equilibrium between international and local dimensions. Schools need to preserve their cultural identity while embracing international educational practices that enhance teaching quality and student learning outcomes. By fostering both international awareness and local confidence, Hong Kong can cultivate a generation of students who are equipped to thrive in international competition without losing their connection to their heritage. This approach not only ensures the sustainable development of Hong Kong's educational framework but also enriches the education sector by contributing unique insights and practices. Through this dynamic model of localized internationalization, Hong Kong can position itself as both a participant in and a contributor to the evolving landscape of education.

7.5 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter has delved into the key aspects of curriculum internationalization in Hong Kong's primary schools, examining the various factors that drive this process and evaluating its impact on the local education system. It first explored the reasons behind pursuing curriculum internationalization, such as market choices, historical factors, and government support, all of which contribute to the growing demand for international educational practices. The chapter then examined the reform efforts within schools, including leadership decisions regarding the introduction of international curricula, the redesign of curriculum systems, and the collaboration between Chinese and Western teachers in curriculum design and professional development.

The next chapter, the conclusion, will provide a summary of the key findings, explore the study's implications, and present recommendations for future research.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

8.1 Overview

This thesis explores the internationalization of primary education in Hong Kong by conducting a comparative analysis of two contrasting primary schools: a long-established local school with an international section and a prominent international school. The findings highlight that Hong Kong schools see educational internationalization as a strategy for enhancing regional competitiveness and elevating their status within the educational arena. In particular, the integration of international curriculum frameworks supports local schools in fostering a broader educational vision that includes greater teacher autonomy, innovative teaching practices, and a balanced approach to local and international values. This study provides valuable insights into how curriculum internationalization can enhance the primary education system in Hong Kong by harmonizing it with global educational standards while safeguarding cultural and regional identity.

8.1.1 Summary of Research Aims, Context, and Methods

This study aims to examine the process of educational internationalization in two primary schools in Hong Kong, one local (School X) and one international (School Y). Through a comparative approach, the study seeks to uncover the motivations behind schools' efforts to promote curriculum internationalization, explore how these efforts are reflected in new reforms, and assess the implications for school development. Specifically, it examines factors such as schools' missions, leadership commitment, funding allocation, teacher backgrounds, curriculum design, professional training, and the level of governmental support. The findings suggest that the successful promotion of educational internationalization is tied to how schools align with broader education narratives. As Knight (1997) outlined, institutions adopt different approaches to

achieve internationalization—whether through activities, competencies, values, or processes—and these frameworks help contextualize the case study findings.

The research focuses on three central questions:

1. What are the motivations driving local primary schools to pursue educational curriculum internationalization?
2. How are these schools' curriculum reforms aligned with international narratives, including the adoption of new teaching methods and ideas?
3. Has the integration of international elements strengthened primary education in these schools, aligning with global reform efforts?

While intercultural education is well-studied in higher education, research on the internationalization of primary education, particularly in curriculum reform, remains limited. This study addresses this gap by examining the processes and challenges of internationalizing primary school curricula in two schools, offering insights into an evolving aspect of Hong Kong's education system.

8.1.2 Summary of Main Findings

This research addressed three key questions, with the findings and discussions presented in detail across Chapters 5, 6 and 7. These chapters collectively generate a set of refined insights, in line with the principles of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 2017), which provided a framework for interpreting the emerging categories. The findings revealed that the process of curriculum internationalization within Hong Kong's primary schools remains an evolving and context-sensitive endeavor, shaped by a mix of school-specific strategies, teacher perspectives, and curricular adaptations unique to each institution.

The following three core insights summarize the study's main findings. First, curriculum internationalization in Hong Kong's primary schools is developing as a nuanced, gradual shift marked by a diverse array of school-led initiatives, which are both responsive to educational trends and rooted in local cultural values. Second, the

implementation paths of curriculum internationalization vary considerably among participating schools, each choosing strategies that best align with their institutional identity, student demographics, and educational objectives. Lastly, the envisioned structure of an internationally oriented curriculum—supported by the input of teachers and school leaders—emphasizes a balance between international educational standards and the distinctive requirements of the Hong Kong primary education context, demonstrating both a rigorous and adaptable approach to curriculum reform.

Research Question One:

What aspects contribute to the motivation of local primary schools in Hong Kong to pursue curriculum internationalization?

This study began by investigating the motivations behind educational curriculum internationalization in two Hong Kong primary schools. The analysis was structured around external factors—such as cultural shifts, policy pressures, curriculum modernization needs, teacher support, and resource availability—and internal factors, including student demographics, faculty perspectives, school mission and vision, material and technological resources, and institutional challenges. These factors collectively framed the necessity and feasibility of integrating internationalized elements into the local curriculum, offering preliminary themes that mapped each school's readiness and motivation for internationalization, blending trends with local educational needs.

The pre-interview data with teachers and administrators, encompassing discussions on policy interpretation, teaching practices, and administrative support, were corroborated by document analysis findings from Chapters 5 and 6. This alignment provided a rich foundation of evidence, illustrating distinct motivational themes that influenced each school's approach to curriculum internationalization. Notably, some themes presented interpretive and contested views, such as balancing local academic standards with

broader competencies, reevaluating traditional values in education, and the leadership's influence on curriculum direction. Other themes were more universally acknowledged, highlighting areas like the need for parent and community support, the constraints of an exam-focused education system, evolving teacher competencies, the overcrowded curriculum structure, and limited access to international resources.

Additional themes—such as the drive for competitiveness, teaching innovation, adaptation to diverse student needs, and alignment with broader standards—emerged, reflecting the breadth of motivations, both explicit and implicit, driving curriculum reform in the studied schools. These motivations encompass both external pressures to conform to educational trends and an internal drive to enhance student outcomes and school prestige. Nonetheless, these pursuits are tempered by practical limitations, including administrative structures, societal expectations, and curriculum constraints.

The findings revealed that each school follows a distinct path in internationalization, shaped by leadership priorities and institutional objectives. Schools appear to align with one of several approaches: a competency-oriented model, an innovation-driven framework, or a community-centered strategy. These variations highlight the distinct motivations and strategic adjustments each school makes to navigate the complex landscape of curriculum internationalization in Hong Kong's primary education system.

Research Question Two:

How has curriculum reform in these schools engaged with international design narratives, including encouraging new teacher agency and philosophies?

This study explored how curriculum reforms in two primary schools in Hong Kong align with educational narratives, with a particular focus on the integration of international teaching methods, pedagogical frameworks, and innovative approaches.

Through the analysis of key reform documents, educational policies, and teacher feedback, the study sought to understand how these schools adapted trends to meet local needs while remaining grounded in Hong Kong's educational context.

The findings reveal that both schools, though differing in their approach to curriculum internationalization, incorporated various elements from international educational models. Recognized practices, such as student-centered learning, collaborative teaching methods, the use of technology in the classroom, and fostering competencies, were present in both schools' curricula. However, the extent and way these practices were adopted varied according to each school's leadership philosophy, teaching resources, and institutional priorities.

For example, School X focused on innovation in teaching by implementing blended learning models and digital tools to promote personalized learning paths, aligning with trends toward technological integration and individualized instruction. In contrast, School Y focused on project-based learning and inquiry-driven methods to foster critical thinking and problem-solving abilities, aligning with international trends that emphasize 21st-century skills and active learning.

Both schools also engaged with international pedagogical trends, including inquiry-based learning, interdisciplinary approaches, and the development of emotional intelligence through social and emotional learning (SEL) frameworks. While the schools exhibited alignment with international narratives in their curriculum reforms, several contextual factors influenced the degree of adoption. These included pressures from standardized testing systems, local policy constraints, teacher preparedness, and parental expectations. Furthermore, the challenge of balancing local educational values with external standards was evident, with both schools navigating this tension through strategic reforms that blended international practices with the preservation of local educational identities. Furthermore, the challenge of balancing local educational values

with external standards was evident, with both schools navigating this tension through strategic reforms that blended international practices with the preservation of local educational identities.

Research Question Three:

How has this reform connected with international narratives to strengthen primary education in these Hong Kong schools?

This study examined whether the integration of international elements within the curricula of two Hong Kong primary schools has contributed to strengthening their primary education systems in alignment with educational reform efforts. Through an investigation of the adoption of international teaching methodologies, curricular frameworks, and innovative pedagogical strategies, this research aimed to assess the impact of these elements on educational outcomes and their alignment with broader trends in primary education.

The findings suggest that the integration of international elements has positively influenced primary education in both schools, enhancing teaching quality and student learning experiences, while supporting alignment with reform trends. Specifically, the adoption of these educational practices has fostered a more student-centered, inquiry-based learning environment—characteristics that are consistent with movements emphasizing critical thinking, creativity, and lifelong learning.

These competencies include cross-cultural understanding, communication, and collaboration. At School X, this focus is reflected in the integration of personalized learning and technology, which allows students to engage with diverse content and develop skills to navigate a technology-driven world. At School Y, the incorporation of project-based learning and interdisciplinary approaches enables students to work

collaboratively on real-world issues, mirroring educational reform initiatives that stress problem-solving and collaboration.

Furthermore, the incorporation of international elements has resulted in a stronger focus on 21st-century skills, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and adaptability. Both schools have made curricular changes to foster these skills. School X has implemented blended learning to offer flexible, individualized learning experiences, while School Y's inquiry-driven methods encourage active learning and student autonomy. However, the degree to which these international elements have strengthened primary education in these schools is also influenced by the local context in which they are applied. Factors such as teacher training, institutional support, and the unique educational environment are crucial in determining the effectiveness of these reforms. Issues such as the need for further teacher professional development, aligning local assessments with international standards, and overcoming resistance to change within the school community remain barriers to full implementation.

In conclusion, the integration of international elements has certainly contributed to strengthening primary education in both schools, aligning them with educational reform efforts. Nevertheless, the full impact of these reforms will depend on sustained support, continuous adaptation, and a more context-sensitive approach to incorporating international elements in ways that respect local educational values and needs.

8.2 Implications for Further Research

This thesis has shown that the growth and widespread adoption of educational internationalization in Hong Kong reflect a pressing need for an education system that aligns with broader demands. The rapid expansion of international curricula is driven by both pull factors, such as the attractiveness of English and foreign language programs that draw families to international schools, and push factors, including the

challenges posed by declining public education quality and fierce competition for admission to prestigious schools. These dynamics compel families to explore alternatives beyond the traditional public system. As Knight (1994) suggests, sustainable internationalization must become embedded within a school's culture, policies, and organizational processes, ensuring that it is treated as a long-term strategy rather than a passing trend.

8.2.1 Role of Leadership and Administrative Support

While administrative leadership is essential for fostering educational internationalization, Raby (2007) emphasizes that a top-down approach alone does not ensure success. Teachers, as the primary implementers of internationalized curricula, play a vital role. However, the teachers in this study reported a significant gap between the support they desire and the support they perceive they receive.

This finding highlights the crucial role of institutional support and policy changes in empowering teachers. Future research should investigate the role of school leadership, particularly principals, in advancing educational internationalization in primary education throughout the Asia-Pacific region. Investigating how principals shape school culture and coordinate policy efforts would provide insights into effective leadership models that support long-term internationalization.

8.2.2 Teachers as Key Agents of Internationalization

Teachers are not only responsible for delivering internationalized content but also serve as advocates for these initiatives within their institutions. They are well-positioned to assess whether their school boards actively support internationalization efforts. Survey findings from this study indicate that teachers acknowledge the importance of offering students a broader perspective, yet they require more tangible administrative support to achieve this goal effectively.

Empowering teachers through professional development and collaborative networks will enhance their ability to integrate internationalization into daily classroom practices. Furthermore, schools must foster an environment where teachers feel encouraged to participate in curriculum innovation and cross-cultural collaboration, reinforcing their role as drivers of internationalization.

8.2.3 Curriculum Design and Cross-Cultural Collaboration

Developing effective internationalized curricula requires continuous review of best practices to ensure alignment with current trends and the needs of learners. As Martell (2007) suggests, curriculum developers must implement strategies that equip students with the skills and competencies necessary for international career opportunities. Integrating internationalization into school programs, as highlighted by Babst et al. (2006), involves more than just adopting foreign content; it requires careful coordination between cultural sensitivity, institutional support, and policy alignment.

In Hong Kong, one of the most pressing challenges in curriculum development is integrating Chinese and Western teaching approaches. Successful cooperative teaching between local and foreign teachers demands not only professional development but also a supportive environment that fosters mutual respect and collaboration. Schools must implement policies that encourage cultural exchange while allowing teachers the flexibility to innovate in the classroom.

8.2.4 Balancing Internationalization with Local Identity

A critical aspect of educational internationalization is the challenge of balancing external influences with the preservation of local culture and traditions. Hong Kong's unique cultural heritage and identity require schools to carefully design curricula that reflect both external perspectives and local values. Integrating courses on local history, language, and cultural practices into international programs can create a more holistic learning experience that nurtures students' appreciation of their heritage.

By providing a learning environment where students can explore international issues while developing a sense of local pride, schools can ensure that graduates are prepared for worldwide engagement without losing their cultural identity. This balance is essential for Hong Kong's education system to foster competent citizens with strong local roots.

The success of educational internationalization in Hong Kong depends on multiple factors: responsive leadership, active teacher participation, and innovative curriculum development. Schools must provide teachers with the resources and support necessary to implement international curricula effectively. In parallel, maintaining a balance between international engagement and local identity will be crucial to preserving Hong Kong's cultural heritage while meeting educational standards.

Future research should further investigate the roles of leadership, teacher collaboration, and policy coordination in advancing educational internationalization. Additionally, studies could explore how schools can develop models of cooperative teaching between local and foreign educators that foster meaningful cross-cultural exchange. These efforts will contribute to refining internationalization practices in ways that both promote educational excellence and safeguard Hong Kong's unique cultural identity.

8.3 Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations: ones related to time constraints, sample size, sampling methods, and demographic convenience. These limitations are beyond the control of the researcher but may impact the study.

8.3.1 Limitations Related to Schools

This study focuses on two types of schools in Hong Kong: private schools and international schools. Although these two types represent a small segment of primary education in Hong Kong, they are key contributors to driving the internationalization of primary education and curriculum. Due to historical and cultural factors, there are notable differences in the systems and curricula of primary education in Hong Kong. Consequently, this study does not cover other primary education sectors for the same age group and excludes them from this research.

The establishment of international schools in Hong Kong is relatively complex. These schools can be set up by various countries and regions, as well as by local educational institutions. The international curricula they offer are diverse. This study focuses primarily on international schools established by local educational institutions that adopt the International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum as a point of reference for exploring educational internationalization. Therefore, the findings do not represent all international schools in Hong Kong.

Another complex factor is that some private primary schools have established their own ‘international sections and classes’, independently choosing and designing international curricula. Their explicit goal is to facilitate studying abroad and support applications to international schools. The admission and enrollment procedures for these international sections and classes are handled separately from those for regular students at the same school. Since there are very few private schools that have established international sections and classes, this study focuses on exploring the process of educational internationalization within this small subset of schools as an exploratory approach.

In summary, while this research provides insights into the internationalization of education in a select group of private and international schools in Hong Kong, it does

not claim to generalize to the entire primary education system. The diversity and complexity of international schools and private schools with international sections highlight the varied approaches and challenges in implementing educational internationalization.

8.3.2 Limitations Related to Sampling Methods

Firstly, the research was conducted within a limited timeframe. The limited time frame restricted the researcher's ability to complete the study in a more comprehensive manner. Secondly, the study has a small sample size, which limits the breadth of the findings. The goal was to recruit 18 participants from two schools in Hong Kong, which limits the ability to generalize the findings to the broader population. From a methodological perspective, this is a common limitation in qualitative research. Thirdly, participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure they met the study's criteria, which may introduce selection bias. Fourthly, the sample size and demographics further limit the generalizability of the results.

Given that the internationalization of primary education and curriculum internationalization are relatively rare on a broad scale, providing insightful data that can inform practice is more valuable than generalizing for empirical research on the internationalization of primary education and curriculum at this stage. The methods employed in this study aim to maximize the strengths in addressing the research questions while acknowledging their weaknesses. The study is limited to these two schools in Hong Kong.

8.3.3 Limitations Related to the Researcher

One limitation of this study is the potential influence of the researcher's personal background. As someone educated within the Asian education system, the researcher may have a different understanding of education that could affect data collection and analysis. Additionally, the researcher's background might influence participants'

responses during data collection, such as in interviews and observations, potentially leading to social desirability bias. Throughout the data collection process, the researcher remained mindful of these issues and made efforts to ensure the study's validity. Triangulation in data collection and analysis helped minimize bias, thereby enhancing the study's validity and reliability.

Another limitation is the simultaneous data collection from schools at different stages of development in promoting educational and curriculum internationalization. This disparity makes it challenging to gather comparable data on educational and curriculum internationalization from both schools. For instance, a local private school may adopt IB curriculum modules to design its own curriculum without obtaining international curriculum accreditation, whereas an international school may fully implement the IB curriculum system. The findings offer valuable insights and potential avenues for further research. By examining the different approaches of local private schools and international schools in curriculum internationalization, this study offers useful references for other regions and schools exploring educational internationalization.

8.4 Contribution to Knowledge and Suggestions for Future Research

This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the internationalization of primary education in Hong Kong from both theoretical and practical standpoints.

8.4.1 Theoretical Contribution

From a theoretical standpoint, this study is among the few data-driven investigations into the internationalization of primary education in Hong Kong. By exploring teachers' perceptions of educational and curriculum internationalization, as well as the various methods schools employ to promote it, this research offers valuable insights into the current landscape of primary education internationalization in Hong Kong.

This study deepens the understanding of primary education internationalization, especially in the Asia-Pacific region, and bridges the gap between theoretical and descriptive analyses and empirical research.

This study adds to the literature by focusing on the practical efforts of schools in advancing educational internationalization. This is especially significant in the context of localizing international educational practices, thereby enriching the knowledge and experience in this field. By doing so, it provides a nuanced understanding of how internationalization is implemented at the grassroots level, which is often underrepresented in the literature. Specifically, this research extends globalization theory (Marginson, 2013) by demonstrating how local primary schools adapt global educational trends to enhance competitiveness, as evidenced by case studies of X Local School and Y International School (see Chapter 6). It also advances the marketization of education framework (Knight, 2006) by revealing how market-driven strategies, such as tuition fee models and teacher recruitment, shape curriculum internationalization in a non-Western context, offering a novel perspective previously underexplored in the literature. Furthermore, this research offers a methodological pathway for future studies by applying internationalization theories to a primary school context in Hong Kong, providing a framework that other researchers can adapt to investigate curriculum internationalization across diverse regions, such as mainland China, Japan, Korea, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and even Chile, Argentina, or Brazil. This approach not only contributes to the theoretical discourse but also serves as a transferable model, enabling scholars to explore how global educational trends intersect with local practices in varied educational landscapes, thus broadening the scope and applicability of internationalization research.

Additionally, this study aligns with the ongoing educational reforms in Hong Kong, highlighting the integration of key educational concepts from international curricula into the local education system. This alignment is especially important given the

broader framework of international narratives that influence educational policies and practices in Hong Kong. By integrating empirical data from teacher interviews with these theoretical lenses, this study provides a new contribution by illustrating how intercultural competence and teacher agency—key constructs in intercultural education theory (De Wit & Hunter, 2015)—are practically enacted in primary settings, thus refining theoretical models with context-specific insights.

Overall, this study bridges the gap between theoretical frameworks and practical implementation in the field of educational internationalization. It provides empirical data that can inform policymakers and practitioners about effective strategies for integrating international education within the local context. This dual focus on theoretical contribution and practical application makes the research particularly valuable for advancing the understanding and implementation of primary education internationalization, both in Hong Kong and beyond, with a distinct contribution that enhances theoretical precision and empirical grounding in the field.

8.4.2 Policies and Education System

The recommendations of this study are designed for practical application by primary education teachers, focusing on strategies for educational and curriculum internationalization from a broad perspective. These recommendations also provide a summary of policies and the education system:

Firstly, a well-designed institutional framework can clarify roles and responsibilities, thereby enhancing the efficiency of internationalization efforts. The study found that in School X, the involvement of foreign teachers in the International Department was low, leading to minimal participation in curriculum design and consequently lower efficiency in advancing educational and curriculum internationalization. In contrast, School Y has promoted collaborative teaching between Western and Chinese teachers for many years, gaining substantial experience. However, there remains a need for

greater collaboration in joint curriculum design and participation. To address this, schools should establish clear policies and structures that facilitate active involvement from both local and foreign teachers in all stages of curriculum development. This includes establishing committees or working groups with representatives from diverse backgrounds to ensure that various perspectives are incorporated into the curriculum. Additionally, regular meetings and feedback sessions can help align the goals and expectations of all stakeholders involved.

Secondly, encouraging teachers to actively participate in curriculum design and innovation is crucial for benefiting students. Teachers gain knowledge and perspectives by integrating a broader view into the curriculum (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Changing or redesigning curricula requires time and effort and should not be done impulsively. Teachers can create checklists for curriculum internationalization to aid in transforming courses, curricula, and learning outcomes according to best practices. These checklists may include internationalized learning objectives, opportunities for cross-cultural communication, and discussions on international issues to ensure the curriculum content is appropriately internationalized.

Thirdly, providing development opportunities for teachers through lectures, themes, and assignments available in existing resources can help identify and manage the integration of internationalized content into the curriculum. Research suggests that teachers must be equipped to teach in diverse classrooms and actively participate in professional development and diversity training (Keith & Van Belle, 2014; Knight, 2015). Introducing new teaching methods in the classroom can initiate professional development activities aimed at creating new models, courses, and curricula (Quezada et al., 2016). Developing an internationalization strategic plan can assist teachers in expanding the curriculum to target areas and viewing the curriculum from a broader perspective. Such training should cover intercultural communication skills, current

educational trends, and international curriculum standards to ensure that teachers have the essential knowledge and skills for effective curriculum development.

These recommendations offer a comprehensive overview of the necessary policies and educational system reforms required to support curriculum development. By implementing these strategies, schools can improve the quality of education and expand students' perspectives.

8.4.3 Curriculum Reform

In the context of Hong Kong's ongoing curriculum reform aimed at enhancing educational quality and fostering comprehensive student development, both X Local School and Y International School have adopted distinct strategies.

X Local School has established an International Department that integrates select modules of international curricula while also designing unique school-based curricula tailored to local needs. However, despite these efforts, X Local School has not fully achieved comprehensive internationalization in its educational offerings, particularly in terms of depth and breadth. To address these limitations and enhance curriculum internationalization at X Local School, several recommendations are proposed:

1. **Expand International Curricula:** X Local School should increase the depth and breadth of its international curricula by introducing more comprehensive modules, such as those aligned with the International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum. This could involve interdisciplinary subjects like international history, cross-cultural studies, and intercultural communication, enriching students' broader perspectives.

2. **Increase Involvement of Foreign Teachers:** It is essential to enhance the participation of foreign teachers within the International Department. Encouraging their active involvement in curriculum design, teaching, and extracurricular activities will expose students to diverse cultures and innovative teaching methodologies.

3. **Foster a Multicultural Learning Environment:** Creating a multicultural learning environment through initiatives such as international cultural weeks, guest lectures by international experts, and student exchange programs will further enrich students' understanding and appreciation of different cultures.

4. Enhance Training for Local Teachers: Offering internationalization training and professional development opportunities for local teachers is essential. Collaborating with international educational institutions, establishing teacher exchange programs, and organizing joint training initiatives will equip local teachers with the expertise and understanding needed for effective international teaching practices.

5. Establish International Partnerships: Forming international partnerships with international schools or educational institutions can facilitate curriculum sharing, teacher training, and student exchange programs. This collaborative approach will integrate international best practices, providing students with enhanced opportunities for international learning experiences while maintaining a strong connection to local cultural and societal realities.

Conversely, Y International School has fully adopted the IB curriculum system and excels in educational and curricular internationalization. However, there remains room for improvement in refining curriculum design to better integrate IB standards with Hong Kong's local characteristics. Enhancing collaborative course design involving both Western and Chinese teachers can effectively enrich the curriculum content, ensuring alignment with international educational standards while closely reflecting Hong Kong's cultural and social contexts.

8.4.4 Teacher Education

From the perspective of teachers, this study can inspire educational practitioners to reconsider the concepts of educational internationalization and curriculum internationalization. The research findings indicate that most teachers maintain optimistic attitudes toward their schools' efforts in promoting these initiatives. However, the study also underscores the necessity of enhancing teacher involvement in these internationalization efforts.

To effectively support the internationalization of the curriculum, several recommendations emerge from this study:

1. Deepen Understanding of International Learning Materials: Faculty is advised to possess a deep understanding of instructional materials and resources that foster

international learning (Manns, 2014). This involves providing teachers with the expertise and resources required to incorporate international perspectives into their teaching practices.

2. Empower Teachers in Curriculum Development: Empowering teachers with decision-making authority in curriculum content selection and development is important (De Witt & Hunter, 2015). Involving teachers in curriculum design ensures that the content reflects their expertise, teaching styles, and the unique needs of their students.

3. Provide Continuous Professional Development: Schools should offer continuous professional development opportunities focused on international education and curriculum development (Keith & Van Belle, 2014). This could involve workshops, seminars, and training courses that provide teachers with the expertise and tools needed to effectively incorporate an international perspective into their teaching.

4. Encourage Collaborative Curriculum Design: Creating an environment that fosters collaborative curriculum design among teachers—especially between local and international educators—is seen as essential (Quezada et al., 2016). Such collaboration enriches the curriculum by incorporating diverse viewpoints and cultural perspectives, thereby enhancing the educational experience for students.

5. Foster Multicultural Learning Environments: Schools would benefit from cultivating multicultural learning environments by organizing cultural activities, inviting guest speakers from diverse backgrounds, and facilitating intercultural exchanges among students (Knight, 2015).

By implementing these recommendations, schools can empower teachers to take a central role in advancing educational and curriculum internationalization. While this study addresses the perspectives of school leaders and teachers, it does not include the viewpoints of students. Further empirical research is recommended to explore diverse perspectives on educational internationalization and curriculum internationalization and to investigate the effectiveness of existing curricula in fostering students' abilities and attitudes toward these initiatives.

8.5 Final Comments

The outbreak of COVID-19 in 2019 posed unparalleled challenges to humanity, leading to global economic disruptions, the rise of protectionist trade measures, and the deepening of pre-existing social inequalities. Nationalism became more prominent,

leading to trends of deglobalization and deinternationalization. However, at the same time, the limitations of nation-states in dealing with the pandemic highlighted the necessity of global cooperation (Bieber, 2022).

After the 2019 Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill Movement, Hong Kong's political atmosphere and social sentiments underwent profound changes, exerting extensive and far-reaching impacts on educational development. This political movement not only intensified social divisions and political tensions but also attracted global attention and sparked discussions. In this context, forecasting the trajectory of education in Hong Kong in the post-pandemic era involves both significant challenges and promising opportunities.

Firstly, the political tensions in society may influence curriculum design and teaching content in schools. Hong Kong's education system is likely to encounter growing challenges stemming from political and social dynamics, including the need to balance education on democracy, the rule of law, and civic awareness with an emphasis on patriotic education to navigate the diverse perspectives and ideological divides within society.

Secondly, the mass migration of Hong Kong's middle class overseas has led to an increasing gap in school enrollment. This demographic and economic uncertainty may put additional pressure on education funding, affecting resource allocation and the quality of education. Combined with the economic downturn in the post-pandemic era, it is reasonable to infer that the global pandemic will have a profound and lasting impact on the modern world order (Bieber, 2022). Some scholars argue that under unprecedented circumstances like COVID-19, the conventional lofty and universal ideals often emphasized in global citizenship education fail to effectively address pressing global issues (Estelles & Fischman, 2020).

Nevertheless, globalization and internationalization of education remain crucial directions for Hong Kong's educational development. Despite the challenges posed by nationalism and deglobalization, the importance of international cooperation and cultural exchange cannot be overlooked. The internationalization of education provides a platform to connect with other regions of the world, fostering students' perspectives and intercultural understanding. By introducing international curricula and enhancing international cooperation, Hong Kong's education system has the potential to contribute significantly to creating a safer, more equitable, and inclusive world in the post-pandemic era.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Key Discussion Topics



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

Faculty of Education and Social Work

**Associate Professor
David Hirsh**

**Education Building A35
The University of Sydney
NSW 2006 AUSTRALIA
Telephone: +61 2 9351 6417
Fax: +61 2 9351 2606
Email: david.hirsh@sydney.edu.au**

Interview Outline

Research questions:

1. Reasons for the curriculum internationalization of two school's education
2. Challenges of curriculum internationalizing two school's education
3. Curriculum Design in internationalizing two school education
4. Teacher international background in internationalizing two school education
5. Teacher teaching philosophy in internationalizing two school education
6. Explore the difference amongst international curriculum practices from two primary school
7. Method of improving the Hong Kong curriculum internationalization of local primary school education

Interview questions:

1. How long have you taught the X or Y course Practical Activities at this school?
2. What does education internationalization mean to you?
3. What does the term education and curriculum internationalization mean to you?

Appendix A: (Continued)

4. What do you think of school education and curriculum internationalization as the biggest challenge?
5. How does the school's vision relate to education and curriculum internationalization?
6. What do you think the improved aspects of internationalization curriculum?
7. How do you view curriculum internationalization and curriculum reform?
8. How do you demonstrate education and curriculum internationalization in your teaching? Give examples.
9. What measures does your school take to improve the quality of education and curriculum internationalization teaching?
10. What can students learn from the class you teach/the activity you supervise about education and curriculum internationalization?
11. What institutions and departments have your school established for the education internationalization?
12. What informal curriculum activities does the school implement to develop students' education and curriculum internationalization capabilities?
13. What informal curriculum activities does the school implement to develop teacher internationalization teaching capabilities?
14. What kind of difficulties do you have in terms of teaching education and curriculum internationalization and the reasons?
15. Do you have suggestions for teaching education and curriculum internationalization in the future?

Appendix B: Observation Protocol for Curriculum Analysis



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

Faculty of Education and Social Work

Associate Professor
David Hirsh

Education Building A35
The University of Sydney
NSW 2006 AUSTRALIA
Telephone: +61 2 9351 6417
Fax: +61 2 9351 2606
Email: david.hirsh@sydney.edu.au

Observation Protocol Form: Formal and Informal Curriculum

Classroom Observation Notes <i>Formal Curriculum</i>			
Date / Time	Activity / Class	Reflections (Focus particularly on issues related to Internationalization of curriculum, label each with detail)	Notes

Appendix B: (Continued)

School: <i>Informal Curriculum</i>				
Date / Time	Event:	Type:	Site:	Participants/Class:
Reflections (Focus particularly on issues related to Internationalization of curriculum, label each with detail)			Notes	

Appendix C: Participant Information Statement



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

Faculty of Education and Social Work

Associate Professor
David Hirsh

Education Building A35
The University of Sydney
NSW 2006 AUSTRALIA
Telephone: +61 2 9351 6417
Fax: +61 2 9351 2606
Email: david.hirsh@sydney.edu.au

Participant Information Statement

Title: Internationalization of Hong Kong's Primary Education in the Intercultural Teaching Context

(1) What is this research about?

This research aims to explore the current state and impact of the internationalization of Hong Kong's primary education. It focuses on teachers' practices and challenges within an intercultural teaching context. The study will analyze the drivers of educational internationalization and its influence on educational reforms in a cross-cultural environment.

(2) Who is conducting this research?

This research is being conducted by Mr. Yi Tang, a PhD candidate at The University of Sydney, under the supervision of Associate Professor David Hirsh.

(3) What does participation involve?

If you agree to participate in this research, you will:

- Attend a one-time interview to discuss your experiences and perspectives on educational internationalization, including any challenges and opportunities you have encountered.
- The interview may be audio-recorded (with your consent) and will be anonymized to ensure your identity remains confidential.

Appendix C: (Continued)

(4) How much time will the research take?

The interview will take approximately 45 minutes, and the specific time can be arranged to suit your schedule.

(5) Can I withdraw from this research?

Participation in this research is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any time without providing a reason, and your withdrawal will not have any consequences.

(6) Will anyone know the results of the research?

Your participation will remain strictly confidential. Only the researcher and the supervisor will have access to the data. The findings may be published in academic formats, but no personally identifiable information will be included.

(7) Will I benefit from participating in this research?

Participating in this research gives you an opportunity to reflect on your teaching practices and discuss the challenges and opportunities related to educational internationalization. This may provide insights that could be beneficial for your future teaching.

(8) Can I discuss this research with others?

Yes, you are free to discuss this research with anyone you choose.

(9) How can I get more information?

If you would like further information, please contact:

- Mr. Yi Tang (PhD Candidate, The University of Sydney)
Email: ytan4989@uni.sydney.edu.au
Phone: +852 61062629 (Hong Kong)
- Associate Professor David Hirsh (Supervisor, The University of Sydney)
Email: david.hirsh@sydney.edu.au
Phone: +61 2 9351 6417 (Sydney)

(10) What if I have a complaint or concern?

If you have any concerns, complaints, or feedback about this research, you can contact the University of Sydney's Ethics Office:

- Phone: +61 2 9036 9161
- Email: human.ethics@sydney.edu.au

Appendix D: Participant Consent Form



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

Faculty of Education and Social Work

Associate Professor
David Hirsh

Education Building A35
The University of Sydney
NSW 2006 AUSTRALIA
Telephone: +61 2 9351 6417
Fax: +61 2 9351 2606
Email: david.hirsh@sydney.edu.au

Participant Consent Form

I, [PRINT NAME], agree to participate in the following research project:

Title: *Internationalization of Hong Kong's Primary School Education Curriculum in the Intercultural Teaching Context*

By signing this consent form, I confirm the following:

1. The details of the research project have been explained to me, and my questions have been answered satisfactorily.
2. I have read the Participant Information Statement and had the opportunity to discuss my participation with the researcher.
3. I understand that my participation is voluntary, and I am not under any obligation to participate.
4. I understand that my participation is confidential, and no information that could identify me will be disclosed.

Appendix D: (Continued)

5. I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time, and this will not affect my relationship with the researcher(s) or The University of Sydney.
6. I understand that I can stop the interview at any time, and any audio recordings will be erased, and the information I provided will not be included in the study.
7. I consent to:

Audio-recording: YES ☐ NO ☐

Receiving Feedback: YES ☐ NO ☐

If you answered YES to the “Receiving Feedback” question, please provide your details below:

Feedback Option

Address:

Email:

Signature:

Date:

Appendix E: Ethics approval by the University of Sydney



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

Research Integrity & Ethics Administration
HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 21 December 2022

Dr David Hirsh
School of Education and Social Work Research Operations; Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
Email: david.hirsh@sydney.edu.au

Dear David,

The University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) has considered your application.
I am pleased to inform you that after consideration of your response, your project has been approved.

Details of the approval are as follows:

Project No.: 2022/747
Project Title: Internationalization of Hong Kong Primary School Education Curriculum under the Intercultural Teaching Context
Authorised Personnel: Hirsh David; Allender Tim; Tang Yi;
Approval Period: 21/12/2022 – 21/12/2026
First Annual Report Due: 21/12/2023

Documents Approved:

Date Uploaded	Version Number	Document Name
15/12/2022	Version 1	Permission School 1
15/12/2022	Version 1	Permission School 2
08/11/2022	Version 2	PIS v2 clean
08/11/2022	Version 2	PCF v2 clean
08/11/2022	Version 2	Initial email to School v2 clean
11/09/2022	Version 1	Safety Protocol
11/09/2022	Version 1	Interview Schedule
11/09/2022	Version 1	Observation Protocol
29/09/2022	Version 1	Interview Questions v2 - Provided by researcher 20220928
29/09/2022	Version 1	Recruitment email for teachers - Provided by researcher 20220928
29/09/2022	Version 1	Responses to preliminary issues - Provided by researcher 20220928

Condition/s of Approval

- Research must be conducted according to the approved proposal.
- An annual progress report must be submitted to the Ethics Office on or before the anniversary of approval and on completion of the project.
- You must report as soon as practicable anything that might warrant review of ethical approval of the project including:
 - Serious or unexpected adverse events (which should be reported within 72 hours).
 - Unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.
- Any changes to the proposal must be approved prior to their implementation (except where an amendment is undertaken to eliminate *immediate* risk to participants).
- Personnel working on this project must be sufficiently qualified by education, training and experience for their role, or adequately supervised. Changes to personnel must be reported and approved.

Research Integrity & Ethics Administration
Research Portfolio
Level 3, F23 Administration Building
The University of Sydney
NSW 2006 Australia

T +61 2 9036 9161
E human.ethics@sydney.edu.au
W sydney.edu.au/ethics

ABN 15 211 513 464
CRICOS 00026A

Appendix E: (Continued)

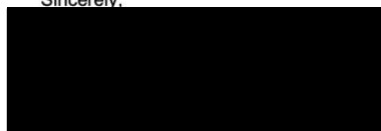


- Personnel must disclose any actual or potential conflicts of interest, including any financial or other interest or affiliation, as relevant to this project.
- Data and primary materials must be retained and stored in accordance with the relevant legislation and University guidelines.
- Ethics approval is dependent upon ongoing compliance of the research with the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research*, the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research*, applicable legal requirements, and with University policies, procedures and governance requirements.
- The Ethics Office may conduct audits on approved projects.
- The Chief Investigator has ultimate responsibility for the conduct of the research and is responsible for ensuring all others involved will conduct the research in accordance with the above.

This letter constitutes ethical approval only.

Please contact the Ethics Office should you require further information or clarification.

Sincerely,



Associate Professor Stephen Fuller
Chair
Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC 2)

The University of Sydney of Sydney HRECs are constituted and operate in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council's (NHMRC) [National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research \(2018\)](#) and the NHMRC's [Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research \(2018\)](#)