

Students' motivation in studying music: The Hong Kong context

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Abstract

Studying music in schools has not been regarded to be important for Hong Kong students and parents. Similar to many other countries and regions, music is marginalised in the school curriculum. However, facing the 21st century, the Hong Kong government regards arts education to be an important contribution to the creative industries. The motivation of students in learning music thus becomes more critical. This article reports data drawn from an international study which examined students' motivation to study music as compared to other school subjects across the school grades. A total of 4,495 students from 23 primary and 20 secondary schools participated in a survey. Results indicate a significant decline of competence beliefs and values ($p < .001$) and a significant increase of task difficulty for music and other school subjects across the school levels. Compared with Chinese, mathematics, visual arts, and physical education (P.E.), music was ranked rather low in terms of competence beliefs and values, and task difficulty. In addition, there is a trend towards many secondary students learning instruments outside schools. Results may be attributed to a range of factors including a utilitarian view of education held by parents and students and the overall business-oriented atmosphere of the society, in that people focus on financial success rather than a holistic human development.

Keywords

competence beliefs, expectancy-value theory, cross-cultural comparisons, motivation, music

education, school subjects, self-beliefs, task difficulty, values

The context for this article

This article reports data drawn from an international mapping exercise that involved eight different countries (Brazil, China, Finland, Hong Kong, Israel, Korea, Mexico, and the United States of America), which examined students' motivation to study music as compared to other school subjects (e.g., art, mother tongue language, physical education, mathematics, science). Readers should refer to the lead article in this series (McPherson & O'Neill, 2010), for a full explanation of the theoretical assumptions underpinning the study, reliability and validity of the questionnaire scales, and description of the methods used to gather and analyse data. Further information on the eight country analysis can be obtained by contacting the research team leader (McPherson) or, in the case of this article, the lead author.

The studies in this series draw on the expectancy-value theoretical framework (Eccles et al., 1983; Eccles, Wigfield, & Schiefele, 1998), to examine the competence beliefs, values, and perceptions of task difficulty of 24,143 students across the eight countries. Competence beliefs were defined as expectations for success or the belief about how well each student thought she or he could do in each subject or upcoming task. Subjective task values were conceptualised in terms of four major components: *attainment value* or importance, *intrinsic value* or interest, *utility value* or usefulness, and the *cost* of participating in the subject.

Four key issues in the overall eight country analysis as reported by McPherson and O'Neill (2010) were investigated: (a) whether competence beliefs and values declined across all eight countries; (b) whether perceptions of task difficulty increased across school levels; (c) differences in students' rating of competence beliefs, values, and task difficulty for music as compared to other school subjects; and (d) differences among boys and girls, and those students

who were or were not learning an instrument or voice (either in or outside of school).

Across the lead article and individual country analyses, a variety of multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) and mixed-design ANOVAs were used to examine students' cumulative mean ratings for each of the three motivation measures (competence beliefs, values, task difficulty). The within-subjects factor (school subjects) and between subjects factors and interaction effects for school level, gender, and music learning are reported for each country. Tukey tests were used for post hoc comparisons. Because of the large sample size, a statistical significance level of .001 was set in the lead article, but adjusted where necessary in individual country analyses.

Gary E. McPherson (research team leader)

Background

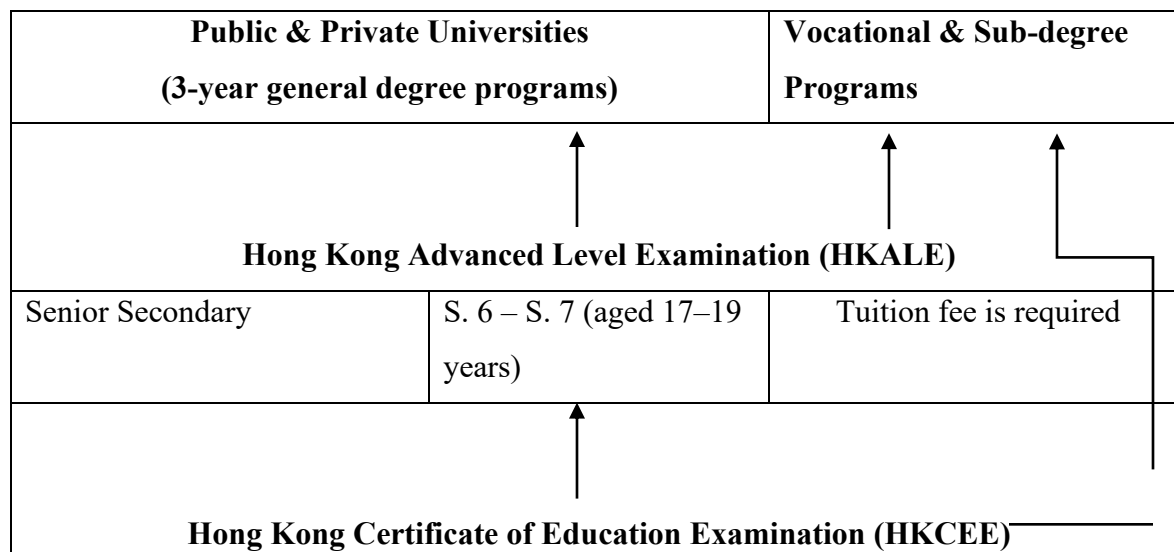
As it approached the 21st century, the Hong Kong government identified as one of its main initiatives that the city should become an international cultural metropolis (Culture & Heritage Commission, 2002). Arts education inside and outside schools, therefore, plays a key role in children's and adult's holistic development. As a Key Learning Area under the education reform (see Curriculum Development Council, 2002), arts education has become more valued by the public and schools. It is recognised by the Culture and Heritage Commission (2002) that arts education strengthens children's confidence and self-discipline, cultivates their creativity and respect for different views, and plays an important role in promoting cultural awareness. Despite this view, however, the commission admitted that there was an 'obvious gap in arts education beyond the junior secondary level' (Culture & Heritage Commission, 2002, p. 10). In part this gap may be attributed to an insufficient requirement in arts education for tertiary education entrance. The issues addressed in this report provide evidence that there are serious problems in

the Hong Kong system of education which does not place sufficient emphasis on arts education, and in which the arts are often considered a leisure activity rather than an area of the curriculum that can contribute to cognitive growth in the same way as other so called ‘academic’ subjects. In addition, Hong Kong arts curricula have traditionally been ill-equipped to adapt to the needs of students in the 21st century.

Current Education System of Hong Kong

Even today, the education system of Hong Kong maintains an influence of the British system before 1997. Primary schools encompass 6 years of study. After finishing the primary education, children are allocated to secondary schools for at least 3 years of compulsory and free education. Most students can continue their study until Secondary 5 (Year 11, aged 17 years) before sitting for the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE).

Approximately 20% of the top achieving candidates in this examination are enrolled into Secondary 6 and 7 in order to prepare for their tertiary entrance by sitting for the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination (HKALE). Secondary 5 and 7 graduates who are not able to gain entry into Hong Kong universities may pursue vocational and sub-degree programs or enter the labor market. Figure 1 summarizes the current Hong Kong education system.



Senior Secondary	S. 4 – S. 5 (aged 15–17 years)	Tuition fee is required
Junior Secondary	S. 1 – S. 3 (aged 12–15 years)	Compulsory & Free Education
Primary	P. 1 – P. 6 (aged 6–12 years)	
Kindergarten	K. 1 – K. 3 (aged 3–6 years)	Optional

Figure 1. Current Education System of Hong Kong (before 2012)

Music Curriculum before 2003

Music as a Cultural Subject in Schools

Music has been a mandatory subject from Primary 1 to Secondary 3 in Hong Kong. Before 2003, three music syllabi, one for the primary (Curriculum Development Committee, 1987a) and the others for the junior (Curriculum Development Committee, 1983) and senior secondary (Curriculum Development Committee, 1987b) levels were issued. Three basic activities, namely, singing, listening to both western and Chinese music, and music reading were identified, whilst creative music making, instrumental playing, and music and movement were categorised as additional activities that teachers are encouraged to incorporate into their teaching if sufficient time is available. The teaching and learning of music skills and knowledge was emphasised in each of these syllabi.

Together with visual arts and physical education, music is regarded as a ‘cultural subject’ (see Vong & Au, 2003) in contrast with languages, mathematics, and sciences, which are regarded as ‘academic subjects.’ The cultural subjects normally receive a minimum allocation of class time in both primary and secondary curricula, while English, Chinese, and mathematics

dominate the school curriculum. This reflects a general belief that academic subjects are useful and important for future academic and career development, while cultural subjects are ‘just’ for leisure. This belief is reinforced by the fact that under the Hong Kong government there is the ‘Leisure and Cultural Services Department,’ which aims to ‘enrich life by providing quality leisure and cultural services for all’ (see the website of Leisure and Cultural Services Department, 2009). Their ‘cultural services’ include providing activities related to all kinds of performing arts, visual arts, libraries, and museums, while their ‘leisure services’ include all sports activities and planting. In sum, together with sports, music and other arts are recognised by the Hong Kong public merely for leisure; they are considered less important and useful in life and career.

Music in Public Examinations

The lack of valuing of music and visual arts in Hong Kong schools is evidenced by the extremely low numbers of students who undertake these subjects for public examinations. For example, the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority reports for 2006, 2007, and 2008 provide current statistics that show an alarmingly low number of students completing examinations in music and the visual arts for both the HKCEE (Hong Kong Examination & Assessment Authority, 2006a, 2007a, 2008a) and the HKALE (Hong Kong Examination & Assessment Authority, 2006b, 2007b, 2008b). Table 1 shows the percentages of candidates taking music and visual arts in these 3 years.

Table 1

Percentages of candidates taking music and visual arts in Hong Kong public examinations

<i>Year</i>	<i>Music</i>		<i>Visual Arts</i>	
	HKCEE	HKALE	HKCEE	HKALE
2006	0.26%	0.047%	6%	0.54%
2007	0.34%	Not offered	7.56%	0.11%
2008	0.24%	Not offered	5.46%	0.75%

The percentages of candidates sitting for music and visual arts have been very limited. For visual arts, there were only 5 to 7 percent of candidates taking the HKCEE and less than one percent taking the HKALE in these 3 years. For music, there were less than 1 percent of the total candidates taking the HKCEE and HKAL. Due to the extremely small numbers of candidates, music examinations have been excluded from the HKALE since 2007. These figures demonstrate the stark reality of how few students participate in visual arts and music in the upper years of secondary school, and, as a result, the distressingly low number of secondary schools that offer these two subjects beyond Secondary 3.

Change of Education System in 21st Century

Based on a number of education reports commissioned by the Hong Kong Government, a large-scale education reform has been proceeding since 2000 in order to cater for the approximately one million students who are currently enrolled in Hong Kong schools, in addition to future generations of students. One of the major changes involves remodeling the secondary and tertiary systems in which the total number of years of the senior secondary will be decreased from 4 to 3 years (Education Commission, 2003). Conversely, general bachelor degree programs will expand from 3 to 4 years. In addition, a new public examination, to be called the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE), will substitute the existing two public examinations. Universities will then recruit students through this new examination. The first cohort of senior secondary (i.e., Secondary 4) started in September 2009 and they will enter the first HKDSE examination in 2012. These students will have to take four core subjects (i.e., Chinese language, English language, mathematics, and liberal studies), and two to three electives, with music being one of the electives available to students (see Figure 2).

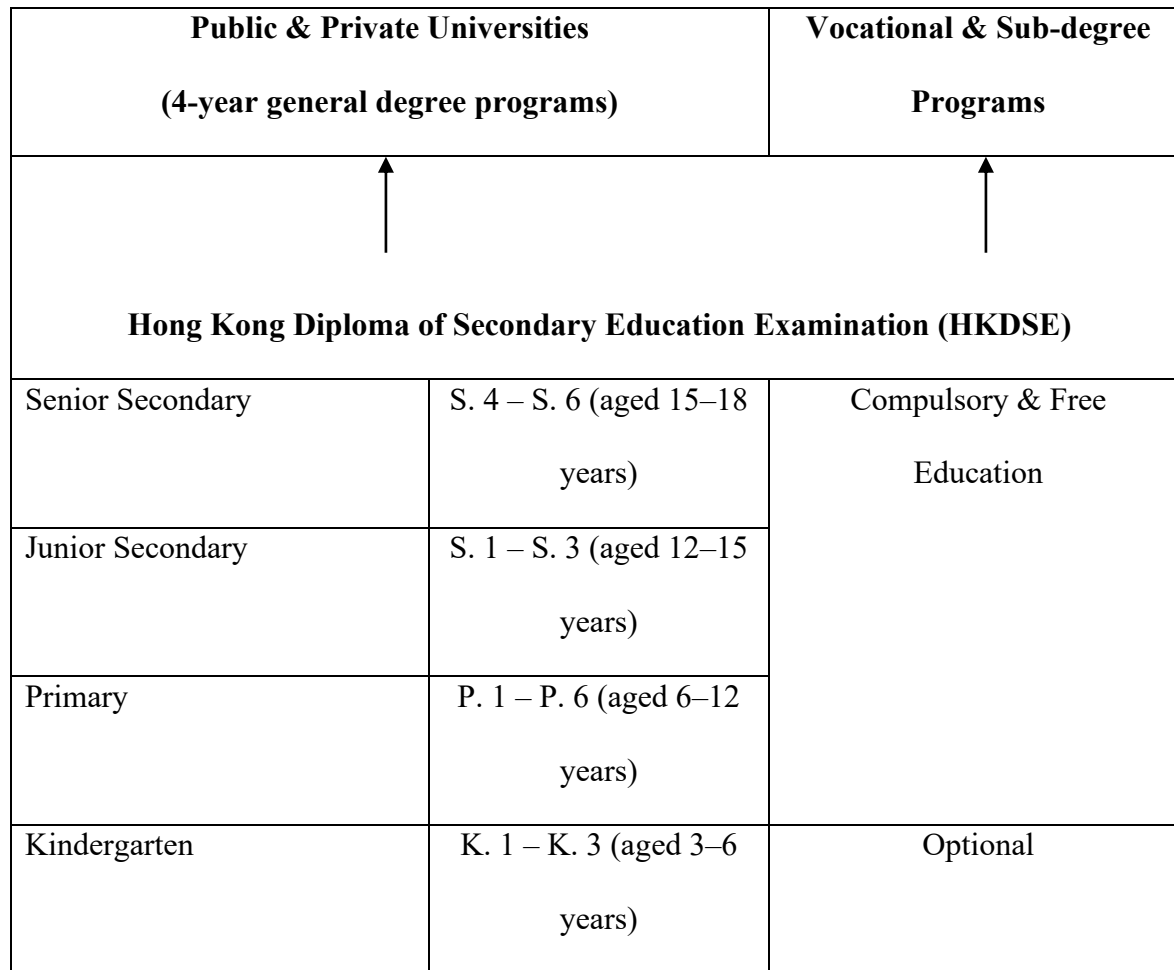


Figure 2. New Education System of Hong Kong

Music Curriculum Reform since 2003

A curriculum reform has been implemented in Hong Kong since 2003, in which music education is under the Arts Education Key Learning Area (KLA).¹ The main change in the reform is a paradigm shift from a content-based music curriculum to an experience-based curriculum. Instead of providing a list of mandated teaching contents, the curriculum merely states the aims of music education in schools and provide music targets for teachers' reference.

In addition, teaching and learning activities are suggested. As a result, a *Music Curriculum*

¹ Eight Key Learning Areas were identified in the school curriculum: Chinese Language Education, English Language Education, Mathematics Education, Personal, Social and Humanities Education, Science Education, Technology Education, Arts Education, and Physical Education.

Guide (Curriculum Development Council, 2003) was issued in 2003 which identifies four music targets:

1. developing creativity and imagination;
2. developing skills and processes;
3. cultivating critical response; and
4. understanding arts in context.

During the process of teaching and learning, students are encouraged to develop their musical skills and creativity through direct experience in musical activities, including composing, singing and instrumental playing, and listening with describing music in terms of musical context.

In order to develop students' musicianship, conceptualisation in music is another important issue that is advocated in the *Music Curriculum Guide* (Curriculum Development Council, 2003).

In facilitating students' learning in listening, performing, and composing, a number of specific music elements are identified: pitch, time value/rhythm, dynamics, tempo, timbre, texture, harmony, tonality, and formal structure (2003, p. 12). Music teachers are reminded to introduce these musical concepts to students so that students can employ what they have learnt in their music making and responding. Students are encouraged to engage in active learning tasks.

During the creative process, students encounter different problems, and problem solving skills are therefore nurtured when the teacher encourages the students to act independently by creating and verifying their own solutions to various musical challenges.

One of the foci of the curriculum reform was to develop nine 'generic skills' through the course of schooling (Curriculum Development Council, 2002). These generic skills included creativity, communication skills, critical thinking skills, collaborative skills, information technology skills, numeracy skills, problem solving skills, self-management skills, and study

skills (p. 43). It is suggested that arts education specifically helps students ‘to develop creativity and critical thinking, nurture aesthetic sensitivity, and build up cultural awareness and effective communication’ (p. 11). Additionally, formative and summative assessments are proposed to evaluate students’ development of these skills so that they can become confident and competent in solving problems in their daily life and work.

Music in HKDSE

The content of the music examination in the HKDSE has been revised according to the recent global trends of music education and assessment. Candidates will be asked to take part in four papers in the areas of listening, performing, composing, plus a free choice paper, selected from (a) advanced performing, (b) advanced composing, and (c) a written project. The major changes in rationale include a shift from ‘academic’ study to practical assessment. Candidates are encouraged to develop their musicianship and apply their knowledge in solving musical problems rather than memorising facts, as has too often been the case in previous examinations. Hence, school-based assessment in performance will be introduced to the examination so that students can be assessed by their school teachers, although systems of moderation will be organized by the Hong Kong Examination and Assessment Authority.

Community Music Education

It has been argued that there is a ‘pyramid’ of music education in Hong Kong (Hiebert, 1993). While all primary and junior secondary students are taking music as a compulsory subject in schools, there have, up until now, been very limited opportunities to study music in local universities. At present, a large number of students seek music tuition outside school. These include the Music Office, private music centres, the Junior School of the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts, and private tuition.

Learning musical instruments is valued as an important area of engagement by many parents since it may enhance students' profiles. It has been further advocated since the 1970s when the Music Office (now under the Leisure and Cultural Services Department) was founded by the Hong Kong Government to offer instrumental tuition with low fees. At present the Music Office offers about 800 tuition classes for approximately 5,000 students annually. In addition, it offers 18 instrumental and choral groups for all kinds of music performances (Music Office, 2008). Many of the current music practitioners in Hong Kong learned their instruments at the Music Office.

The Junior Music Program of the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts is a representative music program which offers instrumental/vocal/compositional training with relevant musicianship development and ensemble playing (Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts, 2009). Students from 5 to 16 years of age can apply for the program in order to receive a music training that enables them to continue their music study at the tertiary level.

Founded in 1969, the Hong Kong Children's Choir is one of the most representative music centres in Hong Kong. At present, the choir is one of the largest choirs in the world, with over 5,000 children receiving choral, dancing, and art and craft training organised by the choir (The Hong Kong Children's Choir, 2008). Every year this organisation selects the best singers to tour overseas and to participate in many official functions organised by the Hong Kong Government. Although the tuition fee is modest, it is difficult to enroll into the program due to keen competition.

Students' Motivation on Music Learning in Hong Kong

The motivation of students to learn music in formal music classes in Hong Kong has been studied in specific areas. Among these, motivation to compose music has been an important issue.

For example, Leung (2008a) found that among 582 Hong Kong primary students, female and instrumentalists possessed significantly higher levels of motivation for composing music.

However, after participating in a composing task, male students and non-instrumentalists were shown to significantly increase their motivation for composing. These results suggest that actual authentic experiences of composing are a key factor that affects the motivation and confidence of students to compose, and that when composing tasks are designed appropriately and are student-centred, even students with limited music background will become more motivated to create music.

Leung (2008b) studied factors affecting 606 Hong Kong secondary students' motivation changes in learning composing after participating in composing tasks. Results suggested that the teacher presentation, the nature of the composition tasks, and the degree of freedom in completing the task may affect motivational changes. In a related study on using technology in music teaching, Ho (2004) found that primary students displayed higher levels of motivation for learning music with the assistance of information technology than secondary students of either sex.

These studies provide very tentative indications that primary students in Hong Kong might be more motivated to learn music than secondary students and that key factors affecting students' learning include the nature of the learning task and the teacher's style of presentation.

Specific Issues addressed in the Hong Kong Study

After reviewing the Hong Kong educational system and recent issues as background, this section further expands the analysis of other related issues based on the data. We intend to explain the results with reference to the Hong Kong context and specific issues.

The questionnaire survey described in this article was drawn from a representative sample

of all Hong Kong schools in terms of school types and districts. After an analysis of all schools to determine appropriateness for their inclusion in the study, 20 secondary schools (16 aided, 2 government, and 2 private) and 23 primary schools (19 aided, 1 government, 1 direct subsidy, 1 private, 1 international) across all geographical locations within Hong Kong were approached and provided their permission to participate in the study. Two research assistants delivered the questionnaires to all schools in-person during their visit. A large proportion of Primary 6 students were guided by the research assistants throughout the responding process. All secondary students completed the questionnaires by themselves after a short briefing delivered by the research assistants.

Results

A total of 4,495 Primary 6, Secondary 3 (Year 9; aged 14–15) and Secondary 5 (Year 11; aged 16–17) students responded to the survey. Table 2 shows the demographic information of participants.

Table 2

Number (and Percentage) of Participants according to School Level, Gender and Music Learner

<i>School Level</i>	<i>Music Learner</i>				<i>Non-Music Learner</i>			
	<i>Female</i>		<i>Male</i>		<i>Female</i>		<i>Male</i>	
	<i>n</i>	(%)	<i>n</i>	(%)	<i>n</i>	(%)	<i>n</i>	(%)
Lower (P.6)	513	(11.40)	369	(8.20)	286	(6.35)	409	(9.09)
Middle (S.3)	432	(9.60)	186	(4.13)	746	(16.57)	521	(11.57)
Upper (S.5)	200	(4.44)	65	(1.44)	505	(11.22)	263	(5.84)
Total	1145	(25.47)	620	(13.79)	1537	(34.18)	1193	(26.53)

Mixed-design ANOVAs, were used to investigate students' cumulative mean ratings for the motivation measures. To correct for Type 1 error, each ANOVA was tested at the .001 level. As presented in Table 3, the Tukey procedure for pair-wise comparisons across school levels, show a significant decline of competence beliefs and values ($p < .001$) and a significant increase of task difficulty for music and other school subjects across the school levels ($p < .001$). The results suggest that primary students tended to regard music and other subjects as being more valuable and easier; and thus were more confident about their music learning. However, students in secondary levels regarded music as more difficult, and less valuable and useful in their lives, in addition to possessing lower competency beliefs.

Table 3

Means (Standard Deviations) and Univariate Effects for School Level (* $p < .001$)

School Level											
Subject	Motivation	Lower		Middle		Upper		d.f.	F	p	Tukey's B
		n	M (SD)	n	M (SD)	n	M (SD)				
Music	Competence	1577	3.48 (0.84)	1885	2.96 (0.83)	1033	2.84 (0.86)	2, 4483	139.860	.000*	L>M>H
	Values	1577	3.54 (0.86)	1885	2.98 (0.86)	1033	2.82 (0.92)	2, 4483	155.364	.000*	L>M>H
	Task Difficulty	1577	2.36 (1.04)	1885	2.79 (1.05)	1032	2.82 (1.01)	2, 4483	58.276	.000*	L<MH
Visual Art	Competence	1577	3.31 (0.85)	1885	2.88 (0.84)	1033	2.69 (0.90)	2, 4483	150.920	.000*	L>M>H
	Values	1577	3.52 (0.81)	1885	3.04 (0.89)	1033	2.86 (0.98)	2, 4483	177.197	.000*	L>M>H
	Task Difficulty	1577	2.36 (1.00)	1885	2.83 (0.99)	1032	3.05 (1.05)	2, 4482	140.412	.000*	L<M<H
P.E.	Competence	1577	3.62 (0.89)	1885	3.05 (0.93)	1033	3.05 (0.89)	2, 4483	136.734	.000*	L>MH
	Values	1577	3.92 (0.73)	1885	3.19 (0.86)	1033	3.09 (0.85)	2, 4483	326.468	.000*	L>M>H
	Task Difficulty	1577	1.98 (0.96)	1885	2.54 (1.04)	1032	2.49 (0.97)	2, 4482	107.843	.000*	L<MH
Chinese	Competence	1577	3.57 (0.71)	1885	3.12 (0.72)	1033	3.09 (0.74)	2, 4483	164.506	.000*	L>MH
	Values	1577	4.32 (0.59)	1885	3.84 (0.69)	1033	3.78 (0.72)	2, 4483	256.448	.000*	L>M>H
	Task Difficulty	1577	2.35 (0.92)	1885	2.98 (0.85)	1032	3.13 (0.85)	2, 4482	257.894	.000*	L<M<H
Mathematics	Competence	1577	3.32 (0.95)	1885	3.04 (0.94)	1033	2.96 (0.97)	2, 4483	24.111	.000*	L>M>H
	Values	1577	4.24 (0.64)	1885	3.91 (0.73)	1033	3.58 (0.88)	2, 4483	152.073	.000*	L>M>H
	Task Difficulty	1577	2.84 (1.17)	1885	3.18 (1.08)	1032	3.25 (1.09)	2, 4482	25.473	.000*	L<MH

Note. (*) The Tukey Test for post hoc multiple comparisons were used in order to locate the significant differences

between means and to control for Type 1 error across the pair-wise comparisons.

Compared with other “academic subjects” including Chinese and mathematics and ‘cultural subjects’ including visual arts and physical education, music was ranked quite low in terms of the three variables. Table 4 shows that students perceived music as a rather difficult subject, that they held low competence beliefs for music, and considered music to be of low value.

Table 4

Rank Order of Cumulative Means for Competence Beliefs, Values and Task Difficulty (1 = the highest; 5 = the lowest)

	<i>Music</i>	<i>Visual Art</i>	<i>Physical Education</i>	<i>Chinese</i>	<i>Mathematics</i>
<i>Motivation</i>					
Competence Beliefs	4	5	2	1	3
Values	5	4	3	1	2
Task Difficulty	4	3	5	2	1

Those music learners were asked to report whether they learned their instrument in school or outside school. Table 5 shows that half of the primary learners learnt their instruments in school, while more than half of junior secondary students and a majority (more than 80%) of senior secondary students learnt their instruments outside school.

Table 5

Percentage of students reporting where to learn their instrument

<i>Venue of Instrumental learning</i>	<i>Primary 6 (n=882)</i>	<i>Secondary 3 (n=618)</i>	<i>Secondary 5 (n=265)</i>
In school	50.4%	36.6%	14.0%
Outside school	32.4%	57.1%	81.1%
Both	17.2%	6.3%	4.9%

Discussion

The principal purpose of this article was to examine the relationship between Hong Kong students' motivation in music learning and the socio-cultural context. As a school subject, music has been marginalised in the school curriculum, with very limited provision before the 2003 curriculum reform. Prior to 2003, the general opinion throughout schools and the wider community was that music's main purpose is mainly for leisure. This may help explaining the result that students do not typically value music as a useful subject within their school education. This has resulted in very limited numbers of students undertaking music as an elective subject in public examinations. As a consequence, music has not, and currently is not, considered a subject

that should be included in senior students' learning profiles.

The perceived utilitarian value of music might be one of the major critical factors affecting Hong Kong students' motivation in learning music. A recent study reveals that there are five motivational factors affecting Hong Kong adolescents' choices in terms of their major study in university (Lee, Kim, & Lo, 2008). These include self-actualisation, job opportunity, field attractiveness, ease of study, and scholastic achievement. Among these five, job opportunity was the most important reason for choice of subjects. Similar findings have been found in overseas studies. For instance, four major motives for choosing dentistry were raised by a group of dental students, including interest, prestige, good employment opportunities and regular working hours (Orenuga & Costa, 2006). These results show that Hong Kong students tend to prioritise their career path when choosing their study in the tertiary education, which helps to explain why Hong Kong students' motivation declines across the secondary school years. Studying music either in universities or conservatories cannot guarantee good employment opportunities or a highly paid career. Important also, is our impression that it is not always clear to those students who choose music as an elective in the upper years of secondary school how the skills, knowledge, and attitudes acquired by studying music might be useful or helpful in their chosen future career.

Parents play a key role in affecting their children's choice of study and career in order to achieve high social status (e.g., Schleef, 2000). As mentioned above, Hong Kong parents and children are keen to seek opportunities for music education in terms of instrumental learning and choral training. In the eye of parents, musical achievement such as a Grade 8 qualification of the Associated Board of Royal Schools of Music Examination can be an 'added value' which is extremely useful for candidates who wish to be recruited by elite secondary schools. Studying in these secondary schools is thought to 'guarantee' or enhance entry into universities. However,

studying music in university or being a professional musician is regarded to be ‘risky’ in terms of one’s capacity to earn a good living. This helps to explain the low participation rate of music in public examinations. This contradictory view is reflected by students’ motivation in music learning in the survey. Students are encouraged to learn music in primary schools in order to enhance their qualifications for entering quality secondary schools. Conversely, they are discouraged from studying music in the university, because it is considered that becoming a musician does not enhance students’ opportunities for gaining a position with a high income, high social status, or good career opportunity.

The schools seem to share a similar view. The results show that there was a rapid decrease in the percentage of music learners who learned music from primary schools to secondary schools. Secondary schools tend to provide less opportunity for students to learn music in school so that many music learners have to rely on outside-school opportunities. Evidence for this is shown in the limited number of offerings relating to music in the public examinations. The belief that music is merely for leisure seems to persist within the school system, even since the implementation of curriculum reform in 2003.

The core of the problem seems to be related to the students’ and their parents’ philosophies in relation to the ultimate goal of education. For Hong Kong people, being educated (such as earning a university degree in various professional fields) may lead to a stable income and a high social status. This utilitarian perspective has been deeply rooted into Hong Kong people’s minds. Education seems to be vocational training for career only, with the result that the general population tend not to consider that an ultimate aim of comprehensive education is to nurture a holistic human being capable of success in different aspects of the self, including spirit, health, social life, and pursue of aesthetics, apart from financial health/wealth.

A number of implications arise when we consider the issue of improving students' low motivation for music. Changing the perception of students and parents to one which supports the belief that learning music can benefit students' cognitive development rather than being for the sole purpose of leisure will be the most important issue for music teachers and curriculum planners. The current curriculum reform advocates that learning music can benefit students' development of generic skills including creativity and critical thinking. It is hoped that a paradigm shift—from an emphasis on learning music skills and knowledge to a more comprehensive learning through authentic experience that involve creating, listening to, and performing music—will more adequately develop students' cognitive and psychomotor domains, as well as lead them to a more complete understanding of the value of music within societies. The acquisition of more authentic musical skills may also start to impact on how students view music in terms of their own personal and professional future life beyond school. When parents believe that music is useful in helping develop generic skills, particularly self-regulation, disciplined behaviour, creativity, and critical thinking, they will hopefully be more positive about encouraging their children to extend their music study to higher levels. Music teachers thus need to commit to advocating music as a useful study area that enhances students' more generic skills, knowledge, and attitudes. In particular, secondary music teachers should provide career advice for their music students so that they are more knowledgeable about all possible careers in music, including those available in creative and future industries, and the ways in which a music education can contribute to an increase in social capital.

Advocacy of music by providing more scientific evidence will be critical in changing perceptions within Hong Kong about the usefulness and importance of music in children's education. It is evident that learning music is beneficial to the human brain in other subject areas.

For instance, Ho, Cheung, and Chan (2003) invited 90 Hong Kong secondary students (aged from 6 to 15 years; 45 instrumental learners and 45 non-instrumental learners) to participate in an experiment in which they were tested using verbal and visual memory measures. Repeated measures ANOVA were conducted to investigate the possible effect of music training on the verbal and visual learning ability of the students with results indicating that children with musical training demonstrated better verbal but not visual memory than those without music training. Evidence of this type will add to the public debate about the importance of music as a school subject.

In conclusion, one of the main challenges facing music educators in Hong Kong is the competitive nature of schools and the constant steering of students towards a focus on subjects that are perceived as helpful to them in maximising their access to universities and successful careers, within a society that is very business-oriented and in which parents are keen for their children to succeed financially in later life. Thus, evolving an education that recognises the role that music can and should play in the education of all children is a major challenge within the Hong Kong education system. Much more research is needed to demonstrate how music benefits the education of students so that educational authorities and parents can be convinced of the educational worth of music as a school subject.

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