

## **Case studies of factors affecting the motivation of musical high achievers to learn music in Hong Kong**

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This article reports on the personal beliefs and attitudes of highly motivated Hong Kong school-age subjects who studied music. A total of 24 participants who demonstrated high achievement and interest in learning music were interviewed. Content analysis of the interview data was performed to elucidate four topics: background information about the music learning of participants; their feelings about learning music; their perceptions of parental expectations of the learning of different subjects; and music learning in schools. A detailed analysis was conducted to understand the views of participants on attainment value, task value, task difficulty, and intrinsic motivation. Based on the results, a theoretical framework was derived that includes three developmental stages: 1) initial motivation, 2) short-term involvement and the learning process, and 3) long-term involvement and ongoing commitment. The study contributes to the understanding of the developmental trajectory of these Asian participants by detailing intrinsic and extrinsic factors that impacted on their musical development.

**Keywords:** motivation, expectancy-value motivation theory, music learning, high music achievers.

### **Introduction**

Since the return of sovereignty of Hong Kong to China in 1997, cultural development of Hong Kong has been raised to the agenda of the government. In the Policy Recommendation Report of the Cultural and Heritage Commission (2003) appointed by the Chief Executive of Hong Kong, a vision was stated:

If Hong Kong becomes a city where life is celebrated through cultural pursuit, a city where its people

are enchanted by the arts, enlightened by different cultures and enriched by social diversity, we will certainly have a vibrant cultural scene. (p. 50)

Recommended by the report, cultural development of Hong Kong relied on school education. However, music education in Hong Kong schools may be considered ‘at risk’. According to the Hong Kong Examination and Assessment Authority (2006a, 2006b), in 2006 only 0.26% of the candidates sitting the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE; a public examination taken at the end of Secondary 5) and 0.047% of those sitting the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination (HKALE; a university entrance examination taken at the end of Secondary 7) chose to elect the music exam. Even worse, music has not been offered in the HKALE since 2007 because of the small number of candidates. These extremely low percentages raise concerns about what can be done to encourage more Hong Kong students to choose music during the ‘elective’ years of their secondary education.

Music is a common pursuance for many parents and children in Hong Kong. Hiebert (1993) argued that there was a “pyramid” of music education in Hong Kong, while all primary and junior secondary students were taking music as a compulsory subject in schools, and a large amount of students sought music tuition outside school from different organizations and private tuition, few of them would study music in local universities. This

reflects that Hong Kong students tend to enjoy learning music during their early childhood but withdraw learning when getting older and facing the entrance of tertiary education. How students are motivated to learn music since their early childhood and sustain their learning in their later stages are regarded to be an important issue in contributing to a holistic cultural development of Hong Kong.

## **Literature review**

### ***External factors of motivation***

External environmental factors including parents, family background, teachers, and peers are considered to be significant influences on children's motivation and commitment to learn music. For instance, early home environment and parental musical interest have been shown to strongly influence children's music learning, and siblings to greatly influence children's decision to learn an instrument (Howe and Sloboda 1991a). Teachers who are positive, show warmth, and have the ability to inspire have also been found to have a positive influence (Howe and Sloboda 1991b). In school settings, the support of the head teacher and class music teacher were crucial in students' instrumental learning (Hallam and Prince 2000). Davidson and others (1995/96) found that children demonstrating high musical achievement received strong parental support up until about 11 years old of age, after which they provide less explicit support because their child has become intrinsically

motivated. In addition, parents who support their children in instrumental learning focus on the benefits of learning music itself and also other extrinsic benefits of learning music including discipline, diligence, academic performance and intelligence (Dai and Schader 2001). Students whose parents are involved in music and supportive of their children's musical participation develop better self-concepts in music, value music more, and develop higher motivation in pursuing different musical activities (Sichivitsa 2007). According to Davidson and others (1998), a child's first music teacher is critical in terms of her or his qualifications, personality, and interpersonal skills. However, teachers and parents have been found to play a less significant role and peers to play a more significant one in influencing the talent development process of non-classical musicians, due to the fact that 'non-classical artists perform and listen to music that tends to be more accessible to, and accepted by, their contemporaries' (Kamin et al. 2007 p. 464). According to Ivaldi and O'Neill (2008), many adolescents identified famous popular singers as their role models. Reasons of admiring models include: a) dedication, b) popular image, and c) ability.

### ***Internal factors of motivation***

Internal factors that influence motivation include perceived self-efficacy (Bandura 1995, 1997), which refers to a personal judgment or belief about ability in a certain domain.

Parents and teachers have been found to influence children's beliefs about their musical

ability (Howe and Sloboda 1991). Self-efficacy seems to be positively related to musicians' performance (see McCormick and McPherson 2003). Small improvements in different aspects of instrumental learning may contribute to construct self-efficacy in learning an instrument (McPherson and McCormick 2006). In addition, intrinsic motivation has been identified as the main internal force driving people to find rewards from an activity (Deci and Ryan 1985). Intrinsic motivation refers to the enjoyment and pleasure obtained in participating in tasks or activities (see Amabile 1996). Driscoll (2009) found that what youngsters enjoy most in instrumental learning include playing along for pleasure, performing in a group, and working out tunes from the instrument. She further indicated that many other external factors would lead to discontinuation of instrumental learning, including: a) expensive tuition fees, b) other activities are more attractive, c) too much school work, d) boring instrumental lessons, e) bad pupil-teacher relationship, f) negative peer pressure for adolescents, and g) entering into a new learning environment such as the secondary school. Besides, being sensitive to criticism is another factor affecting learning motivation. Atlas et al (2004) found that sensitive students tend to be more easily affected by harsh criticism from their instructors. They suggested that instructors should be careful in providing critical feedback to those sensitive students.

Proposed by Weiner (1986), the Attribution Theory provides a further explanation on motivation. Whether one regards the causes of success or failure to be stable or unstable,

controllable or uncontrollable, and internal or external were found to be predictable in maintaining the motivation of achievement. For instance, if one attributes success or failure to uncontrollable causes, s/he tends not to change much in order to improve.

Based on the literature aforementioned, individuals tend to consider both internal and external factors of motivation in making decision of their learning since the internal and external factors are shown to be closely interlinked. Hence, studies in motivation of learning music have been focusing on individual specific issues and factors. Few studies have examined children's motivation to learn music in a comprehensive way that includes all of the aforementioned issues together with differing cultural factors and contexts. A recent survey revealed that Hong Kong students believe that studying music is more interesting and easier than studying academic subjects but less important and useful to their future lives (McPherson et al. 2008). Hence, it is necessary to gain a better understanding of the factors that affect children's motivation to learn music and to determine whether there are developmental stages of motivation. The findings of this study may supplement the current motivation literature and provide a more holistic view of motivation in music learning.

## **Theoretical framework**

### ***Expectancy-value Theory***

According to the Expectancy-value Theory of motivation (Eccles et al. 1983; Wigfield and Eccles 2000), learner motivation variables can be divided into two categories: 1) Expectancy, which refers to task-specific and ability beliefs of individuals, and 2) task values related to specific domains, which include attainment value, intrinsic value, utility value, and cost (Eccles et al., 1983). Attainment value refers to the importance of being successful in a field or domain, intrinsic value refers to the enjoyment that one can obtain through participation in a specific task, utility value is the perception of usefulness that achievement in the task may bring in the future, and cost refers to the perceived difficulties of the task. All of these factors were explored in this study through the interviews with the participants of this study.

### ***Model of culture and achievement behaviour***

Since this study was undertaken in a Chinese society, the context of learning in the Chinese culture should be taken into consideration. Hong Kong is a place where East meets West. In terms of education, schooling in Hong Kong preserves Chinese traditional values. In Hong Kong, school education is highly competitive and examination-oriented. Teachers are more didactic and tend to encourage rote learning and memorization (Salili, Chiu and Lai 2001, cited in Salili 2009). Chinese parents tend to believe that education is crucial in providing prosperous career and social advancement (Sue and Okazaki 1990, cited in Salili

2009). This belief might be inherited from the system of Imperial Civil Examination in China (see Elman 2000) since the Han Dynasty (202 BC – 220 AD), when ordinary people could become government officials who achieve good results in the examination.

In her *Model of culture and achievement behaviour*, Salili (2009, p. 208) proposed that Chinese students are affiliatively oriented while the British students (representing the Western culture) are more individualistically oriented in achieving their goals. Chinese students tend to link their success in personal social life and achievement such as academic work and career with their family social life, while the British students do not. In other words, Chinese students would be more easily affected by their parents in making their decisions on their study and career.

### **Purpose of the study**

To date, no research has been undertaken that clearly establishes how and why Hong Kong children develop the desire to pursue music as a school subject, from their very early exposure in primary school through to their active participation in music as a subject in the final years of high school. Little is known of why Hong Kong children vary in the degree of persistence and intensity they display in accepting, valuing, and participating in music across the years of schooling. Furthermore, the culture as a factor is seldom used in studying motivation in learning music.



Rather than tackling this problem from a teacher-based perspective, this study used a student-based approach to understand how students themselves feel about their music experience, how their beliefs and attitudes are shaped by their music experience in school, and why only a small percentage go on to study music in the senior years of secondary school. It is hoped that the study findings can help educators understand more precisely how students come to value music, and guide teachers and school authorities in what measures they need to take to encourage more Hong Kong children to become actively involved in this important learning area.

In addition, this research into student expectations and values concerning music can serve as the basis for generating new education approaches that are founded on providing courses and instructional methods that meet the needs of all children, not just the artistically gifted, in all schools across Hong Kong. By clarifying children's motivational orientation to study and participate in school-based music activities, the study represents an important step forward in the development of more appropriate strategies that can be used by teachers to improve music learning and teaching in Hong Kong primary and secondary schools.

In this study, selected participants who demonstrated high achievement and interest in learning music were interviewed. The aim was to clarify the factors that influence student motivation in and attitudes towards music learning. The personal beliefs and

attitudes of students and environmental factors were examined in a series of structured interviews.

## **Method**

This study employed a phenomenological approach which describes experiences of individuals about a phenomenon (Creswell 1998) on making decision on music learning. Structured interviews with individual students were undertaken in order to collect personal opinions and experience of identified high music achievers about their learning in music, so that comparison and categorization can be generated by the uniform information (Patton 2002).

### ***Participants***

It was considered if the students were from diverse schools with mixed musical and academic background would be more representative in this study. Thus the researchers invited schools with different academic background in different geographic regions in Hong Kong. It might be difficult to make clear categorizations of schools in terms of musical and academic background. However, there are mainly two major categories of schools in Hong Kong: 1) Aided Schools (see Hong Kong Ordinances 2010), which are founded and administered by various organizations but funded by the government, and 2)

Directed Subsidy Scheme (DSS) Schools (see Education Bureau 2010), which receive both funded by the government and school fees. It is widely accepted that the DSS schools can provide more resources for student learning since they receive more revenue.

The researchers asked participating schools to recommend high music achievers with two criteria: 1) high marks in the subject of Music, and 2) outstanding achievement in music activities including instrumental learning and ensemble participation internally and externally. As a result, the schools had identified 24 higher achievers in music, 14 from Primary 3 and 6 and 10 from Secondary 3 and 5, for interview. For detailed demographic information, see Table 1. The reason to select Primary 3, Primary 6, Secondary 3 and Secondary 5 students was that these students were in their final years of the four Key Stages in Hong Kong schooling system. These students were considered to be representative as they came from different key stages. All participants ( $N = 24$ ) were learning or had previously learnt instruments, and almost all of them ( $n = 23$ ) had learnt more than one instrument, to a maximum of four, while the twenty-fourth one was learning singing the Cantonese opera. The piano and string instruments were the most popular. These students were regarded to be their most outstanding students in music within their schools. However, it must be stressed that the generalizability of this study was limited to the number of the participants and the selection of the participants as they might not be the most outstanding students in Hong Kong.

### ***Procedure***

The researchers invited six primary and six secondary schools to be the partners of this project. Consequently, the schools identified and invited 24 students, 14 in Primary 3 and 6 and 10 in Secondary 3 and 5 to participate in interviews. Written consent was obtained from the secondary students and from the parents of the primary students. Each participant was interviewed privately for about 45 minutes by a research assistant. The interviews took place at school and were arranged by teachers, or at an outside school upon the request of the participant. The interviews were aurally recorded on a mini disc or an MP3 recorder for documentation. To provide a psychologically safe environment in which interviewees could answer questions freely, observers were not allowed.

### ***Development of the structured interview***

The interview questions attempted to uncover why participants had become involved in arts subjects, what opportunities they had taken to extend their skills, and why they continued their involvement in these pursuits. Personal and environmental factors, such as beliefs about music, the nature of music programmes at schools, the home environment, and the influence of teachers, were also investigated. The following is a summary of the questions asked in the interviews. Refer to Appendix 1 for details of each and every question used in

the interviews.

- *Background information about the music learning of participants*

Participants were asked to provide information about their musical background, including when they started learning music and how they first became interested in the subject.

- *Feelings of participants about their music learning*

The feelings of participants about their music learning were investigated by asking, for example, in what ways they felt that they were good at music. The interviewer also asked the participants about their social lives and the interests of their friends.

- *Parental views of the music learning of participants*

Participants were asked about the extent to which their parents helped them in their music lessons or activities and what role their parents played in initiating and supervising their music practise.

- *Music learning in school*

Participants were asked to comment on the music programmes in their school and the support provided in learning music. Their attitudes towards learning music were investigated by asking, for example, how they valued music compared to other subjects.

### ***Data coding and content analysis***

The interviews were conducted in Cantonese (the Chinese dialect predominantly used in Hong Kong) and translated into English for analysis. The translation was undertaken by the research assistant who interviewed the participants, and was checked by one of the two authors, who is proficient in both Chinese and English. Each transcript was saved as a Microsoft Word document and given a code for identification.

A detailed qualitative analysis was conducted. Based on the interview protocol, four main themes, attainment value, task value, task difficulty, and intrinsic motivation, were investigated using the data collected on five aspects: personal views, peers, parents, teachers, and school. All of the participant responses were entered into an Excel spreadsheet under each interview question. Each response was then checked by the two authors to determine whether it needed to be combined with or separated from others for a better portrayal of each participant's statement. The data that emerged from each response were then sorted according to category and simplified into abbreviated phrases for analysis. Validity was based on whether the quotes and explanations matched well and cross-checked by the research assistant and authors (Janesick, 1994). The results and supporting evidence are presented and discussed below.

### **Results**

This section describes the results of analysing the qualitative interview data. The data cover the early experience of participants in learning music, their perceptions on learning music, factors identified to affect their music learning, and their expectations about their future learning. The transcript quotes were given an identification code for reference. For example, (F/S3/1) indicates a female student who was studying in Secondary 3 and the first student being interviewed at that school level.

### ***Early experience in learning music***

Nearly two thirds of the participants (n = 15) described their first music experience clearly.

#### *Extrinsic influence: where the participants first remembered hearing music*

More than half of the participants (n = 13) said their first memory of hearing music was at home (parent teaching piano, sibling playing an instrument, music recording or television) or outside (concert, restaurant, railway). They reacted to what they heard and saw; that is, their interest in music was aroused:

My parents brought me to a restaurant. ...I was unhappy and cried, but became happy again when I listened to the small band in the restaurant. Others wondered why I had a positive response to music because I was very young. My mother thought that my hearing was sensitive

enough to hear little sounds. I was amused when I heard the music and rocked along with the rhythm. The band members found me interesting, too. (M/P6/5)

### *Intrinsic interest: curiosity*

A quarter of the participants ( $n = 6$ ) became actively involved in music after their first exposure to it because of their curiosity. They were curious about the instruments, which motivated them to learn music:

There's an incident. When I was very young, younger than one year old, I played my father's electronic piano at home one day. He was amazed and sent me to learn electronic piano, music listening, and sight-reading, and that cultivated my interest in music. (M/S3/3)

### *Positive perceptions*

Perception of music learning was found to be another crucial aspect in understanding motivation. Positive perceptions are categorised as follows.

#### *Attainment Value*

*Self-recognition.* Three participants thought they had learnt much from joining



competitions and gained self-recognition when they received a prize. Participants were motivated to improve in the future:

Many of the judges who awarded me the prize are famous Chinese opera actors. I feel that I'm a worthwhile person, and a sense of achievement, which makes me continue to learn. (F/S5/3)

I'll practise a lot if there are competitions, and I can learn a lot from others. ...I think there's no bad effect if I lose [and] it's an encouragement if I can get a prize. (M/S5/5)

*Sense of achievement.* Three participants gained a sense of achievement from entering competitions, which they found challenging:

I was interested in music before because it felt good to win prizes. Although I felt tired from practising, I kept on when I thought of the success that lies ahead. Otherwise, I wouldn't be motivated. (F/S3/4)

Four participants felt that their self-esteem was strengthened when they found

themselves able to overcome difficulties in learning music: ‘As the pieces become more difficult, I want to conquer them. I think that’s a motivation’ (M/S5/5). They also felt that learning music helped in the release of tension and emotion: ‘I have [been playing an instrument] for three years and I found myself getting involved in it because I can express myself whether singing and giving a speech’ (F/P6/5).

*Importance.* More than half of the participants (n = 13) believed that music was worthwhile. They said that it helped them to relax and to communicate with others, and was one of their strongest subjects. When asked whether learning music was important, they replied:

Very important. When I experience difficulties in daily life, playing piano can help [me] get rid of those difficulties and relax. There will be no more obstacles to impede me. (F/P3/3)

Yes, quite. Because this is one of my strong subjects, I’ll put more effort into learning it. (M/P6/2)

Yes, it’s like a language, which is used to communicate with others. The knowledge I learn in music lessons now can be used in playing piano and violin. (M/P6/3)

### *Intrinsic value*

Almost all of the participants ( $n = 23$ ) felt happy when learning and playing music.

Participants enjoyed practising as it brought enjoyment and was satisfying to them:

That's an abstract feeling. I like it very much and feel happy. If I'm sad and worried, then I'll forget it soon when I play music. The time that I'm most relaxed and free is when I play music.

(F/S3/3)

I love learning music very much. ...I want to do my best because music is my interest, and I think, why don't I try to do my best? Learning music relies on talent and it should be utilised fully and enjoyed. I'm happy to sing in a choir and join competitions. When I receive good results from what I'm interested in, I feel happier than when I receive good academic results. (M/S3/5)

### *Utility Value*

Most of the participants ( $n = 21$ ) thought that learning music was useful. Three common

perceptions emerged: the utility of music education as entertainment, as a future career, and for performance and technique advancement. One third of the participants ( $n = 8$ ) stated that music was useful only for entertainment and relaxation, and did not view it as a career possibility:

I regard [music] as entertainment and I won't make it my career, but I'll still play violin. Because, firstly, it interests me; and secondly, it entertains me. When I'm tired after work, I'll feel relaxed after playing a few songs. (F/P6/4)

In contrast, five participants thought learning music would be useful in their future, both in their studies and as a career:

My mother thinks that I won't have to work at hard jobs to earn a living if I become a musician.

My cousin, who graduated in a promising subject from a good university, earns only about

\$10,000 [approximately US\$1,200] per month, but the wage of an APA teacher [a lecturer at the

Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts] is now \$600 to \$700 per hour [approximately US\$75 –

\$90]. My teacher receives an even higher wage. ...I think I am more cultivated when I learn music.

(F/S3/3)

A quarter of the students ( $n = 6$ ) thought learning music was useful for performance

and training in advanced techniques:

After learning music, I can sing notes accurately by playing the piano at the same time. ...I have to press my fingers hard so they don't slide off the keys; it's the same for the recorder. My mother said learning piano is the foundation of all of the instruments. (F/P3/3)

### *Negative perceptions*

Although the participants were interested in music, they reported a number of issues that hindered their learning.

### *Cost*

*Academic studies.* A quarter of participants ( $n = 6$ ) valued academic subjects (such as languages and mathematics) the most because a higher proportion of marks are allocated to these core subjects. Parents had great influence in this area, with participants reporting that their parents thought that academic subjects were the most important of their studies:

My parents want me to do well in school. They told me to make school work my highest priority,

saying, ‘We allow you to learn music and know you like it very much, but you have to make it your second-highest priority and consider your school work first’. However, when I did poorly, they didn’t blame me or stop me from learning music, perhaps because the results were not seriously bad [pass in all subjects]. They never urge me to get all passes as they already accept it if the results are all OK. (M/S5/3)

In addition, academic subjects were generally viewed as more valuable in school and society: ‘I value more mathematics, English and physics, chemistry, and biology. Music is not viewed in school as very valuable’ (F/S3/1). It seems that Hong Kong children’s perceptions were influenced to a greater or lesser extent by their parents, social norms, and culture.

*Anxiety.* Stage fright is common among musicians. Some participants admitted that it is difficult to overcome. Fortunately, the participants were optimistic about this problem:

Stage fright affects me a lot so I can perform only 50% of what I’ve practised. I learn how to deal with it when I go to watch more concerts. My teacher lets me go to watch the concerts of senior students that I can learn from them by observation. (F/S3/3)

*Endless grind of practising.* Nearly half of the participants (n = 11) had experienced practise-related difficulties, which may have led some to give up their music education:

I feel burdened because I always have to practise. My classmates know that it's impossible for me to play after school because I have to rush back home to practise; hence, I don't have enough time to do anything besides practise. (F/S3/4)

Fortunately, participants were optimistic about overcoming these difficulties:

It's difficult to a certain extent, but I can overcome it if I'm brave enough to try, practise, listen and get to know music. I think all music learners have their difficult times. I was once very lazy and unwilling to practise. My teacher always scolded me and I wanted to give up because I found it really difficult. But I continued to learn because music is important to me. ...I have no interests other than music. (F/P6/5)

### *Being made to learn by parents*

Eight out of 10 secondary participants said the idea of their learning an instrument was initially raised by their parents. Five children were made to learn an instrument by their parents in order to utilise their spare time meaningfully, cultivate a healthy hobby, and fulfil

parental expectations: ‘I had nothing to do during my spare time and thus my mother forced me to learn the erhu, and I continue to learn it’ (M/S5/4).

### ***Factors affecting the decision of participants to continue their music learning***

Participants were also asked why they continued to study music. All of them (N = 24) expressed great interest in learning music, and most expressed a deep love for music. The reasons that the participants became interested in music can be divided into two categories: personal and environmental.

#### ***Personal factors***

Five main factors influenced the students’ love of music: aesthetic feelings, self-recognition, sense of achievement, music preference, and enjoyment.

*Aesthetic feelings.* All participants (N = 24) agreed that music brought them aesthetic enjoyment. Words expressing positive emotions such as happy, delighted, relaxed, and restful were common in the responses. In addition, they thought playing or listening to music encouraged their imagination:

Music is different from speech; it can express thoughts from my deeper mind without my



speaking to others directly. It is restful. ...Thoughts may arise when I'm listening to music. Say, when I have difficulty doing mathematics, I may have some idea after listening to music.

(F/P6/8)

Most of the primary participants ( $n = 13$ ) were attracted by music itself. Three said that they were attracted to learn instruments because of their beautiful sound. Sound stimulated their aesthetic feelings, acting as a motivation: 'I think the sound made by a piano being played is beautiful. It makes me feel happy. I can play the piano or listen to music when I'm unhappy; this makes me contented' (F/P3/3).

*Ability beliefs.* Over two thirds of the participants ( $n = 17$ ) indicated that their musical ability beliefs came from overcoming challenges in learning music. Six said they became interested in music when they discovered that they were able to manage complicated techniques when playing music, which strengthened their self-confidence: 'Because I found that I can play good music, I like it' (M/S5/5).

*Attribution.* A quarter of the participants ( $n = 6$ ) attributed their talent to their excellent skills, such as good sight-reading and listening ability:

I have good sight-reading ability and I'm happy about this because not everyone can do this.

Sometimes my teacher gives me new scores and requires me to finish practising them within two days. I can do it. When there's an unknown pressure upon me, I can handle it well. (F/P6/6)

Three participants believed that their musical ability was innate: '[I am gifted with regard to] my voice. For vocal learners, it's important to have a good voice that is inborn. ...Some people cannot sing, no matter how hard they practise. Unlike playing percussion, singing really depends on inborn talent' (M/S3/5).

### *Environmental factors*

In addition to having a personal interest in music, participants mentioned different people around them who had had a great impact on their music learning.

*Parental support.* Two children attributed their interest to their parents, who were interested and actively involved in music:

Maybe this is due to my parents' influence. My father played the organ for the church and he always plays piano at home. My mother likes classical music. They listen to relaxing music during work, which helps them concentrate. I don't know why I like music – maybe it's because [an

appreciation of music] has been cultivated in me since I was small. (F/P6/5)

One child explained that her parents encouraged her interest in music:

My parents have never thought of my being greatly involved in music. They expect me to treat it as an interest and a kind of entertainment. When I hated learning music in the past, they encouraged me by saying my life would be boring and less happy without music. I agree with them, and I think I can play as well as others, too. I became interested in music because of their encouragement. (F/P6/6)

Four participants said their family encouraged them to put more effort into learning music and be more willing to deal with difficulties:

I wanted to make my mother's dream come true: to complete grade 8 in music in primary school. I just finished the grade 5 theory exam, and plan to take the grade 7 exam next year and grade 8 one the following year. ...It is quite easy for me to do primary school homework, and I can do it quickly. But the homework in secondary school will become more difficult, and it will be very difficult for me to handle both homework and learning piano at that time. If I pass the grade 8 exam, then I can have one diploma lesson per month, and this should be relatively not too hard. (F/P3/3)

*Teacher influence.* Teachers played an important role in influencing the interest of students in learning music. Four participants said that they became interested in music when they had a good music teacher:

I started liking lessons when I had a good teacher – a popular teacher from whom many participants want to learn. He motivated me a lot [and] I found that I shouldn't be sloppy anymore. I mean I started thinking what music means to me. (F/S3/4)

When participants were asked what made them continue to study music, one student talked about the importance of being taught by a good teacher, because she appreciated a teacher who put effort into teaching: 'A good teacher ... makes an effort for students, so I am grateful for my teacher having expectations of me' (F/S3/1).

*School influence.* Over half of the participants (n = 14) responded positively regarding school support, both physical and emotional, for music education. They appreciated the various extracurricular musical activities organised by their school, including instrumental classes, various performance groups such as string, percussion, and recorder ensembles, Western and Chinese orchestras, and school choirs and bands, which enriched their music

education:

As I'm an orchestra member, I can learn and practise new things that I've never learnt in some pieces. When I practise my pieces, I can apply what I learnt in them because they may require the same technique. (F/P6/3)

Schools also provided numerous performance opportunities for participants, with annual concerts, open days, graduation ceremonies, music sharing at the morning assembly, and so forth.

My school employs outside teachers to teach instruments. I need to pay for the lesson, but the fee is less than that outside. The school is buying some new instruments; for example, it bought a new snare drum last week. (M/P6/7)

Participants spoke most often about the emotional support their schools gave them, such as encouraging them to participate in music competitions on behalf of the school, providing advice before competitions, promoting a music school culture, and introducing the music ambassador and award schemes to motivate students to continue their music studies:

The school offers many performing opportunities for me and two other members of the same pipa group. We perform at Open Days, graduation ceremonies, post-exam concerts, and other events. I really enjoy it. (F/S3/2)

Some schools provided more opportunities for high-achieving students to enter various competitions on behalf of the school:

I was so grateful when I heard their response after they found out about my Chinese opera learning outside school. They gave me permission to join the competition. I regard this as a kind of support. (F/S5/3)

A school culture encouraging music helped in motivating participants to learn music at school:

This school is important to me. I might not have liked music as much had I not entered this school. I have been singing in the choir since primary school, and I find that this school is full of spirit in any activities. ...The school's music festival is the event I look forward to the most every year because we can practise, and even skip lessons, together. These will become good memories when

I grow up and look back, better than getting good school results. I believe there must be some unforgettable things in my school life, and these are the things that I cannot forget. That's why this school is important to me. (M/S3/5)

*Peer support.* One student spoke of her appreciation of her friends, who supported her in learning music: 'I have to attribute my achievement in music to my friends, who support each other and help me continue to learn. I would have given up long ago without these friends' (F/P6/6). Another student also said her peers supported each other:

In the orchestra, students in Secondary 5 and 6 teach younger schoolmates and thus the young ones can learn from them and keep improving. Of course, there's a teacher who teaches us but we can learn from older schoolmates at the same time. (M/S5/5)

*Successful others.* More than a quarter of the participants ( $n = 7$ ) said they were inspired by someone who performed well on instruments either on the television or in concerts:

I thought the people performing on stage were wonderful, and I wanted to try. ...I feel satisfied when standing on stage. Hence I like it. ...I watched TV when I was small and saw people playing instruments on stage. It seemed it would be quite nice to be on stage where I could also learn

music; therefore, I joined the percussion instrumental class. (M/P6/7)

Three of the Primary 3 participants mentioned siblings who played instruments well at home, which helped to arouse their interest in music: ‘I think it’s fun. ...My elder brother, who’s in Primary 6, joined a music group two years ago and I always see him play music. I feel that it is fun to play different songs’ (F/P3/1).

Two participants said they were motivated to put more effort into learning music when they met someone who played better than themselves:

Many older schoolmates are successful examples, in that I can see how hard they worked in the past. Because of these models, I cannot give up. I’m a face-saving person. If I give up learning, then I’ll think I’m a loser if others are discussing music happily. I don’t want to be like this, and that’s why I have to be successful in music. (F/P6/6)

### ***Long-term involvement in music***

Almost all of the participants ( $n = 20$ ) were positive about their future music learning and pursuance. More than half ( $n = 14$ ) sought better qualifications and a higher standard of performance, while the other eight participants focused more on what they felt they needed



to do in order to continue improving.

*Task value of music*

Music was regarded by participants to be important and very interesting. Most of them expressed a commitment to further involvement in music learning for different purposes.

*Improvement in music techniques.* One third of the participants ( $n = 8$ ) were concerned about their future improvement. Four wanted to improve their techniques and do their best in learning music: ‘I hope I can improve my technique [and] not focus only on exams’ (F/P6/3).

*Higher musical achievement.* A quarter of the participants ( $n = 6$ ) wanted to obtain high level musical qualifications: ‘I’ve already achieved a quite satisfying level, yet there are still many others who are better than me. As my short-term goal, I want to get the FTCL diploma, and I want others to know my achievement then’ (F/P6/6).

*Value of music and other academic subjects.* The senior primary and secondary participants ( $n = 18$ ) were asked about their valuing of music and academic subjects. They had learnt from their family and social environment that academic subjects were more important than

the arts; however, most were still very interested in studying music. Hence, some tried to solve this dilemma by balancing their efforts equally between their academic and music studies, even though they valued music more:

I think both [academic and music studies] are important. Other subjects will help me a lot. I'm now in primary school, and I can rely on the results of these subjects to enter a good secondary school. However, music is my favourite subject, so I cannot stop learning it. I think music is more important if I have to choose. (F/P6/3)

### *Plans regarding music studies*

Ten secondary participants were asked whether they would continue studying music as a school subject in the future. Although they were satisfied with their music learning outside school, only three were planning to study music at school, as others thought it would be difficult for them to study an additional elective music subject together with the compulsory academic subjects. Three said that they were planning to study music in university: 'I'd like to be a music major in university' (F/S3/2).

Two participants were preparing for admission to the Hong Kong Academy of Performing Arts:

I want to learn the piano in the junior section of the APA. It'll be good if I'm admitted as I can participate in other music activities like theory lessons and choir besides learning the piano. This is a chance to join a choir outside school so I can observe how they run. (F/S3/3)

*Self-study.* Two participants were considering self-study in music and sitting for the music public examination in the future, as their school no longer provided a music course after

Secondary 3:

No certificate-level music class is provided at school but that allows students to learn music outside school under the Centralised Scheme organised by the government for Form 4 students. ...I'll attend the briefing session and apply for it. I want to apply because I'll be more advanced in music [in the event that] I want to study music in university. (F/S3/2)

### *Career plan*

Over half of the participants ( $n = 15$ ) wanted a music career, and a job teaching music was favoured: 'I think I could be a full-time piano and pipa teacher' (F/S3/2).

Some wanted to be a musician, conductor, or composer: 'I want to be a musician when I grow up because I think that music can really touch others, and I'm happy when listening to music. Music brings happiness, so I want to be a musician' (F/P6/3).

Participants gave several reasons for their interest in a music career. Some said they were interested in music and wanted to utilise what they had learnt for a long time: ‘I like [music], and it seems a waste if I don’t make it my career. I would like to teach others’ (F/S3/2).

Others explained that they wanted to fulfil the expectations of their parents: ‘Yes, [I want a career in music] because I do love music, and so do my parents. They have put their hopes on me when I grow up’ (F/P6/3). Another student said she preferred a music job to a regular and stressful position: ‘I like music. I don’t want my life to be a stressful one. I’d prefer freedom and comfort. ...I don’t like regular jobs very much’ (F/S5/1).

### *Ongoing commitment*

Nearly one third of the participants ( $n = 7$ ) wanted to contribute to society in performance, education, or composition: ‘Something related to the public like performing or teaching children music appreciation. It’s good to have a group of friends with similar hobbies to achieve this’ (F/S3/3). Three participants hoped to incorporate what they had learnt in their music education into their daily life: ‘I hope I can make use of what I learn in life’ (F/S5/1).

## **Discussion**

In this project, we sought to understand how high-achieving participants became motivated to learn music. Based on the responses of participants, we formulated a developmental model of student motivation (see Figure 1). Three developmental stages represent the increasing, progressive level of interest in music.

[Insert Figure 1 here]

### ***Stage 1: Initial motivation***

Participants began listening to music when they were small. Curiosity about music and positive aesthetic feelings aroused their intrinsic interest in music, while enthusiastic parents and a healthy music environment were positive extrinsic influences.

### ***Stage 2: Short-term involvement and the learning process***

Their initial motivation led the participants to imitate playing and to try to play instruments. As the data collected show, most of these high-achieving students started their music learning before entering primary school, and most were interested in playing music themselves the first time they remembered hearing or seeing music played. Hence, space and time to play music are suggested to encourage students to play instruments, as this seems useful in spurring short-term interest in learning music, leading to learning music in

formal lessons.

The participants met many challenges and difficulties in the music learning process. They were optimistic enough to overcome these challenges, and gained positive perceptions in the process, such as enjoyment and a sense of achievement and improving throughout their learning. This reinforced their motivation to learn. In addition, they expressed a desire to continue their music learning through further involvement and given the usefulness of their music education.

Some developed negative perceptions about the learning process, as they had been forced to learn an instrument by their parents. They felt anxious about the endless grind of practising, and the necessity to devote sufficient time to academic studies, which kept them from their music learning.

Personal and environment factors played a critical role in influencing participants' music learning and plans for continuing music studies. Personal factors included aesthetic feelings, the need for relaxation, the effect on imagination, music talent attribution, consistency of involvement in music, level of self-confidence, and goal orientation. Environmental factors including the influence of parents, peers, schools, teachers, and successful others, and parents and teachers were found to help most in motivating participants to continue their music learning.

All of the participants had positive perceptions and attitudes about their music

learning process. They were supported by various personal and environmental factors throughout their learning. As shown in Figure 1, the learning process forms a bridge between short-term and long-term interest, and has a two-way exit. Some might go backward in their learning process because of difficulties and negative perceptions; however, these high-achieving participants were found to be able to cross the bridge, and their interest in learning music was in fact strengthened by overcoming challenges. They kept a positive attitude about it, and were supported by parents, peers, schools, teachers, and their own efforts.

### ***Stage 3: Long-term involvement and ongoing commitment***

At this stage, the participants valued music more than other school subjects, and they expressed a greater commitment to and expectations about their future music learning or career path. Their long-term involvement suggests that their intrinsic interest was strengthened. The above findings confirm those of many previous studies that children are influenced mostly by their parents, siblings, and peers in their music learning. For example, positive teacher-student relationship contributes to sustained learning, and other external factors are also detrimental to the learning motivation (Driscoll 2009). In this study some interviewees suggest that their formal study is important for their entrance of university, which echoes the issue of “too much school work” reported by Driscoll (2009). The higher

achievers reported here attribute their success to internal and stable factors, such as their musical skills, which supports the Attribution Theory (Wenier 1986).

As reported earlier, although Hong Kong children find music more interesting and easier than academic subjects, they regard it as less useful for their future career. Cultural influences should be taken into consideration in explaining this situation. Since the end of British colonial rule in Hong Kong in 1997, the economy has been regarded by most Hong Kong citizens as the main concern. There has been a large influx of immigrants from mainland China since the 1950s, providing a large workforce for industry. The economy started to take off in the 1970s, and Hong Kong has become an international financial centre. For Chinese people in Hong Kong, obtaining a university degree, especially in those professions including medicine, law, and engineering, meant a possible shift in social class. Strength in academic subjects including languages, mathematics, and sciences remains a basic condition for entering university. Education is regarded by the Hong Kong parents to be the engine of economic development (Reeves 2009). Thus, it is understandable that Hong Kong parents would regard music as unimportant and of little use in their children's career plans. Mastery in music is difficult, and only a very few can become outstanding musicians in the Western music world.

The findings indicate that Hong Kong children are highly influenced by their parents, who are influenced by the Hong Kong community and Chinese culture. The parents of the



participants in this study tended to encourage their children to pursue music for external reasons rather than intrinsic values. Those parents who encouraged their child to become a music teacher did so because of the perceived high salary and other external factors. As a result, not all of the participants anticipated making music their career or studying in music in university. This shows that students in Hong Kong are, to a certain extent, utilitarian in their perception, and thus affected by their family and the overall community culture. The influence of culture on children's motivation is perhaps a new perspective that warrants research attention.

### **Conclusion and implications**

This exploratory study examined many factors affecting children's motivation to learn music, and developed a more comprehensive picture of such motivation. The proposed model provides a holistic framework for consideration by different stakeholders in education, including parents, teachers, schools, and communities, in how to motivate children of different ages to engage in and pursue musical achievement. The utilitarian view of Hong Kong parents and children suggests that special attention be paid to how socioeconomic and cultural factors affect music education and motivation to learn music.

The centre of the proposed model is a bridge, the learning process, which is the focus of the study. Children are exposed to various music learning experiences in modern

society. However, whether they continue to strive for achievement in music is affected by many factors, including their positive and negative perceptions of music learning and personal and environmental factors. The efficient and positive management of all of these factors to encourage and support students to strive for high achievement is a common agenda for both parents and teachers, as children's motivation normally declines as they grow older (McPherson et al. 2008).

Parents and teachers might consider the following implications. Children should be exposed to different musical experiences to stimulate their initial interest. Teachers could show the performance of master musicians during music class to motivate participants to learn a particular instrument. Taking children to live performances at an early age would also help motivate them to learn an instrument.

As it is evident that parental involvement and encouragement are effective in motivating participants to learn an instrument, music teachers should consider various kinds of parent education activities to showcase the many advantages of studying music. They should also provide children with different opportunities to demonstrate their musical achievement to reaffirm their musical commitment. Appropriate challenges including practical examinations and competitions might encourage participants to continuously strive for higher achievement. Secondary schools could revise their curricula so that music is an elective for the public examinations, to provide further music opportunities for

interested and competent students. Finally, teachers could discuss the diverse career possibilities in music to change the misperception of students and parents that it is difficult for a musician to earn a living.

Table 1. Demographic information of all interviewees

	<i>Primary Participants</i>				<i>Secondary Participants</i>			
<b>School level</b>	P3 (Year 3)		P6 (Year 6)		S3 (Year 9)		S5 (Year 11)	
<b>Number of participants</b>	6		8		5		5	
<b>School Types</b>	Aided Schools	DSS Schools	Aided Schools	DSS Schools	Aided Schools	DSS Schools	Aided Schools	DSS Schools
<b>Gender distribution</b>	2 M	4 F	2 M	6 F	4 M	1 F	4 M	1 F
	1	5	2	6	1	4	2	3

Figure 1 (see separate file)

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## Appendix      Questions asked in the interviews

1. What musical instruments are you learning?
2. Why did you start learning them?
3. When did you start learning them?
4. Where did you learn them?
5. How many lessons per week do you have?
6. How does the lessons?
7. How many days on average do you practice music? How long is each session on average? What was your earliest involvement in music?
8. How did you first get interested in music?
9. What is it about the subject that interests you?
10. How many teachers have you had for music? Can you describe each of them? How good are they as a teacher or musician? What was your teacher like as a teacher/person?
11. How do you feel about learning music?
12. In what ways is it difficult to you both in your daily life and when you leave school?
13. In what ways is it useful to you both in your daily life and when you leave school?
14. In what ways is it interesting to you both in your daily life and when you leave school?
15. In what ways is it important to you both in your daily life and when you leave school?
16. What is your desired career?
17. What things act to interest you or make you more interested in continuing to be involved with music?
18. In what ways do you feel that you are talented at music?
19. What sort of friends do you usually hang out with?
20. Are your friends interested in music?
21. What are the hobbies, interests, activities among your friends?
22. What is your future expectation about learning music?
23. Do you have any plans to make it your career?
24. How involved are your parents with your practice in music?
25. How do they provide support in your learning?
26. How involved are your parents with your instrumental teacher?
27. Do they sit in your lesson?
28. What is their role in initiating practice and supervising practice?
29. How did they help develop your musical skills when you were preschool age?
30. Are your parents involved in music?
31. Do they think you're doing well in music? How do they say?
32. Do they think you are doing well in academic subjects? What do they say?
33. Do they think music is useful?
34. Do they think music important?

35. Do they think music interesting?
36. What do you think they might want you to do after you leave school?
37. Does the school provide you with support in learning music? In what ways?
38. Does the school help you in developing your skills and knowledge in music?
39. In what ways are you involved in music outside school?
40. In what ways does this help with your development?
41. Is your personal learning agenda being fulfilled at school?
42. In what ways does your school help you in music learning?
43. Is what you want to learn and be able to do in music fulfilled at school or are you more fulfilled in the subject by what you do outside school?
44. Which inspires you the most, the music activities outside school or in school?
45. How do you value music when compared to other subjects?
46. Please give comments about the teachers of music in your school. What are they like and why do you like, or dislike them?
47. Are there any influences on your music learning from joining competitions and won award?
48. Will you continue studying music in future?