

Students' Perceptions of Quality of School Life in Hong Kong Primary Schools

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This paper reports on a study in which the concept and measurement of the quality of school life in the Hong Kong context were developed. Based on the Australian model and scales of quality of school life, a sample of 2,963 students from 35 randomly selected primary schools was surveyed. Principal component analysis was used to analyze the data to confirm the existence of the scales. Further analyses of the data using reliability tests, correlation and multiple regression were performed to test the validity and reliability of the adapted instrument and its scales. The research contributes to the Hong Kong primary schools with appropriate, objective performance indicators when their quality of schooling is assessed internally and externally and provides essential information for schools and teachers about the areas in which the quality of school education can be managed. Important findings include: (1) most students were satisfied with the schools and had few negative feelings about being at school; (2) promoting teacher-student relations was the most effective way to maintain and assure the quality of school life; and (3) the quality of school life for most students deteriorated dramatically in Primary 5 and 6 when compared to Primary 4.

Key words: primary student; quality education; school life

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Quality school education is a popular issue in the 1990s in Hong Kong (Education and Manpower Branch & Education Department, 1991; Siu & Tam, 1995; Education Commission, 1997; Pang, 1998a, 1998b), although pursuing quality in education has been a major interest for Western countries since the 1980s (Esptein, 1981; Ainley, Reed & Miller, 1986; Huges, 1988). In March 1991 in Hong Kong, the Education and Manpower Branch and the Education Department published the *School Management Initiative: Setting the Framework for Quality in Hong Kong Schools* (SMI) to reform schools on a school-based management model. Its concern is improvement of the quality of education. In September 1997, the Education Commission published the final version of its seventh report (ECR7), *Quality School Education*. Its major concern is again the quality of school education. The challenges ahead for most policy makers and school practitioners are to promote the quality of school education. The major recommendations by the ECR7 have been: (i) nurturing a quality culture in the school system; (ii) developing performance indicators for schools in the local context; and (iii) assuring quality school education by establishing Quality Assurance Inspectorate to oversee the developments in schools and by creating incentives to encourage schools to improve. However, these are new issues to most of the Hong Kong people concerned. In order to raise student performance, we have to explore more fully as to (i) how to manage quality in the whole education system; (ii) how to foster a quality culture in schools; (iii) how to link evaluation (uses of performance indicators) and school improvement together; and (iv) how to assure quality school education (Pang, 1998c).

In response to the ECR7 and the development of the Hong Kong education system, this study was launched to conduct an assessment of the quality of school education in Hong Kong. This study initially investigates students' quality of school life in the primary sector, while an assessment of the quality of school life in the secondary sector will be the next project. Before the ECR7 recommendations are fully implemented, more research should be carried out in order to clarify some basic concepts of quality education and to pursue further the ways to manage and promote quality

education in schools (Pang, 1999a). It is under such premises that the study was launched and attempts were made to develop the concept of quality school education and to examine relationships of related constructs of quality school life in the Hong Kong context.

Students' Views of Quality of School Life

A major criticism on the ECR7 from the public since its publication was that the term "quality school education" has not been clearly defined (Pang, 1999b) and that there are no objective, valid and reliable performance indicators (PIs) suggested for both policy makers and school practitioners to follow when a school is being assessed to see whether it is providing quality school education or not (Pang, 1998d). The ECR7 only suggests that more research into the most appropriate PIs should be carried out and that in respect of primary education, PIs should relate more to the various aspects of children's development, such as emotional, social and physical developments.

It should be stressed that no full agreement has been reached about the very meaning of quality school education. Quality school education is an abstract term that is purely subjective. Different people may have different understanding and conceptions of quality school education. It is mainly due to the fact that "quality" is a problematic term that is difficult to define. Despite the fact that Harvey and Green's (1993) have offered five definitions of "quality"—(i) quality as fitness for purpose, (ii) quality as process perfection, (iii) quality as producing change, (iv) quality as high standards and (v) quality as efficiency, people may refer to different definitions in different contexts and at different times. When Harvey and Green's conceptions of quality are applied in school education, it illustrates why quality school education is also a slippery term and why it usually leads to confusions when people speak of quality school education.

Different stakeholders of schools, including school administrators, teachers, parents, employers and the public, may have different views and expectations of the quality of school education and their views are quite

diverse. Many researchers stressed that if the quality of school education is to be enhanced, students' views of their quality of school life should be examined (Ainley, Goldman, & Reed, 1990; Ramsay & Clark, 1990). When students' views of quality of school life are sought, different researchers stress different domains of students' performance in schools, including both academic and social. While there has been a long tradition of assessing the quality of education in terms of students' academic achievement, especially in the school effectiveness movement, some researchers assess students' self-esteem (Bagley, Bolitho, & Bertrand, 1997), general self-concepts (Marsh, 1994), academic self-concepts (Marsh & Yeung, 1997), and students' perceptions of quality of school life (Esptein, 1981; Ainley & Bourke, 1992; Johnson & Johnson, 1993). This present study assesses students' quality of school life as indicative of the quality of school education, basing on a model developed by Epstein and Mcpartland (1976), William and Batten (1981), Ainley, Goldman and Reed (1990). Although students' quality of school life is not the whole but part of the quality of school education, its assessment allows students to report on what schools are doing. Student reports on the school environment and culture can describe whether students perceive what teachers and administrators think is happening in the school and in classrooms. Assessing students' views of quality of school life may shed light on the ways to promote and assure the quality of school education. In sum, this study aims to enrich the literature in such areas as quality school education as well as the quality of school life.

The multidimensionality of students' views of quality of school life has been confirmed and extensively tested in different schools in different countries. Joyce Epstein and James Mcpartland carried out the earliest conceptualization and measurement of students' perceptions of quality of school life in 1976. In their research, the quality of school life was defined in terms of three dimensions of student reactions: (1) satisfaction with the school in general, (2) commitment to schoolwork, and (3) attitudes towards teachers. Thereafter the concept of quality of school life and Epstein's scales of quality of school life were tested extensively in other countries, for example, the United States (Wright and Jesness, 1981), Canada (Isherwood

and Hammah, 1981), Israel (Darom and Rich, 1981) and West Germany (Scheerer, 1981).

In 1980s, the concepts of quality of school life were extended in Australia. In Australia, work on student quality of school life began with a conceptualization of quality of school life reported by William and Batten (1981). They proposed a model of students' views of quality of school life that is distinguished into general feelings of well being and feelings related to specific domains of life. The general domains of quality of school life include:

1. General satisfaction – it concerns general positive feelings about school. (e.g. My school is a place where I really like to go each day.)
2. Negative affect – it concerns general negative personal reactions to school. (e.g. My school is a place where I feel upset.)

Both are measures of students' general well being at school. William and Batten (1981) also proposed five specific domains of student experience originated from a theory of schooling developed by Mitchell and Spady (1978). They were:

1. Teacher-student relations-it concerns the adequacy of interaction between teachers and students. (e.g. My school is a place where my teachers help me to do my best.)
2. Social integration-it concerns the students' relationships with other people and classmates. (e.g. My school is a place where other students accept me as I am.)
3. Opportunity-it relates to a belief in the relevance of schooling. (e.g. My school is a place where the things I learn are important to me.)
4. Achievement-it relates to a sense of being successful in schoolwork. (e.g. My school is a place where I am successful as a student.)
5. Adventure-it is a sense of self-motivation in learning and a sense that learning is enjoyable for its own sake. (e.g. My school is a place where I am excited about the work we do.)

Based on this framework, a school-life questionnaire for use was developed by Ainley, Reed and Miller (1986) in the Victorian government secondary schools. Their work revealed that students' views of quality of school life

are related to aspects of school organization and teacher job satisfaction. Another school-life questionnaire for use in primary schools was developed by Ainley, Goldman and Reed (1990) and its general applicability was well established in both the Victorian and New South Wales school systems (Ainley & Bourke, 1992).

It has been argued that students' views of quality of school life should be considered and investigated when the quality of school education is being promoted. It is such experiences in schools that are part of the "essence" of quality of education and will be the focus of this study. This research aims to test whether the Australian model of quality of school life be applied in the Hong Kong context and to develop appropriate indicators for schools in the assessment of students' perceptions of quality of school life.

Instrumentation and Sample

The 40-item Quality of School Life (QSL) questionnaire developed by Ainley, Goldman and Reed (1990) for the Australian primary schools was adapted for the local context in this study. The items were converted into Chinese and rephrased to suit the local context. Since the researcher foresaw that some of the school life items in certain scales of the original QSL might not fit into the Hong Kong school context, a few more items that might be appropriate to the local environment were created and added to the original item pool for testing. In total, 16 new school life items concerning other aspects of students' lives in respective scales were supplemented to the original QSL (see Table 1). Students were requested to rate the 56 school life items in the form of "My school is a place where..." and on a four-point Likert scale from "Strongly Disagree," "Disagree," "Agree" and "Strongly Agree" with "1" indicating "Strongly Disagree" to "4" indicating "Strongly Agree." The adapted version of QSL was administered to the senior year (Primary 4 to 6) students from 105 classes from 35 randomly selected primary schools in Hong Kong. Within each school, a class was chosen from each of the senior levels (P4 to P6) according to a random selection scheme prescribed before the survey. In total, 2,963 students returned their responses and the rate of return was 80.6 percent.

Table 1 A Comparison between the Item Numbers of the Scales of Quality of School Life Before and After Principal Component Analyses

Scale of Quality of School Life	Before principal component analysis of school life items			After principal component analysis of school life items		
	No. of original items	No. of new items	Total no. of items	No. of original items	No. of new items	Total no. of items
General satisfaction	6	2	8	4	2	6
Negative affect	5	3	8	4	3	7
Teacher-student relations	5	3	8	5	3	8
Social integration	8	0	8	8	0	8
Opportunity	6	2	8	6	1	7
Achievement	5	3	8	3	1	4
Adventure	5	3	8	4	1	5
No. of items	40	16	56	34	11	45

Principal component analysis was used to analyze the data separately for the general school life items and for the specific school life items as a means of data reduction. This approach emphasized the development of specific scales, which were considered to be more likely to provide useful information about concrete areas to schools and teachers than the more general scales. The results of the analyses of the general school life items confirmed the existence of the two areas corresponding to general satisfaction and negative affect. The results of the analyses of the specific school life items also confirmed the existence of the five specific areas: teacher-student relations, social integration, opportunity, achievement and adventure. In scaling the latent factors, 45 items, out of the 56 items in the pool, were included in the final version of the QSL, in which 34 were original items and 11 were new items. All items of the scales in the final structure of the

Table 2 Scales and Sample Items of the Quality of School Life Questionnaire for Primary Schools

General Domain
<p><i>General Satisfaction</i> (No. of items = 6; Reliability Coefficient (Alpha) = 0.79)</p> <p>A high score on this scale indicates that the students in the school perceived themselves having general positive feelings about school.</p> <p>Items: My school is a place where I really like to go each day. My school is a place where I get enjoyment from being there.</p>
<p><i>Negative Affects</i> (7; 0.85)</p> <p>A high score on this scale indicates that the students in the school perceived themselves having general negative personal reactions to school.</p> <p>Items: My school is a place where I feel helpless. My school is a place where I feel threatened.</p>
Specific Domain
<p><i>Teacher-student Relations</i> (8; 0.89)</p> <p>A high score on this scale indicates that the students in the school perceived themselves having adequate and good interaction with teachers.</p> <p>Items: My school is a place where my teachers help me to do my best. My school is a place where my teachers treat me as a friend.</p>
<p><i>Social Integration</i> (8; 0.86)</p> <p>A high score on this scale indicates that the students in the school perceived themselves having a sense of worth within the school and a good sense of learning about other people and getting along with other people.</p> <p>Items: My school is a place where other students accept me as I am. My school is a place where I feel easy to get to know other people.</p>
<p><i>Opportunity</i> (7; 0.80)</p> <p>A high score on this scale indicates that the students in the school perceived themselves having a schooling that is relevant to their future.</p> <p>Items: My school is a place where the things I learn are important to me. My school is a place where I know how to cope with the work.</p>
<p><i>Achievement</i> (4; 0.72)</p> <p>A high score on this scale indicates that the students in the school perceived themselves having a sense of being successful in schoolwork.</p> <p>Items: My school is a place where I am success as a student. My school is a place where I am good at schoolwork.</p>
<p><i>Adventure</i> (5; 0.70)</p> <p>A high score on this scale indicates that the students in the school perceived themselves having a sense of self motivation in learning and that learning is enjoyable for its own sake.</p> <p>Items: My school is a place where I am excited about the work we do. My school is a place where I always do the work that really interests me.</p>

factor model were found to be contributive to the underlying meanings of the latent constructs respectively. The factor structure of the final model of the quality of school life derived from the Hong Kong context was consistent with that of the Australian model. The scales and sample items of the newly developed 45-item QSL and their meanings are summarized in Table 2, in which the number of items and the reliability coefficients (Alphas) of each scale were also included. The reliability coefficients of the seven scales ranged from 0.70 to 0.89, indicating that they were reliable measures of the underlying latent variables of students' perceptions of quality of school life.

Correlations of the Scales of the QSL

There were two domains and seven scales in the conceptualized model of quality of school life. It was expected that the seven scales were inter-correlated among each other. Table 3 shows the correlations among the various scales.

Table 3 reveals that the two scales (general satisfaction and negative affect) of the general domain were negatively correlated, with a coefficient of -0.55. It is evident that while the two scales were not identical in sense and could be treated as separate variables, there was strong association between them. In a school, while one scale was high in score, the other would be low.

Table 3 also shows that all five scales of the specific domain of quality of school life were positively and significantly correlated to each other. The correlation coefficients ranged from 0.43 to 0.62, indicating that the associations were strong to each other.

As to the correlations between the two general scales and the five specific scales, Table 3 indicates that while all five specific scales had positive and significant associations with general satisfaction, they had negative and significant associations with negative affect. The stronger correlates of general satisfaction were adventure and teacher-student relations. This suggests that when students enjoyed good relations with teachers and motivated in learning, they usually had greater degrees of general satisfaction of the

schools. On the contrary, the stronger correlates of negative affect were teacher-student relations, social integration and opportunity. When a student had poor relations with his/her teachers and classmates and when a student did not feel that the schooling was relevant to his/her future, he/she usually had negative feelings, such as, helplessness, neglectedness, loneliness, being upset and worried.

Table 3 Correlations between the Scales of the Quality of School Life Questionnaire

	General Satisfaction	Negative Affect	Teacher-student Relations	Social Integration	Opportunity	Achievement	Adventure
General Satisfaction	1.00						
Negative Affect	-0.55	1.00					
Teacher-student Relations	0.62	-0.55	1.00				
Social Integration	0.55	-0.50	0.48	1.00			
Opportunity	0.59	-0.49	0.62	0.51	1.00		
Achievement	0.50	-0.35	0.43	0.51	0.47	1.00	
Adventure	0.64	-0.40	0.56	0.55	0.58	0.54	1.00

Note: All correlation coefficients are significant at 0.0001 level.

The Effects of Specific Scales on General Scales

The previous section reveals that the scales of both the general and specific domains were strongly associated to each other. In the conceptualization of quality of school life, Ainley, Goldman and Reed (1990) regarded that the general domain and the specific domain of quality of school life were of different measures and should be treated separately. The satisfaction of the five specific scales would have contributed to the students' general satisfaction with the schools and, in the other way, diminished the students' general level of negative personal feelings. It was postulated in this study that the five specific scales of quality of school life might have different effects on the two general scales. The results of regression analyses of general satisfaction and negative affect on the five specific scales of quality of school life are presented in Table 4 and the results of path analysis of their relationships are also summarized in Figure 1.

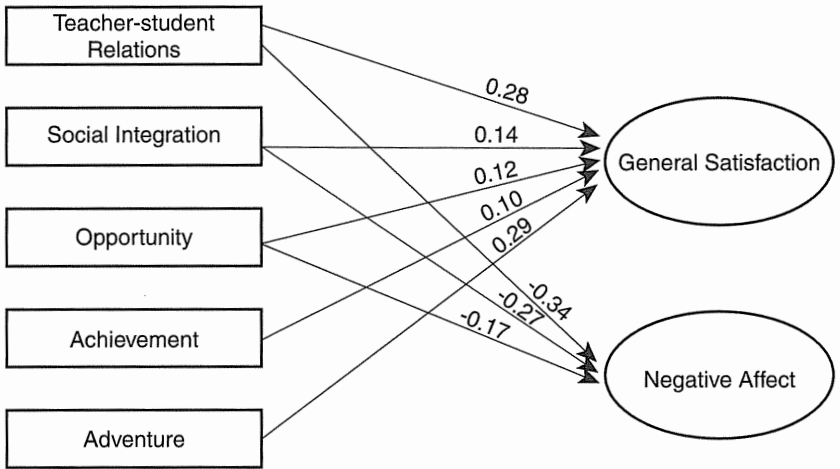
Table 4 Regression Analyses of the General Scales on the Specific Scales of Quality of School Life

	Teacher- student Relations	Social Integration	Opportunity	Achieve- ment	Adventure	Multiple R ²	Adjusted R ²
General	0.28*	0.14*	0.12*	0.10*	0.29*	0.75	0.56
Satisfaction	(0.25*)	(0.13*)	(0.14*)	(0.09*)	(0.29*)		
Negative	-0.34*	-0.27*	-0.17*	-0.01	0.04	0.63	0.40
Affect	(-0.32*)	(-0.28*)	(-0.20*)	(-0.01)	(0.04)		

- Note: (1) * indicates a coefficient which is significant at the 0.05 level.
 (2) Figures given in bold are standardized regression coefficients, whilst bracketed figures are metric regression coefficients.
 (3) When figures are given as standardized regression coefficients, comparisons between variables in the same equation are enabled. When figures are given as metric coefficients, comparisons between the same variables in each equation are enabled.

The standardized regression coefficients given in Figure 1 indicate the extent to which the five scales of the specific domain would have effects on the two scales of the general domain. The results reveal that all five specific scales did have effects on students' general satisfaction of the schools. Adventure and teacher-student relations were the two scales which had most powerful effects on general satisfaction, with standardized regression coefficients close to 0.30, whilst the other three scales could only have moderate effects. It implies that if students' levels of general satisfaction are to be promoted in schools, adventure and teacher-student relations are the more effective strategies.

As to negative affect, only three specific scales did have significant and negative effects on it, that is, teacher-student relations, social integration and opportunity, while the effects of achievement and adventure on negative affect were insignificant. The two more effective strategies to eliminate students' negative affect in school are to promote teacher-student relations and to have stronger social integration among the students. When the social supports from both teachers and peer students increase, students' personal negative feelings will be diminished. Opportunity is the third strategy to reduce students' negative affect, although its effect is less than the former strategies.

Figure 1 Path Analysis of Regression of General Scales on Specific Scales

Note: All figures are given as standardized regression coefficients, which allow for comparisons between variables in the same equation.

A cautionary note should be made with respect to the term “effects” in the regression analyses. Since the statistical data in this study were cross-sectional in nature, there was no way that the data could suggest the directionality of the causal relationships as implied in the study. However, it was based on the hypotheses that the five scales of the specific domain might have effects on the two scales of the general domain (causes and effects). The analysis of the data was designed to shed light on the question of whether or not these hypotheses were consistent with the data. If relationships were inconsistent with the data, doubt would be cast on the hypotheses that had generated them. Consistency of the assumptions with the data, however, would not necessarily constitute a proof of the directionality of the causal relationships, but at least it would lend support to it. The hypotheses survived the test because they had not been disconfirmed.

In sum, both Figure 1 and Table 4 reveal that the most powerful strategy that enhances students’ general satisfaction and eliminates students’ negative affect simultaneously and significantly was teacher-student relations. It is the most important area to which school administrators and teachers should attend, when they want to enhance the quality of school life for their students.

It is also the area in which most teachers can contribute their effort and teachers may have direct effects on the quality of school education.

Primary Students' Perceptions of Quality of School Life in Hong Kong

The means and standard deviations for the two general scales and five specific scales of quality of school life are shown in Table 5. Table 5 reveals that most of the students were satisfied in school lives and had few negative affect in the schools. Of the five specific scales of quality of school life, opportunity and teacher-student relations were the two scales with mean scores above or equal to 3.00. Most of the students agreed that they had good opportunity in school and perceived themselves having a schooling that was relevant to their future. They believed that what they had learned was what they needed to know and might help them in secondary schooling. They also agreed that their relations with teachers were good. Most of their teachers treated them fairly in class and helped them to do their best. The other three specific scales of quality of school life, that is, social integration, achievement, and adventure, had mean scores below 3.00, but above 2.50. It is evident that many students had a sense of worth within the schools and that they were able to learn about and getting along with other people easily. Many of them had a good adventure in the schools. That is, they found that learning was enjoyable for its own sake and that they had high motivation in learning. However, "achievement" was the specific scale that had the lowest mean score, a value of 2.64 that is close to the average value of 2.50 on a 4-point Likert scale. It indicates that some students were being successful in schoolwork, but a few of them still regarded themselves as failures in school.

In sum, most of the students in primary schools had good quality of schooling. They were satisfied with the schools and had low levels of negative personal feelings about being at school. Schooling was adventurous and provided them with good opportunities. Most of the students had good relations with their teachers and were socially integrated. Although many

students believed that they could be successful in school, there were still a few of them who regarded their school lives as being not up to their expectations, especially in the domain of achievement.

Table 5 Means and Standard Deviations of the Scales of Quality of School Life

Scale	Mean	SD	Valid N
General Satisfaction	2.90	0.53	2817
Negative Affect	1.77	0.56	2768
Teacher-student Relations	3.00	0.59	2801
Social Integration	2.87	0.54	2824
Opportunity	3.13	0.47	2825
Achievement	2.64	0.56	2871
Adventure	2.76	0.53	2852

Perceptions of Quality of School Life by Gender of Students

Different students might have different perceptions of their school lives. The views of school life by male and female students were summarized and compared in Table 6. Table 6 reveals that there were statistically significant differences in the views of the two groups of students about the two general scales of quality of school life. Female students generally had more favorable and better school lives than did male students; that is, female students perceived themselves having greater satisfaction in school and lesser personal negative feelings. Of the five specific scales, only two scales showed significant differences between male and female students: teacher-student relations and adventure. Female students perceived themselves having better relations with teachers and having a better sense of self-motivation in learning than did male students. However, there were no significant differences in the perceptions of the other three scales (social integration, opportunity and achievement) between the two groups of students. In sum, female students generally perceived themselves having better quality of schooling than did male students in the Hong Kong primary schools.

Table 6 Perceptions of Quality of School Life by Gender of Students

Scale of QSL	Male	Female	T-Value	2-Tail Significance
General Satisfaction	2.84	2.95	-5.90	0.000*
Negative Affect	1.80	<u>1.73</u>	3.46	0.001*
Teacher-student Relations	<u>2.94</u>	3.08	-6.29	0.000*
Social Integration	2.85	2.88	-1.94	0.052
Opportunity	3.12	3.14	-1.60	0.109
Achievement	2.64	2.64	-0.12	0.907
Adventure	<u>2.713</u>	2.82	-5.15	0.000*

Note: (1) * indicates that the T-test is statistically significant at 0.05 level.

(2) When there is a significant difference between two scores in a T-test, the greater score is printed in bolded typeface, whilst the smaller score is underlined. When there is no significant difference between two scores, the scores remain typed in normal font type.

Perceptions of Quality of School Life by Level of Year

The QSL questionnaire was administered only to the senior primary students (P4 to P6) but not the junior primary students (P1 to P3), because of their different levels of language proficiency (even in Chinese). The junior primary students might have difficulties in responding to the initial 56-item long questionnaire, in understanding about the items, and in providing the kind of imagination and response requested by the QSL. One-way ANOVA tests were performed to the data set to examine the students' perceptions of quality of school life between different levels of year (from Primary 4 to Primary 6). The results of the tests are summarized in Table 7.

On the whole, the quality of school life for most students declined in Primary 5 and 6 when compared to that in Primary 4. There were no significant differences between Primary 5 and Primary 6 in all scales but teacher-student relations. The quality of schooling for most students in Hong Kong primary schools deteriorated in Primary 5 and 6 when compared to that in Primary 4 in all the scales of quality of school life. In the last two years of schooling in primary schools, students' general satisfaction declined and their personal negative feelings increased.

Table 7 Perceptions of Quality of School Life by Level of Year

Scale of QSL	P4	P5	P6	F-Ratio	F-Probability
General Satisfaction	2.99	<u>2.86</u>	<u>2.84</u>	22.480	0.0000*
Negative Affect	<u>1.69</u>	1.79	1.81	12.190	0.0000*
Teacher-student Relations	3.12	<u>2.99</u>	2.89	34.311	0.0000*
Social Integration	2.94	<u>2.83</u>	<u>2.82</u>	13.614	0.0000*
Opportunity	3.25	<u>3.09</u>	<u>3.06</u>	45.194	0.0000*
Achievement	2.73	<u>2.61</u>	<u>2.57</u>	19.715	0.0000*
Adventure	2.87	<u>2.71</u>	<u>2.70</u>	31.877	0.0000*

Note: (1) * indicates that the F-test is statistically significant at 0.0001 level.

- (2) When there are significant differences among the three scores in a F-test, the greater score is printed in bolded typeface, the next score is underlined and the least score is remained normal. When two scores are similarly printed in bolded typeface, underlined, or remained normal in the font type, there is not significant difference between the two scores.

One probable cause for such deterioration may be due to the fact that the schooling in Primary 5 and 6 provided by most of the Hong Kong primary schools is still highly examination-oriented. Although the external, public Secondary School Entrance Examination (SSEE) was abolished in 1978 with the inception of nine-year free and compulsory education, all primary students are still under the present Secondary School Places Allocation (SSPA) system when they proceed further to the secondary level. Primary students will be allocated to secondary schools according to their academic merits in the last two years of primary schooling and their performance in Academic Aptitude Test (AAT) (Board of Education, 1997). In order to have a better chance of allocation to preferred secondary schools, students should compete with fellow classmates since their academic merits will be arranged in order internally and with students of other schools since their overall performance will be moderated externally with AAT. Students are very anxious about their performance in both the internal assessments and the external moderation. Even worse, school administrators and teachers have commonly shown extreme concerns about students' performance in AAT, since the results of which will determine the performance of the school as a whole.

There are drastic changes of school lives when students proceed from

Primary 4 to Primary 5 and 6, because both teachers and students are vulnerable to great pressures from both internal and external assessments, examinations, and competitions. One of the major problems with AAT has been that it does not assess what the students have been learning at school. Furthermore, due to incomplete understanding of the nature and functions of AAT by teachers and parents, AAT has led to the common practices of drilling in schools in an attempt to obtain higher scores (Board of Education, 1997). In order to obtain higher scores in AAT, P5 and P6 students are almost invariably asked to buy and work on commercially produced supplementary exercises for drilling. Some schools even deliberately finish their teaching syllabus earlier by half a year allowing students to get into practices of drilling for AAT. Consequently, normal teaching and learning have been distorted and both teachers and students are overloaded under the direct impacts of AAT.

It is evident that the SSPA system, AAT and in-school and between-school competitions did have very great influences on students in the last two years of schooling in primary education in terms of the quality of school life they perceived. The dramatic change of teaching and learning atmosphere from Primary 4 to Primary 5 and 6 undermines the quality of school life for most primary students in Hong Kong. Specifically, when they proceed further to higher levels, teacher-student relations decline, the time and opportunity of learning about and getting along with other fellow classmates decrease, and the relevance of schooling decreases. Under the pressures of examinations and competitions, students do not regard learning as interesting, self-motivating and enjoyable. Assessments in Primary 5 and 6 have shifted from criterion referencing to norm referencing. The sense of achievement for many students is weakened as they proceed further, since the present assessment system in Hong Kong schools has been designed to create few winners but so many losers. It is recommended that the present SSPA system, AAT and both internal and external modes of assessment in the school education system should be evaluated and modified as soon as possible. Instead, new modes of assessment and new ways of allocating

students to secondary school places that aim at maintaining and assuring quality school education, especially at the Primary 5 and 6 levels, should be provided.

The recently published report on the review of 9-year compulsory education (Board of Education, 1997) recommended that the Academic Aptitude Test (AAT) will be replaced by a newly introduced Academic Ability Assessment (AAA) by the year 2000, in order to alleviate the examination pressures on primary students (p. 88). The author agrees to such a measure in principle, since AAA aims at testing students' higher-order thinking skills such as application, analysis, synthesis, inferencing and problem solving, as distinct from simple reasoning skills assessed by AAT. However, the author still wonders whether the quality of schooling in the last two years of primary education can be maintained and assured, if the atmosphere and practices of teaching and learning in the classroom as well as the beliefs and attitudes of both teachers and parents towards internal assessments, external moderation system, and the allocation system of secondary school places remain unchanged. It is the area to which school administrators and policy makers should pay more attention. In the near future, both teacher and parent education should be strengthened in order to promote their understanding of the SSPA system and the nature and function of the scaling instrument.

Conclusions and Suggestions

The study was launched to assess the quality of schooling in primary schools in Hong Kong. In doing so, the researcher argued that students' views of school life are the essence of the quality of school education and should be considered and investigated if we want to explore the ways to manage and assure quality school education and to link evaluation (use of performance indicators) and school improvement together.

Attempts were made to adapt and test the Australian model of quality of school life and the Quality of School Life (QSL) questionnaire in Hong Kong primary schools. Based on a sample of 2,963 students from 35 randomly selected primary schools, the Australian model of quality of school

life was confirmed in the Hong Kong context. There were two domains and seven scales of quality of school life. While general satisfaction and negative affect were the two scales in the general domain, the five scales in the specific domains were teacher-student relations, social integration, opportunity, achievement and adventure. This study also succeeded in developing a new, Chinese version of QSL questionnaire with 45 school life items from the students' views to assess the quality of schooling in Hong Kong primary schools and in providing appropriate, reliable and valid performance indicators for use in the local context.

It has been argued that the general and specific domains should be treated separately, since the specific scales are likely to provide significant information for schools and teachers about concrete areas in which the quality of school education can be managed. The implication of the study is that if students' levels of general satisfaction in school are to be enhanced, the two effective means are to promote teacher-student relations and to raise students' sense of adventure in classroom. In that sense, enhancing teacher-student relations and interactions, motivating students in learning, and making learning enjoyable for its own sake are important strategies to promote students' general sense of satisfaction with the school. If students' personal negative feelings are to be reduced, teacher-student relations, social integration and opportunity are the good strategies. When students have adequate and good interaction with teachers, have a sense of worth within the school, have a good sense of learning about and getting along with other people, and have a sense that schooling is relevant to their future, the students' quality of school life will be maintained and assured. "Teacher-student relations" is the most important area to which school administrators and teachers should attend, since improving teacher-student relations will directly, significantly and simultaneously enhance students' general satisfaction and reduce students' negative affect, that is, promote students' quality of school life.

The quality of school life in Hong Kong primary schools was generally good. Most of the students were satisfied with the schools and had low

levels of negative feelings about being at school. To them, schooling was adventurous and provided them with good opportunity. Most of the students were socially integrated and had good relations with teachers. Some of them believed that they could be successful in school, while some did not. In general, female students had better quality of school life than did male students. However, the quality of school life for most students deteriorated drastically from Primary 4 to Primary 5 and 6. The quality of school life in all seven areas (scales) declined in the last two years of schooling for most primary students. Such dramatic change was mainly due to the fact that school lives in Primary 5 and 6 became highly examination-oriented. Under the great pressure of both internal and external competition, school administrators, teachers, and students have relegated quality school education to the second place. If the quality of school education should be maintained and assured in the last two years of primary education, new modes of assessment, moderation, and allocation of students to secondary school places should be introduced and the teaching and learning atmosphere and practices in classroom should also be promoted.

Although the Australian model of quality of school life and the QSL did not have a perfect fit to the Hong Kong context, they had been adapted, fashioned and developed appropriately to measure students' perceptions of quality of school life in Hong Kong primary schools. It should be stressed that the development of the model and the instrument is, in principle, an ever-continuing process, and that in practice, the opportunity for their further refinement will be offered by their applications in future research. Further development work including conducting in-depth case studies and empirical observations to confirm the model of quality of school life qualitatively should continue. In future research, the generation of additional scales in the general and specific domains and even more robust reliability and validity tests should also be pursued.

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