

# UAI JOURNAL OF EDUCATION, HUMANITIES AND LITERATURE (UAIJEHL)



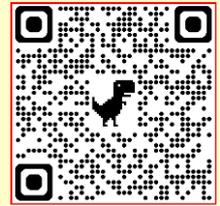
Abbreviated Key Title: UAI J Edu Huma Lit.

ISSN: 3049-3196 (Online)

Journal Homepage: <https://uaipublisher.com/uaijehl-2/>

Volume- 2 Issue- 1 (January- February) 2026

Frequency: Bimonthly



## Improving Senior Secondary School Students' Academic Performance in HK

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### ABSTRACT

*The New Senior Secondary curriculum in Hong Kong aims to move beyond an examination-driven culture and promote whole-person and lifelong learning, yet concerns remain about student engagement, stress, and academic outcomes. Recent longitudinal and cross-sectional studies show that perceived school support, positive youth development attributes, academic confidence, family functioning, and resilience are key ecological predictors of senior secondary students' academic satisfaction and performance. This research-style article synthesises contemporary educational journal review mainly from Hong Kong to analyse determinants of academic performance at individual, family, school, and system levels and proposes a multi-tiered improvement framework aligned with Education Bureau policy goals. This research paper argues that targeted interventions to reduce stress, enhance school support, cultivate virtues and resilience, and strengthen home-school partnerships can meaningfully improve academic engagement and achievement for diverse senior secondary learners. Practical suggestions are offered for school leaders, teachers, and policymakers, followed by a conclusion highlighting implications for future research and practice in Hong Kong's senior secondary sector [1-9].*

**KEY WORDS:** Academic confidence, student engagement, whole-person development, positive school culture

### Introduction

The New Senior Secondary (NSS) curriculum reforms, implemented in 2009, sought to replace a narrow, examination-oriented ideology with student-centred, school-based management and “learning to learn” as the guiding principle for independent learning, whole-person development, and lifelong learning. While many students acknowledge benefits of the NSS curriculum for non-cognitive development (such as self-understanding, positive values, and resilience), substantial proportions report [1][2][7][8] found that low fondness for senior secondary education and perceive junior secondary schooling more positively. High-performing students tend to like the NSS curriculum most and recognise more benefits for their generic skills, whereas low-performing students express weaker interest and perceive fewer gains, suggesting differential impacts on academic engagement. Survey evidence [1][2][8] on generic learning outcomes further indicates that students' performances in areas such as collaboration, problem solving, and communication remain below

expectations, raising questions about how effectively schools plan can facilitate learning and collaboration [1][2][9].

At the individual level, some Hong Kong research studies [1][2] highlight that academic stress is a pervasive concern among senior secondary students, driven by a compressed academic structure, high-stakes Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) examinations, and intense competition for tertiary places. Longitudinal structural equation modelling [1][3][6][7] shows that academic stress negatively predicts later academic satisfaction, while positive youth development attributes (e.g., competence, resilience, moral competence) and school support positively predict satisfaction, with academic confidence mediating most of these relationships. Parallel research [8][11] indicates that school connectedness and perceived parental support significantly predict students' academic self-efficacy and broader life skills, linking psychosocial adjustment with learning outcomes. Resilience research based on multiple waves of Hong Kong data finds that stronger family functioning and

higher-quality parent–child relationships are associated with higher adolescent resilience over time, which in turn supports better adaptation to academic demands [1][3][6][7][8][11].

At the cultural psychological level, the concept of Chinese virtues, such as benevolence, wisdom, and courage has been operationalised and validated among Hong Kong students, with structural models showing that virtues positively predict positive resilience. Although one study observed a complex pattern in which virtues also related to “succumbing,” the overall evidence suggests that nurturing character strengths can enhance students’ capacity to cope with adversity. For ethnic minority (South Asian), a critical review points to home factors (limited cultural capital, gendered expectations, relationships with primary caregivers) and school factors (culturally insensitive teaching, non-differentiated curricula) that constrain language proficiency and academic performance, especially in Chinese. These findings [4][8][11] highlight that “academic performance” in Hong Kong is intertwined with cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic realities and that any improvement agenda must be equity-aware.

## Discussion

### Ecological determinants of performance in Hong Kong

From an ecological perspective, senior secondary academic performance in Hong Kong emerges from the dynamic interaction of individual, relational, school, and policy-level factors within the territory’s distinctive socio-cultural context. At the individual level, academic stress tends to erode satisfaction and engagement, whereas positive youth development attributes, such as virtues, resilience, and academic confidence, serve as protective resources that sustain motivation and performance under the demanding New Senior Secondary (NSS) curriculum. Family environments further shape these outcomes; high-quality parent–child relationships and coherent family functioning enhance students’ resilience and self-efficacy, providing emotional and instrumental support that buffers examination-related pressure. Yet, among some minority groups, limited cultural and linguistic capital may constrain parents’ ability to support learning in Chinese-medium contexts. At the school level, perceived school support including caring teacher student relationships, clear guidance, and a positive climate predicts higher academic confidence and satisfaction, both of which are associated with stronger performance. Schools’ capacity to embody NSS principles through student-centred, inquiry-based learning remains critical to promoting the intended generic outcomes. However, at the system level, tensions between the NSS reform’s emphasis on whole-person development and the persistent high-stakes demands of the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) examination perpetuate a culture of credentialism. This conflict often drives schools to favour examination orient drilling over deeper learning, thereby compromising both academic satisfaction and long-term competency development.

### Gaps between NSS intentions and classroom realities

The literature [1][2][8][9] reveals a gap between policy rhetoric and classroom practice in Hong Kong’s senior secondary education. While the NSS curriculum emphasizes independent learning, generic skills, and whole-person development, survey and outcome data [1][2][7][8] suggest that many schools still struggle to create engaging, student-centred environments, especially for academically weaker and linguistically disadvantaged learners. Regression analyses indicate that [1][2][7][8] students’ generic outcomes are largely explained by how effectively schools plan and facilitate learning inside and outside the classroom, underscoring the central role of school leadership and curriculum coordination [1][2][6][7][8][9].

Moreover, the finding that high-performing students report [1-8] the greatest fondness and perceived benefits from the NSS curriculum, while low-performing students show the lowest fondness and perceived non-cognitive gains, raises ability differences concerns. If the NSS framework benefits those already advantaged by prior achievement, stronger family support, or better fit with the dominant language and culture, it may inadvertently widen performance gaps. The persistence of strong academic stress and competition suggests that reforms have not fully displaced exam-oriented norms, particularly in high-band schools where HKDSE results are closely linked to school reputation and banding [1][2][8][10][11].

### Integrating virtues, resilience, and support into a performance framework

The Hong Kong evidence [1-11] supports our holistic improvement framework that positions academic performance as a function of cognitive skills, non-cognitive strengths (e.g., virtues, resilience, self-efficacy), and ecological supports (school climate, family functioning). Chinese virtues and related character strengths can be deliberately cultivated through curriculum (e.g., Life and Society, Ethics and Religious Studies), pastoral care, and co-curricular activities to strengthen positive resilience in the face of academic challenges. Longitudinal findings on resilience and family processes suggest that sustained efforts to support parent–child relationships and communication can maintain higher resilience trajectories across adolescence, even if resilience naturally declines slightly over time. School connectedness, encompassing students’ sense of belonging, respect, and participation, emerges as a robust predictor of self-efficacy and satisfaction and should therefore be treated as a core improvement lever, not a peripheral affective outcome [1][3][4][5][6].

**Due to the above review**, we purposed our fine-tuning suggestion which will made strides toward student-centred and whole-person education, that cultivate whole person development with positive attitude. Our fine-tuning suggestion is as follow:

### Suggestions On Behalf to School leaders and leadership management

Embed academic performance within the Education Bureau’s performance indicators [2][3][5][6][9] by systematically linking planning, implementation, and evaluation cycles to NSS goals of generic skills and whole-person development, not only HKDSE scores. This can involve explicit school-level targets for resilience, academic confidence, and school connectedness, monitored alongside attainment data.

- Strengthen instructional and distribute leadership, with school-based learning communities so that departments regularly review assessment practices, lesson designs, and homework policies for their impact on student stress, engagement, and confidence. Peer-based Lesson observations and collaborative planning can prioritise student-centred pedagogies (e.g., inquiry, discussion, project-based learning) aligned with NSS exemplars rather than relying predominantly on lecture and drilling.
- Develop whole-school programmes that integrate positive youth education, virtues, and resilience training into the formal and fine-tuning curriculum, using validated tools such as the Chinese Virtues Questionnaire and established PYD frameworks to guide design and evaluation. Schools can, for example, use class teacher periods or religion education lessons to foster goal-setting, cognitive re-framing, coping strategies, and reflection on virtues in academic contexts.

## Frontline teachers and classroom practice

- Intentionally cultivate positive academic confidence by providing clear learning targets, scaffolded tasks, formative feedback, and opportunities for early success, particularly for students at risk of under-performance. Teachers can explicitly teach study strategies and self-regulated learning skills, helping students learning across NSS subjects.
- Reduce unnecessary academic stress by reviewing assessment loads, coordinating test schedules across subjects, and differentiating tasks to match diverse readiness levels, especially in language-heavy subjects where ethnic minority or lower-ability students may struggle. Promoting a positive growth mindset and normalising help-seeking can help students interpret challenges as opportunities for development rather than threats to self-worth.
- Build strong classroom relationships and school connectedness through consistent positive care, fair discipline, and meaningful student voice in decisions about learning activities and classroom norms. Strengthening senior secondary students' perceptions of school support has been shown to directly and indirectly improve academic satisfaction and confidence among Hong Kong senior secondary learners.

## Families and Community

Offer parent education programmes to help caregivers understand NSS expectations, HKDSE pathways, and indication-based ways to support study habits, emotional regulation, and family supporting resilience at home. Such programmes can be tailored for different communities, including linguistically diverse and South Asian families who may face additional barriers in navigating the system.

- Encourage families to foster open communication, realistic expectations, and balanced routines that include rest, physical activity, and co-curricular engagement alongside academic commitments. Strengthening family processes is likely to yield gains in positive resilience that support sustained academic effort across the senior secondary years.
- Engage community organisations and NGOs to provide mentoring, homework support, and role-model exposure for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, helping to compensate for limited cultural capital and providing alternative sources of positive guidance and aspiration.

## For policymakers and system-level actors

- Continue to review the balance between curriculum breadth, depth, and assessment demands in HKDSE to reduce excessive stress while maintaining standards and pathways to post-secondary education. Stakeholder feedback survey and student voice should be integrated into ongoing refinement of subject structures and examination requirements.
- Strengthen support for schools serving high proportions of low-income, ethnic minority, or lower-band students by providing additional resources for language support, counselling, and family outreach, thereby addressing structural inequities in academic opportunity.
- Promote and fund longitudinal research and school-based action research on how specific combinations of academic, socio-emotional, and family-focused interventions influence performance trajectories across the senior secondary years.

## Conclusion

Improving senior secondary students' academic performance in Hong Kong requires reducing academic stress, strengthening school and family support, and systematically nurturing confidence, resilience, and positive youth development under the New Senior Secondary (NSS) curriculum with positive education. Indication [1-10] from Hong Kong demonstrates that senior secondary students' academic performance is shaped by a complex ecology such as school-support, positive senior secondary school students' development attributes, family resilience, and curriculum implementation. While our fine-tuning suggestion has made strides toward student-centred and whole-person education, that cultivate whole person development with positive attitude. A coherent improvement agenda must therefore go beyond on instead of just focusing on raising test scores, but to systematically reduce harmful stress, enhance school and family positive support, and cultivate students' positive attitude strengths, including stress-based resilience and academic confidence. By aligning school leadership, school management, classroom practice, family engagement, and system-level policies with positive holistic vision, Hong Kong can move forward to a positive learning culture system in which more senior secondary students not only achieve academically but also can flourish and become a confident, with positive resilient lifelong learners. Hope my research paper can contribute to the world and the mankind.

## Acknowledgements

I gratefully acknowledge the education I received at the Department of Education, The Chinese University of Hong Kong. The ideas in this paper are based on my teaching experience, my professional knowledge, and my relevant experiences, personal insight during the period from 2005 to 2025.

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