Vocational-oriented Education at Senior Secondary Level: Perceptions, Decision-making, and Life Planning

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Background

- Focus on Applied Learning (ApL) in HKDSE curriculum.

- Review the current situation and prospects of vocational training in Hong Kong.

- Mixed method of questionnaire survey and in-depth interviews
  - Survey: Dec. 2015 – April 2016
    5,618 Secondary 5 students from 55 secondary schools

  - In-depth interviews: April – June 2016
    25 informants from 5 secondary school principals, 8 teachers and 12 parents

Brief Introduction of Applied Learning (ApL)

- Piloting of ApL, formerly known as Career-oriented Curriculum (COC), was first introduced in 2003.

- 2008-10 cohort was the last cohort of piloting, then incorporated the key components of ApL courses to be migrated to ApL courses in the new academic structure from 2010-2011.

- The name "Applied Learning" has been formally used since 2010-2011, and courses are not intended to provide pre-vocational training.

- Helps achieve the 5 essential learning experiences* and develop the generic skills** that underpin Hong Kong's curriculum framework.

* 5 essential learning experiences:

moral and civic education, intellectual development, community service, physical and aesthetic development and career-related experiences

** Generic skills:

communication skills, critical thinking skills, creativity, collaboration skills, information technology skills, numeracy skills, problem-solving skills, self-management skills and study skills

In 2015-2017 cohort for Senior Secondary students, ApL has 17 course clusters organized in 6 area of studies, and 2 courses of practical Chinese for non-Chinese speaking students (Chinese for the Service Industry, and Practical Chinese in Hospitality)

ApL Area of Studies (2015-2017)	Course Clusters
A. Creative Studies	1. Design Studies
	2. Media Arts
	3. Performing Arts
B. Media and Communication	4. Films, TV and Broadcasting Studies
	5. Media Production and Public Relations
C. Business, Management and Law	6. Accounting and Finance
	7. Business Studies
	8. Legal Studies
	9. Food Services and Management

ApL Area of Studies (2015-2017)	Course Clusters
D. Services	10. Hospitality Services
	11. Personal and Community Services
E. Applied Science	12. Medical Science and Health Care
	13. Psychology
	14. Sports
F. Engineering and Production	15. Civil, Electrical and Mechanical Engineering
	16. Information Engineering
	17. Services Engineering

Research Objectives

1. To compare and contrast students taking vocational-oriented courses with their non-taking counterparts.

2. To examine the knowledge and perceptions of vocational-oriented courses and vocational and professional education and training (VPET) held by SS students, parents, and school principals.

3. To inform policy makers, education professionals, students, parents, and the general public about the effectiveness of VET on students at SS level.

Research Objectives

4. To inform policy makers and education professionals in devising a more effective mode of career guidance and counselling services at both junior and senior secondary levels.

5. To provide evidence-based suggestions for the design of effective strategies in enhancing the image and quality of VET in Hong Kong.

6. To generate more discussion on vocational education policies in the community and its possible impacts on students' development of life course planning and vocational orientations.

Research Findings

Table 1. Percentages of Students Taking Applied Learning (ApL)

	Group 1 Schools	Group 2 Schools	Group 3 Schools
	%	%	%
Not Taking ApL	93.9	82.5	75.1
Taking ApL	6.1	17.5	24.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
(N)	(2108)	(1901)	(1609)

Research Findings:

ApL Students

Table 2. Satisfaction with Applied Learning

	Group 1 Schools	Group 2 Schools	Group 3 Schools	All Schools
	%	%	%	%
Dissatisfied/ Very dissatisfied	3.3	5.4	12.8	8.4
Satisfied/ Very satisfied	96.7	94.6	87.2	91.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(N)	(119)	(301)	(361)	(781)

$p < 0.001$

Table 3. Applied Learning Matching Personal Interests

	Group 1 Schools	Group 2 Schools	Group 3 Schools	All Schools
	%	%	%	%
Matching interests	79.8	60.2	40.7	54.2
Not matching interests	20.2	39.8	59.3	45.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(N)	(119)	(299)	(361)	(779)

p < 0.001

Table 4. Matching Interests and Satisfaction with
          Applied Learning

	Matching Interests	
	Yes	No
Satisfied with ApL?	%	%
Dissatisfied/ Very dissatisfied	2.6	15.2
Satisfied/ Very satisfied	97.4	84.8
Total	100.0	100.0
(N)	(420)	(355)

$p < 0.001$

Table 5. Applied Learning Enhances Chance of Further Studies

	Group 1 Schools	Group 2 Schools	Group 3 Schools	All Schools
	%	%	%	%
Yes	79.0	81.0	71.7	76.4
No	21.0	19.0	28.3	23.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(N)	(119)	(295)	(361)	(775)

$p < 0.001$

Table 6. Applied Learning Prepares for Future Career

	Group 1 Schools	Group 2 Schools	Group 3 Schools	All Schools
	%	%	%	%
Yes	89.9	87.0	74.5	81.6
No	10.1	13.0	25.5	18.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(N)	(119)	(299)	(361)	(779)

p < 0.001

Table 7. ApL Students' Interest in further Studies in Vocational Education

	Group 1 Schools	Group 2 Schools	Group 3 Schools	All Schools
	%	%	%	%
Interested in Vocational Ed.	94.1	89.6	74.8	83.4
Not interested	5.9	10.4	25.2	16.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(N)	(119)	(299)	(361)	(779)

$p < 0.001$

Table 8. School Teachers Encourage to Study Applied Learning

	Group 1 Schools	Group 2 Schools	Group 3 Schools	All Schools
	%	%	%	%
Encourage	53.4	65.5	68.8	65.2
Not Encourage	46.6	34.5	31.2	34.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(N)	(118)	(296)	(362)	(776)

$p < 0.01$

Table 9. Skills learned from Applied Learning suit
       Labour Market Demand

	Group 1 Schools	Group 2 Schools	Group 3 Schools	All Schools
	%	%	%	%
Agree / Strongly agree	84.9	90.1	79.0	84.2
Disagree / Strong disagree	15.1	9.9	21.0	15.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(N)	(119)	(303)	(362)	(784)

p < 0.001

Table 10. Applied Learning helps Planning for Further Studies

	Group 1 Schools	Group 2 Schools	Group 3 Schools	All Schools
	%	%	%	%
Agree / Strongly agree	78.8	81.5	72.6	77.0
Disagree / Strong disagree	21.2	18.5	27.3	23.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(N)	(118)	(303)	(362)	(783)

p < 0.001

Table 11. Applied Learning helps Planning for Future Career

	Group 1 Schools	Group 2 Schools	Group 3 Schools	All Schools
	%	%	%	%
Agree / Strongly agree	92.4	91.1	81.8	87.0
Disagree / Strong disagree	7.6	8.9	18.3	13.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(N)	(118)	(303)	(362)	(783)

$p < 0.001$

Table 12. Experiences in Applied Learning Enhance Future
        Employment Chance

	Group 1 Schools	Group 2 Schools	Group 3 Schools	All Schools
	%	%	%	%
Agree / Strongly agree	87.4	90.4	83.4	86.7
Disagree / Strong disagree	12.6	9.6	16.6	13.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(N)	(119)	(303)	(362)	(784)

$p < 0.01$

Research Findings:

ApL vs. Non-ApL Students

Table 13. Educational Aspiration considering own Capability

	ApL Students	Non-ApL Students
	%	%
Degree or above	18.6	45.9
VTC Diploma or Cert.	17.5	5.1
Higher Diploma	16.5	11.9
Associate Degree	13.7	17.2
Pre-Associate Degree	3.4	2.5
Secondary 6	24.7	13.7
Diploma Yi Jin or Youth Employment and Training Programme	4.1	2.1
Others	1.5	1.6
Total	100.0	100.0
(N)	(825)	(4607)

$p < 0.001$

Table 14. Self-Assessed Academic Performance

	ApL Students	Non-ApL Students
	%	%
Average / Good / Very Good	55.2	65.0
Bad / Very Bad	44.8	35.0
Total	100.0	100.0
(N)	(841)	(4694)

p < 0.001

Table 15. Knowledge about Post-Secondary
        Vocational Education

	ApL Students	Non-ApL Students
	%	%
Very much	3.0	1.2
Quite	55.6	36.9
Not quite	32.7	48.4
Almost not	8.7	13.4
Total	100.0	100.0
(N)	(853)	(4708)

$p < 0.001$

# Perceptions Towards Post-Secondary Vocational Education (Higher Diplomas):

ApL vs. Non-ApL Students *

Figures 16.1 – 16.8
*** All are significant at p < 0.001 except 16.1**

16.1 For Lower-Performing Students (為學術能力較低的同學而設)

	Agree /Very Agree	Disagree / Very Disagree
NON-APL STUDENTS	70.8	29.2
APL STUDENTS	70.3	29.7
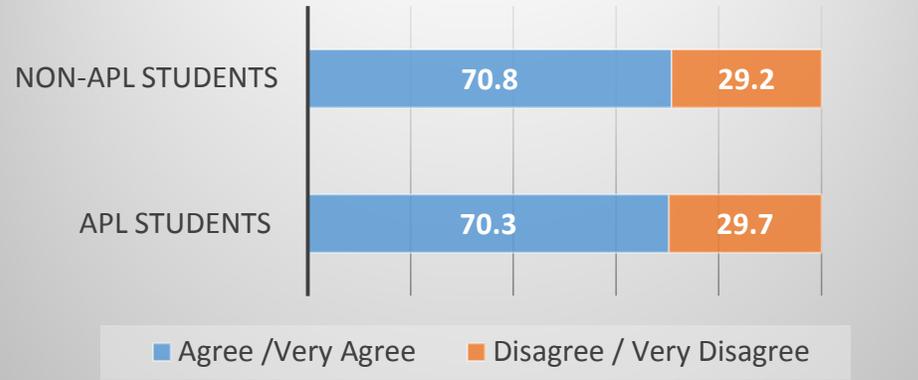
16.2 Qualification recognized by Employers (資格獲僱主承認)

	Agree /Very Agree	Disagree / Very Disagree
NON-APL STUDENTS	65.2	34.8
APL STUDENTS	77.1	22.9
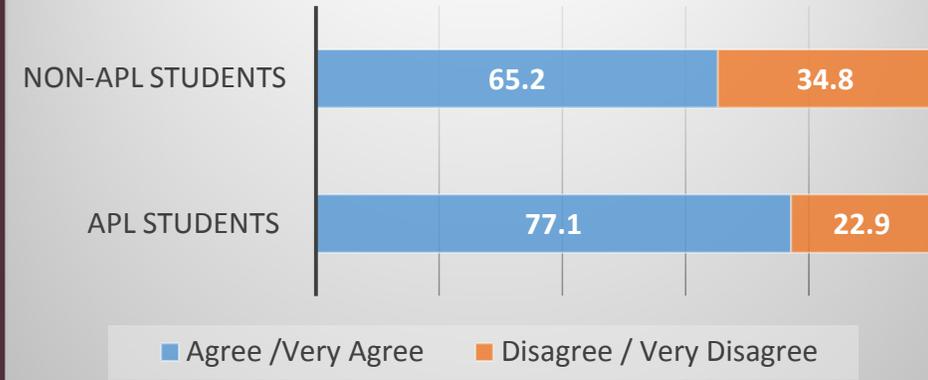
16.3 Builds Foundation for Further Studies in Degree Programme (提供繼續升讀大學學士課程的基礎)

	Agree /Very Agree	Disagree / Very Disagree
NON-APL STUDENTS	67	33
APL STUDENTS	79.8	20.2
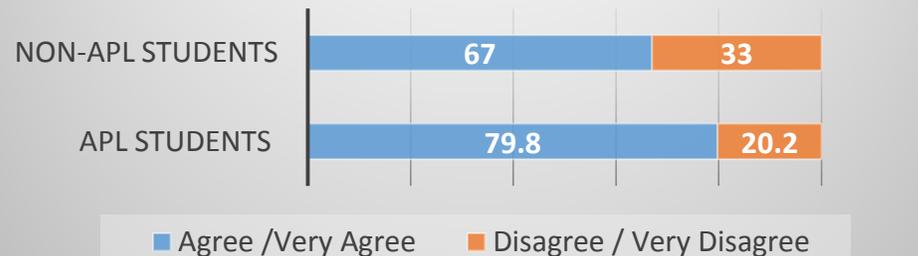
16.4 Provides Good Employment Prospects (提供良好的就業前景)

	Agree /Very Agree	Disagree / Very Disagree
NON-APL STUDENTS	57.4	42.6
APL STUDENTS	77.2	22.8

16.5 For Lower Level Labour Market Positions
(提供的職業訓練只能投身基層工作)

	Agree /Very Agree	Disagree / Very Disagree
NON-APL STUDENTS	61.6	38.4
APL STUDENTS	70.9	29.1
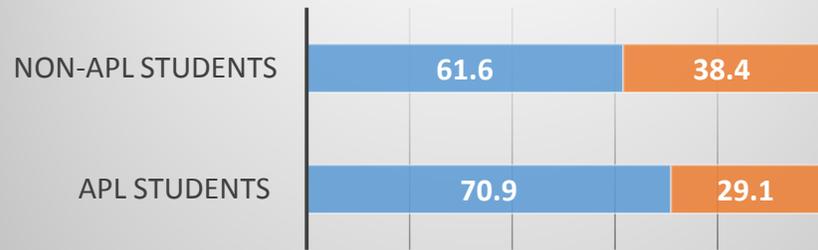
16.6 Combines Academic Knowledge and Vocational Skills
(結合了學術知識和職業技能)

	Agree /Very Agree	Disagree / Very Disagree
NON-APL STUDENTS	85.3	14.7
APL STUDENTS	89.7	10.3
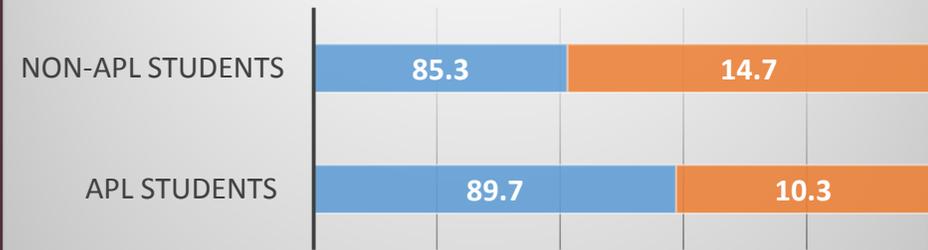
16.7 An Alternative but not Inferior Path for Further Studies
(另類升學途徑，而非次等選擇)

	Agree /Very Agree	Disagree / Very Disagree
NON-APL STUDENTS	60.6	39.4
APL STUDENTS	77.4	22.6
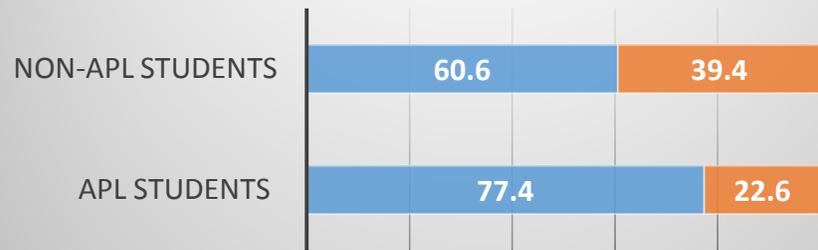
16.8 Same Salary Level as Associate Degree Graduates
(畢業生可賺取與副學士畢業生相近薪酬)

	Agree /Very Agree	Disagree / Very Disagree
NON-APL STUDENTS	53.6	46.4
APL STUDENTS	64.9	35.1
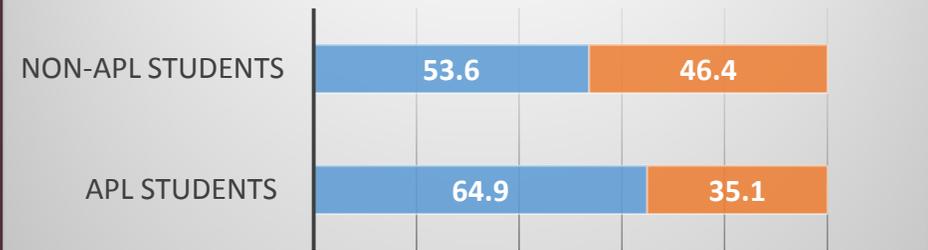
Table 17. Career Prospect for Post-Secondary
Vocational Education Graduates

	ApL Students	Non-ApL Students
	%	%
Good / Very Good	44.4	30.2
Bad / Very Bad	55.6	69.8
Total	100.0	100.0
(N)	(824)	(4604)

p < 0.001

Table 18. Will Consider to Apply for Post-Secondary Vocational Education

	ApL Students	Non-ApL Students
	%	%
Definitely will not	13.5	29.4
Maybe	79.0	68.8
Definitely will	7.4	1.8
Total	100.0	100.0
(N)	(835)	(4662)

p < 0.001

Table 19. Will Consider to Apply for VTC Diploma / Certificate Course

	ApL Students	Non-ApL Students
	%	%
Definitely will not	12.5	31.3
Maybe	80.8	67.0
Definitely will	6.8	1.8
Total	100.0	100.0
(N)	(843)	(4671)

$p < 0.001$

Opinions from School Principals, Teachers and Parents

1. Convergent views on Applied Learning (ApL) by school principals and teachers

- Curriculum outside academic programmes

- Teaching students vocational knowledge and life skills

- Helping students explore alternative interests and path of development apart from academic programmes

- Expanding students' horizon outside their daily reach, especially for those from lower class families who have limited extra resources

1. Convergent views on Applied Learning (ApL) by school principals and teachers

- Not helpful to further studies due to
  - only "Attained" and "Attained with Distinction" grading, comparable to DSE Level 2 and 3

  - from 2018 onwards, a higher "Attained with Distinction (II)" will be added and comparable to Level 4 of common DSE subjects

  - still ApL does not offer Level 5 or above grading.

- Very few University admission schemes recognize ApL results

1. Convergent views on Applied Learning (ApL) by school principals and teachers

- Some ApL subjects hardly offer practicum for students

- Not recognized in relevant vocational fields

- No articulation to employment after graduation

- Although some ApL subjects are equivalent to Level 3 in Qualifications Framework (7-level hierarchy), employers are not familiar with ApL, students with ApL results have no advantage in labour market

2. Factors Affecting Schools to offer Applied Learning or not

- Taking student interests into consideration

- Expecting ApL subjects match students' interests and then further develop vocational skills

- Assisting students who are lower performing in academic subjects to explore alternative vocational path for future development

- Students could have a chance to obtain such satisfactory result as Level 2 or 3 in open examination, who would otherwise not be able to get in academic subjects

3. Parents' Role in Applied Learning

- Parents in general do not know much about ApL

- They regard ApL as extracurricular learning of practical skills or own interests

- Respect children's choice in choosing ApL, showing difference in association with socio-economic status

- Lower class parents usually are informed by their children about the choice of ApL

- Middle class parents have better knowledge in ApL, more active in guiding their children to choose among ApL, more liaison with schools

Policy Implications

- Although "Attained with Distinction (II)" comparable to Level 4 of common DSE subjects will be introduced from 2018 onwards, a full-scale grading matching other DSE subjects is deemed necessary for further studies and recognition

- Appeal to Post-secondary admission system for counting ApL results

- Appeal to corresponding vocational fields for recognizing the QF 3 attainment of ApL subjects

- Information of ApL subjects should be more effectively disseminated to stakeholders

- With full information dissemination, teachers, parents and students are expected to increase confidence in guiding students to take ApL subjects

- Further deliberations on the construction of alternative pathways for senior secondary students