Year of examination: 2012

Candidate number:

Project title: The perception of teachers and students under Hong Kong’s New Senior Secondary (NSS) Curriculum on achieving the objectives of NSS Liberal Studies
Abstract

As a core subject in the New Senior Secondary (NSS) Curriculum, Liberal Studies (LS) has aroused a lot of attention and controversies in society. Since this is a new development in the Hong Kong education reform, only a limited number of studies take into account the teaching and learning situations after the actual implementation of LS. To fill this gap, this paper collects and analyses the perception of the first cohort of NSS teachers and students on achieving the objectives of LS.

In total, 58 student questionnaires and 8 teacher questionnaires were analysed. Also, various newspaper articles and comments on social networking websites served as references for the analysis.

The results reflect that despite the optimistic attitude of teachers and students towards the objectives of the curriculum being achieved, they are at the same time experiencing a lot of difficulties and pressure. In particular, three main dilemmas that hinder the teaching and learning of LS are discovered through the analysis. First, the content is too rich while time is limited. Second, the curriculum aims to urge students to think independently, but too many constraints are imposed on the format of answers. Third, the limited abilities of teachers and students may not fulfil the high demands of IES.

Although this is not long after the curriculum has been launched, it is believed that the reflections and feelings of teachers and students under the new curriculum would be helpful for understanding the rationales and practices of the curriculum as well as responding to the worries in society. Solving the problems identified by the first
A cohort of teachers and students will offer a key for the smooth development of the curriculum.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Modern liberal education, which originated in American universities, has spread to universities worldwide, including those in Hong Kong, by the second half of the 20th century. As part of the recent education reform in Hong Kong, Liberal Studies (LS) became one of the four core subjects in the NSS curriculum, which was launched in the 2009/2010 school year. It has come to the author’s awareness that from its first proposal to its final implementation, the subject has never ceased to arouse controversies and worries.

In fact, the arguments are rarely about the vision of LS, but rather focus on whether the practice can achieve the objectives of the course. Some scholars are worried about the rigid curriculum of LS, students’ lack of basic knowledge, teacher’s ability and experience, and the immature assessment mechanism. On the other hand, some researchers are more optimistic, believing that the curriculum helps enhance interaction between different subjects, experience has been accumulated from the Advanced Supplementary Level LS, there are sufficient training for teachers and having confidence in the public examination as an effective means of assessment.

As there are few studies that take into account the actual teaching and learning situations after the implementation of LS due to the short time, the author decides to investigate the perception of teachers and students under Hong Kong’s NSS Curriculum on achieving the objectives of NSS LS by distributing questionnaires as well as analysing newspaper articles and comments on social networking websites.
The purpose of this study is to deeply understand the rationales of the curriculum and the difficulties encountered in reality, as well as respond to worries in society. It is hoped that the findings can be of inspiration for further developing LS.

**Chapter 2. Literature Review**

This section covers past local and overseas studies relevant to the topic, selected from books, academic journals and reliable websites, recounting development and discussing the controversies related to LS.

While the development of liberal arts in ancient Greece and Rome, the “Seven Liberal Arts” in the Middle Ages, the classical humanities in Renaissance and the Age of Enlightenment are too distant to be relevant to this study, the modern Liberal Studies, or General Education, was born in American universities in the late 19th century, aiming to alter the over-specialisation of knowledge and lack of all-round development of students.\(^1\) Nowadays the subject is an essential component of the higher education in the USA, and is also growing in importance in other countries.\(^2\) Therefore Hong Kong has included Liberal Studies as a core subject in the New Secondary School (NSS) Curriculum in the 2009/2010 academic year.

Although there is no “universal” curriculum for Liberal Studies, there are indeed some common rationales.

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The Harvard Committee\(^3\) points out that the objective of liberal education is to nourish integrated and sound human beings,\(^4\) who should be able to think effectively, to communicate thought, to make relevant judgments and to discriminate among values.\(^5\)

The standard definition of liberal arts education implies a program of study designed to foster capacities of analysis, critical reflection, problem solving, communication, computation and synthesis of knowledge from different disciplines.\(^6\)

The Liberal Studies in Hong Kong has similar objectives. It aims to, through exploring various topics, broaden students’ knowledge base, enable students to understand the contemporary world and its pluralistic nature, cultivate positive values and attitudes and develop independent and lifelong learning capabilities.\(^7\)

The development of liberal education has never been smooth, but instead has experienced a lot of twists and turns.\(^8\) In the 1970s, liberal education was often regarded as the most “disastrous” part of the American undergraduate education. Consequently, many universities started to review and redesign their liberal education in the 1980s.\(^9\) In Japan, after the implementation of Integrative Studies, which is similar to Liberal Studies, in 2002, it has been labelled as the main reason why Japanese students’ literacy has been reduced, and eventually in 2008, the total class

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hour of Integrative Studies was reduced from three to two per week. In Hong Kong, from its first proposal to its final implementation, the subject has never ceased to arouse controversies. In fact, the arguments are rarely about the vision of Liberal Studies, which satisfies the requirements of the modern knowledge-based society. The controversies mainly focus on whether the practice can achieve the objectives of the course.

Some researchers have pointed out that the rigid curriculum of Liberal Studies does not fulfil the idea of “liberating” students’ mind, students may lack basic knowledge and may indulge in empty talk, teachers’ ability and experience may not be sufficient, and the assessment mechanism may not be well-developed enough to ensure fairness.

Those who make positive comments believe the curriculum enhances the interaction between different subjects and helps students build up their own knowledge and grasp “higher-quality” knowledge, that the Advanced Supplementary Level Liberal Studies has helped accumulate certain experience and teachers for the subject, that the

12. Faculty of Education, the University of Hong Kong (2004). Responses to the newly proposed Senior Secondary Curriculum. (online). Retrieved 5 January 2010 from www3.cmi.hku.hk/ls/sub/ALICE-etc_correct.doc
17. 黎樹濠. (2006). 互助互諒 推動通識. (online). Retrieved 28 March 2010 from http://ls.edb.hkedcity.net/LSCom/file_web_v2/parent/others/chi/06_%E4%BA%92%E5%8A%A9%E4%BA%92%E8%AB%92%20%E6%8E%A8%E8%8B%B9%E5%8F%B7%E9%80%9A%E8%AD%98_2_2.pdf
government is providing sufficient trainings for teachers, and that students who adhere to the curriculum and learn effectively will have their results well-reflect in the public examination.

Theoretical investigations on the curriculum have been most instructive to the practice, while the opinions of stakeholders actually experiencing the curriculum can in turn serve as reference for further revision of the curriculum. However, there have not yet been many studies of the latter type, as the curriculum has just been launched. In the sequel, we shall, by distributing questionnaires as well as analysing newspaper, magazine articles and comments on social networking websites, investigate the perception of teachers and students under the NSS Curriculum on achieving the objectives of NSS LS.

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Chapter 3. Methodology

1. Summary

This study aims to identify the perception of teachers and students under the new Senior Secondary Curriculum as to whether the present practice of Liberal Studies is likely to achieve its goals, and by using questionnaires and other supplementary methods, have a deep understanding of the rationales and practice of LS, as well as recognise the challenges faced and possible ways of improvement in the development of the curriculum.

2. Questionnaires

A quantitative study was carried out by distributing questionnaires because of the following reasons. First, since it is not long after the launching of the curriculum, there are few related studies, and hence the most practical method is to collect first hand information directly from teachers and students. Second, questionnaires are believed to be the best means that can cater for both generality and objectivity given limited manpower. Snowball sampling, being an efficient way to collect useful information for this pilot study, was chosen for both student and teacher questionnaires.

In total, 70 questionnaires were distributed to respondents in the first cohort of students under the NSS Curriculum (i.e. form 5 at the time of data collection, September 2010), distributed in four schools. 58 valid questionnaires were collected (82.9% of the questionnaires given out). In addition, a total of 8 LS teachers teaching in various schools completed the questionnaires, too.
The questions are in the forms of rating items and open questions. The respondents were asked questions about the following:

Part 1: Evaluating whether the practice of LS can help achieve its objectives

Part 2: Evaluating the level of difficulty of handling various modules of LS

Part 3: Evaluating how well they adapted to the current teaching methods of LS

Part 4: Evaluating how satisfied they were with different aspects of LS and providing suggestions for future development

Part 5: Evaluating the pressure they experienced while teaching / learning LS

The data, charts, analysis and generalisation enable one to understand to what extent teachers and students think the practice of LS can achieve its objectives, are satisfied with and pressurised by the subject, their feelings and suggestions as well as the inter-relationships among these aspects.

3. Supplementary methods

Owing to the limited number of respondents of the questionnaires, the collection of data was extended to second-hand sources, e.g. interviews and surveys about the viewpoints of teachers and students on the topic, published in newspapers and magazines, as well as teachers’ and students’ comments on social networking websites which are related to LS. This information can make the study more comprehensive.
4. **Limitations**

Snowball sampling is usually considered less definitive. However, if the study can be replicated in a more controlled setting in the future, a stronger result can be obtained for this topic.

Besides, the length of the questionnaire may reduce the interest of some respondents of finishing it, and may cause some of them to complete it in a perfunctory manner, so that some questionnaires may not represent their real perception. However, this length is indeed necessary in order to ensure the comprehensiveness and depth of the analysis.

A harder problem is that time only allows focusing on the first cohort of LS teachers and students. When data was being collected and analysed, their whole course had not completed. Thus it is quite impossible to get a comprehensive and ultimate conclusion.

Nevertheless, it is believed that these limitations do not lower the significance of this study, for the current feelings and perception of teachers and students still deserve our concern and will serve far-reaching instructive purposes for the development of the course.
Chapter 4. Data Analysis

1. Introduction

Discussion will be based on the objectives of LS, the content of the curriculum, teaching methods, level of satisfaction and pressure, and Independent Enquiry Study (IES). The analysis will reveal that while teachers and students generally have an affirmative view towards whether the objectives of LS can be achieved, they also practically face three main dilemmas.
2. Findings and Analysis

2.1. Objectives of LS

This section discusses the perception of teachers and students on the helpfulness of LS in fulfilling its objectives.  

2.1.1. Data

Chart 1 showed that in terms of “enhancing social awareness”, “training multi-perspective thinking”, “broadening my knowledge base”, “training my critical thinking” and “developing my cross-curricular thinking”, higher scores (more than 3

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21 “In particular, it will help each student to:

- acquire a broad knowledge base, and be able to understand contemporary issues that may affect their daily life at personal, community, national and global levels;
- be an informed and responsible citizen with a sense of global and national identity;
- respect pluralism of cultures and views, and be a critical, reflective and independent thinker; and
- acquire information technology (IT) and other skills necessary to life-long learning.”
out of 5) were given by both teachers and students. Trailing behind are “developing lifelong learning ability” and “cultivating positive values”, especially for students, who gave less than 2.5 on average. The average scores given by teachers generally exceeded that by students by 0.5 to 1.

2.1.2. Analysis

On the whole, teachers and students are positive as to whether LS can fulfil its objectives, in the sense that 12 out of the 14 scores given were higher than 2.5 (half the full score). Teachers are usually more optimistic than students. Both teachers and students basically agree that the curriculum helps raise students’ social awareness, broaden their knowledge base, train multi-perspective and critical thinking and link between different curricula.

The above results can perhaps relieve people who think that “the rigid curriculum of Liberal Studies does not fulfil the idea of ‘liberating’ students’ mind”. But what draws attention is that students are still not confident in the effect to “develop lifelong learning ability” and “cultivate positive values”. For the former, a possible reason is that the fruit cannot be observed in a short term. For the latter, as senior LS teacher Hui Shing Yan pointed out, “Facing various knowledge and values involved in numerous issues, students may lose their directions.” This explains why students may have difficulty in grasping the positive values conveyed.

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22 Faculty of Education, the University of Hong Kong (2004). Responses to the newly proposed Senior Secondary Curriculum. (online). Retrieved 5 January 2010 from www3.cmi.hku.hk/tw/sub/ALICE-et-correct.doc


24 Chinese original text: 「面對無數議題涉及的知識內容與價值觀點，學生或會覺得失去方向。」
2.2. **Content of the Curriculum**

This section discusses the perception of teachers and students on the level of difficulty of various modules and the reasons behind.

2.2.1. **Data**

![Chart 2: Level of Difficulty in Learning Various Modules](chart2).

The scores given by teachers to “globalisation” and “modern China” are 3.8 and 3.0 respectively while the scores given by students are 3.4 and 3.7 respectively. “Public health” and “energy technology and the environment” also receive scores higher than
2.5. Students gave “personal development & interpersonal relationships” an average score as low as 2.2. For “Hong Kong today”, teachers gave an average score of 2, which is the lowest among all modules, whereas students’ average score is as high as 3.5.

Among teacher respondents, 75.0% consider “lack of time” as the major reason accounting for the difficulties, while 42.0% of student respondents concur. “Lack of background knowledge” is the most prevalent reason among student respondents (72.0%), while 62.5% of teacher respondents agree. In addition, “the teaching progress being too fast” and “too little materials being handed out” are also notable sources of difficulties.
2.2.2. Analysis

Regarding the content of the curriculum, both teachers and students observe a high level of difficulty, especially for the modules “globalisation” and “modern China”, which mostly cover political and cultural issues students are not familiar with in their daily lives. Students seem to be more capable of learning “personal development and interpersonal relationships”, which is closely related to individuals themselves. It is noteworthy that teachers and students show a larger divergence when it comes to “Hong Kong today”: teachers think this is the easiest module, while it appears to the second hardest to students. This may be because students are not aware enough of social issues. Among the student respondents, 68% read or watch the news for 31 to 60 minutes every day, with 30% less than 30 minutes and 2% never doing so.

The intense learning pace and a large number of extra-curricular activities do not allow students to have time to absorb more information. Thus, the major sources of difficulty for students are the lack of background knowledge and the lack of time to catch up with it. LS teacher Wong Ming Lok comments that “only very little time is available for covering a lot of content, so learning without digestion is inevitable”\(^2\)\(^5\)^\(^2\)\(^6\). Teachers’ difficulties also arise from lack of time and background knowledge. These worries have been mentioned in studies done before and after the launch of the curriculum. Education Convergence has pointed out that teachers may not have enough abilities and experiences to fulfill the requirements of the curriculum.\(^2\)\(^7\)


\(^5\) Chinese original text: 「當局設定的學習範圍太廣，時間太少，學習難免囫囵吞棗。」

Wong Chi Keung, LS teacher in Wah Yan College, pointed out that “teachers who newly adapt to teaching LS need to deal with both the new and the old curricula of the subject, as well as understanding the content, formulating topics for discussion, selecting teaching materials…” Now it seems that these doubts do have some grounds.

That is to say, both teachers and students see a considerable level of difficulty in the content, and face the dilemma of a huge amount of knowledge to be received within limited time.

29 Chinese original text: 「轉型施教通識的教師，既要兼顧本科新舊學制，又要理解和掌握通識課程，構思議題，篩選教材……」
2.3. **Teaching Methods**

This section discusses the level of adaptation of teachers and students to the teaching and learning methods of LS.

2.3.1. **Data**

![Chart 4: Level of Adaptation to Teaching and Learning Methods](image)

Chart 4 indicated that “Lecturing” received a particularly high score from teachers (4) and students (3.4). Both teachers and students gave “multimedia”, “group discussions”, “forums” and “role plays” average scores higher than 2.5. Games ranked 4th out of 8 for students (average score 3.2), but ranked the last for teachers (average score 2.5). Teachers gave “quizzes, tests and examinations” and “IES” 3.6 and 2.9 respectively while students gave these two items 2.2 and 1.8 respectively.
2.3.2. Analysis

The traditional teaching method of lecturing remains the most welcomed one. Multimedia, group discussions\(^\text{30}\), forums and role plays are also quite well adapted to. Quite interestingly, students are much more adapted to games than teachers are. Some teachers and students also suggest holding debates in class. On the other hand, teachers adapt fairly well to examinations whereas students feel rather the opposite. Some student respondents explain that there are too many constraints on the format of their answers, and they cannot grasp the skills of answering questions, find an effective way of revising for examinations and understand the marking scheme. Some teachers also hope to acquire more instructions on marking.\(^\text{31}\) Students also questioned the fairness of the marking of examinations, which coheres with the worry in society.\(^\text{32}\)

For IES, teachers can somewhat adapt to it, but students’ responses are rather worrying. This issue will be further explored in Section 2.5.

To summarise, teachers and students generally adapt to the methods of teaching, but differ in perception on the methods of assessment. Students think there are too many constraints, which seem to violate the liberal rationale of LS, and leads them to face the second dilemma.

\(^{30}\) Some teachers pointed out in the questionnaires that the students’ ability is the key to the effectiveness of group discussions. In addition, large classes make it difficult to control the qualities of group activities.

\(^{31}\) See Appendix IV for the opinions of teacher and students mentioned in this paragraph.

\(^{32}\) Hong Kong Professional Teachers’ Union (2009) pointed out the assessment mechanism may not be well-developed enough to ensure fairness.

2.4. **Level of Satisfaction and Pressure**

This section discusses the level of satisfaction and pressure of teachers and students on various aspects of LS.

2.4.1. **Data**

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| Aspect                               | Average Score
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content of the curriculum</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching methods</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent enquiry study</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examination mode</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schedule</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability of teachers / students</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Process</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Ability of teachers / students”, “teaching methods” and “content of the curriculum” all receive average scores higher than 2.5. Teachers gave “examination mode” the highest average score (3.8), but this item ranks the second lowest for students (2.5). Both teachers and students gave “IES” the lowest average score, 2.5 and 2.1 respectively.
The overall pressure indicated by teachers and students are both 3.6. IES imposes the greatest pressure on teachers (4.1) and students (4.2), followed by examinations (teachers: 3.8; students: 4.0). In the aspects of lessons and homework, in this order, the average scores given by teachers and students are 3.5 and 2.7, 3.4 and 2.9, respectively.

2.4.2. Analysis

Despite a number of difficulties encountered in the teaching process, e.g. high difficulty of the curriculum, tight schedules, etc., teachers and students are still generally satisfied with the content of the curriculum and teaching schedule and methods. Furthermore, teachers and students are satisfied with each other’s ability. Nevertheless, teachers and students have greater discrepancies regarding examinations;
this phenomenon has been noticed in Section 2.3.2. Lastly, IES is the least satisfactory item for both teachers and students.

Teachers and students both received great pressure from LS, especially IES and examinations.

For students, the pressure from examinations is comparatively higher than that from lessons and homework. This is related to their afore-mentioned dissatisfactions regarding the constraints on answers, the difficulty in revision, and the marking scheme. The highest pressure comes from IES, which we will feature in the next section.

For teachers, the pressures from different aspects are more evenly distributed and also greater on the whole. The surveyed conducted by Hong Kong Professional Teachers’ Union concurs with our result\(^\text{34}\), and reveals that the three major sources of pressure are the range in students’ abilities, preparation of teaching materials and inspiring students’ critical thinking.

To summarise, teachers and students are generally satisfied with the ability of teachers/students, teaching methods and content of the curriculum, differ in perception on the examination mode and are most dissatisfied with IES. Both teachers and students receive great pressure from LS, especially IES.

\(^{34}\) Among the 672 teachers (of the around 2000 in Hong Kong) surveyed, 30% of them have pressure reaching the “ceiling”. Moreover, nearly 90% of them spend 8.5 extra hours on preparation for lessons every week, which is equivalent to working one more day per week, thus sacrificing time family and personal lives.

2.5. **IES**

This section discusses the level of adaptation, satisfaction and pressure of teachers and students on the IES.

2.5.1. **Data**

![Chart 7: Pressure from IES (Evaluated by Students)](chart7)

![Chart 8: Pressure from IES (Evaluated by Teachers)](chart8)
Charts 7 and 8 show that 50% of the student respondents considered IES to give the maximum pressure of 5, while 37% of the teacher respondents think similarly. Students giving 3 marks or above account for 92% of the total number of respondents; this figure turns out to be 100% for teachers.

2.5.2. Analysis

According to Charts 4, 5 and 6, IES receives the lowest score from students in terms of levels of adaptation and satisfaction, with the highest score in pressure. More than half the students and one third of the teachers receive the highest level of pressure (5 marks).

The nuisance that IES causes to students can be reflected by their comments online. Whenever it is near the deadlines of submission, students are still struggling late into the night, and complain frequently. The following comments are extracted from the social networking website Facebook:36

Date: 18 March 2010 (the day before the deadline of submission of project proposal)

Time: About 22:00

Student A: I hate IES. It has been a very long time since I last slept earlier than 12 o’clock

Student B: I am dying…

36 See Appendix V for more.

Original text:
Student A: 痛恨 IES.我好耐無早過12點訓
Student B: 我死喇就快....
Student C: @OIL!!!!
Student D: 老子明明 OM 得很累..........IES 真的「雕」透了!
Student A: 我做到想喊
Student B: 我喊左啦已經....-v-
Student C: @OIL!!!!

Student D: I am already very tired with OM… IES is really a damn thing!

Student A: The work is making me cry

Student B: I am already crying…-v-

Students mainly complain about the lack of a whole picture of the task, unfamiliarity with research methodologies, lack of time, excess demand on language skills, etc. 

Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower, Chris Wardlaw, predicted that students would easily adapt to a project-based learning mode since it has been widely practised in primary schools. This seems over-optimistic given the statistics presented above. IES is highly reflective of the rationales of LS, and requires students to show a variety of skills. It differs a lot from projects in primary schools in terms of the scope and depth of study, research methods and presentation. Requiring secondary students to formulate a research topic, design and carry out questionnaires or interviews, analyse data and write reports amid the heavy academic workload and extra-curricular activities indeed brings great difficulties and pressure.

37 See Appendix IV.
39 Liberal Studies School-based Assessment Teachers’ Handbook (p.4) states that “IES is an enquiry learning experience providing students with the opportunity to make knowledge links across various experiences of learning, to develop their higher-order thinking and communication skills, broaden their horizons, cater for their interests and inclinations and, ultimately, prepare them for lifelong learning and challenges ahead.”
On the other hand, teachers, who have received related training in post-secondary education, are well adapted to this method of assessment. But strangely, their level of satisfaction is the lowest and the pressure is the highest among all aspects. Most LS teachers only possess single academic backgrounds but need to handle IES on a wide range of topics, which is difficult. The worries about their own abilities and those of students also contribute to lowering their level of satisfaction and increasing their pressure.

To sum up, IES is helpful in fulfilling the rationales of LS, but due to its high requirements, teachers and students, who are limited in abilities, face the third dilemma.

4. Summary

Both teachers and students believe that the current LS curriculum can fulfil its objectives to a large extent, but in practice some difficulties were encountered. Though basically satisfied with the content of the curriculum, teaching schedule and methods and good adaptation, they both still feel a similar level of great pressure, especially from IES.

41 See Chart 4.
42 See Chart 5.
43 See Chart 6.
44 According to Ming Pao, on average, each LS needs to supervise 60 to 100 IES. “Just looking at the teacher-to-student ratio one can conclude that this is no small challenge.”
46 “Teachers’ worries and problems also originate from their mindsets. They may lack confidence in students. Some of them may not have professional confidence to face to sometimes imprecise demands from the Education Bureau, the Examinations and Assessment Authority, principals, parents and students.”
Three main dilemmas that hinder the teaching and learning of LS are discovered through the analysis. First, the content is too rich while time is limited. Second, the curriculum aims to urge students to think independently, but too many constraints are imposed on the format of answers. Third, the limited abilities of teachers and students may not fulfil the high demands of IES. Solving these problems will offer a key to ensure the smooth development of LS.
Chapter 5. Conclusion

The analysis manifests that, while optimistic that LS can achieve its objectives, teachers and students experience a lot of difficulties and pressure from LS, especially IES. Three main dilemmas that hinder the teaching and learning of LS are discovered. First, the content is too rich while time is limited. Second, the curriculum aims to urge students to think independently, but too many constraints are imposed on the format of answers. Third, the limited abilities of teachers and students may not fulfil the high demands of IES. Solving these problems will offer a key to ensure the smooth development of LS.

The perception of teachers and students can respond to worries in society about LS. They can also build confidence in developing the curriculum and deepen the understanding on its rationales and practices, as well as provide possible direction for improvement.

Future studies can be done to make up for the following limitations:

First, snowball sampling is usually considered less definitive. If the study can be replicated in a more controlled setting in the future with a larger group of informants, a stronger result may be obtained for this topic.

Second, time only allows focusing on the first cohort of NSS LS teachers and students. When the research was conducted, their whole course had not completed. Some of them have not even started working on IES. Thus it is quite impossible to get a
comprehensive and ultimate conclusion. Potential future research possibilities include taking into account a longer time frame and results of the public examinations.

It is also suggested to explore how to help teachers and students better adapt to IES, which plays an unexpectedly significant role in the findings of this study.
Appendix I

Questionnaire (Student)

I am [candidate’s name] from [candidate’s class] of [candidate’s school]. This questionnaire aims to reflect students’ opinions on NSS Liberal Studies. It will be used for research purposes only, and will be discarded after use. All information will be kept confidential. Please kindly spend a few minutes to answer the following questions. Thank you very much for your help!

Please put a tick (√) in the suitable boxes.

I. Please evaluate the helpfulness of Liberal Studies to you in the following aspects.
   (5 = most helpful; 0 = not helpful at all)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>0</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Broadening my knowledge base</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training my multi-perspective thinking</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhancing my social awareness</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultivating positive values</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Developing my cross-curricular thinking</td>
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<tr>
<td>Training my critical thinking</td>
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<tr>
<td>Developing my lifelong learning ability</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Other aspects (if any) that Liberal Studies is helpful to:

__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
II. Please evaluate the level of difficulty in learning various modules. (5 = most difficult; 0 = easiest; please tick “N/A” if you have not started learning that module)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>5</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal development &amp; interpersonal relationships</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>Energy technology &amp; the environment</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Reasons accounting for the difficulties:

☐ Lack of time for studying
☐ Lack of background knowledge
☐ The teaching progress being too fast
☐ Too little materials being handed out
☐ Others (please specify: _________________________________________________________)

III. Please evaluate how well you have adapted to the following teaching and learning methods or methods of assessment of Liberal Studies. (5 = adapted very well; 0 = adapted very badly; please tick “N/A” if you have not tried that learning method)

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<td>Role plays</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Games

Independent enquiry study (IES)

Quizzes, tests and examinations

Any particular reasons accounting for the difficulties in adaptation:

Which learning methods do you think are the most helpful?

IV. Please indicate how satisfied you are with Liberal Studies in the following aspects (5 = totally satisfied; 0 = not satisfied at all)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content of the curriculum</th>
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<tr>
<td>Choice of topics</td>
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<td>Interestingness</td>
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Teaching methods

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Independent Enquiry Study

Examination mode

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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>Extended response questions</td>
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<td>Teaching schedule</td>
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<td>Ability of teachers</td>
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<td>Learning process</td>
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<td>- Time</td>
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<td>- Resources</td>
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<td>- Support</td>
<td>☐</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Any other opinions or suggestions for future development of Liberal Studies:

_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

V. Please evaluate the pressure you experience while learning Liberal Studies. (5 = greatest pressure; 0 = no pressure at all)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>5</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
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<td>From lessons</td>
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<td>From homework</td>
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<td>From IES</td>
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<tr>
<td>From examinations</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Personal Background Information

Which electives are you taking for the HKDSE?
_____________________________________________________________________

How much time do you spend on reading / watching the news every day?

- Nil
- 1 to 30 minutes
- 31 minutes to 1 hour
- More than 1 hour

This is the end of the questionnaire. Thanks a lot!
Appendix II

Questionnaire (Teacher)

I am [candidate’s name] from [candidate’s class] of [candidate’s school]. This questionnaire aims to reflect teachers’ opinions on NSS Liberal Studies. It will be used for research purposes only, and will be discarded after use. All information will be kept confidential. Please kindly spend a few minutes to answer the following questions. Thank you very much for your help!

Please put a tick (✓) in the suitable boxes.

I. Please evaluate the helpfulness of Liberal Studies to students in the following aspects.
   (5 = most helpful; 0 = not helpful at all)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>0</th>
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<th>2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Broadening their knowledge base</td>
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<tr>
<td>Training their multi-perspective thinking</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enhancing their social awareness</td>
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<td>Cultivating positive values</td>
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<tr>
<td>Developing their cross-curricular thinking</td>
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<tr>
<td>Training their critical thinking</td>
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<tr>
<td>Developing their lifelong learning ability</td>
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</table>

Other aspects (if any) of students that Liberal Studies is helpful to:

_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
II. Please evaluate the level of difficulty in teaching various modules. (5 = most difficult; 0 = easiest; please tick “N/A” if you have not started teaching that module)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal development &amp; interpersonal relationships</td>
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<td>Modern China</td>
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<td>Globalisation</td>
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<td>Public health</td>
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<td>Energy technology &amp; the environment</td>
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</table>

Reasons accounting for the difficulties:

- □ Lack of time for preparation
- □ Teachers’ lack of background knowledge
- □ Students’ lack of background knowledge
- □ Too little materials available
- □ Others (please specify: _____________________________________________)

III. Please evaluate how well you have adapted to the following teaching and learning methods or methods of assessment of Liberal Studies. (5 = adapted very well; 0 = adapted very badly; please tick “N/A” if you have not tried that learning and teaching method)

<table>
<thead>
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<td>Role plays</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quizzes, tests and examinations</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Any particular reasons accounting for the difficulties in adaptation:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Which teaching methods do you think are the most helpful?

________________________________________________________________________

IV. Please indicate how satisfied you are with Liberal Studies in the following aspects (5 = totally satisfied; 0 = not satisfied at all)

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<th></th>
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<td>• Choice of topics</td>
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<td>• Extended response questions</td>
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</table>
Any other opinions or suggestions for future development of Liberal Studies:

_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

V. Please evaluate the pressure you experience while teaching Liberal Studies (5 = greatest pressure; 0 = no pressure at all)

<table>
<thead>
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<th>5</th>
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<tr>
<td>• From marking homework</td>
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<tr>
<td>• From following up on students’ IES</td>
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<tr>
<td>• From preparing and marking examinations</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Personal Background Information

What is your academic background?

_____________________________________________________________________

How long have you been teaching Liberal Studies (NSS and AL)?

_____________________________________________________________________

How long have you been receiving training related to teaching Liberal Studies?

_____________________________________________________________________

This is the end of the questionnaire. Thanks a lot!
Appendix III

Charts

Chart 1: Helpfulness of Liberal Studies to Students

- Broadening knowledge base: 4.0 (Teacher), 3.2 (Student)
- Enhancing multi-perspective thinking: 4.3 (Teacher), 3.2 (Student)
- Enhancing social awareness: 4.4 (Teacher), 3.4 (Student)
- Cultivating positive values: 4.6 (Teacher), 3.6 (Student)
- Training cross-curricular thinking: 4.3 (Teacher), 2.7 (Student)
- Training critical thinking: 4.1 (Teacher), 3.2 (Student)
- Developing lifelong learning ability: 3.6 (Teacher), 2.2 (Student)

Legend: Teacher - Blue; Student - Yellow
Chart 2: Level of Difficulty in Learning Various Modules

Average Score

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Hong Kong today</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.0</td>
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<td>Modern China</td>
<td>3.4</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public health</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy technology &amp; the environment</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Legend:
- Teacher
- Student
Chart 3: Reasons Accounting for the Difficulties

- Lack of time for studying: 75.0% (Teacher), 42.0% (Student)
- Lack of background knowledge: 62.5% (Teacher), 42.0% (Student)
- The teaching progress being too fast: 37.5% (Teacher), 28.0% (Student)
- Too little materials being handed out: 17.5% (Teacher), 16.0% (Student)

Chart 4: Level of Adaptation to Teaching and Learning Methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Average Score</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lecturing</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group discussions</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forums</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role-plays</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multimedia</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Games</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent enquiry study (IES)</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quizzes, tests and examinations</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Teacher
- Student
Chart 5: Level of Satisfaction with Various Aspects of Liberal Studies

![Chart 5: Level of Satisfaction with Various Aspects of Liberal Studies]

Chart 6: Pressure Experienced while Learning / Teaching Liberal Studies

![Chart 6: Pressure Experienced while Learning / Teaching Liberal Studies]
Appendix IV

Responses to Open-Ended Questions

1. Other aspects (if any) that Liberal Studies is helpful to:
   
   - Enhance essay-writing skills / presentation skills x 2
   - Telling crappy words
   - Develop and sharpen one’s research skills x 2
   - Be more open-minded
   - Collaboration skills
   - More knowledge and understanding of policy making

2. Other reasons accounting for the difficulties in learning various modules:

   - Too many restrictions on presenting method and thinking logic
   - Low computing skills
   - Too broad x 3
     
     ➢ Too much information, need to define the scope of learning
   - Too many materials to be sorted out at the same time
   - Understanding exam skills
   - The teaching materials are not too useful to worth my time & energy for studying it.
• Too boring

• Students’ expectation of having a definite answer cannot be realised

3. Any particular reasons accounting for the difficulties in adaptation to teaching and learning methods or methods of assessment of Liberal Studies:

• Some of these methods are new x 2

• Some of these teaching methods are uncommon in other classes

• Boring x 2

• Lack of experience / briefing

• Unsure about what we should learn or fulfill

• Not enough guidelines given

• Lack of basic knowledge

• Not enough time for reading the news

• Lack of techniques of answering questions x 2

• No idea about what’s going on

• Lack of background knowledge to participate in discussions

• Lack of time to do IES

• It’s rather difficult to revise for tests and exams

• Low computing skills

• Lack of time
• Too new, not yet acquired the skills required

• Subjective marking scheme and broad assessment area (esp. for LS quizzes, tests and examinations)

• Not actually useful

• The content is really hard & complicated.

• Students need to know much background knowledge beforehand.

• Difficulty in understanding techniques to answering questions.

• The syllabus is somewhat “vague”.

• Personality

• The syllabus is poorly organised and boring

• Group: hard to ensure quality discussion

• Multimedia: requires too broad a knowledge base

• I think IES and exams are beyond my capacity to cope with

• I have never taken part in any kinds of forum or role plays

• Student abilities and teacher experience

• Getting at the issues in some modules isn’t that easy. There are always long-lasting debate over certain matter but I am sometimes puzzled if they are timely enough

• Constant changes and amendments from the government
• Technological support

• Classes are large, quite hard to control the qualities of group activities esp. discussion

• Marking is quite difficult

4. Which learning methods do you think are the most helpful?

• Lecturing x 22

• Self study x 2

• Group discussion x 17

• Presentation

• Multimedia x 8

➢ It is because receiving message from the media can help us to judge whether the message / opinion is good

➢ E.g. playing more related clips in class

➢ Using PowerPoints

• Role plays x 5

• Forums x 10

• Forums followed by a comprehensive lecture

• Games x 2

• News discussion
• Attend forums / talks / activities outside school

• Sleep more

• IES

• Practising more DBQs

• Drilling practices

• Do NOT study materials which are distributed to us. Instead pay attention to newspapers & radios

• Watching news

• Reading notes, reading others’ research etc. Reading is the most helpful

• Debate x 2

5. Any other opinions or suggestions for future development of Liberal Studies:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Expectations and Suggestions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content of the curriculum</td>
<td>• More time should be allocated to deep topics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Teaching methods | Oral discussion should replace more writing  
|                  | Strike a balance between interestingness and efficiency of teaching methods  
|                  | Cancel IES  
|                  | More study guidelines should be provided  
|                  | Content taught and marking schemes should be more standardised in different classes  
|                  | Teachers can teach students step by step instead of just giving students a lot of notes and materials without pointing out the linkage between them  
| Examination mode | More guidelines should be provided for teachers on marking and examination requirement  
|                  | LS can be a compulsory subject but not examined  
|                  | Assessment should be solely based on routine homework  
|                  | Practising more data-response questions  
|                  | Marking should limit to “approved” or “not approved”  
|                  | Drilling practices  
|                  | Data-response questions or short questions, rather than essays, should account for a greater proportion in examinations  
| Miscellaneous    | Lessen LS teachers’ teaching burden to allow them  
|                  | More teaching time for LS lessons  

for more input and more time for preparing teaching materials
Appendix V

Comments on Facebook

Date: 18 March 2010 (the day before the deadline of submission of project proposal)

Time: About 22:00

Student A: I hate IES. It has been a very long time since I last slept earlier than 12 o’clock

Student B: I am dying...

Student C: @OIL!!!!

Student D: I am already very tired with OM… IES is really a damn thing!

Student A: The work is making me cry

Student B: I am already crying…-v-

Student C: IES is making people angry, I feel the guy who invented IES is in danger

XD .................................................... I also want to beat him to death!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!( roaring)

Original Text

Student A: 痛恨 IES. 我好耐無早過 12 點訓

Student B: 我死喇就快....

Student C: @OIL!!!!

Student D: 老子明明 OM 得很累.........IES 真的「雕」透了!
Student A: 我做到想喊

Student B: 我喊左啦已經...-v-

Student C: IES 激起民憤,我 feel 到發明 IES 條友有生命危險了

XD ........................................................我都好想打死佢呀!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!( 咆哮中)

Date: 19 March 2010 (the deadline of submission of project proposal)

Time: About 00:50

Student A: Will work overnight. IES!

Student B: actually i should dislike this

Student A: hahah you staying up as well?

Student B: yeah just started my IES. seriously fallen behind

Student A: add oil! im still amending my background knowledge part! :) and i just realized i have missed out lots of important stuffs..

Student C: yaaaaaaa me tooooooo....too bad...><

Student A: ADD OIL!

Student B: yeah...so down

Student C: 5! let's add oil 2gether!!!

Student A: 555! :)

Original Text

Student A: 捱夜去了。 IES!

Student B: actually i should dislike this
Student A: hahah you staying up as well?

Student B: yeah just started my IES. seriously fallen behind

Student A: add oil! im still amending my background knowledge part! ): and i just realized i have missed out lots of important stuffs..

Student C: yaaaaaaaaa me tooooooo....too bad...><

Student A: GAH YAU!

Student B: yeah...so down

Student C: 5! let's gah yau 2gether!!!

Student A: 555! :)

---

Date: 21 April 2010 (the deadline of submission of Literature Review)

Time: about 00:00

Student A: IES is literally killing me.

Student B: i hv no literature to review...

Student A: i have lots of UNrelated literature.

Student C: i have written 400 words la!!!!!!!!! so awesome! How many words are you going to write?

Student A: i have written 723 words.. S: but they are all crap.

Student B: lol better then me

Student A: well. i think im going to end it. i dont want to write anymore. its stupid.

Student D: Today and tomorrow, the form 4 classrooms will become the largest panda park in the world – pedestrians should watch out for their safety and prevent the animals in the park from losing control

Student A: Im so gonna be one of the first few pandas losing control. Fuck IES.
Student E: IES killed me

Student B: me2

Student C: cant agree more

Student E: 55 i only have 100 words in my literature review ==

Student F and 11 other friends joined the group I believe I can call together 10,000 students not satisfied with the current system of Liberal Studies

Student G: WHO INVENTED IES

Student H: MUST DIE

Student D: our dearest HKEAA!

Student I: Intimidatingly Exploiting Serpents.

Student J: I am thinking about this too! I'm gonna kill him... or her or them==

**Original Text**

Student A: IES is literally killing me.

Student B: i hv no literature to review...

Student A: i have lots of UNrelated literature.

Student C: i have written 400 words la!!!!!!!!! so awesome! How many words are you going to write?

Student A: i have written 723 words.. S: but they are all crap.

Student B: lol better then me

Student A: well. i think im going to end it. i dont want to write anymore. its stupid.

Student D: 今明兩天中四班房群將成世界最大熊貓樂園 — 路過人士請注意安全，以免園內動物失控

Student A: Im so gonna be one of the first few pandas losing control. Fuck IES.

Student E: IES killed me
Student B: me2

Student C: cant agree more

Student E: 55 i only have 100 words in my literature review ==

Student F and 11 other friends joined the group. 我相信可以召集 10,000 個不滿 [識科現行的制度] 的學生.

Student G: WHO INVENTED IES

Student H: MUST DIE

Student D: our dearest HKEAA!

Student I: Intimidatingly Exploiting Serpents.

Student J: I am thinking about this too! I'm gonna kill him... or her or them==

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Date: 22 April 2010 (the day after the deadline of submission of Literature Review)

Time: about 00:00

Student A: My Brief Comment about Re.: About the literature review (No offense*)

As mentioned, "it is prohibited [to ask LS teachers to read the draft for students] at this stage as it is the consensus of all the teachers that we will not read or proofread your work" (Miss X, April 20 2010). "It will be unfair to others if we comment on one student's work but not the others" (LS teachers, April 20 2010).

We are also advised to "pay full attention in class"(LS teachers, April 20 2010), and are reminded that "quality of your work is more important than quantity"(LS teachers, April 20 2010).

In my opinion, this does not make any sense as everyone has the right to hand in their drafts to the LS teachers. If students choose not to hand in their drafts, then they have
to bear their consequences on making such a decision.

I think it will not wrong by saying we have already paid full attention in class, but rather the instructions given are unclear and indirect, and that is the reason why we have to find our corresponding teachers from time to time.

As known and agreed among classmates and certain teachers, words itself is a container for quality and content. It is very reasonable to say that limited words cannot give rich content.

In response to this, I indirectly get a reply - "LS teachers are far too busy if they are checking out each literature review"(Miss Y, April 21 2010).

I do not have much to say, as I think I should leave some room to my dear classmates to express their viewpoints.

Again, I have to restate that this is only my brief comment, in which I do not mean any offense. I apologize for all misunderstanding caused.
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http://life.mingpao.com/cfm/learn3b.cfm?File=20100301/lnall/gfl1.txt

Title: The perception of teachers and students under Hong Kong’s New Senior Secondary (NSS) Curriculum on achieving the objectives of NSS Liberal Studies

Marks: 8

Comments:

- A comprehensive background information search, with various sources cited from articles, news and online resources.
- Presented a well-structured enquiry framework, with clear and comprehensive questionnaire design. Each enquiry question was further operationalised into more specific questions to collect the respondents’ views.
- Analyses of the findings from multiple perspectives as seen in Chapter 2. Findings from secondary sources as well as primary data were used to provide insightful analysis and ideas.
- Data presentation was clear as seen in the part of Appendix III, which shows both teachers and students’ responses in simple charts. The responses to open-ended questions and comments made on Facebook are also appended.
- As the main focus of the study is on evaluating how much the objectives of NSS Liberal Studies (LS) have been achieved– from both teachers’ and students’ perceptions, the findings seem a bit sidetracked by the problems/dilemmas faced by them. As the candidate wrote on p.6, ‘the aims of LS… through exploring various topics, broaden students' knowledge base, enable students to understand the contemporary world and its pluralistic nature, help them cultivate positive values and attitudes and develop independent and lifelong learning capabilities…’ There is room for further analysis. However, the candidate only used one chart (chart 1 – helpfulness of LS to students) in this regard. IES could have discussed under the topic of LS teaching and learning.
- Showed a high level of competence in reflection on the enquiry and keen awareness of the limitations of the enquiry.