

**A Study on  
the Continuity of Curriculum  
and  
Teaching Practices  
between  
the Junior and Senior Secondary  
Levels  
of Education**

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## **Abstract**

In response to the recommendation in Education Commission Report No. 1, a study was carried out to identify the differences in curriculum and teaching practices between junior secondary and senior secondary levels of education, to identify the difficulties encountered by pupils on their transition from Secondary 3 (S3) to Secondary 4 (S4), and to suggest ways and means of facilitating the transition.

Preparatory work began in late 1989. Twenty-two sample schools were selected with respect to the type of curriculum adopted, medium of instruction and academic performance of Secondary one intakes, involving 1563 S3 pupils in the 1990/91 school year. Owing to various reasons such as pupil drop-outs, transfers, and the failure of matching pupil records in the three administration of pupil questionnaires, the pupil sample was reduced to 1280 at the end of S4. Other four target groups with whom the pupils interacted in their learning environment at home and in school were parents, principals, teachers and school social workers/student counsellors.

The study on curriculum was carried out by means of paper analysis of the curriculum prepared by the Curriculum Development Council and recommended for use in schools by the Education Department with respect to aims/objectives, design and content of the junior and senior secondary curricula. The study on teaching practices was done through various perspectives, first, through the administration of questionnaires to the five target sample groups at the end of S3, beginning of S4 and the end of S4; second, through the examination of pupils' academic achievement in the Hong Kong Attainment Tests in the subjects of Chinese, English and Mathematics; and third, through classroom observations by subject inspectors of the Education Department. These three measurements taken longitudinally in S3 (1990/91) and S4 (1991/92) were compared.

Results from paper analysis on selected subjects from S3 to S4 show that there is coherence in the aims/objectives, design and content of the S4 prescribed curriculum for Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Human Biology, Social Studies, Economics, Economic & Public Affairs, Government & Public Affairs, Geography and Chinese History.

The findings from the questionnaires reveal that there are significant rises in the pupils' self-image and their relation with teachers upon transition from S3 to S4. There are no significant changes in their attitude towards medium of instruction, their relation with school and classmates.

However, there are drops in the pupils' learning attitude and learning atmosphere in class. The pupils indicated that there was not enough academic guidance from teachers. They had difficulties in the new and diversified S4 curriculum, particularly in the English subject. Moreover, pupils with high learning attitude experienced low relation with school in S4.

While parents did not exert much pressure on their children in their studies at S4, there were drops in parent-school relation and parent-involvement in their children's studies. Measurements for principals, teachers and school social workers/student counsellors did not show any significant changes between S3 and S4. But the most common issue among pupils' counselling requests was related to their learning problems.

It was found difficult to measure pupils' adaptation from S3 to S4 in terms of academic achievement in the three core subjects of Chinese, English and Mathematics because of the ceiling effect and floor effect: the high achievers could go no further up and the low achievers no further down. Classroom observations by subject inspectors indicated pupils were adapted to the learning and teaching in S4. However, as the number of classroom observations was small, the results could not be conclusive.

To ease the difficulties faced by S4 pupils in their transition from S3 to S4, it is suggested to operate an induction course at the beginning of S4 to brief them on the S4 curriculum. An enhancement course can also be organized in summer to strengthen their English language proficiency. In view of pupils' problems regarding their learning attitude, leaning atmosphere, insufficient academic guidance from teachers and perceived difficulties of subjects, teachers should adopt more diversified teaching methods to actively engage pupils in the teaching/learning process. They should be more attentive to the needs of the high achieving pupils and involve them in the learning/teaching process by giving them more challenging tasks, asking them to assist their classmates with learning difficulty and encouraging them to take an active part in extra-curricular activities.

To help parents understand better the senior secondary curriculum and subject streaming at S4, it is recommended that schools should organize relevant seminars for parents explaining to them the curriculum in layman terms. Parents should be actively involved in their children's studies and be encouraged to participate in activities which promote home-school co-operation.

As regards counselling of pupils, teachers should be fully aware of the needs of individual pupils and provide them with proper guidance on academic and non-academic matters. It is recommended schools should adopt whole school approach in providing guidance and counselling services to pupils.