

Editorial

Hong Kong National Security Law education programs: What do evaluation findings tell us?

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Introduction

Law and order are vital to the stability of a society. Without law and order, criminal offences would increase which results in social unrest and chaos. To achieve law and order, the public must have a sense of law-abiding spirit, which includes understanding of the requirement of the law and the motivation to follow the law. In particular, as young people usually hold negative views about authority, there is a need to educate young people on the importance of law abidance.

To maintain national security, many countries have legislations on national security, including economic security, energy security, social security and political security, which are commonly regarded as “national security law” (NSL). With particular reference to Hong Kong, the Hong Kong National Security Law is something new to the Special Administrative Region of China. Under the Hong Kong Basic Law, Hong Kong has the constitutional responsibility to enact the Article 23 covering national security issues such as treason, theft of state secrets and subversion. Unfortunately, because of different obstacles, Hong Kong has not been able to enact Article 23 since the resumption of sovereignty by the P.R.C. on July 1, 1997. During the past 26 years, two major social events took place that have shattered the stable social foundation of Hong Kong. These included the “Occupy Central” movement in 2014 and the “Anti-extradition Law” social event in 2019-2020. In the former case, although there was widespread illegal occupation of roads, violence was not serious. Unfortunately, for the social event taking place in 2019-2020, widespread vandalism and violence took place. For example, protestors occupied the Hong Kong Polytechnic University and the Chinese University of Hong Kong to block the major roads in Hong Kong.

To regain law and order in Hong Kong and to maintain national scrutiny in the Special Administrative Region of P.R.C., the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress promulgated the Hong Kong National Security Law. Before finalization of the Hong Kong National Security Law, consultation of various stakeholders (such as the two professional bodies of lawyers and barristers) was carried out. To help young people understand the Hong Kong National Security Law, it is explicitly stated in the Hong Kong National Security Law that education institutions, including universities, have the responsibility to implement education programs on the Hong Kong National Security Law.

As the Hong Kong National Security Law education is something new for Hong Kong, there are two issues to be addressed. The first issue is the content of National Security Law education programs. While it is necessary to introduce the four offences under the National Security Law, mere coverage of such offences is not adequate. There is a need to cover the basic concepts of national security, the "Century of Humiliation" in modern Chinese history, a brief introduction of the history of modern China, the Constitution, and Hong Kong Basic Law. Through such topics, it is hoped that the students could appreciate the background leading to the Hong Kong National Security Law as well as develop national identity. The second issue is to understand the impact of NSL education through systematic evaluation. Essentially, evaluation provides the necessary scientific evidence to inform educators about the impact of the Hong Kong National Security Law education programs.

At the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, we have developed four NSL programs. First, we have designed a face-to-face program on law abidance leadership for 4-year undergraduate students (3 hours of interactive lecture and 7 hours of self-study). Second, we have designed an online program on law abidance leadership (3 hours of online teaching and 7 hours of self-study). Third, for taught postgraduate students, they are required to take a 3-hour online course plus three hours of self-study. Finally, for research postgraduate students, they are also required to take a 3-hour online course plus three hours of self-study. In the past two years, we have already demonstrated the impact of the program for the 4-year students via objective outcome evaluation, subjective outcome evaluation and qualitative evaluation. Besides the responses of students, we also collected sharing from the teachers. Taken as a whole, the available evaluation findings are very positive (1-6).

Besides the 4-year undergraduate program, there is a need to understand the impact of NSL education programs for the Senior-Year program, Taught postgraduate programs, and Research postgraduate programs. Hence, in this special issue, we collected several papers adopting different evaluation strategies to examine the impacts of NSL education programs in Hong Kong.

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