

NEEDS OF AND SUPPORT TO SENIOR-YEAR ADMITTED (COMMUNITY-COLLEGE TRANSFER) STUDENTS

KIN CHEUNG, HING-MAN NG, BIN LI, PETER BENZ, KAMING CHOW, LILLIAN ZHANG

Background

Studies on community college transfer students, known as senior-year admitted (SYA) students, have been limited in Hong Kong. This lack of attention is due to the perceived image of SYAs as more mature than the non-SYA students (first-year first-degree / native students). A local pilot study (Cheung et al., 2015) suggested that the difficulties faced by SYA students are not recognized and addressed, thus affecting their learning experiences negatively from beginning to the end of their already shortened time at university.

Objectives

To explore views of SYA students from local universities to understand different aspects of their needs.

Methods

Mixed methods (that is, both qualitative and quantitative data) using survey and focus group interviews have been conducted with local SYA students in three University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded universities in Hong Kong. To identify the unique needs of SYA students, a questionnaire was distributed to both SYA and non-SYA students. This questionnaire was adapted from various developed scales, including the LEARN questionnaire measuring study load and stress and self-efficacy belief (Parpala et al. 2010), transfer students' experiences accessing social support at the university (Moser 2012), and the Depression, Anxiety, Stress Scale (DASS) (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995). It has been tested for its content validity and reliability. For the content validity, it was validated by both local and overseas experts, with a content validity index of 0.95. The internal consistency of the subscales ranged from 0.63 to 0.82 in a study of 210 SYA students. Focus group interviews were conducted at PolyU (124 students in 46 groups), CityU (108 students in 91 groups) and CUHK (28 students in 9 groups). Qualitative Content analysis was conducted to analyze the qualitative data from interviews after verbatim transcription.

Conclusions

There is a need to formulate strategies for different stakeholder groups, such as government, universities and community colleges, to work collaboratively in order to provide positive teaching and learning environments for SYA students.

References

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Results

2,637 questionnaires were collected from the three participating universities. Tables 1 and 2 show the preliminary results of the survey. Table 1 shows the participants' characteristics. Table 2 shows that SYA students have heavier study loads, lower social support, lower self-efficacy and more mental health concerns (reflected from students' perceptions of study-related stress and study load, as well as DASS), than non-SYA students. The preliminary results from the focus group interviews supported the quantitative findings. The SYA students reported having stress from heavy workloads and tight schedules associated with meeting the curriculum requirements for earning a University degree. The challenges of adjusting the learning mode from sub-degree to university added to this stress. Support resources in the university were not utilized. The SYA students relied on peer support and limited staff support to facilitate their learning processes.

Table 1. Characteristics of participants (N = 2,637)

Characteristics	Number (%)
Participating University	
The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU)	1,819 (69.0%)
City University of Hong Kong (CityU)	668 (25.3%)
The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK)	150 (5.7%)
Student Type	
Senior-year admitted (SYA) students	1,593 (60.4%)
Non-SYA students	1,044 (39.6%)
Gender (N=2,636)	
Female	1,708 (64.8%)
Male	928 (35.2%)
Age (years) (N=2,595)	21.5 ± 1.9

Table 2. Comparisons between SYA and non-SYA students

Factors	SYA	Non-SYA	T-test
	Mean score		p
Study load ^a	3.85±0.77	3.69±0.73	<0.0001
Study load and stress ^b	3.35±0.78	3.23±0.76	<0.0001
Self-efficacy belief	3.49±0.63	3.57±0.56	0.001
Social support at the university	3.32±0.66	3.46±0.61	<0.0001
Sense of belonging	3.24±0.85	3.33±0.78	0.003
Social connections	3.37±0.73	3.51±0.67	<0.0001
Mental Health (DASS)			
Stress	15.27±10.2	14.63±9.5	0.103
Anxiety	11.67±9.5	10.89±8.6	0.026
Depression	12.56±10.0	11.32±9.1	0.001

^a From item: "Do you consider your study load to be heavy?" (rate: 1: very light to 5: very heavy)

^b From LEARN subscale (3 items): high scores = high study load and stress