

穿梭兩地 ——  
跨境學生的學習與成長需要研究  
The Learning and Developmental Needs  
of Cross-Border Students

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**The HKFYG Youth Research Centre**

**Youth Study Series (YS 50)**

**The Learning and Developmental Needs of**  
**Cross-Border Students**

**Discussion and Recommendation**

February 2014

**Research background**

According to a written reply by the Secretary for Education and Manpower to the Legislative Council in 2001, "cross-border students" referred to Hong Kong residents residing in the Mainland but studying in Hong Kong<sup>1</sup>.

The number of Hong Kong children living in Shenzhen but commuting to attend classes here has grown four-fold to more than 16,000 in the last decade, from 3,567 in 2002/03 to 16,356 in 2012/13. Against the background that more and more Hong Kong residents are residing in the Mainland, combined with the fact that both Type I babies and Type II babies were at the right age to receive an education<sup>2</sup>, it is widely believed that the number of cross-border students would be on the rise in the coming years.

The cross-border students are Hong Kong children and they are eligible to receive an education in Hong Kong. They could be an important source of manpower in the future development of Hong Kong. The earlier they get adapted to society in Hong Kong, the easier it will be for them to get along with the local children of their age and the more favourable it will be when planning the manpower of Hong Kong society in the future.

This study focused on exploring the learning and developmental needs of cross-border students. Discussions and recommendations are put forward with

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<sup>1</sup> Source: "Students who cross the border for schooling in Hong Kong every day", LEGCO Question No. 18 (written reply), March 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Type I babies were Hong Kong babies born to Mainland mothers (the fathers were Hong Kong permanent residents). Type II babies were Hong Kong babies born to Mainland mothers (both parents are non-Hong Kong permanent residents).

an aim to provide possible solutions for improving the problems that these cross-border students were facing.

### **Current pictures of the cross-border students**

Currently many of the Hong Kong children crossing the border to attend Hong Kong schools were at the kindergarten or the primary levels. On every school day, the cross-border students go to the land crossing control points to go through a series of entry procedures before arriving in their respective schools. They have to follow the same procedures before getting back home to Shenzhen after school.

Currently there are six land crossing points that the cross-border students could use for entering into Hong Kong and returning to Shenzhen. They are the Luohu Control Point, Lok Ma Chau Spur Line Control Point, Man Kam To Control Point, Lok Ma Chau Huangguang Control Point, Sha Tau Kok Control Point, and Shenzhen Bay Port. Of these, Luohu and the Lok Ma Chau Spur Line Control Points are the two most frequently used control points among the cross-border students.

After going through a series of exit procedures at the control points, the cross-border students took different modes of transport to different districts to get to their schools for classes. Government figures showed that most cross-border students were studying in the North District, Yuen Long District and the Tuen Mun District, which were the districts in the vicinity of the land crossing points.

### **Target group of the Study**

Taking into account the recent development of Hong Kong society, the cross-border students in this Study referred to three groups of students based on their parents' identity: (1) both parents were Hong Kong permanent residents; (2) one of the parents was a permanent resident of Hong Kong; (3) both parents were non-Hong Kong permanent residents.

## **Methodologies of the Study**

To explore the learning and developmental needs of the cross-border students, the Study conducted a self-administered survey by the cross-border students. Data was also gathered through case interviews with the cross-border students and their parents. In addition, experts and scholars in the field were interviewed in order to understand stakeholders' views on the phenomena about the growing number of cross-border students that came to Hong Kong for their education.

### **1. Survey:**

The Survey aimed at understanding the problems that the cross-border students were facing. The Survey targeted cross-border students studying from Primary 4 to Form 3 during the 2013/14 academic year. The Survey collected data by adopting a convenience sampling method. A total of 710 valid questionnaires were received from fourteen primary and secondary schools in the North, Tuen Mun and Yuen Long Districts. The Survey was conducted from the 11th of December, 2013 to the 13th of January, 2014, with a standard error of  $\pm 1.9\%$ .

### **2. Case Interviews:**

The Study conducted face-to-face interviews with 11 cross-border students studying from Primary 4 to Secondary 3, and 5 parents of cross-border students (16 cases in total). The case interviews were conducted from the 13th of December, 2013 to the 11th of February, 2014. All the cases were conducted independently.

### **3. Research Interviews with experts and scholars:**

In-depth face-to-face research interviews with experts and scholars were conducted from the 3rd of December, 2013 to the 3rd of January, 2014. A total of 5 experts and scholars were successfully interviewed. They came from the school management level, front-line service unit, the Legislative Council, and the Steering Committee on Population Policy.

The Discussion section in the following summarized the major findings of the self-administered survey and the analysis of the interviews. After that came the recommendation section for reference.

<b>Discussion</b>
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**1. Four-fold increase in the number of cross-border students in a decade.  
The number is expected to be on the rise in the near future.**

The number of Hong Kong children residing in Shenzhen but commuting for classes here has grown four-fold to more than 16,000 in the past decade. The continuing rise in number of the cross-border students in the foreseeable future has implications on resources as well as the provision of services for these students. A comprehensive and systematic data collection process is needed to formulate an accurate and long term plan of service to address the needs of the cross-border students, which the Government is lacking at this stage.

In the light of the fact that more Hong Kong children made their way and crossed the border to study in kindergartens, primary and secondary schools here each day, the Government should start the preparation work on data collection and service planning as early as possible.

**2. The number and percentage of cross-border students for kindergarten has surged rapidly, implying that the demand for primary and secondary school places would be on the rise.**

The Study noted that the number of cross-border students attending kindergarten has increased speedily within a short period of time, from 1,456 in 2007/08 to 5,708 in 2011/12, presenting 44.4% of the cross-border students of the year. Since then the figures and the percentages surpassed their counterparts attending primary education. The number grew to 7,454 in the 2012/13 academic year.

The following factors could be the possible reasons for the rapid rise in the number of cross-border students attending kindergarten in the territory. (1) Hong Kong children residing in the Mainland could not attend mainstream schools in Shenzhen because they have Hong Kong identity cards. They are restricted to expensive private schools or some international schools there; (2) Hong Kong schools took the initiative to recruit Hong Kong students living in Shenzhen for enrolment in an attempt to avoid getting the axe under the threat of school closure, amidst a continuous low birth rate leading to falling enrolment figures in the territory; (3) The Education Bureau provided a fee subsidy to parents of their Hong Kong born children attending kindergartens in the territory through the Pre-primary Education Voucher scheme since the 2007/08 school year.

In the long run, the demand for primary and secondary school places would increase amidst the growing number of cross-border students attending kindergarten. The Government should start the preparation work as early as possible to assess and estimate the number of school places needed to meet the demand, particularly the long term demand on the school places for primary and secondary education.

**3. The cross-border students are confronted with the problems of excessively long commutes to and from school each day, safety threats, and language adaptation difficulties.**

The Study found that 68.0% of the respondents surveyed spent two or more hours travelling daily from Shenzhen to Hong Kong and back. One-fourth even needed to spend at least three hours commuting daily and more than one-third (33.9%) of respondents found this tiring. When asked about what services they would like to be provided with, 22% (22.3%) of respondents said they needed dormitory facilities here. Some respondents of the case interviews pointed out that the dormitory facilities could help reduce their travelling time and thus free them from the tiring physical and psychological burden.

Regarding personal safety, more than half of the respondents surveyed at the primary school said that no parents or relatives accompanied them on their way to school. To make matters worse, the extremely busy and congested border

crossings, with packed commuters and heavy vehicles waiting in long queues, and school buses jammed with cross-border students, posed a potential safety threat to the students. Some parents of the case interviews said that the busy and heavy traffic at the land crossing points had made them worry about the safety of their children.

For the problem about language adaptation, cross-border students were encountering two difficulties in their academic and social life respectively. They were (1) a difference in the level of the standard of English, and (2) problems in using English or Cantonese for social communication.

These difficulties might hinder the cross-border students' plans or intentions to develop their prospects in the territory.

**4. Cross-border students believe receiving an education in Hong Kong is an advantage for their future development, but they do not have sufficient time to attend academic activities after school. Some even develop negative feelings towards learning.**

Close to 30% (29.5%) of respondents surveyed said the quality of education in the territory that they had experienced from their cross-border life had made them happy. Some parents of the cases interviewed admitted that the main purpose in sending their children back and forth between the two cities (Shenzhen and Hong Kong) to attend classes was for them to get into Hong Kong's advanced educational system.

Nevertheless, 40% (40.6%) of the respondents surveyed did no academic extra-curricular activities after school, with most referring to the reason that they needed to rush home to Shenzhen. More than 20% (21.5%) said that their learning opportunities were fewer than their classmates.

Meanwhile, the long commute has exhausted the cross-border students and made them physically tired. Some of them revealed that they did not like commuting to Hong Kong for their education, with 21.5% falling into this category. Parents of the case interviews pointed out that the long commuting had taken up so much of their children's time that it had ultimately discouraged them from taking part in extra academic activities after school.

While the cross-border students and parents believed that receiving an education in Hong Kong could be an advantage for their prospects, some found that their learning experience here was adversely affected. A disparity existed between expectation and reality.

**5. Cross-border students get along with their local classmates, but some feel that Hong Kong does not welcome cross-border students.**

More than half (56.3%) of the cross-border students surveyed said that their classmates were friendly to them. Respondents of the case interviews said that classmates were helpful in updating them about the current issues in Hong Kong. It seemed to suggest that the moral education at schools had played an important role in nurturing the values of mutual help, respect, sharing and etc among pupils. It also suggested that the schools had invested substantially in establishing a discrimination-free campus environment.

Yet, more than 10% (12.5%) of the respondents surveyed got a feeling that Hong Kong society did not welcome the cross-border students. We should pay attention to this situation amid the recent conflicts arising from the difference in cultural backgrounds of the two cities.

**6. Cross-border students have restricted exposure to community participations, hindering their familiarity with and the sense of belonging to Hong Kong society.**

Learning should not be confined to the classroom. Learning for students could take place outside the classroom. The community is a place full of learning resources for students through their participation in person. Such precious experiences cannot be replaced by reading books.

The Study, however, noted that the cross-border students surveyed rarely took part in community activities. They found themselves not very familiar with the community that their schools were located in.

The following reasons were the possible factors for this poor participation. Firstly, cross-border students were restricted to the transport compartments on their way back and forth to school, leaving them with no opportunities to experience community life in person. Their understanding or impression of the community was obtained from what they saw through the windows of the transport they took on the way to school and back home. Secondly, they needed to rush back home after school, leaving them no time to take part in community activities. Thirdly, many of the cross-border students' parents were not familiar with the culture or values of Hong Kong society, leaving them with no great motivation to encourage their children to take part in community activities.

All these might hinder the opportunities for cross-border students to get familiar with the larger environment of Hong Kong. Cross-border students are Hong Kong citizens and they could be an important source of Hong Kong's development of human resources in the future. We need to provide them with sufficient supportive measures to nurture them to be active learners, citizens and members of Hong Kong society.

**7. Classes in Shenzhen designed for Hong Kong children could be a buffer zone to ease the pressure for school places in the territory, but the classes are limited by various factors. There are rooms for modification.**

Currently a total of six non-government schools in Shenzhen are offering primary classes for Hong Kong children whose parents are Hong Kong residents. This is also applicable if either one of the parents is a Hong Kong resident. The curriculum of these classes could be linked to Hong Kong primary schools. Eligible Hong Kong children studying in Primary Six in these classes could be allocated a public sector Secondary One place in the secondary schools in Hong Kong.

In November 2013, the Hong Kong and the Shenzhen Governments agreed to open the above classes to children born in Hong Kong but whose parents are not Hong Kong residents. The two Governments also agreed to increase the number of the school places of these classes, from the current 1,400 to around 1,600.

From the positive side, the arrangements would provide these children (Hong Kong children whose parents are not Hong Kong residents) with the option of receiving an education in Shenzhen. At the same time, it could alleviate the pressure on primary school places of the territory amid the current continuing influx of cross-border students.

Nevertheless, the Study noted that these classes received a tepid response from the cross-border students, with 46.5% of the respondents surveyed saying that they did not want to go to schools in Shenzhen designed for Hong Kong pupils. The percentage was far more than those who thought of attending (14.8%).

Furthermore, the Study noted that the classes had some limitations. For example, the extra increase of 200 school places was too small when compared with the current huge number of cross-border students taking primary education in the territory (there were 6,749 cross-border students attending primary education during the 2012/13 academic year). In addition, the classes were located in Shenzhen. The lack of a Hong Kong-based community element might be a disadvantage for students when they come to Hong Kong for development in the future.

**8. Cross-borders students have a strong desire to continue studying in Hong Kong for higher levels. The majority want to work here. Less than half consider Hong Kong to be their first priority place for residence.**

The Study showed that as high as 85% (84.6%) of the respondents surveyed wanted to continue their education for higher academic levels in Hong Kong, while just 5.4% put the Mainland as their choice. The difference in percentage between the two was obvious. Some respondents of the case interviews said that they aimed at completing a degree in Hong Kong. For employment prospects, 70.1% of respondents surveyed would look for work in Hong Kong, while 13.6% preferred working in the Mainland. An obvious difference in percentage between the two existed. Nevertheless, the difference in percentage of those who chose Hong Kong as their preferred place for living from those who chose the Mainland as the answer was not that obvious. The percentage stood at 44.9% and 36.4%, respectively.

Cross-border students, no matter on which side of the border they live, are Hong Kong children. They are a vital part of the human resources of our society in the future. Yet, the language problems, the unfamiliarity with society in Hong Kong, together with other factors, might hinder their integration and familiarization here.

<b>Recommendation</b>
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Given the findings and discussions above, this Study makes the following recommendations to address the learning and developmental needs of the cross-border students

- 1. Set up a task force group under the Steering Committee on Population Policy to examine issues arising from the growing number of cross-border students or children from the Mainland, and to put forward a comprehensive and long term plan to deal with the foreseeable problems.**

The continuing increase in the number of cross-border students calls for an increasing demand of related services, in particular the demand for school places in kindergarten in the short run, and primary and secondary school places in the long run. It also has implications on the development of human resources of the territory in the long term. A piecemeal and patchy approach to tackle the problems arising from the heavy influx of cross-border students is not a long term solution. We recommend that the Government set up a task force as soon as possible to put forward a comprehensive plan on addressing the issues and problems arising from the continuing growing number of cross-border students and children from the Mainland.

- 2. Commence a systematic and continuing data collection work to facilitate more accurate resource planning.**

A systematic and continuing data collection on issues related to cross-border students is important and vital for accurate planning. A lack of comprehensive

statistical data would lead the Government to grope in the dark. We recommend that the Government start the data collection work systematically and periodically on issues related to cross-border students, including the current and the predicted number of cross-border students, their features and their personal plans with regards to studying, working and living in Hong Kong. This could not only help make a more accurate plan, but also avoid unnecessary misunderstanding of the cross-border students by society due to insufficient data or a lack of information.

### **3. Supporting measures and services for cross-border students are required.**

Cross-border students are residing in the Mainland. The living environment, culture, and values on the Mainland, to a certain extent, are different from that of Hong Kong. All these factors make crossing the Hong Kong-Shenzhen border to go to school for an education in Hong Kong not that easy, and indeed, that much harder and more difficult, particularly among pupils at lower levels. We recommend that the Government enhance the supporting measures and services for the cross-border students, including:

#### **3.1 School-based orientation arrangements:**

At the beginning of each new academic year, schools with an in-take of cross-border students provide a range of support services to the cross-border students through an orientation programme. The orientation aims at providing all the necessary information and services to the cross-border students, such as the resources from their school and community that are available to them, the features or characteristics that their community possesses, and the cultures or values that the Hong Kong society upholds. The orientation could also be arranged to include the parents of the cross-border students if needed.

#### **3.2 School-based community participation activities:**

Schools with an in-take of cross-border students are encouraged to join efforts with community service organizations to arrange more community activities for the cross-border students to enhance their understanding and familiarity with their communities and society in Hong Kong as a whole.

#### **4. Pilot programme of dormitory facilities for cross-border students.**

Cross-border students are disadvantaged by the long hours going back and forth across the border. We recommend that the Government carry out a pilot programme of dormitory facilities for the cross-border students. The Government could consider converting the abandoned schools near the crossing points into dormitories for the cross-border students in need. This could bring various advantages to the cross-border students. Firstly, it would ease the time of their journey and reduce their stress, both physically and psychologically. Secondly, by saving them their travelling time they could take part in extra-curricular activities after school and thirdly, it could offer them more opportunities to get familiar with the larger environment of society in Hong Kong.

#### **5. Keep on with the public education to promote a harmonious society.**

Cross-border students could be an important source of manpower for Hong Kong in the future. Nevertheless, some people might think that the cross-border students did indeed impose an unnecessary pressure on society given the heavy influx in numbers over a short period of time, when society was not prepared for it. Misunderstandings or conflicts between the two cities might be intensified. We recommend that the Government keep on with the public education so as to promote the values of respect and harmony for the betterment of society as a whole.