

School Culture and Its Effect on Extracurricular Participation in Hong Kong

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Abstract Extracurricular participation has displayed positive effects on student development; it is, therefore, worthwhile to investigate the factors that influence students' willingness and ability to participate in extracurricular activities held by the school. Through a qualitative research design, this study hopes to reveal how school culture and other factors influence extracurricular participation among local high school students in Hong Kong. Focus groups were conducted with students from three local schools, and teachers and administrative staff were interviewed when available. The study focused on four main themes: school and student profile, participation requirements, activity availability, and school mission and academic emphasis. Hand coding and data analysis suggest that principal and school attitudes influenced the activities available, while timing and activity arrangement significantly affected student participation. Overall, there were mixed opinions toward extracurricular activities.

Keywords Extracurricular participation; School culture; Opportunity equality; Local school; Hong Kong

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Introduction

Over the span of two decades, the university enrolment rate in Hong Kong for youth from the top 10 percent richest families reached 48.2 percent, 3.7 times more than those living under the poverty line (Chou, 2013). The local school system is a leading cause in perpetuating educational inequality in Hong Kong, because students' socioeconomic status (SES) affects the type of schools they attend and thus the quality of their education. Upon graduation from primary school, local students proceed to the first year of secondary school: Form One (Grade 7). A three-level banding system with a standardized assessment is used to allocate Secondary One places to primary students of different degrees of academic performances (Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, Legislative Council Secretariat, 2014); where Band 1 represents the best group of students and Band 3, the weakest (Cheng, 2009). The government computer system randomly assigns students to a school within their band and residential district (Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, Education Bureau, 2016). Because low-income families tend to reside in remote districts of the New Territories (Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, Hong Kong Government Data, 2017), where lower banded schools are more prevalent (School Land, n.d.), low-income students have higher chances of attending lower-banded secondary schools if they do not score well on standardized assessments. Government statistics from various districts add weight to the argument that there is a strong correlation between income and education attainment across different districts of Hong Kong (O'Sullivan, 2015).

While Chau-Kiu Cheung and Elizabeth Rudowicz (2003) claim the local banding system has no significant harm for students' academic achievement, other researchers conclude that a significant pedagogical problem exists within lower-banded secondary schools (Crawford, Hui, & Heung, 2000; Wong, Chan, & Firkins, 2006). According to Nick Crawford, Len Hui, and Vivian Heung (2000), "ability grouping in Hong Kong means sorting lower ability students out of opportunities to succeed" (p. 13) and thus extends educational inequality. It contributes to a heavy academic emphasis, because secondary school placements depend on standardized assessments. Chinese Confucian values could also be a factor contributing to this heavy emphasis on paper examinations and reduced emphasis on extracurricular developments (Zhao & Zhao, 2012), which is why this study investigates a different aspect of the high school experience and attempts to understand how school culture influences students' extracurricular participation. In this study, school culture refers to how attributes such as school and student profile, participation requirements, activity availability, school mission and academic emphasis contribute to a school's atmosphere and practices that influence student behaviour (McNeal, 1999). It also includes a culture of participation that operates on the institutional level to guide extracurricular involvement (Quiroz, 2000).

With the local school banding system, each school offers different support systems for student activity involvement. It is, therefore, necessary to understand the extracurricular participation situation because low-income students could lose the opportunity to learn skills that may be beneficial for the workforce later on (Snellman, Silva, Frederick, & Putnam, 2014). The crucial relationship between school culture and extracurricular participation among high school students is am-

biguous and has not been heavily researched (Hohepa, Scragg, Schofield, Kolt, & Schaaf, 2007), especially among local schools in Hong Kong. Through a qualitative approach, therefore, this study hopes to answer this research question: how does school culture affect extracurricular participation among local high school students in Hong Kong?

Other questions this research study explores include

- What are some key school factors that encourage or discourage extracurricular participation?
- How do local school students feel supported by their school in extracurricular pursuits?
- Is there a relationship between school banding and students' level of extracurricular involvement?

Literature review

The influence of extracurricular activities on students

Extracurricular activity (ECA) is defined in this study as activity opportunities provided by local schools unrelated to academic classes (Denault & Guay, 2016). A substantial amount of research in the U.S. reveals the positive influences of extracurricular participation. For instance, by filling non-school time with constructive activities ranging from sports teams to community service, ECAs help decrease youth violence, increase social skills, and enhance academic achievement (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Snellman et al., 2014; Zaff, Moore, Papillo, & Williams, 2003). In addition to the aforementioned benefits, ECAs impact students' motivation to attend school, as more autonomy is associated with higher intrinsic motivation for participation and school attendance (Denault et al., 2016; Fischer & Theis, 2014). With ECAs offering such benefits, it is important to observe how students may be affected to participate under the unique education system in Hong Kong.

More importantly, ECAs are seen in the West as opportunities to not only bolster academic performance but also build valuable civic skills (Durlak, Weissberg, & Pachan, 2010; Fischer et al., 2014; Fredricks & Eccles, 2008; Stearns & Glennie, 2009). Similar arguments are advanced in a Chinese research study that finds ECAs to be important supplements to classroom teaching that can help students develop practical abilities (Zhang, Zhao, Wu, & Lester, 2016). This once again confirms the importance of this study, which investigates how Hong Kong schools influence their students in ECAs. While a growing body of evidence demonstrates the advantages of extracurricular participation, Lok Sang Ho (2013) advanced the notion that ECAs potentially create more pressure on students and greater tension within families in Hong Kong due to differences in opinions between parents and students. This reflects possible negative consequences of ECAs. Nonetheless, it would not be far-fetched to argue that extracurricular participation is an important aspect of the secondary school experience.

Apart from academic achievements, ECAs are important in student life as well. Extracurricular participation is one aspect of adolescent development that has displayed positive outcomes and found to be beneficial for the preparation of higher education (Kaufman & Gabler, 2004; Rivera, 2012). Yet funding challenges and heavy academic emphasis could prompt schools to reduce activity opportunities

(Stearns & Glennie, 2009). Despite the basic education provided to all Hong Kong citizens, underprivileged students may lack the support and funding necessary for pursuing after-school activities. Forty-seven percent of grassroots students whose families earn less than half the median household income do not participate in ECAs; and within the 53 percent of students who are involved, 51 percent do not attend long-term activities that could be further developed (Alliance for Children's Development Rights, 2017). Although funds are allocated to assist students who could not afford extracurricular fees (O'Sullivan & Tsang, 2015), the government states that Form 4–6 students have to pay for their own extracurricular expenses (Alliance for Children's Development Rights, 2017). So in addition to government funding and support, school culture could play an important role in shaping participation (Quiroz, 2000). This study thus examines school cultural factors that influence extracurricular participation among local high school students, focusing on school and student profile, participation requirements, activity availability, school mission and academic emphasis.

School and student profile

Multiple investigations have evaluated the effect of school culture on extracurricular participation. Ralph McNeal (1999) and Pamela Quiroz's (2000) findings in the U.S. confirm a general trend that students with higher SES are more likely to participate in activities, while students with a low SES remain underrepresented (McNeal, 1998; Simpkins, Delgado, Price, Quach, & Starbuck, 2013), possibly due to their lack of resources. Although multiple studies report a correlation between higher SES and extracurricular participation, there is contradicting opinion; McNeal (1999) proposes that motivation to participate is lower when attending a school with students that have a higher SES. This study will address how various aspects of school culture influence local students' extracurricular participation in Hong Kong.

In addition to SES, another factor of student profile that affects participation is social background. Students coming from different backgrounds respond differently to the school environment. For example, immigrant youth in the U.S. have been found to be disadvantaged in terms of extracurricular participation because they differ in social and ethnic backgrounds from their peers (Okamoto, Herda, & Hartzog, 2013). As a safe school environment fosters increased activity involvement (McNeal, 1999), students from different backgrounds, such as ethnic minorities, might not feel secure enough within the school setting to participate. Since student ethnic composition is found to be a notable factor that influences participation, this study will investigate how student profile might contribute to the school culture and participation rates.

Apart from student body composition, Paul Lindsay (1984) contends that school size has a greater influence on extracurricular participation than other variables. Furthering the discussion on school culture and extracurricular participation, Lindsay's (1984) research sheds light on the positive association between higher extracurricular participation and social activity as young adults. Yet, despite its perceived benefits, extracurricular opportunities can stratify educational inequality because students may be systematically selected for certain activities (McNeal, 1998; Stearns et al., 2009). This is because schools may establish requirements that hinder

certain students from participating, such as teachers recruiting students to join certain activities, inconvenient scheduling, and participation fees (McNeal, 1998; Quiroz, 2000). Since social aspects within a school affect extracurricular participation (Fischer et al., 2014), it is worth exploring how different school profiles and activity systems influence the participation of local Hong Kong students.

Activity availability

Other than school and student profiles, activity availability and resources are important factors that constitute school culture. A school's financial resources often determine activity availability; higher levels of funding are frequently associated with more extracurricular resources. When faced with budget cuts, schools often eliminate ECAs first (Stearns et al., 2009). School support systems could further influence student access to ECAs, because students are unaware of opportunities without promotion (Quiroz, 2000). The availability of and access to activities, whether from financial or school support perspectives, is crucial to student participation, as increased availability has displayed increased participation rates (Stearns et al., 2009). This ties into the idea of how schools incorporate ECAs into their education mission and how they enhance their participation culture.

Participation requirements and school mission: Academic emphasis

Access to facilities alone is insufficient to promote participation, as equal access to opportunities is also necessary for students to become involved. Depending on how schools incorporate ECAs into their education mission, school practices and extracurricular support systems would vary (Quiroz, 2000). Access to extracurricular opportunities is limited when schools establish participation criteria, such as teacher recruitment and participation fees, because it is more challenging for students to exploit opportunities (McNeal, 1999; Quiroz, 2000). This is especially illuminating since school mission was found to influence school practices regarding ECAs and a school's participation culture. The present study will investigate how local school attitudes constitute school culture and affect extracurricular participation.

Academic emphasis is another factor that could influence extracurricular availability. Although researchers urge schools to move away from a heavy emphasis on academic achievement due to concerns that it would draw attention away from ECAs (Crawford et al., 2000), there is insufficient evidence to draw connections between academic emphasis and extracurricular participation (McNeal, 1999). Resources within schools are a critical aspect of school culture that influences participation, therefore a study of their effects on student participation would be helpful in understanding opportunity equality in Hong Kong. This study will illustrate how various local school profiles and practices—such as activity availability, participation requirement, and academic emphasis—produce extracurricular opportunities to learn (Quiroz, 2000).

Research method

Research question

The essential research question of this study is: “how does school culture affect extracurricular participation among high school students in Hong Kong?” School culture refers

to how school attributes contribute to the school's atmosphere and to practices that influence student behaviour. The study used an exploratory approach; the researcher collected qualitative data through small focus groups and interviews. This study is considered inductive because data was collected to answer open-ended questions.

Rationale and alignment

This study employed a qualitative approach, as it allowed an in-depth understanding of faculty and student opinions on ECAs and how school culture might influence participation. Unlike quantitative methods, such as surveys that focus on numerical data, qualitative research presents richer findings, as it focuses on insight and offers deeper understanding of the participants' perspectives (Merriam, 1998). The research method was modified from Bayat's (2015) doctoral dissertation and Quiroz's (2000) article. The four main factors of focus—school and student profile, participation requirements, activity availability, school mission and academic emphasis—were consolidated from Quiroz's (2000) article, which used interviews to discuss students' experiences with ECAs. In addition, certain questions used in this study's interviews and focus groups were adapted from Bayat's (2015) dissertation to answer the essential research question.

The phenomenological design was chosen to be the most appropriate approach to answer the research question. A phenomenological study records participants' responses in great detail and tries to answer questions regarding participant experiences (Christensen, Johnson, & Turner, 2014). This study attempts to analyze how school culture influences extracurricular participation, the phenomenological design allows for detailed analysis on different factors affecting participation.

Process and resources

Participants

The researcher contacted school offices to obtain principals' consent through an email that included an introduction and an outline of the study. Participants volunteered to take part in the study and came from three local secondary schools within the same district. A total of 16 high school students from a Band 1 school participated, 16 from a Band 2 school, and 12 from a Band 3 school. The Band 1 school is an all-girls Catholic school, composed of mainly local students and a small group of foreign learners. It aims to provide an all-round education, and offers ECAs in the academics, sports, performing arts, service, and religious categories. The Band 2 school is an all-girls school comprised of local students. The school values and encourages student participation in ECAs, hosting over 30 clubs and interest groups. It especially promotes service-related activities, and it holds leadership-training sessions to enhance student abilities and leadership skills. The Band 3 school is a co-educational school with a diverse student body, with goals of enhancing students' communication skills through ECAs to help them transition into society and cultivate their sense of responsibility. The ECAs offered in this school include school teams, interest groups, service groups, and aesthetic development programs. All participating students were 15 to 18 years old and were mostly local Cantonese, with the exception of a few ethnic minorities in the Band 3 school. To triangulate the qualitative

data, two, six, and three teachers and administrative staff (e.g., the principal) were interviewed from the Band 1, 2, 3 schools, respectively.

Data collection

Focus groups of three to seven participants were conducted with local school students, they were semi-structured, so deviation from the original questions allowed for further insight that would provide constructive information. The list of questions comprised the researcher's original questions and some modified from Bayat's (2015) dissertation. They were grouped in accordance with the factors to be investigated: school and student profile, participation requirements, activity availability, and school mission and academic emphasis (see Appendix A). In response to the research question, the groups discussed topics of school culture surrounding these four categories (Quiroz, 2000). The focus groups and interviews were arranged over the span of a month at the participants' convenience and took place either within school premises or in a nearby coffee shop. The focus groups lasted between 30 to 40 minutes, and participants were given the choice to speak in their preferred language: Mandarin, Cantonese, or English. Students were assigned a number and asked to fill a form of basic information for identity confidentiality and the convenience of data analysis (see Appendix B). In addition, teachers and administrative staff were interviewed when available to gather additional perspectives on how school culture affects participation (Christensen et al., 2014). Certain questions for teachers and administrators were isomorphic for data triangulation (Quiroz, 2000; see Appendices C and D for administrative and teacher interview questions). The conversations were audio recorded when permitted and later transcribed, then selected quotes were translated to English. All participants were fully informed of the study's purpose and gave consent to use their responses.

Assumptions, biases, limitations

A key assumption is that school culture influences students' extracurricular participation to some extent. Another assumption is that each school has a distinct school culture, even schools within the same band.

The bias of this study lies in the researcher's interpretation of the qualitative data. Focus groups and interviews were conducted with students and teachers to understand how school culture influences extracurricular participation. The interpretation and coding of data, however, varies with each researcher and his or her background.

A limitation is that participants may not reveal true feelings during an interview or focus group. This is especially valid for focus groups, as participants may influence other participants' responses. In addition, it was challenging to have administrative staff agree to be interviewed, so there was limited amount of data from this perspective. A combination of teacher and student opinions, however, included a variety of perspectives. Another limitation is the fact that the findings cannot be generalized to secondary schools in Hong Kong due to the small sample size.

Validity and reliability

Although the study contains its biases and limitations, the validity was increased through data triangulation where themes were established based on several sources

(Creswell, 2014). Furthermore, clarifying researcher bias acknowledged that each researcher interprets findings differently, which created an open narrative and increases validity.

To increase the reliability of the findings, transcripts and translations were checked to ensure no obvious mistakes were made. Moreover, the researcher made sure there was no drift in the definition of the codes by constantly comparing data with the codes.

Ethics

The Internal Review Board approved the research methodology. Ethical considerations were included to protect the study's participants. Prior to the data collection process, all participants were informed of the study's purpose. Consent forms were given to indicate that consent was given to record, analyze, and report the participants' responses (Appendix E). Parental consent forms were distributed for participants under the age of 18 (Appendix F). It also clarified the participants' right to withdraw from the study during any point of the process, and that participant identities were kept confidential with the use of code names. Within six months of the study's completion, all data will be destroyed to prevent the leakage of personal information.

Data analysis

Data analysis began with interview transcripts of the focus groups and interviews (Bayat, 2015). The voice recordings were transcribed into Google Docs. Once fully transcribed, the transcripts were reviewed a second time to ensure accuracy. Analysis was conducted on data collected from different sources: students, teachers, and a few administrative staff. Along with the literature review, this combination of sources triangulated the data.

Phenomenology and hand coding were then used to identify common themes within the conversations, which are reported in a detailed narrative form (Christensen et al., 2014). Hand coding was helpful in digging deeper into the data and drawing comparisons among data collected, not only within individual schools but also across the three schools. To explore how school culture influences extracurricular participation, the researcher laid more emphasis on selected factors of school culture, as mentioned in the literature review: school and student profile, participation requirements, activity availability, school mission and academic emphasis.

Although the analysis was based on themes mentioned above, the researcher also noted emergent themes when analyzing transcripts (Taylor-Powell & Renner, 2003). The coding process began by jotting down themes and ideas while reading the transcriptions to get a sense of the whole picture. The final list of codes consisted of pre-set codes revolving around the four themes, but it also included emergent codes as participants suggested new factors that influence participation, such as student grade level, activity timing, and teacher attitude (Appendix G). Similar codes were clustered together as a theme to narrow the focus down to the investigating factors. The codes were then written next to appropriate segments of the text (Creswell, 2014).

Results and discussion

An underlying assumption made in this study is that school culture does influence

student participation in ECAs. The hand coding of the transcripts revealed that school culture did in fact influence participation; the influencing factors were grouped into the following four categories: school and student profile, participation requirement, activity availability, and school mission and academic emphasis.

School and student profile

The literature review revealed that students with a higher SES have higher participation rates (McNeal, 1998; Quiroz, 2000), and that students with a lower SES tend to be underrepresented. McNeal (1999) offers a contrasting view where there is lower participation motivation with a student body that has a higher SES. However, student SES was not found to influence participation in the three local schools. Despite certain activity costs, students' socioeconomic profile did not appear to influence their ability to participate. This might be because Band 1 school students had a higher SES in general, and the other two schools offered abundant funding to support students' extracurricular pursuits.

Another aspect of student profile is grade level; participation generally decreases as students reach higher grades due to heavier academic workload. It was quite common for schools to hold extra academic lessons in place of ECAs for high school students. A student from the Band 3 school said, "Now that we are in high school, there are less extracurricular activities. Even though there is an option to choose one, generally there are no real activities." This was consistent across all three schools (see Table 1, Quote 1 and Quote 2); however, an interesting phenomenon is that the Band 1 school actually offered more opportunities for students of higher grades, as they were delegated more responsibility with roles such as club presidents (see Table 1, Quote 3). In addition to student profile, Lindsay (1984) argues that school size heavily influences student participation. Present findings agree, as teachers in the Band 3 school suggest that their smaller size facilitated communication and enhanced staff-student relationships, which was useful in getting student opinions across (see Table 1, Quote 4).

Table 1: Quotes related to school (ECA frequency) and student profile

Quote number	Quote
1	*B3FG1S1: In Form 1 and Form 3, the last two lessons on Thursday are a special time for their extracurricular activities. Form 4 to Form 6 students actually don't have a time just for extracurricular activities.
2	B2T3: Maybe Form 4 students are very proactive, but in Form 5 and Form 6, they need to allocate more time to studying. In general, committee members are concentrated among Form 4 students. In Form 5, all the activities, service, school duties will be lessened, so they have more time to prepare for the public examinations.
3	B1FG1S1: The lowest grade that can become a committee member would be in Form 3; if there is really no one available, then you can find someone in Form 2. They want to leave the quota for higher-form students, so there are quite a few opportunities for participation.

Table 1 (continued):

Quote number	Quote
4	B3T1: Our school culture toward students is that if they have opinions about clubs or extracurricular activities, we welcome them to make suggestions to the teachers. Because our student population is not big, the entire school is only 200-something people, students have quite good relationships with teachers.
5	B2T2: Honestly when it comes down to joining things, it is all down to the peer group. If your friends are going, you want to go.
6	B2T3: I think different students have different attitudes. More active students will volunteer to participate. So there are two sides, you also have to consider the nature of the activity. Some activities are more popular, so students are more active in joining.

Notes: * “B” refers to the school’s banding, “FG” refers to the focus group number, “S” refers to the student number, and “T” refers to teacher number. These numbers were assigned to protect participant identity, and apply to all the tables in this article.

As part of school and student profile, the most prominent aspect influencing participation is student attitude and motivations. The main motivation for student participation was found to be improving their university application profile. A Band 1 student expressed, “When you apply for university, you will make a better impression, so a lot of times people force themselves to participate for a certificate, to fill out the OEA [other extracurricular activities]. We have something called service hour, it is helpful for university application, and useful for our future.” Regardless of banding, local students join activities or clubs not only out of interest but also to receive awards and obtain committee roles to boost their résumés. Another main reason students participate in ECAs is peer influence; teachers observed that students are more inclined to join if their friends do (see Table 1, Quote 5). Interestingly, student attitudes toward ECAs in all schools were mixed. Very often students were not passionate about ECAs, especially those made compulsory. Teachers believed, however, that students are active and enjoy the activities (see Table 1, Quote 6). This discrepancy might contribute to the misunderstanding of student attitudes toward ECAs.

Participation requirement

Scholars point out that participation requirements hinder students from activity involvement (McNeal, 1998; Quiroz, 2000; Stearns et al., 2009), the same phenomenon is seen with local students in Hong Kong. A limited quota is the first factor that prevented participation—there were insufficient spaces for students to attend their first-choice activity. This was unproblematic, however, as most schools had flexible quotas (see Table 2, Quote 1). Across three schools, selection occurred mostly for student representatives of the school or activities that require special skills, such as sports and music, whereas other clubs did not establish such requirements. In comparison, the students at the Band 1 school were presented with more selection processes, such as teachers selecting students, academic requirements, and relationships with existing committees. When asked about selection mechanisms, a Band 1 student said “I think teachers selecting students influences their ability participation,

because certain clubs have selection criteria like academic requirements or personal relationships.” Their criteria were more academic based, whereas Band 2 and 3 schools emphasized student attitude and punctuality more (see Table 2, Quote 2).

Table 2: Quotes related to participation requirements

Quote number	Quote
1	B3FG2S2: Quota is actually limited, so there is some selection. But teachers try to fulfil student desires. For example, if it is just a little bit off, teachers will be more lenient and allow the student to join, so that students who are truly interested can participate.
2	B3T2: Learning attitude, this is important, punctuality is also important. A lot of students in lower or higher forms say they want to [join activities], but actually we see that they don’t have a serious attitude. So we think they might not be punctual, and won’t give the spot to them. They might have to wait for the next round. Maybe next semester the class will have space—then we will give it to them.
3	B2FG1S4: I have applied for funding in the past years, but they all denied it. I applied to both of the fund foundations, but they disqualified me because I don’t meet their requirements. Their standards are set so, so high, they ask me for proof, and after I give it, I am not qualified. So I don’t meet the standards, and the fund foundations will directly disqualify me. But I have a lot of activities, so it adds up to be a financial burden. But they don’t take my application, so I think the standards are too high. They have a funds foundation for students who struggle, but not every struggling student can receive funding.

Apart from selection criteria, activity costs can also be an obstacle for participation. Local students generally do not incur high costs for typical clubs, and all schools provide funding for those who need it. Kaisa Snellman, Jennifer Silva, Carl Frederick, and Robert Putnam (2014) contend that wealthier parents have more time and resources to spend on their children, which may contribute to their higher extracurricular participation rates. Similarly, local students who had a higher SES, such as those in the Band 1 school, had fewer concerns for activity costs. On the other hand, Band 2 students claimed the standards for their funding application were too high and many were ineligible (Table 2, Quote 3). Although not the most significant issue, activity costs could hinder participation. Students from different schools express similar opinions as a Band 2 student, who said, “if all the clubs had sponsors, students would be more interested in them. So more sponsor, more emphasis.” Overall, students were more willing to participate in activities when they were sponsored.

Activity availability

According to the literature, larger schools and those with more affluent student bodies offer more activities (Stearns et al., 2009); in Hong Kong specifically, school banding affected the resources available for ECAs (Crawford et al., 2000). The Band 2 and Band 3 schools’ participants indicate that general clubs were offered, but students did not want to participate due to the repetitive and boring activities (Table 3, Quote 1). Students believe that their extracurricular achievements and resource al-

location were proportional, where more resources equated to heightened interest and higher achievements. A Band 2 student said, “the biggest influence is the availability and the money allocation, how many resources equates to how well they perform. But for some clubs, they don’t allocate resources, so it doesn’t matter how interesting the thing is, it could still be boring.” Literature indicates that participation rates are higher when there are more activities available (Stearns et al., 2009). The results of this study align with that finding: Band 1 students displayed higher participation rates, perhaps due to their increased availabilities.

Table 3: Quotes related to activity availability

Quote number	Quote
1.	B3FG3S1: I would like to change the repeated activities [that have been offered] since Form 1, since junior form. The classes—I would like to change that. It has to be some more interesting classes that actually work out for the school and for students.
2.	B1FG2S2: A lot of things seem to be very free, to attract you to participate. So I think if it can be changed, they should let students take more initiative. I think there can be a moderator, but at the same time you really need to give students enough freedom to express. You can’t have them follow orders for everything.
3.	B3T2: The cooperation is that we can schedule it during the class time, so students don’t have to use after-school time. This would make them more accepting of activities, become more engaged, and would also increase efficiency. Timing, most importantly timing. The current generation of teenagers values its own personal time, so if you ask them to go after school, they won’t be willing, they’d rather game. On the other hand, if you could incorporate activities into the lesson, the level of acceptance would increase.
4.	B2FG2S3: Activities are generally after school, but the teachers use your after-school time for extra lessons. So a lot of students cannot participate in activities, because extra lessons last more than 30 minutes. The activities would have ended already and they can’t participate.

On top of availability, activity arrangement also influenced participation rates. Anne-Sophie Denault and Frédéric Guay (2016) found that more autonomy was associated with higher participation motivation. That also applies to local students who participated in the study: they wished for more freedom and autonomy in organizing ECAs (Table 3, Quote 2). An additional factor that influenced availability was the school support system, because students were unaware of opportunities unless those opportunities were promoted (Quiroz, 2000). Yet not much effort was invested in activity promotion across all three schools, other than typical methods such as brochures, poster boards, and announcements.

An unexpected but impactful factor was activity timing. Teachers suggested that participation rates might increase if the school incorporated activities into its schedule, as this could alleviate the tension between school activities and students’ personal activities (Table 3, Quote 3). Students were also better able to participate when schools arranged ECAs so they did not conflict with extra lessons, as students from the Band 1 and Band 2 schools had limited ECA options due to this conflict (Table 3,

Quote 4). It is likely that activity length influences participation in addition to scheduling, since students were less willing to participate when the activity was too time consuming. It can be concluded that many participants would agree with the Band 1 student who said, “sometimes the scheduling is not good, a lot of people think they stay too late [and if they did activities] their own tutor lessons or other activities would have to be later.”

School mission and academic emphasis

Previous research shows that heavy academic emphasis lowers chances for extracurricular participation (Crawford et al., 2000; McNeal, 1999); the situation is accentuated in Hong Kong because schools emphasize academics more than extracurricular activities. Examples of heavier academic emphasis would be the Band 2 school’s teachers forcing students to stay for detention and miss ECAs, and the Band 1 school’s higher amount of academic scholarship than the non-academic scholarship. These measures discourage students from continued ECA involvement (Table 4, Quote 1). The local education system emphasizes academic outcomes, so schools have no choice but to play by the rules and focus on academics. Furthermore, all participating schools invested more resources in academic-related clubs. This emphasis on certain types of activities affected students’ access to ECAs, and often this was determined by principal preference and school goals. The Band 3 school had a principal who was very supportive of ECA developments; but the Band 1 and Band 2 principals emphasized activities that would contribute to the school image, such as academic-related or Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Mathematics (STEAM) activities (Table 4, Quote 2 and Quote 3).

Table 4: Quotes related to school mission and academic emphasis

Quote number	Quote
1.	B2FG3S2: A lot of core subject teachers would ask you to go to extra lessons first, like go to the academic subject classes first and then to extracurricular activities. They ask that we change activity dates when possible, and focus on academics instead.
2.	B2FG1S5: In terms of administration level, the principal definitely does not support us. But we have two vice principals, and one of them was a music major, so she emphasizes musical developments a lot. ... In the music aspect, I see the principal allocates a lot of money and lets them go to Germany for competitions. Our principal is actually happy because it helps boost school image, otherwise I think the school would have closed it already.
3.	B1FG3S4: Our principal doesn’t care what activities we participate in; she only wants good results. And she doesn’t emphasize the activities we participate in, instead it is the awards we bring back—if there is anything that could boost the school profile, or if it would affect our academic grades.
4.	B2T3: There are 20-something clubs, but not every teacher has to be in a charge of a club. So those who lead a club would have a responsibility, and they would be more involved in their club affairs. But those who are not in charge of a club, their involvement would be relatively less. So all teachers understand the school operations include ECA, but their participation rates depend on if they have been allocated related duties.

Table 4 (continued)

Quote number	Quote
5.	B1FG3S3: I think the school should try to listen to student demands, instead of generalizing or following the mainstream and feeling obligated to emphasize certain areas of development.

Wu

*Extracurricular
Participation and
School Effects*

Apart from principal visions, teacher attitudes toward ECAs also significantly shape student participation. Local school teachers generally encourage academics more than ECAs, but there are mixed opinions; teachers are more supportive if they are involved in activity coordination (Table 4, Quote 4). Students become more willing to dedicate time and effort when teachers were serious and organized. A Band 2 student said, “I think the school should find teachers who are passionate about it. Sometimes the teachers in charge of clubs are not serious, so students do not treat it seriously either. So it is important to find a teacher who is passionate about the club in order to organize activities.” A major difference between the Band 1 school and the other schools was that its teachers actually encouraged activity participation to enrich students’ college profile. The two other schools asked students to focus on academics instead.

Finally, the school attitude and openness toward student opinions influenced participation. Many students demanded more student-generated clubs and more focus on student opinions (Table 4, Quote 5). Although the schools already had mechanisms to gather student opinions, students still felt a lack of attention toward their true desires.

Conclusion

Previous research has shown evidence of various school factors influencing extracurricular participation, examples of which include SES, participation requirements, and academic emphasis. The present study further investigated how other factors of school culture influence participation among high school students in Hong Kong. As a whole, local students were not passionate about extracurricular activities organized by their schools. Instead, their motivation to participate was to improve their profile for university applications. There were occasional selection requirements and costs that deterred participation, but the most significant factor was timing and the arrangement of activities. This suggests that ECAs at local schools could be incorporated into daily schedules to avoid time conflicts and enhance students’ willingness and ability to participate. Students were more engaged when activities were new, interesting, and scheduled conveniently. Local schools could, therefore, gather student opinions and create activities that actually appeal to students in order to increase participation rates. Another significant aspect of school culture affecting participation is the teacher and school attitudes. When they were more supportive, both financially and emotionally, students had higher motivations to participate. Therefore to improve ECA programs in local schools, the school administration could invest more time and resources in the programs, and teaching staff could demonstrate positive attitudes toward ECAs to support student participation. Surprisingly, banding did not greatly affect levels of participation, although the schools’ differences in mission and policies did impact students’ activity opportunities.

This study identified some key factors that affect extracurricular participation among local students from the three selected schools. With a better idea of which specific factors are more influential, local schools can modify existing extracurricular programs in order to enhance students' ability and willingness to participate. More qualitative studies on factors affecting participation are needed to complement results from this study. As the current study only worked with three schools within the same district, future research can investigate extracurricular participation among local schools in other districts or even international schools. In particular, comparisons could be drawn between international and local school cultures to reveal more factors affecting extracurricular participation, and potentially propose detailed policy recommendations to enhance students' extracurricular participation.

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Appendix A

Student focus group questions

IJEPL 15(8) 2019

Wu

*Extracurricular
Participation and
School Effects*

- 對於學校提供的課外活動規劃，總的來說您認為有什麼優點和缺點？您有權選擇自己希望參與的活動嗎？
[What do you like and dislike about the ECA programs offered in school? Can you choose which ECAs you can be involved with?]
- 您能描述一下學校提供的活動類型嗎？您自己如何選擇參加哪些活動？
[Could you describe the type of ECAs that your school offers? How do you select which activities to participate in?]

Participation requirements and availability

- 學校如何讓更多的學生更積極地參與這些課外活動呢（推廣，方便的時間表，資助...）？
[How are activities made available to students (promotion, convenient scheduling, funding ...)?]
- 在報名參加課外活動的時候，您有沒有遇到過任何阻礙，令您無法參加這項活動？如果有的話，請解釋一下。
[Were there any challenges that prevented you from participating in ECAs? If so, please explain.]
- 學校有沒有向您收取活動費用？
[Was there any cost for you to participate?]
- 課外活動在你們學校是免費的嗎？如果不是，學校如何支持那些可能負擔不起的人？
[Are all ECAs free at your school? If not, how does the school support those who might not be able to afford it?]
- 有沒有活動會設置學術要求，才讓學生參與此項活動？
[Do any ECAs need academic requirements for students to participate?]
- 提供的活動是否有參與的先決條件？例子包括選拔賽，教師選擇，活動選項，有限名額，活動時間安排...
[Do the ECAs offered have prerequisites for participation? Examples might include tryouts, teacher selection, availability of activities, limited quotas, activity scheduling ...]
 - 教師是否設定了某些活動的要求？課外活動有任何的限制可能會阻礙學生的參與嗎？
[Do teachers set requirements for certain ECAs? Are there any limitations of ECAs that might hinder student participation?]

- 教師是否選擇某些活動的參與者？

[Do teachers select participants for certain ECAs?]

- 您認為學校是否滿足了參與活動背景不同的學生的需求？請解釋。

[Do you think the school addresses the needs of students with diverse backgrounds in ECA participation? Please explain.]

School mission and academic emphasis

- 您的學校是否鼓勵參與ECA？為什麼或者為什麼不？

Does your school encourage participation in ECAs? [Why or why not?]

- 學校如何鼓勵學生參與課外活動？有沒有設置任何政策或校規來鼓勵同學們參加？

[How does the school encourage students' participation in ECAs? Are there any policies in place to help develop ECAs?]

- 學校對於課外活動有沒有提供諮詢和校內推廣？

[Were there any counselling experiences and school promotion?]

- 你如何同時兼顧學業和課外活動？學校在這方面如何幫助你？

[How did you manage school work along with the ECA? How does the school facilitate you in doing so?]

- 你認為你的學校是否非常重視學業成績？如果是這樣，學校如何幫助你在兩者之間保持平衡？

[Do you think your school has a heavy academic emphasis? If so, how does the school help you cope with and balance academics and ECAs?]

- 在您看來，學習管理處對課外活動的態度是什麼？他們鼓勵或支持嗎？為什麼/為什麼不呢？那教師態度和意見又如何呢？

[What is your perception of the administration's attitude toward ECA? Do they encourage it? Why/why not? How about teachers' attitudes and opinions?]

- 請解釋您在課外活動中有遇到的任何支持或障礙。如果曾經遇到過任何與活動的爭執或衝突，您是如何處理的呢？

[Please explain any support or barriers you have experienced in ECAs. How did you deal with conflicts in ECAs, if any?]

Student opinions on ECA

- 你是喜歡課外活動的那些方面，才促使你定期參加？

[What did you like about an ECA that motivated you to attend regularly?]

- 您認為您參加課外活動最重要的原因是什麼?
[What do you think was the most important reason for you to participate in an ECA?]
- 如果您可以更改學校的活動規劃或政策，那麼您會更改什麼，令更多的學生有機會參與這些活動?
[If you could change your school's ECA programs/policies, what would you change for more ECA involvement/access for all students?]
- 如果有人告訴你課外活動並不重要，你會如何回應?
[If somebody tells you ECAs are not important, what would be your answer?]
- 你認為課外活動對你帶來什麼樣的幫助?
[How have you been helped through ECA?]

Appendix B

Student general information form

JIEPL 15(8) 2019

Wu

*Extracurricular
Participation and
School Effects*

Participant Code	Filled out by researcher
Name 姓名	
Gender 性別	
Grade Level 班別年紀	
Email/Phone 電郵 / 電話	
The clubs/ECAs you are involved in within school 校內參加的課外活動有哪些? (任何與學業無關的活動/參與)	
Why have you chosen these specific ECAs to participate in? 為什麼選擇參與這些課外活動?	
Were there any challenges that prevented you from participating in ECAs? 有任何困難令你無法參與課外活動嗎?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation requirement 參與活動的要求和標準不達標 • Scheduling 時間表安排 • Heavy academic workload 學業功課太多 • Activity availability and quota 提供的活動選項和名額有限 • Teacher selection 教師選擇
Estimate your total participation fees for activities within school (per year) 估計你每年參與活動的費用	
Do you receive funding for participating in ECAs? 參與課外活動是否收到學校資金?	
Do you attend the programs on a regular basis? 你是否定期參加學校舉辦的課外活動?	
Data confidentiality 數據機密性	The data collected from focus groups/interviews will be kept safely with the course teacher, Dr. Linda Lehmil, until data destruction. Only the researcher will have access to the data.

Appendix C

Administration interview questions

IJEPL 15(8) 2019

Wu

*Extracurricular
Participation and
School Effects*

School/student profile

- 請簡單描述一下學校的環境和學生社會。你們學校的教育使命是什麼？
[Please describe your school and community. What is the education mission of your school?]
- 你能描述一下學校提供的活動類型嗎？學校是如何選擇提供的活動種類呢？
[Could you describe the type of ECAs your school offers? How do you select which activities to offer?]
- 在您看來，學生對課外活動的態度是如何的呢？
[What is your perception of students' attitude toward ECA?]
- 在您看來，學習管理處對課外活動的態度是什麼？他們鼓勵或支持嗎？為什麼/為什麼不呢？那教師的態度和意見又如何呢？
[What is your perception of the administration's attitude toward ECA? Do they encourage it? Why/why not? How about teachers' attitudes and opinions?]
- 學校的ECA參與率是多少？課外活動在你們學校是強制性的嗎？
[What is the ECA participation rate at your school? Are ECAs mandatory at your school?]
- 在您看來，為什麼有些學生會參與課外活動，而有些卻沒有參與？
[Why do you think some students are involved in ECA, and why are some not?]
- 參與活動的學生有沒有共同的特點？（由於財務狀況，父母的期望，同輩壓力而出現的問題 ...）
[Are there any patterns of participation, any specific student groups who might participate more or less? (Problems arise due to financial status, parent expectations, peer pressure ...)]

Participation requirements/availability

- 學校如何讓更多的學生更積極地參與這些課外活動呢（推廣，方便的時間，資助 ...）？
[How are activities made available to students (promotion, convenient scheduling, funding ...)?]
- 學校對於課外活動有沒有提供諮詢和校內推廣？
[Were there any counselling experiences and school promotion?]

- 有沒有活動會設置學術要求，才讓學生參與此項活動？
[Do these ECAs need any academic requirements for students to participate in them?]
- 課外活動在你們學校是免費的嗎？如果不是，學校如何支持那些可能負擔不起的人？
[Are all ECAs free at your school? If not, how does the school support those who might not be able to afford them?]
- 提供的活動是否有參與的先決條件？例子包括選拔賽，教師選擇，活動選，有限名額，活動時間安排 ...
[Do the ECAs offered have prerequisites for participation? Examples might include tryouts, teacher selection, the availability of activities, limited quotas, activity scheduling ...]
 - 教師是否設定了某些活動的要求？課外活動有任何的限制可能會阻礙學生的參與嗎？
[Do teachers set requirements for certain ECAs? Are there any limitations of ECAs that might hinder student participation?]
- 教師在課外活動中扮演什麼角色？
[What roles do teachers play in ECAs at your school?]
- 您認為學校是否滿足了參與活動背景不同的學生的需求？請解釋。
[Do you think the school addresses the needs of students with diverse backgrounds in ECA participation? Please explain.]

School mission/academic emphasis

- 學校如何將課外活動納入其教育使命？
[How does the school incorporate ECAs as part of its education mission?]
- 在你看來，影響學生參與課外活動的一些主要因素是什麼？
[In your opinion, what are some school factors that influence student's willingness to participate in ECA?]
- 學校是否鼓勵參與ECA？為什麼或者為什麼不？
[Does your school encourage participation in ECA? Why or why not?]
- 學校如何鼓勵學生參與課外活動？有沒有設置任何政策或校規來鼓勵同學們參加？
[How does the school encourage students' participation in ECA? Are there any policies in place to help develop ECA?]

- 請解釋您在課外活動中有遇到的任何支持或障礙. 如果曾經遇到過任何與活動的爭執或衝突, 您是如何處理的呢?
[Please explain any support or barriers you have experienced in ECA. How did you deal with conflicts in ECA, if any?]
- 學生們如何處理任何與課外活動的衝突?
[In your opinion how did students deal with conflicts in ECA?]
- 你認為你的學校是否非常重視學業成績? 如果是這樣, 學校如何幫助你在兩者之間保持平衡?
[Do you think your school has a heavy academic emphasis? If so, how does the school help you cope with and balance academics and ECAs?]
- 如果您可以更改學校的活動規劃或政策, 那麼您會更改什麼, 令更多的學生有機會參與這些活動?
[If you could change your ECA programs/policies, what would you change for more ECA involvement/access for all students?]

Appendix D

Teacher interview questions

IJEPL 15(8) 2019

Wu

*Extracurricular
Participation and
School Effects*

School/student profile

- 請簡單描述一下學校的環境和學生社會。你們學校的教育使命是什麼？

[Please give me a description of the school and community. What is the education mission of your school?]

- 你是否參與課外活動的規劃和協調？你在活動中扮演什麼樣的角色？你認為課外活動的目標是什麼？

[Are you involved in ECA coordination? → What was your leadership role in ECA? What were the goals of your ECA?]

- 你能描述一下學校提供的活動類型嗎？學校是如何選擇提供的活動種類？

[Could you describe the type of ECAs that your school offers? How do you select which activities to offer?]

- 在您看來，學生對課外活動的態度是如何的呢？

[What is your perception of students' attitude toward ECA?]

- 在您看來，學習管理處對課外活動的態度是什麼？他們鼓勵或支持嗎？為什麼/為什麼不呢？那教師的態度和意見又如何呢？

[What is your perception of the administration's attitude toward ECA? Do they encourage it? Why/why not? How about teachers' attitudes and opinions?]

- 學校的ECA參與率是多少？課外活動在你們學校是強制性的嗎？

[What is the ECA participation rate at your school? Are ECAs mandatory at your school?]

- 在您看來，為什麼有些學生會參與課外活動，而有些卻沒有參與？

[Why do you think some students are involved in ECA, and why are some not?]

- 參與活動的學生有沒有共同的特點？（由於財務狀況，父母的期望，同輩壓力而出現的問題...）

[Are there any patterns of participation, any specific student groups who might participate more or less? (Problems arise due to financial status, parent expectations, peer pressure ...)]

Participation requirements/availability

- 學校如何讓更多的學生更積極地參與這些課外活動呢（推廣，方便的時間，資助...）？

[How are activities made available to students (promotion, convenient scheduling, funding ...)?]

- 有沒有活動會設置學術要求,才讓學生參與此項活動?
[Do these ECAs need any academic requirements for students to participate in them?]
- 課外活動在你們學校是免費的嗎? 如果不是, 學校如何支持那些可能負擔不起的人?
[Are all ECAs free at your school? If not, how does the school support those who might not be able to afford it?]
- 提供的活動是否有參與的先決條件? 例子包括選拔賽, 教師選擇, 活動選, 有限名額, 活動時間安排 ...
[Do the ECAs offered have prerequisites for participation? Examples might include tryouts, teacher selection, availability of activities, limited quotas, activity scheduling ...]
 - 教師是否設定了某些活動的要求? 課外活動有任何的限制可能會阻礙學生的參與嗎?
[Do teachers set requirements for certain ECAs? Are there any limitations of ECAs that might hinder student participation?]
- 教師在課外活動中扮演什麼角色?
[What roles do teachers play in ECAs at your school?]
- 您認為學校是否滿足了參與活動背景不同的學生的需求? 請解釋。
[Do you think the school addresses the needs of students with diverse backgrounds in ECA participation? Please explain.]

School mission/academic emphasis

- 學校如何將課外活動納入其教育使命?
[How does the school incorporate ECAs as part of its education mission?]
- 學校對於課外活動有沒有提供諮詢和校內推廣?
[Were there any counselling experiences and school promotion?]
- 在你看來, 影響學生參與課外活動的一些主要因素是什麼?
[In your opinion, what are some school factors that influence student's willingness to participate in ECA?]
- 學校是否鼓勵參與ECA? 為什麼或者為什麼不?
[Does your school encourage participation in ECA? Why or why not?]
 - 學校如何鼓勵學生參與課外活動? 有沒有設置任何政策或校規來鼓勵同學們參加?
How does the school encourage students' participation in ECA? Any policies in place to help develop ECA?]

- 請解釋您在課外活動中有遇到的任何支持或障礙. 如果曾經遇到過任何與活動的爭執或衝突, 您是如何處理的呢?
[Please explain any support or barriers you have experienced in ECA. How did you deal with conflicts in ECA, if any?]
- 學生們如何處理任何與課外活動的衝突?
[In your opinion how did students deal with conflicts in ECA?]
- 你認為你的學校是否非常重視學業成績? 如果是這樣, 學校如何幫助你在兩者之間保持平衡?
[Do you think your school has a heavy academic emphasis? If so, how does the school help you cope with and balance academics and ECAs?]
- 如果您可以更改學校的活動規劃或政策, 那麼您會更改什麼, 令更多的學生有機會參與這些活動?
[If you could change your ECA programs/policies, what would you change for more ECA involvement/access for all students?]

Appendix E

Consent form for teachers/administrators

I, _____, agree to take part in a study on extracurricular opportunities within school, I understand that:

- I am under no obligation to participate in an interview and observations.
- I can refuse to answer any question in the interview or terminate both the interview and observations at any time without consequence.
- My specific answers and comments will be kept confidential.
- My name or the name of my school and district will not be identified in any report or presentation that may arise from the study.
- Only the research team will have access to the information collected during the study.
- Data collected for the study will be destroyed within six months of the study's completion.
- I will be audio recorded and the data will be analyzed in the study.
- Participation in this study provides me with a professional development opportunity through reflection on my own practices.
- I may request a summary of findings once the study is complete.

I agree to participate and I understand what this study involves. I have received a copy of this form for my records.

Name of Participant _____ (Please Print)

Signature of Participant: _____

Date: _____

Appendix F
Parent consent form (for students)
Parental consent to participate in a research study

Title of Study: Extracurricular opportunities within school

Investigator: Melissa Wu

Parent/Guardian Name: _____

Introduction

- Your child is being asked to be in a research study of extracurricular opportunities within school.
- We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before allowing your child to participate in this study.

Purpose of study

- The purpose of the study is to explore how school culture affects students' extracurricular participation.
- Ultimately, this research may be submitted to the College Board as part of the Advanced Placement Research class.

Description of the study procedures

- If you decide to allow your child to participate in this study, s/he will be asked to do the following things: participate in a focus group of four to six students and answer several questions surrounding their experiences with extracurricular activities within school. It will take approximately twenty to sixty minutes, depending on the number of students in each focus group and the group dynamics.

Risks/discomforts of being in this study

- There are no reasonable foreseeable (or expected) risks. There may be unknown risks. However, the conversations will be audio recorded and transcribed to text for data analysis later on.

Confidentiality

- This study is anonymous. We will not be collecting or retaining any information about your child's identity. Although there will be audio recordings made, only the researcher will have access to them and data will be destroyed within six months of completing the study. Meanwhile, the data will be stored safely with the instructor of the course, Dr. Linda Lehmil. We will not include any information in any report we may publish that would make it possible to identify your child.

Right to refuse or withdraw

- The decision to participate in this study is entirely up to you and your child. You are welcome to observe the interview if you wish. Your child may refuse to take part in the study at any time. Your child has the right not to answer any single question, as well as to withdraw completely from the interview at any point during the process; additionally, you have the right to request that the interviewer not use any of the interview material.

Right to ask questions and report concerns

- You have the right to ask questions about this research study and to have those questions answered by me before, during, or after the research. If you have any further questions about the study, at any time feel free to contact me, Melissa at _____ or by telephone at xxxx xxxx. If you like, a summary of the results of the study will be sent to you.

Consent

Your signature below indicates that you have decided to allow your child to participate as a research subject for this study, and that you have read and understood the information provided above. You will be given a signed and dated copy of this form to keep, along with any other printed materials deemed necessary by the study investigators.

Parent/Guardian Name:

Date:

Parent/Guardian Signature:

Date:

Student Participant Name:

Date:

Student Participant Signature:

Date:

Investigator Signature:

Date:

Appendix G Themes and codes used

academics	grade
activity location	limit
administration	motivation
atmosphere	parents
availability	principal
balance	promotion
compulsory	quota
cost	resources
atmosphere	school attitude
availability	school care
balance	school profile
compulsory	selection
cost	student attitude
ECA arrangement	student profile
ECA classes	support
emphasize type	teacher
funding	timing
gov/system	