

Evaluation Study on The Women's Foundation's Life Skills Programme

Evaluation Report

Submitted to

The Women's Foundation

By

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Executive Summary

The Women's Foundation's Life Skills Program was launched in 2011. The main goal of the program is to teach mid-to-late Hong Kong teens to examine, question, and challenge the status quo, to replace negative stereotypes with positive images, and to feel empowered to bring about positive life changes at university, the workplace, and beyond. The curriculum covers important life skills focusing on financial literacy, healthy relationships, and well-being, as well as life and career planning. In order to develop an evidence-based life skills program, the Women's Foundation has commissioned this research team to conduct an evaluation study to assess the effectiveness of this program and to explore the essential factors affecting the feasibility and usefulness of the program to tailor itself to the needs of adolescents in Hong Kong.

The present evaluation study has adopted both quantitative and qualitative research methods to conduct subjective outcome evaluation, objective outcome evaluation, and process evaluation. For the subjective outcome evaluation, a survey design was adopted to collect participants' opinions with regards to the workshops and instructors. In relation to the objective outcome evaluation, a one-group pre-test and post-test follow-up test design was used to assess the Life Skills Program in terms of its effectiveness in (1) improving the adolescent participants' sense of self-worth (self-esteem), (2) assisting them in searching for their own life goals (meaning in life), (3) helping them to discover and affirm their own ability to achieve their goals (self-efficacy), (4) raising their knowledge and skills with regards to financial management, (5) enhancing their interpersonal skills (feeling of relaxation in social contacts and listening skills), and (6) arousing their awareness of social stigma and gender inequality (critical thinking ability and agreement with gender equality). For the process evaluation, focus groups were arranged to explore participants' experiences, learning, and perceptions of the program.

The results of the subjective outcome evaluation showed that an overwhelming majority (87.9% to 97.5%) of the participants rated the program and the performance of the instructors positively. The objective outcome evaluation indicated that the participants experienced substantial improvements in their sense of self-esteem, presence of meaning in life, feeling of relaxation in social contacts, willingness to participate in family financial management, and critical thinking ability. In addition, almost all of these positive impacts are sustainable. Furthermore, focus group participants expressed their appreciation for the passionate instructors, interactive activities, and insightful discussions and reflections on issues that they rarely or have never explored.

The synthesis of the quantitative and qualitative research findings suggest that the Life Skills Program can consider making the following changes for the sake of excellence. First, the program should focus more on enhancing students' constructive evaluations of their own competence and

problem-solving ability. Second, the sensitivity of male adolescents towards gender biases should be strengthened as part of the program. Third, the involvement of students in choosing topics and designing the activities should be promoted. Fourth, adequate debriefings on activities should be provided and students should be given enough time to figure out the fundamental meaning of what they are learning in relation to their lived experiences and daily situations. Fifth, close interactions and open discussions among students should be fostered. Sixth, instructors should strive to create and consolidate an interactive learning atmosphere through a dialogical form of relationships and positive modeling, with the assumption that students are active rather than passive learners.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the Evaluation Research

Young people are the future pillars of society. They are at a transitional stage between childhood and adulthood when care, support, and encouragement are essential for helping them develop a healthy identity, exercising their freedom with a strong sense of responsibility, and making a contribution to society (Commission on Youth, 2011). Life skills training is a type of non-formal education designed to nurture young people with the positive qualities needed to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life (Program on Mental Health, World Health Organization, 1997). The development of life skills can also enable young people to protect themselves from a multitude of vulnerable social environments and risk-taking behaviors (UNICEF, 2012). In response to the urgent need for providing life skills training for Hong Kong adolescents, the Women's Foundation's Life Skills Program was launched in 2011. The main goal of the program is to teach mid-to-late Hong Kong teens to examine, question, and challenge the status quo, to replace negative stereotypes with positive images, and to feel empowered to bring about positive life changes at university, the workplace, and beyond. The curriculum covers important life skills focusing on financial literacy, healthy relationships and well-being, and life and career planning. In order to develop an evidence-based life skills program, the Women's Foundation has commissioned this research team to conduct an evaluation study to assess the effectiveness of this program and to explore the essential factors affecting the feasibility and usefulness of the program to tailor itself to the needs of adolescents in Hong Kong.

1.2. Research Objectives

- To assess the effectiveness of the program in terms of five complementary levels: cognitive level (critical thinking), personal level (self-concept, self-efficacy, and pursuit of meaning in life), interpersonal level (communicative competence), family level (financial management in family), and social level (perception of gender equality).
- To examine the perceptions and experiences of the participants in the program.
- To investigate the factors conducive to the success of the program.
- To explore the long-term influence on their personal growth, relationship enhancement, and social awareness.
- To evaluate the sustainability of the program model for young people.

2. Literature Review

The significance of life skills development among adolescents has been increasingly recognized in Hong Kong since its inception in the 2000s. Life skills development is commonly regarded as courses, programs, and activities provided by life skills training practitioners to enhance young people's attitudes, knowledge, and skills for the promotion of their personal, social, academic, and career development (Agochiya, 2010; American School Counseling Association, 2003; Yuen et al., 2003). It emphasizes equipping adolescents with self-knowledge, social and emotional skills, decision-making and problem-solving skills, time-management skills, and career planning skills to foster whole-person development and prepare them for full participation in society and the community (Faculty of Education, CUHK & Department of Educational Studies, 2007; Watkins, 1998; Yuen, 2011). Metaphorically speaking, life skills development does not refer to a single subject but to a large family. Scholars from different disciplines are still exploring the theoretical foundation of life skills development and its relationship with life education (Faculty of Education, CUHK & Department of Educational Studies, 2007), positive youth development (Shek, Ma, & Merrick, 2007), and leadership development (Ngai, Ngai, Cheung, & To, 2012). From the perspective of mental health counseling, life skills development provides adolescents with rich learning experiences that emphasize the revival of the life momentum embedded in various life domains, namely family, school, community, and career (Gazda & Brooks, 1985).

Numerous overseas and local research studies have explored the effectiveness of life skills development and leadership training programs. Having adopted a randomized controlled trial for program evaluation, the study conducted by Graves, Sentner, Workman, and Mackey (2011) indicates that young females who have participated in a life skills program increased their personal/self sexuality expectations and improved certain aspects of their parent-child communication when compared to control group participants. Another clinical trial conducted by Campbell-Heider, Tuttle, & Knapp (2009) found that the mental health problems of high-risk male teens were significantly reduced after their participation in the life skills training program. Lee and Yim (2004) evaluated a leadership training group for secondary students and noted an improvement in the group members in terms of self-understanding, interpersonal communication, decision-making, group maintenance, and leadership practice. Chan (2000) also reported that student participants rated themselves as having more qualities, characteristics, or abilities related to leadership after undergoing the leadership training.

In the past, government and welfare organizations have put a great deal of effort into reducing the antisocial behavior of young people and helping them to reach the expected norms of society. In recent years, a paradigm shift from a problem-based orientation to an orientation that seeks to

address adolescents' lived experiences and potential has been promoted (Leung, 1996; To, 2007). Echoing such a paradigm shift, a transformative learning approach was used to theorize a research framework for assessing the effectiveness and applicability of the Women's Foundation Life Skills Program. Mezirow (2000) defines transformative learning as "the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspective, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action" (p.7). Inspired by transformative learning, life skills development should try to work with the life process of awareness in order to bring to adolescents the possibilities for richer and more meaningful experiences of self-enrichment, relationship enhancement, and community participation. This approach also reminds us that life skills development programs should comprise the following components:

First, life skills development should affirm that young people have existing reservoirs of strength and resources to draw upon, as well as possessing a distinct capacity for growth (Linden & Fertman, 1998). Life skills training should aim to facilitate young people to foster a positive self-concept, affirm their competence, and enhance their coping capabilities (Edginton, Kowalski, & Randall, 2005). In addition, changes in knowledge and skills will not be consolidated unless personal meaning in life is found and owned (To, Tam, & Chan, 2013).

Second, this approach recognizes the fact that life skills are by nature interpersonal, thus a crucial element is to enhance young people's communicative competence and practice of the self with regards to interpersonal relationships (Johnson, 2003). Much emphasis should be placed on building connections with other people, acknowledging that at the heart of life skills remains getting others to cooperate and in making full use of their verbal and nonverbal communication skills in resolving relationship problems (Ngai et al. 2012).

Third, this approach contends that although the transfer of knowledge and skills is significant, the most powerful source for influencing young people in a positive direction is trainers' own living examples of who they are. Besides teaching knowledge and skills, trainers can share with participants their reflections and wisdom derived from their real life experiences (Walters, 2008). Trainers should also maintain a collaborative relationship with participants, sincerely hear their voices, and generate meaningful dialogue between them (To, 2009).

Fourth, life skills development should go beyond the individual dimension. It should create chances for young people to express their concerns and participate in the civic lives of the school, community, and society. In addition to promoting the constructive psychological development of young people through cultivating a positive self-concept, enhancing self-efficacy, and searching for

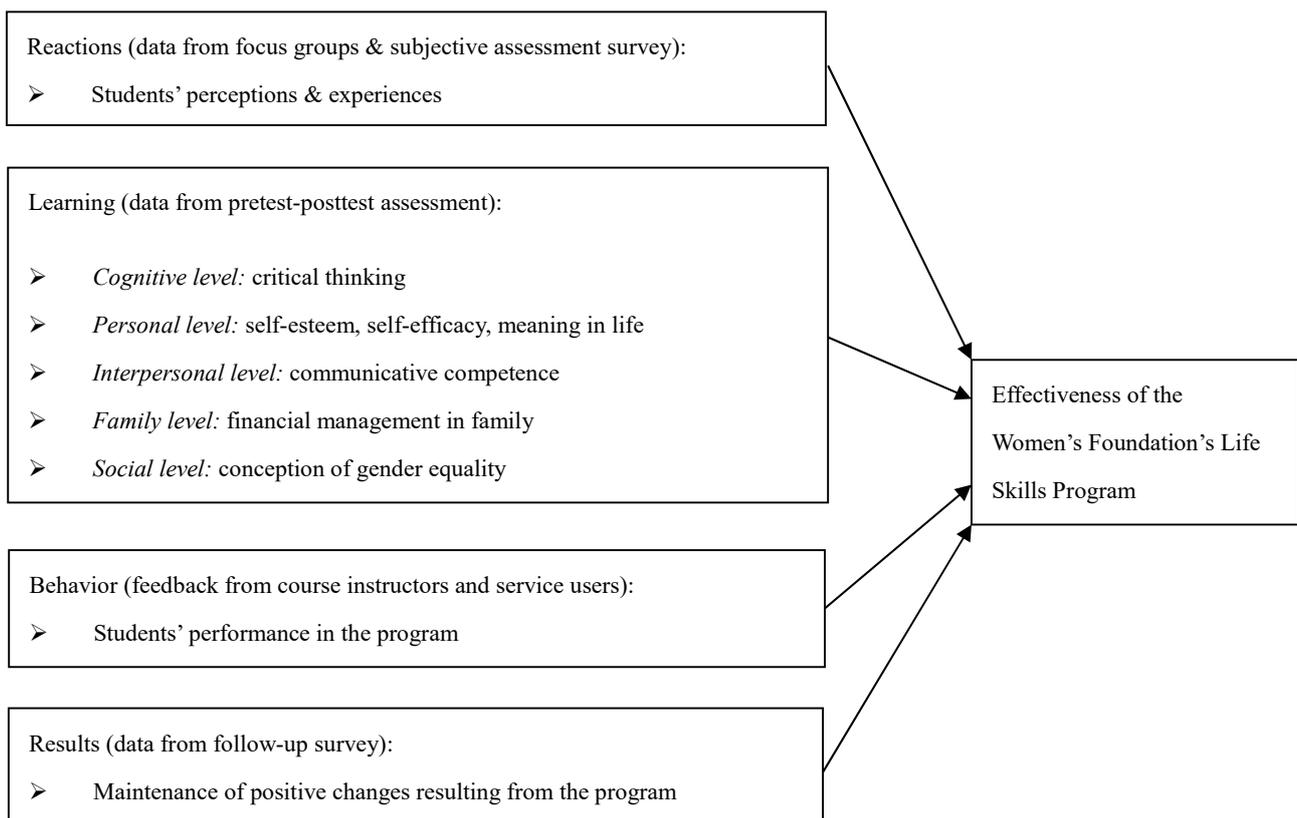
life purpose, it should also contribute to the cognitive development of young people through the critical assessment of social-life issues and application of knowledge to respond to these issues (Ennis, 1993). Furthermore, it should provide real experiences conducive to an improved sense of community and prepare them for full participation in youth and social affairs (Claus & Ogden, 1999).

Fifth, in contrast with a technical and one-way transmission of knowledge and skills, life skills development should be perceived as a process through which participants are aligned to support each other in applying what they have learned (To et al., 2013). Giving different perspectives also helps participants expand their personal narratives so they can move forward from a powerless situation to refocus their capabilities to make a personal transformation. This is also beneficial for the sustainability of the program and its generalization for other adolescent groups.

Although past research has illustrated the significance of life skills development among adolescents, there is a paucity of research on its impact on the holistic growth and life advancement of young people. Thus, many attempts have to be made to explore the change processes and outcomes of life skills development and the factors conducive to success.

3. Conceptual Framework

In this study Kirkpatrick's evaluation model (1977, 1979) is adopted to develop our research framework. There are four interlocking domains of evaluation to be conducted, namely reactions (students' perception of the program and their satisfaction level), learning (change of values, attitude, and skills that result from the program), behavior (transfer of learning to professional practice), and results (final outcomes of the program). In addition to Kirkpatrick's evaluation model, our research framework is also built on the transformative approach to youth development (To, 2007, 2009). This approach assesses its effectiveness via five complementary levels: cognitive level (critical thinking), personal level (self-concept, self-efficacy, and meaning in life), interpersonal level (communicative competence), family level (financial management in family), and social level (conception of gender equality). Synthesizing these two models, our research framework can be illustrated by the following diagram:



As shown in the diagram, each box on the left represents an evaluative dimension, and the combination of all dimensions helps generate a comprehensive assessment of the effectiveness of the program. This research framework has several special features. At the cognitive level, critical thinking is an ability that is essential to analyzing information in an objective and reflective manner.

It can also contribute to adolescent development by helping young people discover and assess the factors that affect their perceptions and behaviors. At the personal level, young people should acquire a positive appraisal of his/her own worth (self-esteem), ascribe meaning to their life experiences (meaning in life), and develop competence to cope with stressful life events (self-efficacy). At the interpersonal level, young people should learn how to make and maintain friendly relationships with different people and solicit social support. At the family level, young people's direct communication with their parents about financial issues in family can help improve family relationships and enhance family resilience. At the social level, life skills programs can strengthen adolescents' belief in gender role equality, which is of great importance to their social well-being. This evaluation research aimed to explore whether the participation of students in this program would lead to positive changes in the said domains.

Regarding the long-term outcomes, a lack of transfer and retention of skills has been found in life education programs (To et al., 2013). In our view, young people gain knowledge and skills in a way that makes a difference only if they discover the personal meaning associated with the application of this knowledge and these skills. As such, an acquisition of life skills is built upon an integration of how participants reflect the program in their daily experiences, although this crucial element is often neglected in life education. Therefore, changes in terms of critical thinking, self-esteem, meaning in life, self-efficacy, financial management in the family setting, and belief in gender role equality were examined three months after the completion of the program in order to evaluate its prolonged effects.

4. Evaluation Design

In order to generate a comprehensive picture of the impact of the program and the participants' experiences, a mixed-methods approach was adopted to collect evaluation data from the following five areas:

Area 1: Outcome Evaluation of the Life Skills Program

Due to the difficulty of the random assignment of participants in the experimental and control groups, a one-group pre-test and post-test design was adopted to evaluate changes in the students in terms of their critical thinking ability, self-esteem, self-efficacy, pursuit of meaning in life, communicative competence, participation in financial management in family, and their agreement with gender equality.

Area 2: Subjective Assessment of the Life Skills Program

The participants were invited to respond to the subjective outcome assessment in the last session of the Life Skills Program.

Area 3: Qualitative Evaluation Based on Participant Observation

Two participant observations on the Life Skills Training Program were arranged. Field notes on teaching and learning behaviors, as well as trainer-student interactions, were taken and analyzed.

Area 4: Qualitative Evaluation Based on Focus Group Interviews

Five focus group sessions were conducted for 17 male and 28 female adolescent participants. They were recruited by a purposive sampling method from schools. The selection criteria include their age, socio-economic status, educational level, location of school, and the religious affiliation of school. In addition, 10 instructors were invited to form another focus group. The subjective perceptions and experiences of the participants and instructors in the training program were gathered and examined.

Area 5: Follow-Up Survey Study

A follow-up questionnaire was given via The Women's Foundation to the participants to assess the maintenance of positive changes resulting from the program.

4.1. Measures

Efforts were made to develop instruments to assess the effectiveness of the program. This is important because valid and reliable tools related to the assessment of this kind of training program are not locally available. In the planning stage, the measures used in this study were adapted from a variety of existing scales in Western literature, while scales appropriate in the Chinese context were also developed. Details of the measures are as follows:

4.1.1. Outcome Evaluation

Variables concerning participants' critical thinking ability

A scale was constructed to examine students' self-perception of their critical thinking ability. It consists of 8 items answered on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (highly disagree) to 6 (highly agree). The total scores range from 8 to 48. A higher total score indicates a person has a more positive evaluation of his/her own critical thinking ability.

Variables concerning participants' self-esteem

The Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (RSE) (Rosenberg, 1962; Shek, 1992) was adopted. It consists of 10 items answered on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (highly disagree) to 6 (highly agree). The total scores range from 10 to 60. A higher total score indicates a person has a more positive evaluation of his/her own worth.

Variables concerning participants' pursuit of meaning in life

The Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ) developed by Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler (2006) was adopted. It consists of two 5-item subscales, namely "Search for Meaning" and "Presence of Meaning." Items are answered on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (highly disagree) to 6 (highly agree). The total score of each subscale ranges from 5 to 30. A higher total score for the Search for Meaning indicates a stronger motivation to search for meaning in one's life while a higher total score of Presence of Meaning indicates a stronger sense of presence of meaning in one's life.

Variables concerning participants' self-efficacy

The Self-Efficacy Scale created by Shek, Siu, Lee, Cheung, and Chung (2008) was used. It consists of 7 items answered on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (highly disagree) to 6 (highly agree). The total scores range from 7 to 42. A higher total score indicates a person has a

more positive evaluation of his/her own ability to complete tasks and reach goals.

Variables concerning participants' communicative competence

The Communicative Competence Scale constructed by Spitzberg (1989) was modified and adopted. It consists of two 5-item subscales, namely "Listening" and "Social Relaxation." Items are answered on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (highly disagree) to 6 (highly agree). The total score of each subscale ranges from 5 to 30. A higher total score for Listening indicates a person has better listening skills while a higher total score for Social Relaxation indicates a person has a higher level of comfort in social contacts.

Variables concerning financial management in family

A 6-item scale was constructed to examine the degree to which students are willing and able to discuss with family members about the financial management matters. It consists of 6 items answered on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (highly disagree) to 6 (highly agree). The total scores range from 6 to 36. A higher total score indicates a person's higher willingness and ability to participate in financial management matters in the family.

Variables concerning participants' perception of gender equality

The Gender Role Equality subscale of the Sexual Ideology Instrument developed by Lottes (2011) was used. It consists of 8 items answered on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (highly disagree) to 6 (highly agree). The total scores range from 8 to 48. A higher total score indicates a person has a higher agreement with ideas of gender equality.

4.1.2. Subjective Assessment

Variables concerning participants' perception of the program

The Client Satisfaction Scale (Larson, Attkisson, Hargreaves & Nguyen, 1979), a widely-used measure for assessing the general satisfaction level with services among clients of human service agencies, was used. It consists of two 5-item subscales, namely "Satisfaction with Workshop" and "Satisfaction with Instructor." Items are answered on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (highly disagree) to 6 (highly agree). The total score of each subscale ranges from 5 to 30. A higher total score for each subscale indicates a person's higher satisfaction with the program content and the performance of the instructors respectively.

4.1.3. Reliability of the Scales

All scales have obtained a reliable Cronbach's alpha level (0.6 or above).

Reliability of All Scales			
	Pre-test Alpha	Post-test Alpha	Follow-up Test Alpha
Self-esteem	.83	.82	.81
Self-efficacy	.78	.82	.82
Search for Meaning	.83	.84	.87
Presence of Meaning	.85	.84	.84
Social Relaxation	.83	.82	.83
Listening	.80	.81	.83
Critical Thinking	.69	.69	.66
Gender Equality	.70	.75	.75
Financial Management	.71	.70	.63
Satisfaction with Workshop	N/A	.94	N/A
Satisfaction with Instructor	N/A	.96	N/A

4.1.4. Focus Groups

Semi-structured questions were set to frame the general direction and main discussion themes of the focus groups. They include the following questions:

- What were their expectations before they joined the program?
- What was their experience and learning from the training sessions?
- What was their impression on the communication pattern and class atmosphere?
- What were the impact of the class on their values and beliefs on life skills development?
- To what extent did the learning experience facilitate their inspiration on effective personal, social, and career talent development?
- What were their perceptions towards participation in discussion about financial issues in the family?
- To what extent did the learning experience affect their conception of gender and sexuality?
- Which sessions and the activities of the class were helpful for the participants?
- To what extent did the Life Skills Program enable them to transfer the knowledge learned from the program to daily life?
- What are the factors that may affect the implementation and effectiveness of life skills development programs?

4.2. Data Collection Procedures

For the quantitative evaluation, all participants filled in the pre-test assessment questionnaire in the first session of the training program. Then the same set of questionnaires was given to them in the last session of the program. If a participant cannot complete the questionnaire in a self-administered manner, the research assistant will read the items. All data was treated with the strictest confidence and no individual information will be disclosed. The participants were invited to respond to the same set of questionnaires after three months in order to evaluate the prolonged effects of the program.

During the focus group interviews, the participants were encouraged to express their ideas freely. The researchers were aware of the importance of neutrality during the discussion. The questions served as a general framework for the researchers, which means the flow of sharing is participant focused rather than question focused. The discussion process of the focus groups was recorded with participants' written consent.

4.3. Data Analysis Strategies

As far as the outcome evaluation is concerned, a series of dependent t-tests were conducted to ascertain any differences in pre- and post-intervention scores. T-tests and Analyses of Variance (ANOVA) were conducted to test for differences among the participants. Inter-relationships among the variables were also examined.

Regarding the qualitative evaluation, the content of the tapes was fully transcribed after the focus group interviews, and the process of data analysis then began. The researchers read and reread every line of the transcripts in search of "meaning units" rather than relying on prior concepts to understand the data (Padgett, 1998). They then assigned codes to those meaning units and categorize the codes. After that they refined the codes and found different levels of meaning produced by the narratives and then sorted out similar narratives to form the major themes of this study (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996).

5. Findings

5.1. Quantitative Findings

5.1.1. Demographic Data

The data shown below indicate the demographic characteristics of students who participated in the Life Skills Programme (LSP) in the first and second semesters. There is discrepancy between the sample size (N=1,506) and the actual number of students involved in the program due to some invalid questionnaires and difficulties in matching the pre- and post-test cases.

Demographics (N=1,506)	
School	Percentage %
1st Term	
China Holiness College (CH)	4.8
PLK Wai Ying College (WY)	3.0
St. Catharine's School For Girls, Kwun Tong (STC)	12.2
PLK Lo Kit Sing 1983 College (LKS)	9.4
Tak Ching Girls' Secondary School (TC)	13.3
2nd Term	
Ju Ching Chu Secondary School, Yuen Long (JCC)	10.6
Kwai Chung Methodist College (KCMC)	8.0
PLK Ma Kam Ming College (MKM)	13.0
Pope Paul VI College (PP)	11.2
PLK Tong Ngai Kan Junior Secondary College (TNK)	14.4
Gender	
Male	32.8
Female	65.9
<i>Missing values</i>	1.3
Age	
14 or below	20.9
15	46.1
16	18.8
17	8.6
18 or above	3.8
<i>Missing values</i>	1.8

Educational Level

F.3 or below	33.0
F.4	56.9
F.5	3.1
F.6	4.7
<i>Missing values</i>	2.3

Religion

No religion	69.7
Catholic	2.0
Christian	21.0
Buddhist	2.9
Others	0.5
<i>Missing values</i>	3.9

Number of Sibling

No sibling	20.8
1	48.2
2	18.6
3 or above	6.8
<i>Missing values</i>	5.6

Parents' Marital Status

Married	81.7
Separated	1.6
Divorced	10.0
Widowed	2.8
Other	0.7
<i>Missing values</i>	3.2

Father's Educational Level

F.3 or below	35.9
F.4 to F.5	22.0
F.6 to F.7	18.3
College or above	11.6
<i>Missing values</i>	12.2

Mother's Educational Level

F.3 or below	37.1
F.4 to F.5	23.7
F.6 to F.7	19.9
College or above	9.5
<i>Missing values</i>	9.8

Father's Occupation

No paid job	5.2
Non-technical	10.4
Technical	31.3
Services / sales	8.5
Clerical	5.2
Administration / management	13.1
Professional / assistant professional	5.0
Others	1.5
<i>Missing values</i>	19.8

Mother's Occupation

No paid job	32.1
Non-technical	8.0
Technical	2.9
Services / sales	17.7
Clerical	12.1
Administration / management	5.4
Professional / assistant professional	5.8
Others	0.9
<i>Missing values</i>	15.1

Monthly Family Income

Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA)	3.3
\$10,000 or below	9.8
\$10,001 - \$20,000	28.8
\$20,001 - \$30,000	15.9
\$30,001 - \$40,000	8.2
\$40,001 - \$50,000	4.3
\$50,001 - \$60,000	2.1
\$60,001 or above	3.5
Others	5.2
<i>Missing values</i>	18.9

5.1.2. Mean Scores of All Indicators

Pre-test, post-test, and follow-up test mean scores of all indicators are presented below.

Mean Scores of All Indicators				
	Range	Pre-test Mean (SD)	Post-test Mean (SD)	Follow-up Test Mean (SD)
Self-esteem	10-60	38.48 (6.80)	39.00 (6.61)	38.49(6.21)
Self-efficacy	7-42	27.53 (5.35)	27.26 (5.42)	26.90(5.22)
Search for Meaning	5-30	13.44 (4.09)	13.24 (3.95)	13.51(4.01)
Presence of Meaning	5-30	19.10 (4.76)	19.88 (4.43)	19.53(4.47)
Social Relaxation	5-30	21.36 (4.13)	21.63 (3.91)	21.56 (3.81)
Listening	5-30	22.61 (3.27)	22.77 (3.17)	22.71 (3.13)
Critical Thinking	8-48	31.03 (4.41)	31.49 (4.23)	31.27 (4.12)
Gender Equality	8-48	34.78 (5.13)	34.38 (5.67)	34.37 (5.55)
Financial Management	6-36	21.79 (4.62)	22.67 (4.19)	22.48 (3.88)
Satisfaction with Workshop	5-30	N/A	22.14 (3.99)	N/A
Satisfaction with Instructor	5-30	N/A	24.80 (3.99)	N/A

5.1.3. Results of Subjective Assessments

The results of subjective assessments, namely the Satisfaction with Workshop and Satisfaction with Instructor, show that the majority (87.9% to 97.5%) of participants rated positively towards the workshop as a whole and the performance of instructors.

Results of Subjective Assessments – Satisfaction with Workshop

Items	Percentage %					
	Strongly Disagree		Slightly Disagree		Strongly Agree	
	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree
The workshop can meet my expectations.	0.8	1.7	7.4	46.0	35.5	8.6
The workshop can satisfy my needs.	0.8	1.9	8.1	45.8	34.8	8.6
The workshop can assist me to solve my problems.	1.0	2.2	8.9	45.8	34.3	7.8
Overall I feel satisfied with the workshop.	0.6	1.0	4.3	40.0	40.3	14.8
If my friends have needs that are similar to mine, I would recommend this workshop to them.	1.1	2.2	7.7	43.2	34.3	11.4

Results of Subjective Assessments – Satisfaction with Instructors

Items	Percentage %					
	Strongly Disagree		Slightly Disagree		Slightly Agree	
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I think the instructor is well-prepared.	0.6	0.4	2.3	23.5	48.2	24.9
I think the instructor has delivered the messages clearly.	0.4	0.7	2.7	23.1	47.3	25.7
I think the instructor has taken care of the reactions of participants.	0.7	0.6	3.0	23.2	44.8	27.8
I think the instructor can arouse discussions and sharing among participants.	0.7	0.6	2.2	24.0	45.3	27.1
Overall I feel satisfied with the performance of the instructor.	0.6	0.4	1.6	20.6	45.1	31.8

5.1.4. Correlations

Using the Bonferroni approach to control for Type I error, a p value of less than .001 (***) was required for significance. The results of the correlational analyses were presented in the following table. It shows that the correlations (as indicated by the Pearson's r) between the pairs are rather strong.

a. Pre-test

	Self-esteem	Self-efficacy	Search for Meaning	Presence of Meaning	Social Relaxation	Listening	Critical Thinking	Gender Equality
Self-efficacy	.603***							
Search for Meaning	-.077	-.064						
Presence of Meaning	.502***	.417***	-.088***					
Social Relaxation	.344***	.268***	-.171***	.309***				
Listening	.270***	.251***	-.264***	.295***	.567***			
Critical Thinking	.340***	.393***	-.169***	.365***	.260***	.375***		
Gender Equality	.158***	.201***	-.090***	.089***	.148***	.197***	.156***	
Financial Management	.285***	.289***	-.124***	.316***	.216***	.195***	.356***	.071

b. Post-test

	Self-esteem	Self-efficacy	Search for Meaning	Presence of Meaning	Social Relaxation	Listening	Critical Thinking	Gender Equality
Self-efficacy	.604***							
Search for Meaning	-.062	-.022						
Presence of Meaning	.479***	.394***	-.031					
Social Relaxation	.383***	.331***	-.215***	.319***				
Listening	.374***	.336***	-.280***	.327***	.621***			
Critical Thinking	.396***	.449***	-.128***	.344***	.308***	.387**		
Gender Equality	.208***	.259***	-.044	.082	.114***	.194**	.200**	
Financial Management	.358***	.334***	-.069	.310***	.290***	.290**	.385**	.117**

c. Follow-up Test

	Self-esteem	Self-efficacy	Search for Meaning	Presence of Meaning	Social Relaxation	Listening	Critical Thinking	Gender Equality
Self-efficacy	.594 ***							
Search for Meaning	.00	.055						
Presence of Meaning	.464 ***	.346***	-.007					
Social Relaxation	.364***	.292***	-.150***	.332***				
Listening	.315***	.270***	-.271***	.310***	.586***			
Critical Thinking	.286***	.347***	-.103***	.298 ***	.250***	.419 ***		
Gender Equality	.177 ***	.270***	-.091***	.049	.143***	.191***	.170 ***	
Financial Management	.306 ***	.320***	-.057	.272 ***	.230***	.242 ***	.338***	.095***

5.1.5. Comparisons among Pre-, Post-, and Follow-up Test Results

A series of Repeated-measures Analysis of Variance (ANOVAs) were conducted to evaluate whether the students showed positive changes in terms of various indicators after joining the programme, and whether the positive changes could be maintained for at least three months. The effect of socio-demographic variables, including gender, age, educational level, religion, parents' marital status, parents' educational level, number of sibling, and monthly family income, was controlled during the analysis.

	Post-test (T2) vs. Pre-test (T1) (n=833)		Follow-up Test (T3) vs. Post-test (T2) (n=833)	
	Mean Difference	Change	Mean Difference	Change
Self-esteem	.72***	Improved	-.95***	No maintenance
Self-efficacy	-.27	No significant change		
Search for Meaning	-.13	No significant change		
Presence of Meaning	.64***	Improved	-.24	Maintained
Social Relaxation	.30*	Improved	-.03	Maintained
Listening	.20	No significant change		
Critical Thinking	.49**	Improved	-.29	Maintained
Gender Equality	-.21	No significant change		
Financial Management	.87***	Improved	-.14	Maintained

* $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$

- Students showed positive changes in terms of presence of meaning in life, social relaxation, critical thinking ability, and financial management skills after joining the program. In addition, the positive changes in these aspects could be maintained for at least three months.
- Students' self-esteem was improved significantly after joining the program. However, the improvement could not be sustained.
- There were no significant changes in students' self-efficacy, search for meaning in life, listening, and their agreement with gender equality.

5.1.6. Sub-group Analyses

Based on the post-test results, a series of ANOVAs were performed to conduct sub-group analyses of the objective assessment and the subjective assessment indicators. Statistically significant comparisons are shown below.

a. Gender

Comparison between Male and Female Students

	Male		Female		p-value	Comparison
	n	Mean (SD)	n	Mean (SD)		
Gender Equality	426	31.99 (5.50)	888	35.55 (5.37)	.00	F > M
Satisfaction with Workshop	391	22.72 (4.03)	850	21.84 (3.93)	.00	M > F
Satisfaction with Instructor	391	25.11 (4.02)	853	24.65 (3.96)	.06	M > F

- Female students showed a higher level of agreement with gender equality than male students.
- Male students showed a higher level of satisfaction with workshop than female students.
- Male students showed a higher level of satisfaction with instructor than female students.

b. Age

Comparison among Students in Three Age Groups*

	Group 1		Group 2		Group 3		p-value	Comparison
	n	Mean (SD)	n	Mean (SD)	n	Mean (SD)		
Self-esteem	286	38.46 (6.35)	628	38.84 (6.76)	402	39.65 (6.56)	.05	Gp3 > Gp1
Search for Meaning	288	12.74 (3.69)	628	13.57 (4.05)	402	13.06 (3.89)	.01	Gp2 > Gp1
Presence of Meaning	288	19.92 (4.20)	629	19.57 (4.67)	401	20.35 (4.18)	.02	Gp3 > Gp2
Listening	285	22.93 (3.24)	623	22.49 (3.06)	401	23.12 (3.20)	.01	Gp3 > Gp2
Gender Equality	284	33.00 (5.75)	624	35.20 (5.57)	401	34.10 (5.55)	.00	Gp2 > Gp1 & Gp3; Gp3 > Gp1
Satisfaction with Workshop	286	22.49 (3.77)	617	21.77 (4.17)	333	22.52 (3.69)	.01	Gp1 & Gp3 > Gp2

* Group 1 = Aged 14 or below; Group 2 = Aged 15; Group 3 = Aged 16 or above

- Students aged 16 or above showed a higher level of self-esteem than those aged 14 or below.
- Students aged 15 were more likely to be in search for life meaning than those aged 14 or below.
- Students aged 16 or above showed a stronger ascription to life meaning than those aged 15.
- Students aged 16 or above showed a better acquisition of listening skills than those aged 15.
- Students aged 15 showed a higher level of agreement with gender equality than those aged 14 or below and those aged 16 or above.
- Students aged 15 showed a lower satisfaction level of workshop than those aged 14 or below and those aged 16 or above.

c. Educational Level

Comparison between Junior and Senior Secondary Students

	F.3 or below		F.4 or above		p-value	Comparison
	n	Mean (SD)	n	Mean (SD)		
Self-esteem	447	38.29 (6.53)	863	39.37 (6.64)	.01	Senior > Junior
Self-efficacy	449	26.73 (5.58)	865	27.56 (5.33)	.01	Senior > Junior
Social Relaxation	440	21.93 (3.96)	863	21.49 (3.84)	.05	Junior > Senior
Critical Thinking	441	31.04 (4.35)	863	31.74 (4.13)	.01	Senior > Junior
Gender Equality	441	32.41 (5.69)	862	35.39 (5.39)	.00	Senior > Junior
Satisfaction with Workshop	443	22.81 (3.92)	788	21.76 (3.94)	.00	Junior > Senior
Satisfaction with Instructor	446	25.05 (4.00)	788	24.66 (3.94)	.01	Junior > Senior

- Senior secondary students showed higher levels of self-esteem, self-efficacy, critical thinking ability, and agreement with gender equality with instructor than their junior counterparts.
- Junior secondary students showed higher levels of social relaxation, satisfaction with workshop, and satisfaction with instructor than their senior counterparts.

d. Sibling

Comparison between Students Who Have Sibling(s) and Those Who Do Not Have One(s)

	No sibling		Have sibling(s)		p-value	Comparison
	n	Mean (SD)	N	Mean (SD)		
Presence of Meaning	292	20.40 (4.28)	987	19.71 (4.45)	.02	No sibling > Have sibling(s)
Satisfaction with Workshop	270	22.66 (3.75)	927	21.95 (4.01)	.01	No sibling > Have sibling(s)

- Students who have no sibling showed a stronger ascription to life meaning and a high level of satisfaction with workshop than those who have one(s).

e. Parents' Marital Status

Comparison between Students Whose Parents Are in a Normal Marital Status and Those Who Are Not

	Married		Others		p-value	Comparison
	n	Mean (SD)	N	Mean (SD)		
Self-esteem	1092	39.18 (6.68)	202	37.62 (6.14)	.00	Married > Others
Self-efficacy	1094	27.35 (5.40)	203	26.66 (5.53)	.09	Married > Others
Critical Thinking	1086	31.58 (4.27)	201	31.03 (4.06)	.09	Married > Others
Financial Management	1086	22.74 (4.16)	200	22.15 (4.29)	.07	Married > Others

- Students whose parents are in a normal marital status showed higher levels of self-esteem, self-efficacy, critical thinking ability and financial management skills than those whose parents are in other marital statuses.

5.2. Qualitative Findings

5.2.1. Focus Group Information

Six focus groups were held in May 2013 at the City University of Hong Kong to collect information regarding participants' (including students, ambassadors, and instructors) perceived experience and outcomes of the Life Skills Program. The arrangement of the focus groups is as follows.

Group 1 – Students

- Interviewers: Dr. TO Siu Ming
- Interviewees:
- 3 male students from CH
 - 5 male students from WY

Group 2 – Students

- Interviewers: Dr. TAM Hau Lin
- Interviewees:
- 2 female students from PP
 - 3 female students from STC

Group 3 – Students

- Interviewers: Dr. TO Siu Ming
- Interviewees:
- 5 male students from LKS
 - 3 female students from MKM
 - 4 female students from TC

Group 4 – Students

- Interviewers: Dr. TAM Hau Lin
- Interviewees:
- 2 female students from CH
 - 2 female students from JCC
 - 3 female students from KC
 - 3 female students from TNK

Group 5 – Ambassadors

- Interviewers: Dr. TAM Hau Lin
- Interviewees:
- 4 male and 1 female students from LKS
 - 5 female students from PP

Group 6 – Instructors

- Interviewers: Dr. TAM Hau Lin
- Interviewees:
- 2 male instructors
 - 8 female instructors
-

5.2.1. Participants' Perceived Experiences and Outcomes of the Program

The following sections summarize the narratives collected from the focus group interviews. They help

uncover the ways in which all participants, including students, ambassadors, and instructors, perceived their experiences and outcomes of the program.

a. Positive Experiences and Outcomes

- Interesting and Inspiring activities

Most students were able to recall the activities they took part in during the workshop. Among all activities, many of them found the game regarding household financial management the most insightful. It allowed them to be engaged in an area that they seldom explored. It also offered a valuable opportunity for them to contemplate the difficulties encountered by their parents and recognize the significance of financial literacy.

“The most insightful activity was the role-play game that was used to teach financial management... (After the activity) I realize that it is not easy for our parents to manage the family financial matters... Uncertainties like financial crisis, being laid off, or inflation could ruin their plan... At worst we could have no spare cash! My mum was right! We should only spend money on what we really need.” (extracted from Group 2)

“I think what they teach (financial management) are useful because we as teenagers don’t make money. We ask for pocket money from our parents whenever we want to shop. We haven’t thought about the difficulties our parents face. That lesson lets us reconsider what our necessities are.” (extracted from Group 3)

“Personally I think the reason for introducing financial management to students is to instill a basic concept into our mind so that we can deal appropriately with this issue when we face it in the future.” (extracted from Group 1)

The second most inspiring game was that which involved making life choices. It helped them to reflect on how to deal with life choices and the possible consequences of their choices.

“There was a lesson about life choices... They used Jeremy Lin’s life as an example and it reminded us that we must consider carefully before making any life choices... I recall that Jeremy was facing a dilemma between joining a famous basketball team but playing as a substitute, or playing for a team of lower ranking. So, how would you choose? It’s a tough choice, isn’t it?” (extracted from Group 2)

“There are times when we have to make our own choices... Even if we know ourselves well, and even if we are so sure about our decision, it may still lead to an unsatisfactory result... But I think the most important thing is to face the failure in a positive way... We may stumble but we must get up and go

on.” (extracted from Group 2)

“It seems like we don’t have many choices in our lives... I think this program aims to educate us how to make a decision even when there seems to be no choice, and how to do what we want to do... Live a life we want to live... That’s the essence of the program.” (extracted from Group 1)

Apart from the two most impressive activities mentioned above, some students also found other activities helpful in facilitating them to reflect on various aspects of life skills, such as self-understanding, avoiding stereotyping, and attaining win-win situations.

“There was an activity which required a group of students to do a task and another group of students to observe the doers’ performance and their characteristics... Those observations allow us to gain some new perspectives on our classmates. For example, a quiet person could be very active as well!” (extracted from Group 3)

“We wrote down the characteristics of some classmates we found in the game... After the game you could learn your own strengths and weaknesses from others’ perspectives... And you would know how to improve.” (extracted from Group 5)

“I remember a story in which some people asked a guy what birthday gift he had given to his father and he answered flowers. Those people were surprised and asked whether his father was gay. Then they found out that his father was dead... This story reminds us to understand a person before judging him.” (extracted from Group 5)

“I’ve learned that we shouldn’t judge people by their appearances... This morning I volunteered for the charitable flag selling... I met people who dressed decently but rejected to donate... In contrast, a few youngsters who smoked and dressed indecently were willing to donate a dollar or two... I thought they wouldn’t make donation at first but it was surprising that they actually approached me!” (extracted from Group 3)

“There was a game that made me realize we are often selfish and overlook the common interest... If we’re willing to cooperate with others, we will create a win-win situation.” (extracted from Group 2)

- **Interactive teaching and dedicated instructors**

Most students appreciated that the instructors adopted an interactive teaching approach and possessed qualities such as being “funny,” “energetic,” “passionate,” and “patient.” Most importantly, they successfully used the teenagers’ own language to create an enjoyable atmosphere.

“Our energy level was boosted up ever since she has entered our classroom... She is very passionate

and really knows how to draw our attention and establish a good atmosphere...” (extracted from Group 3)

“He doesn’t teach in an old-fashioned way. His way of speaking is close to ours...” (extracted from Group 4)

“We thought the workshop would be very boring... But there were games and interactions... Very relaxing...” (extracted from Group 2)

Students also felt content with the opportunity to be involved in open discussions and reflections. They realized that some of their thoughts and beliefs had been changed positively through these interactions.

“We rearranged the room setting and formed a circle every time... I like the instructor because he always involves us in brainstorming and discussion... The most unforgettable discussion I recall is about ‘success.’ What is the real meaning of ‘success?’” (extracted from Group 1)

“The instructor is great. She gave us a supplementary information sheet after each lesson. For example, if the lesson is about career, she will share with us a successful case whose background is similar to us. This may help change some of our ways of thinking.” (extracted from Group 2)

“Those reflection moments allowed me to digest what I have learned from the activities... Oftentimes we have experienced a lot but we won’t slow down and reconsidered what we have learned in our lived experiences... I think those reflections really help us to consolidate our memories.” (extracted from Group 2)

Lastly, students showed their appreciation for the instructors’ dedication. They noticed that their instructors had taken great effort in maintaining a good relationship with them.

“I think... those instructors really teach with heart.” (extracted from Group 2)

“The instructor is a nice person... Not only did he spend much effort in teaching, but he also spent time to communicate with us before and after the lesson, and that made us get into the lesson.” (extracted from Group 3)

“I really appreciate the great effort of the instructor... However lazy I was in writing the reflective journal, she would still give me her feedback with heart.” (extracted from Group 3)

- Valuable experience gained from corporate visits

Although only a few of respondents joined the corporate visits offered by the program, it is noteworthy that they perceived the visits as worthwhile because this helped broaden their horizons and enhanced their understanding of different kinds of vocations and industries.

“We visited the Li & Fung Limited... This experience lets me know that the subject of fashion and textile, which I’m now studying, can offer us many job opportunities. Before that I thought being a designer was my only career option.” (extracted from Group 2)

“They brought us to JP Morgan, a large organization which we normally won’t have a chance to visit... After visiting JP Morgan, we’ve learned so many about its operation and more about the job requirements for this business....” (extracted from Group 2)

- **A good overall impression on the workshop**

A scaling question eliciting their overall impression on the workshop was raised in the interview and many students rated it a 7 or 8 on a 10-point scale, with 10 being the highest. Although they pointed out that there was room for improvement (which will be covered in the next section), they were generally satisfied with the workshop.

“7... Overall I think it’s an interesting program. It’s fine.” (extracted from Group 1)

“The reason for rating a 7 is that this program has talked about many ideas which I perceive as useful for young people... Young people should learn these ideas.” (extracted from Group 1)

“I give an 8 because the content and the direction of the program are great.” (extracted from Group 3)

“I would give an 8 because the program design and arrangement are fine. You will find it quite interesting. It is not boring.” (extracted from Group 3)

b. Areas for Improvements and Recommendations

- **Reconsiderations for program content due to time limitations**

As mentioned above, many students found the workshop useful. However, they still felt that its impact was not strong enough because on many occasions the instructors had to go through all activities within a very short period of time.

“It felt like they were rushing the activities... they couldn’t complete the activities... I hardly got any profound experience.” (extracted from group 3)

“Time was really short. Sometimes, we were in a hurry... I mean... Some activities have not been completed... No, it was completed, but with something skipped.” (extracted from group 1)

“We had just one lesson every one to two weeks. You just couldn’t pay much attention to what they taught.” (extracted from group 1)

“In each lesson, the instructor reserved five to ten minutes for us to write the reflective journal... But... I didn’t have enough time to write it.” (extracted from group 2)

Most instructors recounted similar experiences and faced the same dilemma of rushing between activities and spending more time on generating in-depth discussions. Others felt regret that they could not make closer connections with the students due to the time limits.

“We can’t fulfill everything... For example, sometimes we tried to act flexibly by compressing or shortening the games because students showed more interest in the discussions... I would rather spend more time in discussion. I think they can gain more insights through this.” (extracted from Group 6)

“Every time when I knew that I had to make a decision on cutting certain planned activities because students didn’t arrive on time, I struggled a lot... Or when something happened in the classroom and the session plan couldn’t be followed, I would rather pay more attention to what they said and gave quick responses. I think such a communication had a great impact.” (extracted from Group 6)

“I think the inadequacy of time caused a chain effect. It made me shorten the time for them to write the reflective journal at the end. This exerted a great influence! It broke the only connection between me and them... So I understood why the students didn’t write much in their reflective journals. It was not because they didn’t want to reflect. It was because we didn’t give them enough time to reflect.” (extracted from Group 6)

As for recommendations, most students and instructors acknowledged that time cannot be extended, because it is bound by the school timetable. However, the content of the program can be reconsidered thoroughly. The following subsection demonstrates their ideas.

- Fewer topics but deeper reflections

Many students felt that the workshop covered too many topics and they could not benefit from a deep experience for each topic. Considering the time limit, they suggested that topics should be reduced while reflections should be fostered.

“The program covers too many topics! The time allocated for each topic is too little, and we haven’t learned much.” (extracted from group 2)

“The workshop encompasses lots of aspects, but none of them is in-depth enough. For example, regarding the aspect of interpersonal relationships, it would be better to specify the relationships with family, with friends, and so on... A closer investigation into each area is important; otherwise the content will become too vague.” (extracted from group 2)

“I think the topic regarding future career is not quite useful... They just briefly introduced different kinds of jobs and this didn’t help us to decide our career.” (extracted from group 5)

Some of the instructors’ comments also echo this part of feedback and suggestions from the students.

“We played a 5-minute short clip of a meaningful movie at the end of the lesson and the students were very attentive to it... I preferred showing them a longer clip because they were very interested in knowing how the protagonist dealt with the challenge... But the time was too limited and we were always in a hurry... That clip was actually very useful in stimulating reflections, but it couldn’t take effect due to the time limit” (extracted from Group 6)

“Personally I think financial management could be treated as a distinct topic... In just one or two sessions you can’t go deep... It isn’t comprehensive enough... If we make it a six-session financial management program, it could have a stronger impact on students.” (extracted from Group 6)

- Matching topics with the needs of students

Some students pointed out that they were very familiar with the messages presented in the workshop and thus did not gain much insight.

“The program talks much about values. But I think there aren’t marked differences in normal people’s values... So, we won’t experience much change in our values after attending the lessons.” (extracted from group 1)

“The messages mentioned in the program have already been conveyed by many other people. If those ideas had impact on us, we would have changed... So, it’s not very useful.” (extracted from group 1)

“I haven’t learned much because those were just games in the classroom and we couldn’t experience the ‘real’ world.” (extracted from group 3)

In fact, many students already had an idea of what they longed for. For instance, they wanted to explore their competency, potential, and life goals, to gain more practical knowledge and direct experiences especially in relation to work and further study, and learn how to cope with stress.

“I have a suggestion... The program emphasizes ‘living our life wisely’. But I think many students like me don’t know what to do after the public examination... So, the program shouldn’t teach too many concepts. Instead, I think it is better for them to facilitate us to understand ourselves and to think about what we want to do.” (extracted from group 1)

“If the program can offer us some outings, like some outdoor activities or internships, it will be much more interesting... Teaching in the classroom cannot generate impressive experiences... We can’t understand the jobs and think about what we want to do if we haven’t got the experience.” (extracted from group 3)

“I think they should provide us training on interview skills. We face a lot of interviews, like the university admission interview and job interview... They should design some courses for us to make better preparations for these interviews.” (extracted from group 5)

“They can offer a stress management or resilience enhancement program... Sometimes we feel helpless... We feel sad and we may give up. These negative emotions really annoy us, particularly because we are going through the puberty.” (extracted from group 2)

Some instructors observed other needs of the students, such as the exploration of the meaning of life and also love. They thought that workshop topics should address these needs as well.

“I really want to discuss the life meaning with them. Actually it works! I want to point out that young people are able to discuss this kind of issue with us. But there’re just too few discussions on this. If we really want them to live their lives wisely, I think it’s necessary for us to place more emphasis on these discussions. And the fact is that students treasure these discussions as no one has ever explored this issue with them.” (extracted from Group 6)

“I always wonder why the topic of courtship is omitted in this program. Most secondary school students, especially the junior ones, must encounter this issue. But teachers seldom talk about it at school. Comparing with financial management skills and life goals, I think courtship is much closer to their needs.” (extracted from Group 6)

Finally, some students suggested that the service provider consult their opinions in order to facilitate program design so their needs and expectations could be met.

“They should spend more time to investigate what topics the secondary school students are

interested in before designing the program. Like the topic of financial management, we are actually not so interested in it. I think it would be better to conduct a survey before the start of the program and let us (students) tell them what we like.” (extracted from group 3)

“Actually students in different schools have different preferences. Maybe they should send us a questionnaire asking about our areas of interest and gather some data on the most popular topics.” (extracted from group 5)

“The instructor should devote more time to understand our characteristics such as our (class) atmosphere, our social skills, and so on... I mean... If she could address our characteristics, she could help us a lot... Maybe she could seek information from our teacher, or she may observe us for a while and see what topics are attractive to us.” (extracted from group 2)

6. Discussion and Recommendations

Having adopted several key evaluative indicators to assess the effectiveness of the Life Skills Program, it is anticipated that the program can help (1) improve the adolescent participants' sense of self-worth (self-esteem), (2) assist them in searching for their own life goals (meaning in life), (3) discover and affirm their own ability to achieve their goals (self-efficacy), (4) raise their knowledge and skills in terms of financial management, (5) enhance their interpersonal skills (feeling of relaxation in social contacts and listening skills), and (6) arouse their awareness of social stigma and gender inequality (critical thinking ability and agreement with gender equality). The results of the outcome evaluation study suggest that almost all of these aspects show significant improvement and maintenance. Specifically, the positive impact of the program on adolescents' ascription of meaning to life, feeling of relaxation in social contacts, critical thinking, and financial management can be maintained for at least three months. However, it was found that although the participants' sense of self-esteem was significantly enhanced after the program, it could not be sustained. It is suggested that further interventions should be made to prolong the improvement of participants' self-esteem. This helps them to realize and confirm their inner strengths and resources, which serve as a solid foundation for pursuing their career and purpose in life. While one's self-esteem may be frustrated by multiple stressors or repeated failures, extra workshops on stress management or resilience enhancement should be offered. In fact, qualitative findings show that some adolescents do have these needs and look forward to this type of training.

Not only have the participants gained a better understanding of their own strengths and resources, but they have also discovered how to find more meaning in their lives. The results of the outcome evaluation report a significant improvement and maintenance in participants' ability to ascribe meaning to their lives. The findings are very encouraging because having meaning in life can facilitate setting life goals and provide them with the intrinsic motivation to live and make life choices. For the sake of excellence, program designers should take the focus group findings into consideration and try to increase the time for interactive discussion and reflection. Although searching for meaning can be a long journey, both the students and the instructors enjoyed this journey and found it worthwhile.

While it is important to help adolescents recognize their strengths and figure out their life direction, it is also crucial to strengthen their sense of self-efficacy so that they will recognize their potential and competence to reach these goals and take further action. The results of the outcome evaluation reveal that there was no significant change in participants' sense of self-efficacy. A possible explanation would be that the program provided the participants with limited opportunity to deepen their real-life experiences. The Life Skills Program is mainly a seminar-based program. Even though the program was filled with intriguing and insightful role playing games, as appreciated by many focus group participants, those were still imaginary exercises and might not be adequate to support participants to apply what they learned to cope with their life challenges and difficulties. It is undoubtedly difficult for adolescents to hold a strong belief in their own capacity to complete life tasks and goals when they have not yet received any positive reinforcements from successful experiences. Therefore, it is recommended that there should be an increase

in the provision of practical learning experience. For instance, as shown in the qualitative findings, corporate visits are highly valued by the participants, as these visits can broaden their horizons and enhance their understanding of different types of vocations and industries. However, not all participants joined these visits due to the inflexible school timetables. Considering that practical learning experiences may help facilitate the improvement of self-efficacy, extra efforts should be exerted on negotiations with schools about the arrangement and mobilization of corporate involvement so that more of these types of opportunities can be offered.

As financial education is regarded as a promising tool for helping adolescents to enhance their capabilities to make well informed financial decisions and cope with the financial demands of daily life, much emphasis has been placed by this program to equip participants with knowledge and skills in financial management. The outcome evaluation results indicate that the program can achieve this goal. In addition, the maintenance of the positive impact can also be found. It is also interesting to find that on the one hand, most of the focus group participants made positive comments about the module of financial management; on the other hand, program designers should be aware that some participants considered this topic inapplicable to their situation, as they had too little money to use in their daily life. Perhaps more discussions about how participants perceive their role in family finances and how they can apply these knowledge and skills in future could be induced so that program designers can gain a better understanding of their circumstances and come up with a better teaching approach.

Life skills not only include the aforementioned personal and family aspects (self-esteem, meaning in life, self-efficacy, and financial management), but also put particular stress on interpersonal relationships. It is therefore important to find that participants' feeling of relaxation in social contacts has been improved significantly and there was a maintenance of such improvements after the program. Being relaxed in social contacts is one of the crucial elements that allows adolescents to connect with others and express themselves. These connections can be valuable social capital that aid adolescents in coping with life challenges and accomplishing their life goals. Yet, it should be noted that there was no significant change in participants' listening skills. Thus, more effort should be put to enhancing this crucial component of effective communication.

While competence in communication can facilitate adolescents to build interpersonal relationships, the process could be influenced by social stigma and gender biases. This is the reason why the program took great care to attempt to raise the critical thinking ability of the participants and promoting gender equality. It was found that participants' critical thinking ability was improved significantly, and such an improvement can be maintained. In addition, focus group participants also expressed that they have critically reflected on the issues of social stereotyping. However, there was no significant improvement in participants' agreement with gender equality. Recognizing that both male and female adolescents are being raised in a society in which gender roles are culturally categorized, sensitivity toward gender biases should be strengthened in the program. A closer look into the sub-group analysis will find that female participants showed more agreement with gender equality than their male counterparts. This result informs us that

there is an urgent need to raise male adolescents' awareness of gender inequality.

The findings of the sub-group analysis indicate that students whose parents were in a normal marital status had higher degrees of self-esteem, self-efficacy, critical thinking ability, and financial management ability when compared with those whose parents were separated/divorced/widowed. Arguably, adolescents who live in single-parent families may suffer from limited family support for positive youth development. More resources should thus be allocated for these adolescents, offer tailor-made and quality programs for this target group, and motivate young people from different family backgrounds to engage in life skills programs. Nevertheless, one should be careful not to over-generalize the impact of family structure on certain developmental outcomes of young people because a good parent-child relationship and other sources of social support can act as buffers against the difficulties encountered by single-parent families.

The qualitative findings show that both the instructors and adolescent participants considered life skills development as a dialogical process. In their narratives, successful life skills programs require deep conversations between both sides. These recurrent dialogues can promote an understanding of each other's subjective world. Practitioners can thus remain alert to exploring the rich meanings of the students' thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Instead of imposing the instructors' interpretations or suggestions in a manipulative manner, students will change their own perspectives when they feel an empathic understanding from the instructors and think about the questions raised by them. In addition, as shown in the qualitative findings, the participants appreciated the training style of practitioners who could channel respect toward the students' developmental needs. Students were mostly impressed with the instructors' illustrations and their sharing of daily life examples rather than teaching difficult academic and theoretical material on life skills development.

Regarding the future direction of the program, it is recommended that the government and related organizations formulate a clear policy to guide the development of life skills among young people. More effort should be put to consolidating the core position of life education in school curriculums and advocate school-based and community-based life skills programs. More resources should be allocated for establishing social support networks among adolescents, and offering intensive and quality programs for them, their parents, and teachers. Furthermore, mentoring has become a popular form of intervention, and constructive adult role models can be used to widen young people's life experiences and enhance their social capitals. More systematic program evaluation research should also be conducted with a view for improving the design and implementation of the life skills program.

Overall, the Women's Foundation Life Skills Program was found to have achieved most of its objectives. It is also noteworthy that an overwhelming majority (87.9% to 97.5%) of the participants have rated the program and the performance of the instructors in the subjective outcome study positively. Areas for improvement and recommendations are summarized above, and it is our hope that the program will strive for excellence and continue making a positive impact on our next generation.

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