

Outcomes of Community-Friendly Schools in Hong Kong

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ABSTRACT

Amid growing competition and evolving demands, schools must rethink their roles in addressing the needs of various stakeholders. Community-friendly schools in Hong Kong, which integrate community resources to help students understand and contribute to social issues, not only facilitate students' engagement in learning activities and their learning attitudes but also positively impact students' willingness to serve the community and the school's reputation. This research adopted both qualitative and quantitative methods, utilizing questionnaires and interviews as data-gathering instruments. The sample included students, teachers, and community stakeholders for the questionnaires, while interviews were conducted with a smaller group, consisting of participants from each of these groups. The performance of these schools was assessed in terms of their impact on students' understanding of the community, willingness to serve, and school reputation. These aspects were evaluated through three tiers of community-friendly schools: community learning activities, activities in cooperation with community organizations, and community services organized by the school. The data analysis employed descriptive statistics, analysis of variance, and linear regression models to highlight the significant impacts of these institutions. Key findings revealed that community-friendly schools significantly boosted student engagement in community activities, deepening their understanding of social issues and fostering a stronger sense of civic responsibility. Students' involvement in these programs was strongly linked to a deeper understanding of the community and a greater willingness to serve. These initiatives also positively impacted the school's reputation, as stakeholders perceived these schools as fostering meaningful community connections and shared responsibility.

keywords: *experiential learning, community-based learning, service learning, organizational performance, social impact*

1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

Hong Kong schools face several challenges due to intense competition and changing demographics. A declining birth rate has led to reduced student enrollment, resulting in decreased funding and resources for schools. Concurrently, schools face growing government expectations for academic performance and accountability, with public reviews heightening competition (Ho and Lu, 2019). The introduction of the Direct Subsidy Scheme, which provides certain schools with additional resources and greater autonomy, coupled with the heightened importance placed on public examination results by parents and students (Lam, Yu, and Li, 2019), has further intensified this competition. Additionally, the ongoing revisions to the curriculum have compounded the challenges schools face, adding to the pressure to adapt

and maintain high standards. These challenges have prompted schools to adopt diverse practices and innovations to ensure consistent student development, enhance school performance, and attract more students.

In Hong Kong's competitive educational landscape, a school's reputation is crucial for its success and stakeholder satisfaction. Research highlights how a school's reputation is closely linked to the satisfaction derived from its services and initiatives (Brown et al., 2006; Gilpin, 2010; Helm, 2011). Key factors shaping a school's reputation include academic achievement, student quality, individual attention, discipline, overall satisfaction, and teaching staff quality (Oplatka & Nuphar, 2012). Personal experiences, marketing efforts, information dissemination, and public perceptions also play crucial roles in constructing this reputation. To build a strong reputation, schools must move beyond traditional, closed-off approaches and engage more openly with their communities (Palmieri & Palma, 2017). Schools that actively interact with community members and address their needs are better positioned to enhance their reputation, attract and retain students, and support ongoing improvement initiatives.

CCC Tam Lee Lai Fun Memorial Secondary School (TLLF) initiated the concept of community-friendly schools, which are defined as institutions that “create a platform for interaction and mutual learning between students and community members. They achieve this by integrating community elements into the curriculum, cooperating with external organizations, and providing social services that benefit students, schools, and the community” (Lau, 2024b). It adopts the concept of the “1.5km Experiential Learning Circle”, which searches for suitable community resources and topics within a 1.5km radius of the school, inviting community members and organizations to learn together with students, to implement the three-level hierarchies of the community-friendly schools¹. The circle encourages students to learn about, within, and for the community through experiential, service, and community-based learning and allows students to engage directly with their surroundings, build relationships, and serve the needs of the community, applying their knowledge in real-world contexts and promoting community participation (Chan, 2009).

Community schools and community-friendly schools both aim to support students, families, and communities but differ in approach and context (Jacobson & Blank, 2011). Community schools, typically found in disadvantaged areas, integrate academic and social services to address diverse needs (Benson et al., 2009; Blank et al., 2003; Heers, 2014). They collaborate with families and community organizations to provide a range of services, such as academic support and health care, acting as essential support centers within their communities (Dryfoos, 2000; Heers, 2014; Rumberger, 2011). In contrast, community-friendly schools in resource-rich education systems emphasize inclusivity, social cohesion, and relevance to real-world issues. They foster experiential and service learning through community-based activities, creating meaningful, hands-on opportunities that boost students' motivation and academic performance. By integrating these approaches, they enrich the learning experience and promote

¹ The first level, community-based learning activities (*About the Community*), integrates local elements into the curriculum. Activities include water quality monitoring in the Tuen Mun River, visits to the Tuen Mun fire station, and excursions in Tuen Mun Park, fostering students' connection to their environment.

The second level, learning activities in cooperation with external organizations (*In the Community*), builds partnerships with external organizations to enhance experiential learning. Examples include air quality monitoring with Clear Air Network and workshops with Fullness Social Enterprises Society, providing professional insights for students.

The third level, community services/activities organized by the school (*For the Community*), emphasizes proactive community engagement. Examples include organizing STEM and easy sports courses for young elderly individuals and youth, utilizing school facilities as a community center. Initiatives like technology ambassador programs and elderly visits reinforce the school's role as a social organization.

active community engagement (Lau, 2024a). Active community participation is central, with students involved in local initiatives, advocacy, and decision-making, promoting social responsibility and leadership. These schools also strengthen ties with the community by sharing resources like facilities and educational programs, fostering a mutually supportive relationship that benefits both students and residents.

Community-friendly schools are a new concept with limited research on their effectiveness. Existing studies typically focus on service-learning, experiential learning, or community-based learning separately, rather than integrating these approaches into a cohesive framework. For instance, Eyler and Giles (1999) highlight how service-learning can enhance students' civic responsibility and academic achievement, while Kolb (1984) emphasizes the role of experiential learning in deepening practical understanding and engagement. Additionally, the Community Based Learning Impact Scale developed by Carlisle et al. (2017) evaluates community-based learning through themes like civic engagement and academic learning. However, these approaches are often treated as distinct, with little attention to their integration within a cohesive model. This study aims to address this gap by integrating service-learning, experiential learning, and community-based learning within the community-friendly school framework. By evaluating the combined effects of these strategies, it seeks to provide new insights into how this unified model can enhance both community engagement and views toward schools, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the broader impact of community-friendly schools.

This study aims to explore the impact of community-friendly schools practices in Hong Kong schools on community understanding, engagement, and school reputation. By examining how these initiatives influence the perceptions and involvement of various stakeholders, the research seeks to contribute to a comprehensive understanding of how schools can effectively foster positive students' civic awareness, school-community relations and enhance their reputation within the local context.

1.2. Problem Statement

The education institutions in Hong Kong face huge pressures and competitions in the rapidly changing environment, so the school managers have to equip the proper management skills and abilities to evaluate the schools' performance and the effectiveness of managing resources by responding to the needs and expectations of the stakeholders in organization and the community. This research provides insights for the education sector in Hong Kong and changes the focus of current performance indicators on educational figures only. Therefore, this research addresses this limitation by combining educational and social factors to analyze the impacts of the community-friendly schools. Instead, this study could help demonstrate the effectiveness of this performance measurement on measuring the academic and cognitive impacts on the students, and social impacts and value determination of these schools.

1.3. Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its potential to contribute to the field of education by addressing the identified gaps in evaluating the organizational performance of community-friendly schools in Hong Kong, specifically in terms of their social impact on the local community. The findings of this research have several important implications for various stakeholders, including educators, policymakers, and school administrators.

The research informs the development of more comprehensive performance measurement frameworks that capture the full range of contributions made by community-friendly schools.

By identifying limitations in current evaluation methods, which focus primarily on academic outcomes, the study advocates for a holistic approach that includes social and community impact indicators. This can help schools in Hong Kong and beyond to better recognize and enhance their roles as agents of social improvement.

The study also offers insights into the concept of community schools, positioning them as hubs for community development. It examines how community-friendly schools in Hong Kong integrate educational objectives with community service and development activities, providing practical examples for other schools to adopt. This approach strengthens community ties and fosters social cohesion while improving educational outcomes.

The findings further contribute to policy discussions on evaluating and supporting schools in Hong Kong. By highlighting the broader societal contributions of community-friendly schools, the research encourages policymakers to develop targeted policies that recognize and incentivize schools' social roles. This includes revising performance measurement frameworks to incorporate indicators of community development and social capital.

Through detailed case studies, the research offers lessons on the practical implementation of the community school concept, with examples of successes and challenges in Hong Kong. These insights guide schools in adopting similar approaches, balancing educational goals with community needs to create long-term social impact.

The study advocates for a reevaluation of school assessment methods, proposing a framework that includes both educational and social impact dimensions. This contributes to a broader understanding of the role of schools in community development, influencing potential policy reforms aimed at supporting the overall development of students and their communities.

1.4. Research Questions

1. Can the community-friendly school increase the students' engagement in the community?
2. What effect does the students' involvement in the program of the community-friendly school and the level of understanding and engagement in their surrounding community have?
3. What effect does the community-friendly school have on its reputation from different stakeholders?

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design

This exploratory study seeks to fill gaps in understanding schools' performance in educational and social accountability. It uses a mixed-method approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data to provide a comprehensive analysis. According to Creswell et al. (2003), mixed-method research involves collecting and analyzing both data types, either concurrently or sequentially, with one often prioritized. This method mitigates the limitations of using only one approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The research began with a quantitative survey, followed by qualitative interviews with a randomly selected subset of participants to enrich the initial findings. Three paper-and-pencil questionnaires were distributed to students, teachers, and community stakeholders. Comparative analysis highlighted mean differences across these groups, while correlation analysis examined relationships between variables, such as students' involvement in

community-school programs and their understanding of and willingness to serve their community.

Semi-structured interviews offered in-depth insights into students' and teachers' experiences with community learning activities, despite the time-intensive nature of data analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Using a convergent parallel mixed methods approach, the study separately analyzed quantitative and qualitative data before integrating the findings to achieve a comprehensive understanding.

2.2. Population and Sampling

The study targeted community-friendly schools in Hong Kong, specifically focusing on TLLF, which is actively engaged in community-based projects and initiatives. The school has a population of approximately 80 students, 20 teachers, and 30 community stakeholders. A total of 148 participants were selected for the quantitative phase of the study, utilizing a representative sample that included students, teachers, and community stakeholders.

A simple random sampling technique was used to select participants for the survey, ensuring a fair representation of opinions across different groups. For the qualitative phase, a homogeneous sampling technique was employed to select eight participants for interviews, including students, teachers, and community stakeholders who had direct experiences with the school's community initiatives. This approach aimed to gather in-depth insights into their experiences and perceptions.

2.3. Data Collection Instruments

The study utilized three sets of structured questionnaires to gather data from students, teachers, and community stakeholders regarding their perceptions of community-friendly school initiatives. Students and teachers will be asked how these three levels of community-friendly initiatives affect the students' engagement, learning attitudes and willingness to serve the community with 55 items scored on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). For the questionnaires for community stakeholders, the community services or activities organized by the schools are focused and assessed on how these activities affect their perception of the school and students with 14 question items.

In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected participants to explore their experiences and insights related to the school's community-friendly programs. This method facilitated deeper understanding of the individual perspectives on how the community initiatives affected their engagement and sense of responsibility within the community.

2.4. Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant educational authorities and the administration of TLLF to conduct the study. Participants were provided with an introductory letter outlining the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights, including the right to withdraw at any time without consequences.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they were fully aware of the study's objectives and the intended use of the collected data. Additionally, written consent was secured from the parents or guardians of the students, allowing them to complete the questionnaires.

Confidentiality was prioritized, with codes assigned to questionnaires and interviews to protect participants' identities. Efforts were made to maintain anonymity in the presentation of data, ensuring that individual responses could not be traced back to specific participants.

2.5. Data Processing and Analysis

Quantitative data collected from the questionnaires were processed using Statistical Product for Service Solutions (SPSS) software. Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were calculated to summarize the data and identify trends and patterns regarding the effectiveness of community-friendly school initiatives on student engagement in the community. ANOVA was conducted to determine significant differences in students' engagement in community-based activities in relation to their understanding of the community and their willingness to serve. Chi-Square Tests were used to validate the results of the Repeated-Measures ANOVA. Regression analysis was also employed to examine the relationship between variables and to assess how community-friendly schools influence students' engagement with the community.

Qualitative data from semi-structured interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis to explore the impact of community-friendly schools in Hong Kong. The analysis began with transcribing and reviewing the interviews to become familiar with the data. Open coding was then applied to identify meaningful segments, which were subsequently grouped into broader themes. These themes were reviewed and refined to ensure coherence and alignment with the study's research objectives. The thematic analysis, when combined with quantitative data, provided a comprehensive understanding of how community-friendly schools influence students' engagement and willingness to serve, as well as their broader impact on the school's reputation within the community. This mixed-method approach allowed the study to offer a thorough insight into the effects of community-friendly schools on both students and community stakeholders.

The interview protocol was carefully designed to facilitate effective data collection while ensuring participant comfort. All participants gave informed consent, outlining the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights, including the option to withdraw at any time without consequence (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Interviews were conducted in locations chosen by the participants to ensure convenience, with permission reconfirmed before each session (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Interviews concluded with gratitude expressed, ensuring a respectful and ethical approach.

The thematic analysis followed the six-phase approach of Braun & Clarke (2006), offering flexibility in navigating complex data. The researcher first familiarized themselves with the transcripts, then generated initial codes, which were grouped into themes. These themes were reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately captured the participants' experiences and perspectives. Reflexivity was employed throughout the process to maintain alignment with the research objectives (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Reliability was ensured through the use of a clear coding framework, and member checking—where participants reviewed preliminary themes—further strengthened the credibility of the findings (Birt et al., 2016). This thorough analysis offers meaningful insights into the contributions of community-friendly schools to student development and community relations.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Research Question 1

Table 1 summarizes the perceptions of students and teachers on the effectiveness of community learning activities in enhancing students' community engagement. The analysis includes mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) scores for each item, reflecting the impact of these activities on understanding the community and willingness to serve.

Table 1.

The views towards community learning activities on students' community engagement

Survey Items	Students		Teachers	
	M	SD	M	SD
On the understanding on the community				
Questions: ... made me (my students) have better understanding on the community.				
The learning activities in the community	3.80	0.89	4.37	1.01
The learning activities cooperated with the external organizations made	3.80	0.98	4.26	0.99
The community services/activities organized by the schools	3.80	0.99	4.26	1.14
On the understanding different stakeholders on the community				
Questions: ... help me (my students) to understand different people in the community.				
The learning activities in the community	3.85	0.98	4.47	1.02
The learning activities cooperated with the external organizations made	3.92	1.02	4.37	1.01
The community services/activities organized by the schools	3.93	1.00	4.32	1.00
On the willingness to serve the community				
Questions: ... inspire me (my students) to take action or make a difference				
The learning activities in the community	3.71	1.00	3.84	0.90
The learning activities cooperated with the external organizations made	3.79	1.01	4.05	0.85
The community services/activities organized by the schools	3.74	1.08	3.95	0.91

Learning activities within the community were positively perceived, with students rating them at 3.80 (SD=0.89) and teachers at 4.37 (SD=1.01). This suggests that these activities significantly enhanced community understanding, particularly from the teachers' perspective. Similarly, learning activities in collaboration with external organizations were rated 3.80 (SD=0.98) by students and 4.26 (SD=0.99) by teachers, indicating a consistent recognition of the value these partnerships bring to understanding the community. Community services or activities organized by schools were also seen favorably, with students assigning them a mean of 3.80 (SD=0.99) and teachers 4.26 (SD=1.14). The variability in teachers' responses could suggest differing experiences with these activities, but overall, they are viewed as beneficial for community understanding.

A Secondary Two student (S1) from TLLF describes how the external organizations help them to understand the community better:

When we visit Ching Tin Estate, we can learn more from their social workers from Yan Oi Tong. Before our visits, they would tell us a little, maybe about the elderly's behaviors, and then they'd share more with us afterward. This helps us understand the community better, and they also introduce us to how the community operates.

When it comes to understanding different stakeholders within the community, learning activities within the community received ratings of 3.85 (SD=0.98) from students and 4.47 (SD=1.02) from teachers. This underscores the belief that such activities play a crucial role in

helping students appreciate diverse community perspectives. Similarly, collaborative activities with external organizations were rated 3.92 (SD=1.02) by students and 4.37 (SD=1.01) by teachers, further highlighting their importance in fostering a broader understanding of community dynamics.

S1 also mentioned that:

I hope there could be more of these activities, so we can reach out to more people in the community, whom we can't meet at other schools.

Another Secondary Two student (S2) revealed that:

Visiting elderly has made me more confident. I can communicate more with people in the community, even those I don't know. It helps you meet more people in the community.

A teacher (T1) from TLLF stated that:

Different activities expose them to the community, like "Food guide in Hung Kiu". Students mentioned that their usual visits to restaurants in Hung Kiu are only for eating, without interacting with the owner or understanding the story behind the operation. But through these activities, they get to explore and ask questions actively. They truly get to know the community, rather than just being transient visitors or customers.

In terms of willingness to serve the community, the impact of learning activities within the community was moderate, with students giving a mean rating of 3.71 (SD=1.00) and teachers 3.84 (SD=0.90). This suggests that while these activities do inspire civic action, their influence is somewhat limited. Learning activities in cooperation with external organizations were perceived as slightly more impactful, with ratings of 3.79 (SD=1.01) from students and 4.05 (SD=0.85) from teachers. Community services organized by schools received similar ratings, with students giving them 3.74 (SD=1.08) and teachers 3.95 (SD=0.91).

S2 provides compelling support for the finding:

During my visits, residents expressed their inability to manage electronic devices that weren't functioning properly. Consequently, they sought our assistance, prompting us to liaise with the social worker. In instances where they ensure follow-up, highlighting my significant role. Acting as an intermediary, I relay their needs to the social worker, facilitating appropriate follow-up actions.

S1 shows a strong commitment to serving her community:

Some elderly people have issues in their home, so we would talk to the social workers in the community. Then our volunteer team has a home maintenance class. We've gone out to help the elderly with repairs, so there are some activities like that. ... It's mostly about looking at knowledge in books, with few opportunities for practice. But after this practice, I have a better understanding of this knowledge.

A Secondary Five student (S3) shares how participating in beach clean-ups made him aware of water pollution:

When I participated in beach clean-ups, there were different types of trash on the beach, and some of them are quite large, and they tended to hide in some corners. I have a deeper understanding of myself, a deeper understanding of this environmental issue. After seeing that garbage, I have a deeper understanding of this topic, and a firmer position toward environmental protection. If I may start from myself, I will bring my own tableware for meals or order less takeout, starting from daily life.

Another Secondary Five student (S4) mentioned that his view of the community changed after engaging in community service:

I used to think the community was fine, but after participating in this activity, I found that there are many areas in the community that need improvement. Therefore, I want to be a person who contributes to society in the future.

In conclusion, the findings demonstrate that community-friendly schools significantly enhance students' engagement with their communities. Specifically, community learning activities improve students' understanding of local dynamics and stakeholders, with teachers noting a particularly strong impact. These activities also help students appreciate diverse community members. As the overall increase in students' willingness to engage in community service is moderate, collaborative activities with external organizations show a greater influence. Thus, community-friendly schools are effective in fostering both a deeper understanding of and a greater commitment to community involvement among students.

3.2. Research Question 2

Table 2 illustrates the relationship between students' involvement in different community activities and their understanding of the community. Three key areas were examined: learning activities within the community, learning activities in cooperation with external organizations, and community services organized by the school.

Table 2.

The relationship between involvement and understanding in their surrounding community

Areas	Multiple R	R Square	Standard Error	t Stat	P-value
The learning activities in the community	0.6146	0.3777	0.8555	2.3504	0.0211*
The learning activities cooperated with the external organizations	0.7374	0.5438	0.7282	2.4709	0.0155*
The community services/activities organized by the school	0.7010	0.4915	0.7815	3.3124	0.0014**

Note. Statistical significance at the $p < 0.05$ level indicated by * and $p < 0.01$ level indicated by **

The analysis of students' participation in various community activities reveals a positive relationship between their engagement and their understanding of the community. Specifically, involvement in learning activities within the community showed a moderate positive correlation, with a Multiple R value of 0.6146 and an R Square of 0.3777, indicating that 37.77% of the variance in understanding can be attributed to these activities. The statistically significant p-value (0.0211) underscores the reliability of this relationship. Learning activities involving external organizations demonstrated an even stronger positive correlation, with a Multiple R value of 0.7374 and an R Square of 0.5438, explaining 54.38% of the variance in understanding. The significance of this relationship is further supported by a t Stat of 2.4709 and a p-value of 0.0155. Additionally, community services organized by the school showed a robust positive relationship, reflected in a Multiple R value of 0.7010 and an R Square of 0.4915, indicating that 49.15% of the variance in understanding can be explained by these activities. The t Stat of 3.3124 and p-value of 0.0014 further affirm the strength and significance of this relationship.

The regression analysis, which combines the data from three types of community activities, further supports this conclusion, with the resulting equation $Y = 0.6742X + 3.865Y$ indicating that

increased student engagement leads to a higher level of understanding. The model explains approximately 62.89% of the variability in understanding.

Table 3.

The relationship between involvement and willingness to serve the community

Areas	Multiple R	R Square	Standard Error	t Stat	P-value
The learning activities in the community	0.7223	0.5217	0.7501	2.9016	0.0047**
The learning activities cooperated with the external organizations	0.7132	0.5086	0.7557	2.9007	0.0048**
The community services/activities organized by the school	0.7169	0.5140	0.7640	2.2377	0.0279*

Note. Statistical significance at the $p < 0.05$ level indicated by * and $p < 0.01$ level indicated by **

Table 3 focuses on the relationship between students' involvement in community-friendly programs and their willingness to serve the community, exploring the same three areas as Table 2.

The analysis of learning activities in the community revealed a positive correlation with the willingness to serve, demonstrated by a Multiple R value of 0.7223. The R Square value of 0.5217 indicates that 52.17% of the variance in willingness to serve can be attributed to participation in community-based learning activities. This relationship is further supported by a statistically significant t Stat value of 2.9016 and a p-value of 0.0047. Similarly, learning activities with external organizations also exhibited a positive correlation with willingness to serve, with a Multiple R value of 0.7132. The R Square value of 0.5086 suggests that 50.86% of the variance in willingness to serve can be linked to these collaborative efforts, and the significance of this relationship is reinforced by a t Stat value of 2.9007 and a p-value of 0.0048. Additionally, community services organized by the school demonstrated a positive correlation with willingness to serve, shown by a Multiple R value of 0.7169. The R Square value of 0.5140 indicates that 51.40% of the variance in willingness to serve can be explained by participation in these school-organized activities, with a statistically significant t Stat value of 2.2377 and a p-value of 0.0279 further highlighting the relevance of this relationship. Overall, these findings underscore the importance of community engagement in fostering a willingness to serve.

It combined the statistics of three types of community activities and delved into whether students' involvement in a community-friendly school program positively influences their inclination to serve their surrounding community. The regression analysis further supports the hypothesis of a positive correlation between students' involvement in community-friendly programs and their willingness to serve, with the equation $Y = 0.7765X + 2.504$ indicating that greater student engagement leads to a higher willingness to serve. The model explains approximately 69.37% of the variability in willingness to serve, confirming the significance of the relationship.

To conclude, the analysis demonstrates that students' involvement in community-friendly school programs significantly enhances their understanding of the community and increases their willingness to serve. The positive relationships observed across various community activities indicate that such programs effectively improve both students' comprehension of community issues and their commitment to community service. This suggests that engaging students in these programs fosters a deeper understanding and a stronger inclination to contribute positively to their communities.

3.3. Research Question 3

Table 4 summarizes stakeholders' perceptions of community-friendly schools, highlighting the effects of school-organized community services and activities on their reputation. The data reveals that teachers and community stakeholders perceive these activities as distinguishing the school from others, with mean ratings of 4.11 (SD=1.05) and 4.09 (SD=0.96), respectively. Students, however, rated this aspect slightly lower at 3.91 (SD=0.98), indicating that while these activities are generally seen as setting the school apart, students may view this less strongly.

Table 4.

The views of respondents towards community learning activities on school's reputation

Survey Items	Students		Teachers		Community Stakeholders	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
The community services/activities organized by the school made the school different from other schools.	3.91	0.98	4.11	1.05	4.09	0.96
The community services/activities organized by the school make the school better ties with the community.	3.84	0.97	4.37	1.01	4.38	0.87
The community services/activities organized by the school make the school better reputation in the community.	3.88	0.94	4.37	0.90	4.19	0.93
The school has responsibilities to serve the community.	3.83	1.05	4.05	1.18	3.88	0.98
The community services/activities organized by the school made me have a better understanding on the school.					4.06	0.95
Participating in community services/activities organized by the school help me to understand more about teenagers.					4.03	0.90
I will recommend the community-friendly schools to other people I know.					4.19	0.86
More schools should work as community-friendly schools.					4.22	0.91

When evaluating how these activities enhance ties with the community, both teachers and community stakeholders have high ratings, with means of 4.37 (SD=1.01) and 4.38 (SD=0.87). Students provided a lower mean rating of 3.84 (SD=0.97), suggesting that while the school's efforts are effective in building strong community connections, students perceive this impact with some variability. Regarding the school's reputation, teachers rated the positive influence of these activities with a mean of 4.37 (SD=0.90), followed by community stakeholders at 4.19 (SD=0.93), and students at 3.88 (SD=0.94), showing that teachers and stakeholders view these activities as more beneficial to the school's reputation than students do.

The sense of responsibility the school holds towards the community was rated moderately by all groups: teachers with a mean of 4.05 (SD=1.18), community stakeholders at 3.88 (SD=0.98), and students at 3.83 (SD=1.05). This suggests a shared recognition of the school's community obligations, albeit with some variations in perceptions. Community stakeholders specifically noted that their understanding of the school and teenagers improved through these activities, with mean ratings of 4.06 (SD=0.95) and 4.03 (SD=0.90), respectively. Additionally, they showed strong support for recommending community-friendly schools, reflected in a

mean of 4.19 (SD=0.86), and advocated for more schools to adopt this approach, with a mean of 4.22 (SD=0.91).

T1 emphasizes that interactions between elders and students can change the elders' perceptions of both students and the school:

Schools were regarded as closed spaces, but these activities provide a channel for community members to come into schools, interact with students, and see them in a different way. They often find students more polite and respectful than they might have assumed. These interactions not only help elderly understand the teenagers better but also indirectly contribute to the school's positive image within the community.

A community stakeholder (CS1) shares her positive impressions of the students she interacted with:

After interacting with the students, I feel they are lively and well-behaved. I sense their concern for the elderly, their willingness to communicate with them, and their consideration for the abilities of the elderly even when playing games. During the visits, the students demonstrate care, greet, and patiently listen to the life experiences of the elderly. This process makes me feel very warm-hearted.

Another community stakeholder (CS2) praises the school as an excellent platform for intergenerational interaction and community service:

My initial involvement was merely through a friend's introduction to participate in an elderly fitness class, with the original intention being to stay fit and healthy. However, gradually I discovered that this place was not just an ordinary elderly center but rather an excellent platform to discover and serve alongside the elderly in the community with students.

The community-friendly school's community services and activities positively impact its reputation among stakeholders. Teachers and community members view these efforts as distinguishing the school and enhancing its connections with the community, while students recognize the benefits but with slightly less enthusiasm. The school's role in fostering community ties and intergenerational interactions is seen as a key factor in its positive image. Feedback from community members highlights that these engagements improve perceptions of both students and the school, reinforcing its position as a valuable hub for learning and community integration.

4. Discussion of Results

This study provides insights into the impact of community-friendly practices in schools across Hong Kong, highlighting their effectiveness in fostering student awareness of local issues and promoting civic responsibility. The learning activities in the community, such as small shop visits, air quality monitoring, river water monitoring, and regular visits to the elderly, provide direct experiences with real-world challenges that deepen students' engagement and practical understanding, linking learning directly to civic action and community needs (Kolb, 1984). Data indicate that students engaged in these activities developed a stronger sense of civic duty and community service, aligning with findings from Moely and Ilustre (2014), who reported that students participating in service-learning courses enhanced their community understanding. Similarly, Carlisle et al. (2017) and Ofsted (2006) found that the majority of students experienced an increased sense of civic engagement and responsibility, along with a heightened awareness of their accountability for their actions and understanding of social issues. These

findings collectively underscore the positive impact of community-friendly learning activities on student development and civic consciousness.

The study supports the hypothesis that there is a positive correlation between students' involvement in community-friendly programs and their willingness to serve their community. Students who engage in these programs demonstrate a strong commitment to contributing, as they are empowered to take effective action in addressing community needs (Bandy, 2011). This aligns with findings from Chung, Taylor, and Nehila (2018), who emphasized the role of service-learning education in increasing student engagement with communities. Similarly, Astin and Sax (1998) found that greater involvement in service activities leads to stronger positive outcomes across various domains, highlighting the importance of sustained engagement in service learning for maximizing benefits. Additionally, previous research by Bastida Jr. (2023) shows that community engagement positively impacts students' holistic development by fostering civic-mindedness and a sense of responsibility. This, in turn, strengthens their commitment to serving the community and promoting human dignity. Together, these findings underscore the value of community-friendly schools in nurturing a deeper sense of civic responsibility and dedication to community service.

The study also reveals that schools prioritizing community-friendly pedagogy are perceived more favorably by various stakeholders, including students, teachers, and community members. Such schools consistently receive better reputation and public image compared to those that do not adopt these initiatives. This positive perception is critical as it fosters stronger, more positive relationships between schools and their surrounding communities. The findings highlight the importance of well-structured and meaningful service-learning activities, as supported by Ngai, Chan, and Kwan (2018), who stressed the need for varied and engaging service experiences to maximize student and community benefits. It also aligns with Karak's perspective on school reputation, which asserts that schools bear a significant social responsibility and must thoughtfully align with the needs and aspirations of the societies they serve in order to build a strong reputation within their communities (Karak, 2008). This level of engagement reflects the quality of the students, which significantly influences parents' perceptions—one of key factors in shaping the school's reputation (Oplatka and Nuphar, 2012). Efforts such as organizing courses for community residents, opening the campus to external organizations, and conducting regular visits to assist those in need are acknowledged by stakeholders as significant contributions to enhancing the school's reputation and fostering stronger community ties. By engaging external stakeholders through these initiatives, schools provide opportunities for the broader community to become familiar with their capabilities and accomplishments. This not only improves public perception but also creates a positive feedback loop where community members are more likely to support and collaborate with the schools. These practices also help cultivate social capital, essential for schools' long-term success. By reinforcing networks of trust and cooperation within and across communities (Putnam, 2000), schools that engage in sustained interactions build stronger social bonds. This leads to enhanced collaboration, resource sharing, and mutual support, ultimately increasing the schools' overall effectiveness (Tsang, 2009).

4.1. Key Findings

This study has yielded several important insights into the effects of community-friendly learning activities on students, teachers, and the broader community in Hong Kong. First, the study reveals that students who actively participate in community-friendly initiatives exhibit a marked improvement in their understanding of the local community. The data reveal that students who engage in community-friendly learning activities develop a better understanding

of their local community. This improvement is evident in the mean scores from both students and teachers, particularly regarding the students' comprehension of diverse community stakeholders. For instance, activities within the community and in cooperation with external organizations received high ratings for their role in deepening students' understanding. The qualitative data support this, with students expressing that their interactions with different community members, such as the elderly, expanded their perspectives and boosted their confidence in engaging with the community. Understanding the community and its stakeholders is a crucial first step for students to effectively serve their community. By interacting with external organizations and participating in community services, students gain a deeper appreciation of community needs and build confidence in their ability to contribute. This foundational understanding enables them to serve the community more effectively and with greater impact.

Community-friendly learning activities significantly foster students' sense of community, enhancing their willingness to serve. According to McMillan and Chavis (1986), a sense of community is built on four dimensions: membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection. Through these activities, such as teaching the elderly easy sports, volunteering at local elderly centers, participating in environmental conservation projects like river water monitoring, engaging in air quality assessments, and collaborating with small businesses during shop visits, students develop a stronger sense of belonging, gain influence by contributing to community life, and derive satisfaction from meeting personal and collective needs. The shared emotional connections formed through meaningful interactions further strengthen their community ties. These activities, such as clearing beaches and repairing the homes of the elderly, provide opportunities for students to explore different identities and social roles, allowing them to better understand the potential challenges others face and enhancing their sense of connectedness to the community (Albanesi, Cicognani & Zani, 2007). Additionally, these activities help build relationships with peers and adults, fostering social capital and civic responsibility, which boosts students' confidence and motivates them to contribute positively to their communities (Youniss, McLellan & Yates, 1997; Pretty et al., 2002).

The research indicates a strong positive correlation between students' engagement in community-friendly programs and their willingness to contribute to community service. Quantitative data reveal that students involved in these activities show a greater inclination toward civic responsibility and action. Multiple regression analysis supports this, demonstrating that higher engagement levels correspond with a stronger willingness to serve. Qualitative accounts, such as students assisting the elderly or participating in environmental clean-ups, further illustrate how these activities inspire positive contributions. Higher levels of engagement also enable students to take on more diverse roles, such as assistants of sports courses, event planners, and leaders, providing them with satisfaction and empowerment. As they gain successful experiences and recognition from peers and community members, students develop confidence in their ability to shape and improve their community. By being delegated more autonomy, they can contribute according to their potential and what they are good at, gaining greater control over their lives and environments, and experiencing empowered outcomes as a result of these processes (Zimmerman, 2000). This leadership role enhances their sense of civic responsibility, encouraging ongoing involvement in community service. The data suggest that increased involvement in community-related activities leads to a deeper commitment to service and a strengthened sense of civic duty.

The study identifies an improvement in the reputation of schools that adopt community-friendly practices. These schools are perceived more favorably by key stakeholders, including students, parents, and community members. Schools that implement community-friendly

practices are seen as distinct from others, with a stronger reputation and better ties to the community. Teachers and community stakeholders, in particular, rate the impact of these activities on the school's reputation highly, suggesting that these efforts significantly enhance the public image of the schools. Importantly, the study emphasizes the need for school leaders and teachers to actively build social relationships with the broader community to improve their standing in a competitive environment and increase their social capital. By opening their campuses and facilities, schools allow different stakeholders to interact directly with students, providing an opportunity for stakeholders to gain firsthand knowledge of the students through meaningful interactions, rather than relying solely on secondhand information or informal reports. This direct engagement helps stakeholders better understand the school's ethos and student qualities, offering a more informed perspective. Given that most perceptions of schools are often formed through secondhand information, this approach plays a critical role in fostering stronger relationships and improving the school's reputation.

Teachers and community members hold favorable views on the evolving role of community-friendly schools, seeing them as essential in bridging the gap between adolescents and their communities. These schools are viewed as crucial in reshaping the traditional role of education by transforming into active learning hubs that promote deeper connections. They have evolved beyond traditional academic institutions, fostering collaborative learning experiences that actively engage students in real-world issues and community-based initiatives. Teachers highlight how these initiatives give students a deeper understanding of their community, while community members appreciate the respectful and proactive attitudes students display. By serving as learning hubs for both students and the community, schools play a pivotal role in building stronger, more meaningful relationships, aligning with the OECD's vision for the future of education, which emphasizes the importance of schools as dynamic spaces for knowledge flow, where students, teachers, and the wider community collaborate to address emerging challenges and drive innovation (OECD, 2020). This enhances student learning, social responsibility, and strengthens the overall community.

4.2. Recommendations

In light of the findings and limitations identified in this study, we propose several key recommendations for future research aimed at enhancing the understanding and effectiveness of community-friendly schools. These recommendations focus on addressing the challenges of sampling, measurement, data collection, and cultural context, as well as mitigating the impact of time, resource constraints, and subjectivity in self-evaluation.

Future research should broaden its scope to include a diverse range of schools from various regions and educational systems. This will improve the generalizability of findings and allow for comparisons across different contexts. Employing random sampling methods and conducting longitudinal studies can provide more representative data and insights into the long-term effects of community-friendly initiative.

To improve data reliability, future research should refine tools like questionnaires and interviews through pilot testing. Triangulation—using multiple data sources and methods—can help validate results and reduce bias. Additionally, developing more sophisticated tools to measure complex social impacts, such as community cohesion, will allow for more accurate assessments of the initiative.

Advanced data management systems should be integrated into future research to handle diverse datasets. Involving experts in both qualitative and quantitative methods will ensure proper data synthesis and interpretation. Complementing self-reported data with objective measures, such as academic records, can further enhance data reliability and the overall quality of analysis.

Future research should adapt its methodologies to reflect cultural and contextual factors, ensuring relevance across different educational settings. Cross-cultural comparisons can identify universal and context-specific elements of community-friendly schooling. Engaging local stakeholders in the research process can provide valuable insights and enhance cultural sensitivity.

Adequate funding and resources are essential for conducting comprehensive studies. Collaboration with multiple institutions can pool resources and expertise, broadening the scope of research. Establishing realistic timelines is also crucial to avoid rushed conclusions and ensure thorough investigation.

To minimize subjectivity, researchers should practice reflexivity, critically examining their biases throughout the study. Standardized evaluation tools should be developed to provide consistent assessment criteria. Peer debriefing and member checking can further ensure that findings accurately reflect participants' perspectives, leading to more objective and reliable conclusions.

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