

Unhealthy education culture is the root of youth problems

As a 2024 Diploma of Secondary Education(DSE) candidate, I can attest to the intense pressure that accompanies the exams. The recent wave of suicide attempts among students once again brings this systemic problem into the public's eye.

Wong Yan-lung, chairman of Hong Kong's Advisory Committee on Mental Health, has called on schools to prioritise students' mental health after a recent study found that one in four children and adolescents suffered from at least one mental disorder in the past year.

Schools are often under immense pressure to increase their admission rates and produce top scorers in order to enhance their reputation. Consequently, teachers and students are compelled to invest significant amounts of time and effort in achieving good DSE results. As a result, students are often drilled in past papers and focus solely on what the examination authorities expect them to know. This creates a culture of intense competition and places excessive stress on the individuals involved.

The emphasis on drilling may produce low-quality talent, as it does not encourage a deep mastery of knowledge, or the development of critical thinking and creativity. Exams become a competition that rewards diligence and carefulness without considering individual talents and aptitudes.

This system has negative consequences for students' mental well-being. Students are overwhelmed by the pressure from their parents, teachers, and the society to perform well in the examination. If students cannot perform well in the examination, their career prospects will be grim. Moreover, with the keen competition nature of Asian society, scores in a public examination are considered indicative of a family's status, further adding more pressure onto students' shoulders.

As these habits have become deeply ingrained in Hong Kong's education system, it is important to address the root causes. While counselling and resilience-building are important steps in treating the symptoms, we must address the systemic issues that contribute to this culture of competition and stress.

Simplifying the syllabus is a potential solution. It could alleviate the pressure to some extent, though it could hamper the cultivation of talent. Nevertheless, taking this step is better than doing nothing at all. It is time to rethink our approach to education and create a system that allows students to thrive without sacrificing their mental health.

Questions

* - Answer cannot be directly found from the essay.

1. Which word in paragraph 1 can be replaced by “extreme”
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2. According to Wong Yan-Lung, what should schools focus to do?
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3. In paragraph 3, which of the following **is not** what schools in Hong Kong are currently trying to achieve?

- A. Becoming more prestigious
- B. Higher admission figures
- C. Producing top scorers
- D. Improving the mental health of students

4. Which of the following words most closely resemble the meaning of “solely”?

- A. Only
- B. Mostly
- C. Partly
- D. Collectively

5. Determine if the statements are true, false or not given.

- i. Students do a lot of past papers to prepare for the DSE
- ii. Students who score well in the DSE do a lot of past papers
- iii. The writer believes the stress placed on students is appropriate.

6. *According to the writer, what skills must “high-quality” talent have?
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7. Use one word to fill in each of the blanks to complete the following statement based on the information in paragraph 4.

Paper drilling will lead to low-quality talent since individual talents and aptitudes are not _____. Instead, exams foster competition that rewards hard-working and _____ people.

8. What does “this system” at the start of paragraph 5 refer to?

9. *How do students feel about taking the DSE?

10. *With reference to the culture of Asian families, how do parents benefit when their children score well in the DSE?

11. What is “the habit” at the start of paragraph 7?

12. Fill in the following summary with reference to paragraphs 7-8, using ONE word for each blank.

The writer believes that _____ the root causes of the issues caused by the habit which is a core of Hong Kong’s _____ system is more important than treating the _____. The writer proposes to _____ the syllabus which could alleviate the burden on students, but it also reduces the *_____ of talent produced. Nonetheless, the writer believes that this is a good first step to take as we reconsider our direction in the education system to allow children to *_____ their talents without putting their mental health on the line.

13. Do you support simplifying the syllabus? Support your answer with a reason.

Questions

14. Which word in paragraph 1 can be replaced by “extreme”

intense

15. According to Wong Yan-Lung, what should schools focus to do?

Improve students' mental health

16. In paragraph 3, which of the following **is not** what schools in Hong Kong are currently trying to achieve?

E. Becoming more prestigious

F. Higher admission figures

G. Producing top scorers

H. Improving the mental health of students

17. Which of the following words most closely resemble the meaning of “solely”?

E. Only

F. Mostly

G. Partly

H. Collectively

18. Determine if the statements are true, false or not given.

iv. Students do a lot of past papers to prepare for the DSE

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v. Students who score well in the DSE do a lot of past papers

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vi. The writer believes the stress placed on students is appropriate.

F

19. *According to the writer, what skills must “high-quality” talent have?

Deep mastery of knowledge, or the development of critical thinking and creativity.

20. Use one word to fill in each of the blanks to complete the following statement based on the information in paragraph 4.

Paper drilling will lead to low-quality talent since individual talents and aptitudes are not **considered**. Instead, exams foster competition that rewards hard-working and **careful** people.

21. What does “this system” at the start of paragraph 5 refer to?

Education/Examination system (which rewards...)

22. *How do students feel about taking the DSE?

Worried/ afraid/ scared

23. *With reference to the culture of Asian families, how do parents benefit when their children score well in the DSE?

It can improve the social status of the family.

24. What is “the habit” at the start of paragraph 7?

Paper drilling

25. Fill in the following summary with reference to paragraphs 7-8, using ONE word for each blank.

The writer believes that _____ the root causes of the issues caused by the habit which is a core of Hong Kong’s _____ system is more important than treating the _____. The writer proposes to _____ the syllabus which could alleviate the burden on students, but it also reduces the *_____ of talent produced. Nonetheless, the writer believes that this is a good first step to take as we reconsider our direction in the education system to allow children to *_____ their talents without putting their mental health on the line.

26. Do you support simplifying the syllabus? Support your answer with a reason.

Yes, it could alleviate the pressure to some extent. //

No, it could hamper the cultivation of talent.
