Examining the Categorical of Ability Tracking in Hong Kong

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1. Introduction

The widespread adoption of ability tracking has long shaped education systems globally, categorizing students based on academic abilities. Whether that is in-school tracking in the United States and Canada, or tracking across different ability schools in many European countries, most individuals worldwide have been shaped by this education system (Betts, 2011, p. 341). Despite its prevalence, ability tracking has been labelled "the oldest and the most controversial issue in education" (Slavin, 1987).

To some, distributing students based on their academic abilities is a fair system. Proponents argue that ability tracking enables teachers to tailor instruction to diverse learning needs (Department for Education, 2005). However, critics contend that these systems often perpetuate inequality, sorting students based on their families' social and economic status rather than their true academic abilities (Francis et al., 2016; Oakes, 1992). Furthermore, disparities in instructional quality between ability groups can disadvantage students from lower-income backgrounds (Francis et al., 2016; Ireson & Hallam, 2001).

In an ideal world, using standardized tests to group students might seem fair, potentially offering talented children from disadvantaged backgrounds better learning opportunities. Nevertheless, significant criticism persists regarding how ability tracking can hinder social mobility. As such, this paper explores a critical question: *Can education systems genuinely provide equitable opportunities for all students?*

While much literature examines ability tracking in Western contexts, research on other regions remains sparse. Will the theories that evaluate ability tracking, such as categorical inequality and labelling theory, be applicable in a different cultural setting? This paper aims to fill that gap by analyzing Hong Kong's Secondary School Places Allocation System as a unique case study, shedding light on its implications for educational equity.

Additionally, while current literature on ability tracking extensively covers its effects on students—such as academic performance and self-efficacy—there is a lack of agreement between scholars on whether eliminating ability tracking would effectively reduce inequalities in opportunity for students. As such, beyond reviewing existing literatures on ability tracking, this paper will also detail the proposal of a study where rising Primary 6 students will either be grouped into three bands based on their academic abilities or be in a mixed, untracked classroom to study Computer Science. The self-efficacy of students, confidence from teachers, and academic scores will be compared regarding the classes they are in, evaluating the effects of tracking and detracking on students' learning experiences and outcomes.

This author will explore how ability grouping, a system built to provide equitable educational opportunities to students, ultimately diminishes social mobility contrary to its intended purpose.

2. Background

In Hong Kong, a child's future success is determined at the age of 11. An ability grouping policy operated since 1978, the Hong Kong Secondary School Places Allocation System (SSPA), categorizes Primary 6 students into *allocation bands* based on their academic abilities. These allocation bands correspond to specific secondary schools that students will eventually attend (Education Bureau, 2024). While the Hong Kong Education Bureau (EDB) does not formally publish the bands for each school, the schools remain categorized by locals based on their reputation and prestige (Details of School, 2024; Education Bureau, 2024).

It is common knowledge in Hong Kong that one's allocated band is closely related to the student's future academic success. For example, the results of the Hong Kong Diploma of

Secondary Education (HKDSE), the standardized undergraduate admission examination in Hong Kong, reflect that Band 1 students perform much better than others.

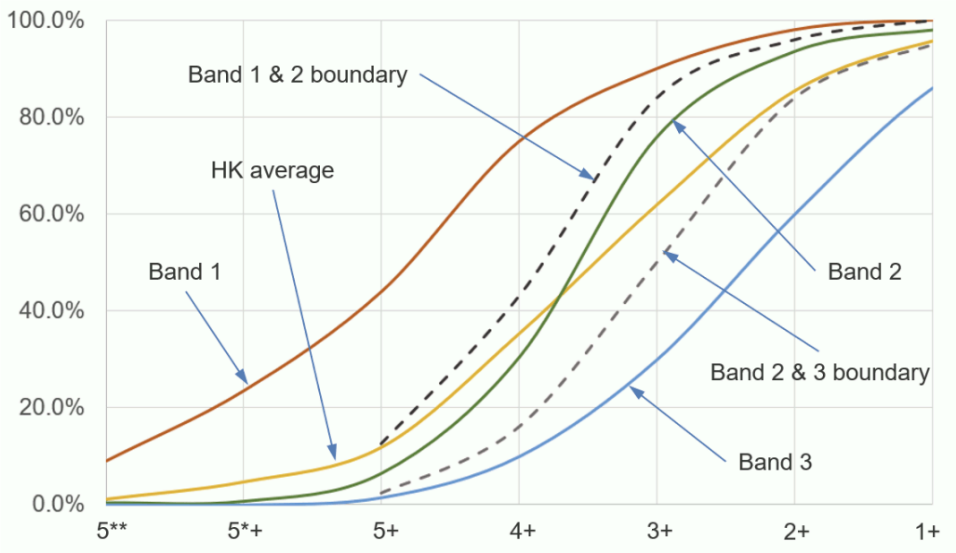

Figure 1. Distribution of HKDSE scores for each estimated band. (Details of School, 2024)

In HKDSE, 5** is the maximum score while 1+ is the minimum score (HKEAA, 2021). It can be seen in *Fig 1* that students from Band 1 schools perform significantly better at their college entrance examinations than their counterparts in Band 2, while Band 2 students perform much better than Band 3 students. Since HKDSE determines the university that students will attend, it can be inferred that Band 1 students have a much higher chance of attending competitive universities than their counterparts.

This however raises the question: Do Band 1 students perform better academically due to their natural superior intelligence, or are there external factors caused by SSPA that differentiate students' educational outcomes? On the one hand, some argue that Band 1 students are inherently higher achievers since they were positioned in their respective bands based on their academic abilities, quantified by a standardised exam. On the other hand, some may argue that the standardised exam, taken in Primary 6, cannot accurately predict students' potential in the next six years. Instead, lower band students may more likely be

under-resourced students, due to the bands formed by SSPA mirroring students' socioeconomic classes. Additionally, SSPA may provide unfair privileges to Band 1 students that advance their academic journey.

Hence, this paper aims to examine the potential inequalities between schools from different bands with the following research questions:

1. *To what extent does the Hong Kong Secondary School Places Allocation System form categorical inequalities that hinder social mobility?*
2. *To what extent do the labels assigned to students through the Hong Kong Secondary School Places Allocation System influence their academic experience and self-concept?*

To answer Q1, this paper will draw upon the theory of categorical inequality to explore whether dividing students into bands acts as a social structure that further stratifies socioeconomic classes. This is examined by investigating the relationship between students' allocation bands and their geography and ethnicity. To answer Q2, this paper will be guided by the labelling theory to assess the extent to which SSPA constructs inequalities in the quality of teaching and student's academic self-concept, which consequently contributes to their educational outcomes.

Through a comprehensive literature review of categorical inequality and labelling theory in the context of ability-tracking systems, this paper argues that the SSPA system creates underlying inequalities in students' educational resources and academic self-concept, tacitly creating differences in educational achievements that exacerbate socioeconomic inequalities. The paper will also propose a research design to answer the research questions with quantitative and qualitative data, comparing the education outcome of a tracked and an untracked school environment.

The reporting of this paper aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the SSPA policy, contributing to the discussion of whether Hong Kong should be detracking its schools and providing suggestions to improve the Hong Kong education system.

2.1 Categorical inequality and social mobility

The theory of categorical inequality was developed by Charles Tilly, where he theorized that "categorical inequality" is produced for "exploitation" or "opportunity hoarding". Specifically, "exploitation" refers to "powerful, connected people [commanding] resources from which they draw significantly increased returns by coordinating the efforts of outsiders whom they exclude from the full value added by that efforts", and "opportunity hoarding" describes when "members of a categorically bounded network acquire access to a resource that is valuable, renewable, subject to monopoly supportive of network activities, and enhanced by the network's modus operandi" (Tilly). Whether it be class, race, gender, or patronage relations, families in more powerful positions would have more ability to increase their children's chances to attend higher bands and attain higher quality education.

Beyond the context of ability tracking, categorical inequality has been explored to examine how education system categories like "high school dropout" and "college graduate" reinforce social inequalities related to gender and race (Domita et al., 2017). It has also been used as a theoretical framework for examining how schools regulate citizenship categories, such as requiring undocumented immigrants to pay out-of-state tuition (Pérez, 2012). Additionally, it reflects how the categorization of students with learning disabilities influences perceptions of their abilities and determines the educational support they receive (McDermott, 2001).

Supporters of the ability tracking system argue that tracking only divides students based on their intelligence. For instance, in the United States, higher-tracked students and

parents reject detracking because they believe that teachers would often have to simplify the teaching materials to ensure that all students, including those who are less intelligent, can keep up (Burris and Welner, 2005). This argument is built on the assumption that lower-tracking students are inherently slower learners than higher-tracked students. The theory of categorical inequalities, on the other hand, contradicts this argument.

Following the theory of categorical inequalities, those who are more privileged would "exploit" their position to increase their return in the education system. This is evident in one of the common arguments made by those who oppose detracking: it would remove their "academic, social, and status" advantages associated with being from a higher track (Lyken-Segosebe & Hinz, 2015, p. 97). This demonstrates that higher-class families acknowledge and exploit their privilege to obtain better educational resources, which allows them to advance their children in the education system over others.

The effects of categorical inequality are evident in standardized entrance examinations, which Hong Kong uses for band allocations. For instance, a survey of 1,000 university students found that while Gaokao, China's national college entrance examination, do not involve a "strong socioeconomic selection", they "[punish] those from rural areas for lacking equal educational opportunities and resources at the school stage, and justifies their inferior status with demonstrable outcomes in the examinations" (Brown et al., 2013; Liu, 2013). This study shows that outcomes of a standardized entrance examination reflect access to opportunities rather than intelligence, contradicting the idea that standardized exams are fair assessments of student potential. This aligns with the theory of categorical inequality, as those in suburban and urban areas are "opportunity hoarding" through their superior resources, constructing inequalities between geographic locations.

Similarly, in Hong Kong's SSPA system, families from poorer areas of the New Territories provide fewer opportunities for their youth. According to a particular Band 3

student from Tin Shui Wai (New Territories), “Of course [parents] do not have enough knowledge and information to [give academic support and career advice to their children]. That is why they are not successful people and they cannot teach their child to be a successful person” (Spires, 2016, p. 8). According to Hong Kong’s official 2021 population census, Tin Shui Wai’s median monthly income was 16,500 HKD compared to Hong Kong Island’s median monthly income of 21,250 HKD (District Profiles, 2024). This lack of resources and knowledge leads to categorical inequality, as the under-resourced children are more likely to attend lower-tracking schools after underperforming in their band allocation examination. They are not “very lazy” or “problematic” as their peers and teachers described them, but rather underprivileged and unsupported by the Hong Kong education system (Spires, 2016, p. 10). Consequently, the banding system reflects and reinforces external socioeconomic inequalities, hindering social mobility for future generations.

Following the theory of categorical inequality, this paper responds to the first research question with the hypothesis that SSPA in Hong Kong, along with other ability-tracking systems, is discriminatory to students with fewer resources, acting as an obstacle to decreasing social mobility.

2.2 Labelling theory, academic experience, and self-concept

The labelling theory was first theorized by Howard Becker in 1963. It describes how the behaviour of individuals and the people surrounding them are shaped according to their social labels (Samkange, 2015). Since bands in SSPA label students’ academic abilities with Band 1, Band 2, and Band 3, the following literature review will explore the extent to which the band labels create a self-fulfilling prophecy for the students, directing their educational achievement via varying levels of access to resources and academic self-concept.

Current approaches to labelling theory examine how labels such as disabled, gifted, deaf, or having speech and language disorders can raise public awareness of different children's needs, potentially attracting sponsorship and funding (Samkange, 2015). However, labelling can also lead to misunderstandings, with other students perceiving favouritism towards "gifted" children, creating stigmatization of learning, which can negatively impact children's learning and development (Samkange, 2015).

In the context of ability tracking, those who support labelling students with bands argue that homogeneous low-achieving classrooms provide students the opportunity to move forward at a comfortable speed without falling behind a fast-paced curriculum (Burris & Welner, 2005). Hence, ability tracking benefits all students, particularly lower-tracking students. However, this argument assumes that the “low achieving students” are academically less capable than Band 1 students, even though they could have been categorized in Band 3 due to their lower access to educational resources. Instead, through the lens of labelling theory, it can be argued that the stereotypes of the bands form the academic differences between students.

One form of inequality would be the teacher’s treatment of students. A research study that compared teachers’ behaviours in different ability-based reading groups discovered that teachers would often call on students in high-ability tracks, but would only select those who raise their hands in low-ability tracks (Eder, 1981). This suggests that teachers are more confident that Band 1 students would make productive contributions to class discussions. As such, they have altered their expectations and attitudes towards students associated with the stereotypes formed by the band labels. This research result is supported by Boaler’s research in UK schools, which observed that teachers would alter class routines after following their expectations formed by the labelling, ignoring their direct observations on individual capabilities (Boaler et al., 2000). When teachers treat students differently following the

labelling theory, students will receive unequal teachings in school that may not necessarily suit their academic capabilities, eventually forming differences in student achievement (Entwistle, 2022).

Beyond teachers' expectations, the curriculums designed for students also vary depending on the allocation band. Some researchers observed that in the United States, curriculums provided to students would have different quality and quantity depending on their tracks (Oakes, 1992). Specifically, the curriculum for upper tracks demonstrates a more extensive range that encourages students to be creative. On the contrary, curriculums for lower tracks tend to be more simplistic and fragmented, with a strong emphasis on discipline (Kelly & Carbonaro, 2012). Boaler's research also reveals that students in higher tracks do not necessarily benefit from their position as they would usually be overwhelmed by the quick pace of instruction and the enormous amount of material covered in class (2000).

Other than external factors such as teachers and curriculums that follow the labelling theory, students themselves are also directly affected by their labels. The labels stuck on students shape their academic self-concepts that dictate their performance in class, such as their classroom engagement and motivation to learn (Prince & Nurius, 2014). According to a teacher who teaches a Band 3 school in Tin Shui Wai,

> "[students] will not think of some professional jobs, like to be a doctor, no, no chance, they understand themselves quite thoroughly. To be an accountant, no, no chance, no chance at all. Because you have to get in the university" (Spires, 2016, p. 11).

As these students are still studying in high school, they have already developed low academic self-concepts. Since student self-efficacy motivates students to put effort and persist in their academic journey, it is expected that Band 3 students would conform to the labels of "lazy" and "more naughty", realizing the self-fulfilling prophecy.

Following the labelling theory, this paper responds to the second research question with the hypothesis that SSPA in Hong Kong, along with other ability-tracking systems around the world, forms inequalities in the quality of education received and students' confidence. These differences would eventually cause a difference in students' academic achievement, further decreasing social mobility.

3. Data and Methods

3.1 Design

To settle the debate on whether tracked schools benefit or harm students, this paper proposes a research study comparing learning effectiveness in tracked versus untracked schools using quantitative and qualitative methods. The study will focus on a 3-week beginner Computer Science summer course for rising Primary 6 students in Hong Kong, divided into four classes: Band 1, Band 2, Band 3, and a mixed group. Factors that contribute to the learning experience of students in a class, including the class's levels of student self-efficacy, teacher attitude, learning outcomes, and learning environments, will be compared to answer the two aforementioned research questions in the following ways:

3.1.1 Categorical inequalities and social mobility:

Existing literature has established a correlation between higher tracks and more powerful family backgrounds, revealing how categorical inequalities are prevalent in ability-tracking systems and hinder social mobility. This leaves the questions: Is ability tracking the problem or just a system reflecting a deeper societal issue? Will there be new categorical inequalities formed after detracking? Is detracking an effective solution for the government to implement or will categorical inequalities continue to exist in the education system nevertheless?

This study aims to answer these questions by comparing the learning experiences of tracked students with those of their untracked peers who performed similarly in the entry band allocation examination. This comparison will reveal the demographic of students who benefit from tracking and the demographic of students whose learning experience is hindered by the ability-tracking system, contributing to the scholarly discussion on whether detracking is an effective solution to reducing categorical inequalities in the education system or not.

3.1.2 Labelling theory, academic experience, and self-concept:

To verify whether placing labels on students will affect their learning experience, the study will compare the factors of a student's learning experience among students of different bands to see how their labels have affected their opportunity to learn. Existing literature shows that ability-tracking systems favour more affluent families by placing them on higher tracks. This second part of the investigation will explore how these categorical inequalities are further exacerbated by the differing learning experiences students encounter across various bands. This study will specifically compare the factors influencing students' learning experiences across the tracked students from different bands. This will be achieved by investigating the below methods:

3.2 Setting

A school is eligible to be the host of this experiment if they are a public government-funded secondary school in Hong Kong. This location allows the summer course to replicate most Hong Kong students' authentic secondary school environment, enabling students and teachers to engage as they would during the academic year.

Conducting the research in the summer ensures that students and teachers can fully dedicate their time to learning and teaching programming, just as they would during the

school year. A three-week duration is sufficient for students to gain a fundamental understanding of Computer Science and for the categorizations to influence their learning.

The participating school would not employ their own teachers for the summer course as the experiment aims to study the behaviours of teachers from a wide range of backgrounds. Instead, three secondary school teachers experienced in teaching Computer Science from each band will be selected around Hong Kong, achieving an even distribution of teacher representation from each type of school, totaling to nine Computer Science teachers. A uniform 3-week curriculum on Computer Science will be introduced to the teachers for them to follow through the summer course. The teachers will be teaching all four classes, but they each will focus on different parts of the curriculum. This is to ensure that all students receive the same teaching from the same teachers.

The curriculum was chosen to be about Computer Science because it is a topic of which most Primary 6 students do not have prior knowledge, being a subject that only secondary students are mandated to learn about in Hong Kong. Students with prior knowledge of Computer Science are ineligible to participate in this study. As such, all students will be able to start from scratch, limiting the influences from their pre-existing educational background in the study results.

In terms of the classes, there will be four different classes each with 24-25 students to imitate the average class size in a Hong Kong secondary school. The classes are made up of rising Primary 6 students who have yet to take their SSPA allocation examinations and hence have not experienced any effects of the ability tracking system yet, but at the same time are mature enough to begin learning topics such as Computer Science.

Before the study, each student will be required to take a standardized examination based on Mathematics that allocates the students into three bands: Band 1, Band 2, and Band 3. 8 students will be randomly selected from each of the bands and be placed in the fourth

class: the mixed class. Other than the mixed class, all other students will be informed which band they were allocated to at the start of the program. Similarly, teachers will only be allowed to know the bands of the students in the unmixed classes.

After every week of the course, each student must fill in a survey to reflect on their performance. Specifically, the survey will ask the student to provide a predicted score for themselves in the final Computer Science examination. Each teacher must also fill in a spreadsheet every week to indicate their predicted score for every student in all four classes. Both the survey and the spreadsheet can be found in ***Appendix One*** and ***Appendix Two***. Videotapes of the classes will be recorded and analysed so each class can be rated based on the level of class participation, as indicated by the number of times students asked questions, answered questions, and were engaged in the class.

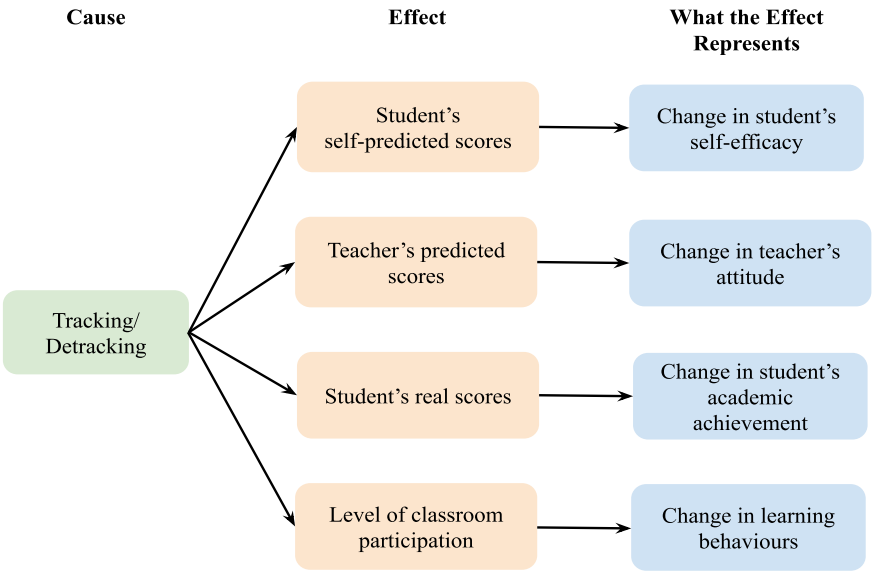

Figure 2. Research Design

3.3 Independent variable

The independent variable in this research is the class that the students are in: Band 1, Band 2, Band 3, or mixed. Students will be initially evenly grouped into these three levels based on their performance on an entry examination, and an equal number of students will be selected from each band to join the mixed class (*see Table 1*).

Allocated Class	Original Band from Entry Examination			Total Students
	Band 1	Band 2	Band 3	
Band 1	25	0	0	25
Band 2	0	25	0	25
Band 3	0	0	25	25
Mixed	8	8	8	24
Total Students	33	33	33	99

Table 1. Distribution of students from each class

As shown above, a total of 99 students are participating in this experiment. There will be a total of four classes, each with 24 or 25 students.

3.4 Dependent variables

The four dependent variables in this experiment can be seen in *Figure 2*, where each orange box is measured to quantify a factor of students' learning experiences, which can be seen in the blue boxes.

The first dependent variable is the ***teacher's attitude towards students***, which reflects the educator's beliefs about their students' capabilities and potential for success. This attitude can be quantitatively assessed through the predicted Computer Science exam scores that the teachers gave to students every day on a spreadsheet, representing teachers' expectations for their students. See ***Appendix Two*** to see how the teachers will provide predicted exam scores.

The second dependent variable is ***student efficacy***, defined as a student's belief in their own ability to succeed in academic tasks (Kennedy, 2009). This will be assessed through surveys after each day of the summer course, where students quantitatively predict their scores out of 100% on the final Computer Science exam. See ***Appendix One*** for an example

of the survey. The self-assessments indicate how students perceive their competence, significantly influencing their motivation and engagement.

The third dependent variable is ***student achievement***, measured by the student's final exam scores after the three-week course. This metric reflects the knowledge of Computer Science gained over the three-week course and helps determine whether their class placement impacted student learning and growth.

The fourth dependent variable is the level of ***class participation***, which will be quantified through a score through the analysis of the video recordings of each class, following the four criteria listed below:

Criterion	Frequency of students asking questions	Frequency of students volunteering to answer questions	Level of side conversations during class
Score	1 - 10	1 - 10	1 - 10

Table 2. Criteria for Class Participation.

These criterion scores will add up to a number that quantifies the level of class participation out of 30. The different numbers can then be compared between the different classes to compare the level of class participation.

3.5 Controlled variables

The study will be conducted within a single ***institution***, a government-funded secondary school, to maintain a consistent school environment. The preferred location is a secondary school to replicate the local secondary school learning environment, which is the level of education that is being tracked. Students entering this location would be more incentivized to engage in school with an authentic learning environment, enabling students and teachers to engage naturally like they would during the academic year. This approach

minimizes variations in resources, facilities, and overall school culture that could influence student learning.

To control ***class environments***, each class will have a similar number of students and comparable classroom settings, reducing the likelihood of unequal attention from teachers and the influence of the classroom environment on students' willingness to learn.

All participating ***students*** are Primary 6 students from Hong Kong, as they have not yet been categorized by the SSPA system. This ensures they are old enough to understand their band designations while not yet having formed strong biases about their self-perception. To accurately compare academic abilities, all students will complete an entry programming examination to verify they have no prior knowledge of programming.

To minimize variability in individual teaching styles, all ***instructors*** will teach all four classes, allowing the reuse of course materials. This setup will highlight any differences in attitudes towards students.

The ***curriculum*** will be standardized across all classes, ensuring that every student is exposed to the same content and learning objectives. This control allows for a focused analysis of teacher attitudes and student self-perceptions without interference from differing educational materials or methods.

All classes will take the same ***entrance and final exams*** under consistent conditions, including identical formats and scoring rubrics. This ensures fairness in assessment, enabling accurate comparisons of student performance across different groups.

3.6 Methodological approaches

3.6.1 Categorical inequalities and social mobility:

As mentioned before, the first part of this investigation is to study the extent to which the Hong Kong Secondary School Places Allocation System forms categorical inequalities

that hinder social mobility. This study achieves this by comparing the learning experiences of tracked students, in regards to the four orange factors listed in Figure 2, with those of their untracked peers who performed similarly in the entry band allocation examination to see how the establishment of an ability-tracking system altered students' learning experiences across the bands. This will be done through the following methods:

1. Comparison of the students' self-predicted scores between tracked and detracked students from each Band.
2. Comparison of the teacher's predicted scores between tracked and detracked students from each Band.
3. Comparison of the final Computer Science examination scores between tracked and detracked students from each Band.
4. Comparison of the level of classroom participation between tracked and detracked students from each Band.

3.6.2 Labelling theory, academic experience, and self-concept:

To investigate the extent to which labels assigned to students through the Hong Kong Secondary School Places Allocation System influence their academic experience and self-concept, the study will compare the academic self-concept, teachers' attitudes, academic outcomes, and classroom environment among tracked students of different bands, as shown in Figure 2. This will be achieved by investigating the below methods:

1. Comparison of the students' self-predicted scores between the tracked students from different Bands.
2. Comparison of the teacher's predicted scores between the tracked students from different Bands.

3. Comparison of the final Computer Science examination scores between the tracked students from different Bands.
4. Comparison of the level of classroom participation between the tracked students from different Bands.

3.7 Limitations

While this research design can provide insight into the extent to which ability-tracking influences student's learning experience, there are some limitations to the study that must be acknowledged.

For one, the surveys (*see* ***Appendix One***) sent to students may not accurately represent the students' real self-efficacy, as students may feel pressure to present themselves in a certain way, such as appearing overly humble or excessively intelligent. This can lead to responses that do not accurately reflect their true self-perception. Similarly, teachers might also exhibit biases, aiming to appear fair in their assessments and interactions. Despite these potential biases, investigating students' and teachers' predictions about the students' performance remains valuable, as trends and patterns between the classes may still emerge.

Additionally, conducting the study within a single school may skew the results. In Hong Kong, students typically attend schools where their peers are in the same band as them. So, for instance, a student who excels in a Band 2 school might have higher ambition and self-esteem due to their performance relative to their classmates. However, in this study, when this student is placed alongside Band 1 students, their confidence may diminish due to comparative performance pressures. As such, this setting may limit the representativeness of the findings for Hong Kong's education system. However, this controlled setting provides a convenient framework for the study, allowing for better control of variables such as teachers and classroom environments, thereby enhancing the accuracy of the research. Therefore,

while it is important to acknowledge this limitation, it is still worthwhile positioning the investigation in a singular school.

4. Discussion

While ability tracking is not the root cause of socioeconomic inequalities, it exacerbates social disparities through categorical inequalities and creates more differences between the tracks as explained by labelling theory. This paper proposes a study to examine the effects that tracking and detracking can have on students' self-efficacy, teachers' confidence, academic performance, and classroom participation in the context of Hong Kong. While this paper explores ability tracking through the lens of SSPA, the discussion on ability tracking's inability to provide equal learning opportunities extends to educational systems around the world.

The literature review reveals that the problem of categorical inequalities stems not from the ability-tracking system itself, but from its reinforcement of socioeconomic disparities. This exacerbates social mobility by further limiting opportunities for under-resourced children. Consequently, the anticipated benefits of detracking may be undermined by the capacity of resource-rich families to exploit alternative avenues for advantage. So, while this paper cannot provide a definite answer to policymakers and scholars on whether detracking should be implemented in Hong Kong and around the world - though the implementation of the proposed study may provide a direction -, this paper highlights that, ultimately, addressing categorical inequalities necessitates a focus on the root causes of social inequality, particularly the lack of support and equity for certain demographics. In the case of Hong Kong, this could involve supporting non-Chinese students in Hong Kong who face language barriers in entrance exams or building more schools in rural areas to ensure better educational access for students in the New Territories.

Following this paper's discussion, educators in Hong Kong and around the world must recognize that lower-track students possess potential and be mindful of the categorical inequalities that may have influenced their band placements. These placements do not fully represent students' academic abilities, and teachers should approach all students with equal confidence. Otherwise, they could potentially hinder their students' learning opportunities by stereotyping them and lowering their confidence.

Similarly, school leaders need to address their biases and eliminate differences in curricula across bands, fostering a supportive environment for students across all bands. This is particularly important in Band 3 schools, where leaders should acknowledge their students' potential and work to improve the school curriculum and classroom environments, rather than assuming they are destined for lower-income careers.

In regards to researchers in the education field, this paper proposes that while ability-tracking systems form categorical inequalities by acting as a catalyst for those in power to hoard opportunities, these social inequalities will persist despite detracking. The natural next step of this research is to implement the research proposed in this paper as well as analyze existing detracked systems around the world to evaluate the effectiveness of removing ability-tracking in providing equitable education opportunities to all.

As this paper concludes the discussion on ability-tracking systems' inability to provide equitable opportunity for all students, new questions arise: Are categorical inequalities an inevitable facet of educational systems? If so, what policies can be most effectively employed to mitigate these disparities?

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8. Appendix

Appendix One - Survey to Students

This is the survey sent to students after every day of the summer course.

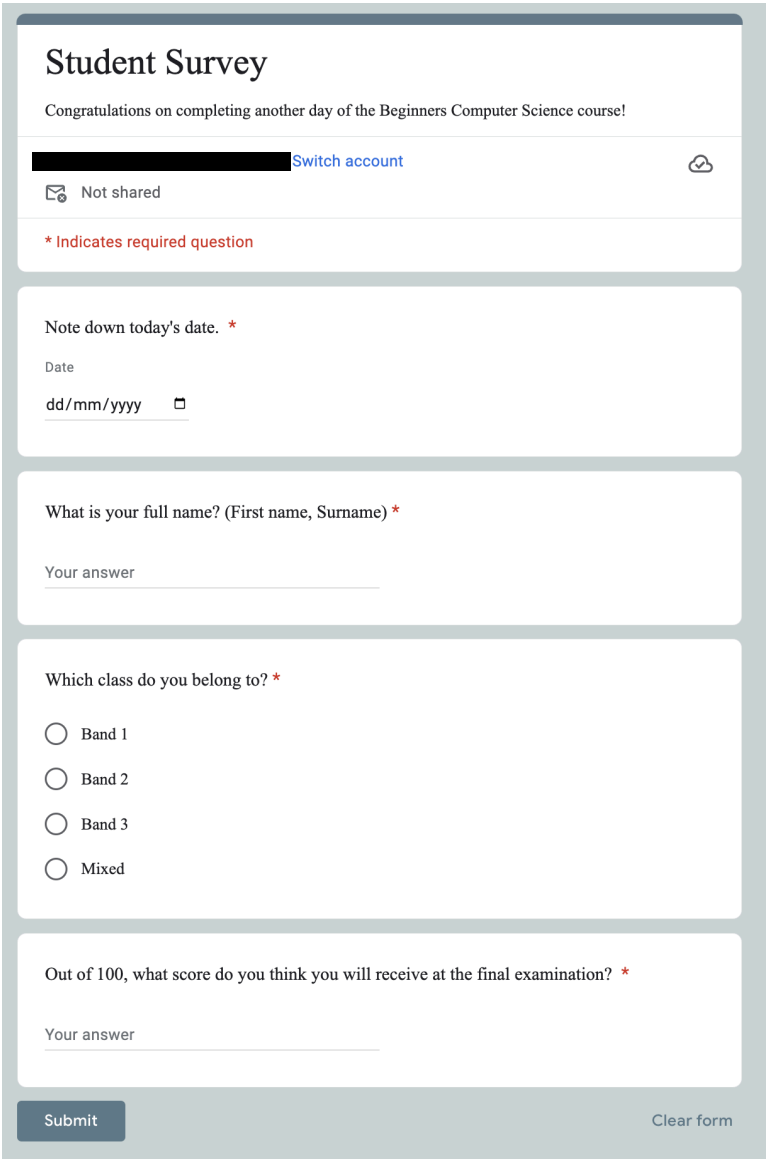

Figure 3. Student Survey.

Appendix Two - Teacher's Spreadsheet

This is an example of what the teacher's daily spreadsheet might look like:

Student Evaluation Sheet

Student	Class	Prediction on July 1	Prediction on July 2	Prediction on July 3	Prediction on July 4	Prediction on July 5
Alison King	Band 1	90	100	96	92	92
Penelope Wong	Band 1	70	84	87	82	77
Cassandra Williams	Band 1	80	90	85	88	86
Sophie Allison	Band 1	80	73	73	78	76
Jack Marins	Band 2	85	67	74	75	79
Frank Mccarthy	Band 2	50	57	49	51	48
Jonty Daniel	Band 2	70	76	67	65	68
Felix Guo	Band 2	95	92	96	100	96
Ivan Cheung	Band 3	60	61	68	72	69
Faris Chaney	Band 3	60	71	74	74	76
Rex Bryan	Band 3	70	75	77	79	83
Junaid Gibbons	Band 3	50	69	69	69	74
Lochlan Song	Mixed	80	74	77	81	78
Aleesha Murphy	Mixed	60	79	79	84	82
Khadija Jacobs	Mixed	90	98	89	91	95
Liana Chong	Mixed	60	44	44	47	44

Figure 4. Teacher's Spreadsheet.