

**Project:** Analysing English learners' experiences in the transition from senior secondary mainstream and shadow education to university studies

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**Abstract:**

The study aimed to understand first-year university students' English learning experiences in their senior secondary school years, and the extent to which their English proficiency meets the language needs for university studies. First-year university students from the local curriculum in the University of Hong Kong were invited to respond to a questionnaire about their English learning background. Among the 1,016 respondents, 66 with diverse backgrounds were recruited to participate in two one-to-one semi-structured interviews. These participants reflected on their English learning experiences at school and, if any, private tutoring; and evaluated how such experiences impacted their use of English at university. The findings reveal that students in general only slightly agreed the learning objectives in the secondary English language curriculum were met. Compared with school teachers, students perceived that private tutors were only better in helping them with examinations. A weak positive correlation was shown between students' secondary school English results and their university English course grades, and several challenges in learning English in the transition were found. One evident aspect is how to properly cite academic sources in writing and speaking. The participants struggled with selecting suitable texts from sources, paraphrasing them, and using them to support their arguments. They also perceived a need to abandon the formulaic expressions they recited for the secondary school examination in university. This study reveals gaps between secondary school English and university English and offers insight into what first-year students need when they transition from secondary school to university studies.

**Keywords:**

English for academic purposes; English learning experiences; private supplementary tutoring; senior secondary curriculum; transition to higher education