

Research and Development Projects 2021-22**Dissemination article**

Project Name : **Development of a school-based assessment of Core Academic English Language Skill Instrument (CALS-I) for measuring Hong Kong secondary students' reading comprehension ability from different language backgrounds**

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Academic language proficiency can be conceptualised as the ability of learners to effectively understand, use, and communicate in the language used in an academic setting. Research has shown that students who are proficient in conversational language still face challenges when learning from academic texts. A possible reason might be that these students have an insufficient level of academic language proficiency. There is no shortage of research evidence demonstrating that students who lack adequate academic language proficiency are likely at risk of academic failure due to their struggles in comprehending daily learning tasks during their early schooling years. Despite the broad consensus that academic language proficiency plays a vital role in school learning, there is a lack of research delineating the specific academic language skills that warrant pedagogical attention in the context of secondary education in Hong Kong.

With generous financial support from the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research (SCOLAR), this research project developed the Bilingual Students Academic Language Skills Scale (BSALS-S) specifically tailored for secondary education in Hong Kong. The BSALS-S is informed by a theoretical framework consisting of eight domains (see Figure 1), a comprehensive examination of Hong Kong textbooks and curricula across all secondary

subjects, and group consultations with experienced secondary education teachers. The Rasch model was employed to ascertain the reliability of the BSALS-S with data from 305 secondary school test takers. The results revealed a satisfactory model fit with a great variability in the level of difficulty of scale items and in participants' BSALS-S scores. This suggests that the BSALS-S encompasses a diverse range of item difficulties and therefore is able to capture a wide range of skill levels among the test takers.

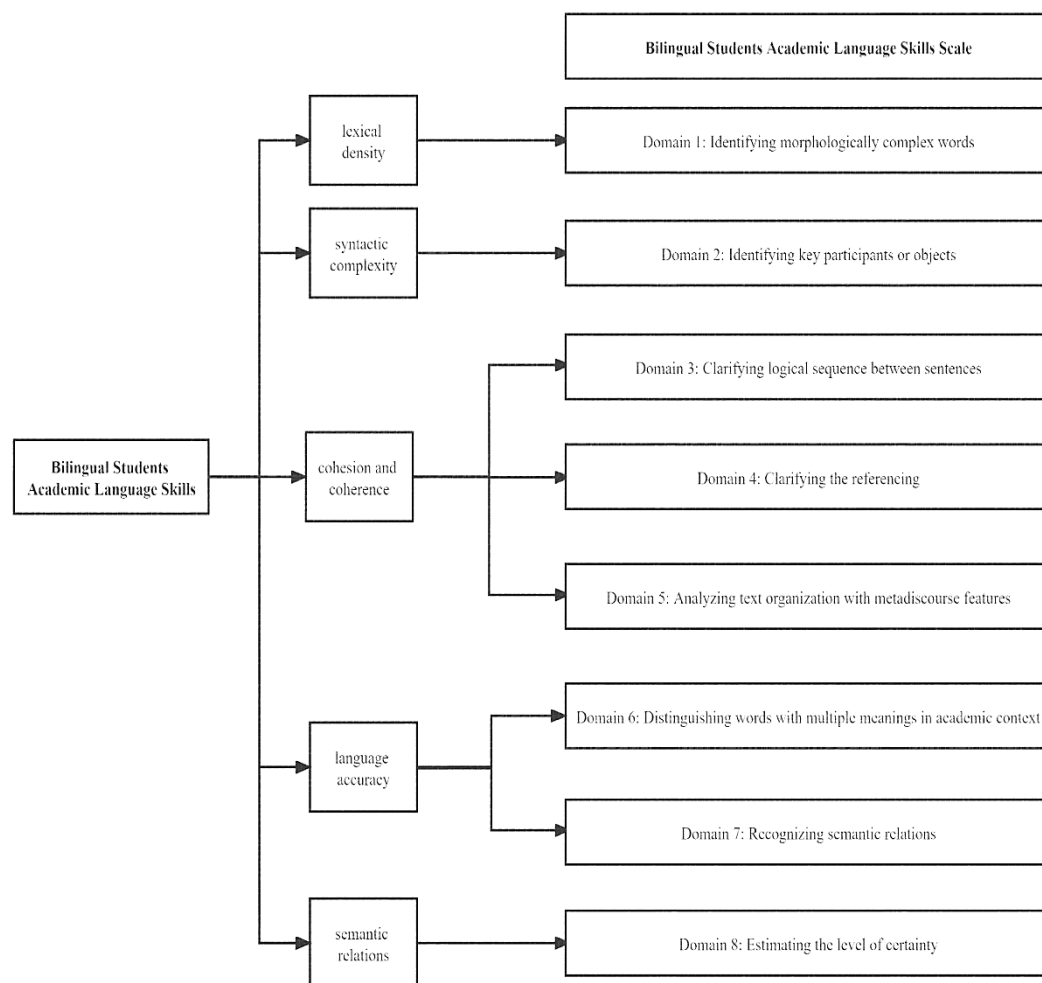


Figure 1. Theoretical framework of the BSALS-S

Furthermore, we invited a total of 2,500 secondary school students from diverse language learning backgrounds in Hong Kong to undertake the BSALS-S along with a reading comprehension assessment. They were drawn from 12 different secondary schools, comprising six English Medium of Instruction (EMI) schools and six Chinese Medium of Instruction (CMI)

schools. The students belonged to various language background groups: local Cantonese speakers, Mandarin speakers, and non-Chinese minority backgrounds. Student recruitment involved reaching out to a cross-section of schools to ensure representation of diverse medium of instruction and varied socio-economic statuses. As a result, the selected schools represented lower, middle, and higher socio-economic statuses, respectively. The sample was balanced in terms of students' gender, ethnic background, family socioeconomic status, and first language. Among the collected data, 2,249 responses were deemed valid, representing a data validity rate of approximately 90.0%. The results of the correlation analysis showed a significant positive relationship between academic language skills measured by the BSALS-S and reading comprehension scores. The linear regression analysis also revealed that academic language skills measured by the BSALS-S significantly predicted reading comprehension scores.

Overall, the data supports the validation of the BSALS-S as an effective tool for assessing the academic language skills of secondary school students in Hong Kong. It is advisable for frontline secondary school teachers in Hong Kong to incorporate the BSALS-S into the curriculum to assess and monitor students' academic language proficiency levels over time. Its use can provide valuable information about students' academic language skills, which in turn enables frontline secondary school teachers to identify areas of strength and areas that require further development. Frontline teachers are also encouraged to draw on the specific domains of the BSALS-S to provide targeted, explicit instruction for enhancing learners' academic language skills. It is highly advisable for frontline secondary school teachers to visit our website (<https://jpsummerintern2021.wixsite.com/scolar/resources>) to view the eight-minute dissemination video to know more about our research project and to download the BSALS-S for use.