

香港資優教育學苑  
The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education

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## RESEARCH BRIEF

### A Study on the Experience with Early Admission

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**Objective.** The study is to understand the academic profile of early admission applicants and their experiences with early admission. In particular, we are interested in the process of early admission, what happened thereafter and the factors/parties involved in the process.

**Method.** The study is purely qualitative in nature. We invited six pairs of parent-students who attempted early admission to an individual, semi-structured interview. They were chosen based on the criterion that the children concerned had either applied to university or been admitted to university via early admission. Five of the six pairs accepted the invitation, while the parent of the sixth pair chose not to participate. Interview recordings were later transcribed into interview notes for thematic analysis, in which codes were identified and grouped into themes. The research officers discussed the discrepancies in their findings until consensus on the themes was reached.

**Results.** Demographic information of each of the interviewees is presented in Appendix. Highlights of findings are as follows:

1. Early admission was not the acceleration strategy to which the students first resorted. Most of the students mentioned in the interview that they had participated in some off-site gifted programmes, including the Education Program for Gifted Youth (EPGY) and/or those offered by the Center for Talented Youth (CTY), the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST) and The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education, at younger ages before considering early admission. Some even skipped grade/subject and had some experience in learning together with senior students.
2. Some of the interviewed students initiated the idea of early admission themselves, while in other cases, the idea was suggested by parents or professors. Application for early admission was mostly an unplanned decision. Yet there existed consensus between the parents and students in all of the cases that high school curriculum did not meet their (children's) needs, and that early admission was something worth trying.
3. In most of the cases, the application required submission of an online application together with supporting documents (e.g. personal statement, transcripts, letter of recommendation, testimonials, and public examination results). It was followed by an interview with staff from

the admission office and/or faculty members mainly focusing on the applicant's understanding of the subject applied, and more so on the applicant's mental maturity for undergraduate studies. An offer would be granted in late-August if the application was deemed successful.

4. A prominent theme in the interviewees' language is that **both parents and children struggled in the application process**. The source of struggles included lack of relevant information and inability to meet deadlines. Early admission in Hong Kong is rare, and often dealt on a case-by-case basis. Little relevant information, if any, existed for their reference. As a result, it was easy for them to miss deadlines, which could be detrimental to their applications. In one of the cases, for instance, the student's application to a local university was declined because it was submitted after the deadline for the non-Joint University Programmes Admissions System (JUPAS) application. Late notification of the application result was another struggle. All of the respondents we interviewed said that they received their offers in late August, when they had already been preparing for the upcoming semester in high school. The notification only allowed little time for making the final decision and complicated the children's transition to university.
5. Parents were also concerned about their children's mental maturity. As one of the parents shared that she was a bit worried that her child would have difficulty making friends in university. However, the children were a lot more optimistic in this regard. They devised their own strategies to compensate for not being able to attend orientation camps and make friends. These strategies included arriving at the lecture theatre earlier to talk to other early birds and participating in societies and orchestra. Yet one of the interviewed students who did not go through early admission eventually noted that there would have been a loss of high school memories if he had opted for the early admission. It was a trade-off that he considered seriously during the process.
6. The language of the interviewees revealed another theme that **parents heavily invested their time and effort in the process**. Because information regarding early admission is not widely available, everything is left in the dark for parents and their children to explore. As a result, a considerable time is spent on communicating with schools, the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA), universities and the Education Bureau for special consideration, clarification of procedures and issues to note. For example, in one of the cases, the parents whose child took a total of seven subjects (combined) in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) in three attempts at the age of 12, 13 and 14 were not aware of the fact that only the results of six or more subjects (combined) in HKCEE made in the first two attempts would be considered in JUPAS application. As a result, they spent a tremendous amount of time to communicate with relevant parties for special consideration. The respondent parents also had to assist their children in conducting information search and preparing application packages, not to mention their supporting financially and in visa application (if they aimed for overseas studies).
7. Across all of the cases, there appears the third emerging theme that **the struggles and investment were paid off by the benefits of early admission**. Despite the struggles, time and effort involved, benefits to the students who went through the early admission were

evident to their parents and the students themselves. They reported more intellectual challenges at university that could fulfill their intellectual curiosity. Meanwhile, there was more access to knowledge in universities, because they had libraries with a rich and extensive collection, and professors from different specialties for discussion. The interviewed students enjoyed the freedom of course selection at university and the availability of diverse courses within a discipline. And last but not least they could meet senior peers who shared similar interests with them to hold academic discussion and enjoy leisure activities together.

**Way forward.** With the belief that sufficient case review can benefit parents of gifted children who are interested in early admission, we plan to extend the project in the following three dimensions:

1. To gather more early admission cases into our database;
2. To enquire universities' admission offices about how they handle early admission cases; and
3. To compare and contrast local early admission cases with overseas ones.

Early admission is not for everyone. Students need to be both intellectually and psychologically ready. In fact, some of our interviewees decided to stop pursuing early admission and focused on other activities, such as research work and student activities. These stories are also valuable to be shared with students and parents as they provide a different point of view.

In sum, this database will contain information regarding the application policies/procedures of early admission, as well as students' and parents' experiences throughout the process. We believe the database would be useful for parents and students who seek information of early admission, and may assist them in considering if early admission is an appropriate and viable academic option for the students.

**Issues to note.** This is a qualitative study from which we seek insight rather than generalisability. Every gifted student is unique in terms of their characteristics and their surrounding context, and thus their experience with early admission is qualitatively different. While it is tempting to expect a gifted child/student to go through a similar early admission experience described above, readers should refrain from formulating stereotypes of early admission. Should readers have concerns regarding early admission of their gifted children/students, please consult education professionals for advice.

### **Acknowledgement**

We are grateful to the students and their parents who participated in this study.

### **Contact information**

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## Appendix. Profiles of students interviewed

	Student A	Student B	Student C	Student D	Student E	Student F
<b>Age at early admission</b>	13	15	14	14	17	n/a
<b>Types of acceleration experienced:</b>						
<b>Early admission</b>		•	•	•	•	
<b>Grade-skipping</b>		•	•		•	
<b>Subject-skipping</b>			•	•		
<b>Advanced Placement (AP)</b>				•		
<b>Mentoring</b>		•				
<b>Off-site support</b>	•	•	•	•	•	•
<b>University and faculty enrolled</b>	n/a	Faculty of Science at a local university	Faculty of Engineering at a local university	Faculty of Science at a local university	Faculty of Science at a local university	Faculty of Science at a local university
<b>Remarks</b>	Student A received offers from overseas universities but decided not to take any.	-	-	-	-	-