

Title: To what extent do disposable plastics in the sea impact Hong Kong citizens and marine life?

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Part 1: Team Element (300 words) (GROUP)

Topic Area	Water, Food and Agriculture
Research Question	To what extent do disposable plastics in the sea impact Hong Kong citizens and marine life?
Aims & Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a thorough comprehension of negative effects of disposable plastics • Spread awareness of how disposable plastic impacts marine life and humans • Make a direct contribution towards improving the issue of plastic in the seas
Description/ evidence of the outcome	<p>Our group completed direct service by conducting a beach cleanup which was carried out with students not in our group as well so we could collect more plastic. Our group also carried out advocacy work through Instagram to spread awareness about the problem of plastic pollution in the ocean, which gained over a hundred followers over the span of a few weeks.</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: flex-start;"> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>A team member at the beach cleanup</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Plastic collected at the clean-up</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Our instagram account</p> </div> </div>
Outcome link to Cross-Cultur	Before we decided on our outcome, our group carried out cross-cultural research to improve our understanding of this multifaceted issue.

al Research

We had already known that plastic pollution is a global problem that affects people and ecosystems in devastating ways, such as disrupting the food chain and threatening human health (Andrews, 2012). However, we also learnt new facts like 5.2 million plastic bottles are thrown away everyday in Hong Kong (Ng, 2017). After educating ourselves, we were inspired to work towards solving this issue.

We originally wanted to make a statue out of the waste we found at the beach cleanup to display at school, and show everyone the impact of our single-use plastic on our environment in a striking way. However with Covid-19 shutting down schools, this was infeasible. Instead we conducted a beach cleanup so we could make a direct contribution. We also used our Instagram account to spread lasting awareness amongst the public, as we realised that raising awareness is the first step in making change.

Part 2: Personal Element (1048 words) (INDIVIDUAL)**Strengths and limitations of outcome in achieving the project aims**

I think our team succeeded in understanding the negative effects disposable plastics have on humans and the environment. I learnt how the level of single-use plastics in our oceans has escalated recently (Adyel, 2020), which fascinated me and motivated me to continue researching. We conducted extensive cross-cultural research so we could communicate the severity of the issue to others.

We also raised awareness through Instagram successfully, as our Instagram insights showed us our posts reached nearly 200 accounts. We posted infographics and photos of our beach cleanup to show our followers how they could help the issue. We also used a friendly tone in our captions to make people more engaged with our content. However, our followers were mostly other Island School students, so next time we could raise more awareness by using hashtags in our captions so others can discover our posts more easily.

Furthermore, we carried out a beach cleanup which directly contributed towards reducing the plastic in our oceans. However, the impact of this outcome was negligible as a beach cleanup is a "band-aid solution" and doesn't create lasting change. Our impact could've been larger if we had focused on addressing sources of plastic pollution, such as supermarkets (Earth.org, 2020).

Strengths and limitations of the work process

One of our group's strengths was time management. At the start of the project, we created a planning framework so we could manage our time as productively as possible. Working together was initially awkward as I didn't know my team members, but the strict timeline forced us to cooperate, developing our communication skills. Everybody was interested in learning more about single-use plastics, which motivated us to adhere to the timeline. Eventually, we carried out our outcome in early December, several weeks before the mid-January deadline.

However, during online learning, I was distracted easily as there was nobody around me to encourage me to stay focused. I encountered this problem in all of my lessons, and I found myself constantly doing the lesson's work after school, which affected my performance in other classes. Since then, I have downloaded SelfControl, an app that blocks all social media on my laptop, in order to limit my distractions.

Benefits & challenges of working in a team

One of the benefits of working in a team was that it developed our collaboration skills. Initially, a lack of communication between our team members meant we all researched the same cultural perspective of global causes of plastics in the ocean. As the project progressed, I started delegating tasks each lesson to increase our productivity.

However, working in a team was challenging during online learning as everybody was physically apart, and we all had our cameras and microphones turned off on Zoom calls. This made it easier for some group members to not participate in conversations. I tried to resolve this by asking specific members of the group questions so they'd know I was addressing them, but I was still met with monosyllabic answers. I ultimately realised that some team members simply worked better by themselves, and that my constant barrage of questions may have hindered their work processes. Next time, I will balance the time evenly between group discussions and individual work so everybody can show their strengths.

Strengths and weaknesses of own performance as a team member

As the sole Year Eleven in my team, I took on the role of the leader. I encouraged my team members to contribute and to come to me if they had questions. This helped bring our team members closer together as a supportive environment was created, and we started communicating more effectively.

However, sometimes I prioritised my other responsibilities over this team project, which meant I wasn't always as focused as I should have been and thus induced a larger workload for my group members. The beach cleanup was mostly planned by the Year

Tens, and although it was very successful, I still should have played a more active role in its conception as I was the team leader. Leaders should be fully committed to the project, or else the team members will not be devoted either. I have since tried to support my teammates with developing their reflections because I have more experience in this area. Next time, I will be a more hands-on leader from the start and fully dedicate myself to a project.

What has been learned about different cultural perspectives

A particularly shocking fact I learnt from my secondary research was that 90% of Hong Kongers started bringing their own reusable bags after a tax on plastic bags was enacted ("Research findings", n.d.). This surprised me because it shows even though the public supports solutions to the problem of single-use plastic, the issue is still as prominent as ever, and further action is needed if any change will be made.

Our group reached out to [Plastic Free Seas](#), a local NGO, and learnt more about the problem locally. I had previously thought that throwing plastic away was ineffective, but the NGO told us that Hong Kong has sanitary landfills and so the landfilled waste does not end up back in the environment (Plastic Free Seas, personal communication, November 2, 2020). This influenced my opinion as I realised the problem of single-use plastic in our oceans differs between countries, so if I wanted to understand more about their effect in Hong Kong, I had to do more primary research as much of the secondary research was set within a Western context.

I also interviewed my classmates and found that although most students understood disposable plastic in the ocean has significant consequences on the environment, a significant proportion didn't know how they could help solve the problem. Our primary research directed our outcome as we created infographics that explained what our peers didn't know much about. However, I feel if we also surveyed different demographics and interviewed organisations who support the production of single-use plastics, we would've understood our research question more thoroughly.

Practical skills that have been developed

From this project, I learned more about the problem of disposable plastic, became better at collaborating with people I'm unfamiliar with, and developed my digital skills as I made infographics. One valuable lesson I learned is that being an effective leader is not limited to setting a good example for your group members but also constantly supporting them and encouraging them to voice their opinions. In the future, I will volunteer for more leadership roles so I can gain more experience in leading.

Bibliography

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