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Admitting Ethnic Minority Kindergarteners: Overcoming Challenges and Identifying Opportunities

Executive Summary

June 2022

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Background

1. Various organisations and researchers have pointed out the unwillingness of many kindergartens to admit ethnic minority (EM) students due to various gaps in policy, financial provision, and kindergartens' capabilities and approaches. However, few have taken a more in-depth look at the approaches and strengths of kindergartens towards overcoming the obstacles and enabling success for all.
2. Since the 2019/20 academic year, the Government has introduced a five-tiered subsidy for kindergartens joining the Kindergarten Education Scheme (KES) according to the number of non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students admitted. Thus, the School of Education and Languages, Hong Kong Metropolitan University, and the Hong Kong Child-Rity Association were funded by the Equal Opportunities Commission to conduct this research project on “Admitting Ethnic Minority Kindergarteners: Overcoming Challenges and Identifying Opportunities” to:
 - explore the reasons for kindergartens admitting/not admitting EM children in the face of the changing policy;
 - understand the strengths of kindergartens in admitting and supporting EM students, in terms of their Capability, Aspirations, Resources, and Engagement; and
 - identify the strategies and opportunities of kindergartens of different subsidy tiers in working with EM students.
3. To achieve these objectives, we collected the views of participants from 161 kindergartens participating in the KES in the 2020/21 academic year via an online questionnaire survey between May and July 2021. The sample represented nearly a quarter of all KES kindergartens in Hong Kong. About 70% of the responding kindergartens had worked with EM students and parents in the academic year. Follow-up telephone interviews were also conducted in July 2021 with representatives of 10 kindergartens purposely selected, which provided a variety of perspectives and experiences.

Key Findings

4. Our findings show that the Government's new subsidy for kindergartens admitting NCS students did help increase a higher level of acceptance of EM students among Hong Kong kindergartens. Among the 107 kindergartens that reported they had EM students, about half (49.5%) agreed that they had admitted more EM students due to the increased financial subsidy. Among the 46 kindergartens that did not have EM students, most (67.4%) did not receive any applications from EM students, or the EM families rejected the places they were offered (10.9%). Only 3 kindergartens indicated that they would not consider admitting EM students. All 3 of them pointed out that their staff's English proficiency, school-based resources, and training in handling EM students were insufficient. Noteworthy, 2 of these respondents were unaware of the five-tiered subsidy which has been introduced by the Government since 2019/20.
5. In terms of Capability, we found that the responding kindergartens recognised their various capabilities in attracting and supporting EM students, including their visions and missions, the programme modes they offered, and their school-based curricula (*M*s between 4.17 and 4.83 out of a maximum of 6, $\geq 80.8\%$ agreed). However, Chi-square tests and one-way ANOVAs revealed significant differences among different tiers of kindergartens in terms of their locations ($\chi^2 = 13.814, p = .017; F = 3.283, p = .008$); experiences ($\chi^2 = 12.827, p = .012; F = 4.472, p = .002$) and training ($\chi^2 = 13.642, p = .009; F = 2.705, p = .035$) in supporting EM students; and the availability of EM staff members to provide a helpful hand to students ($\chi^2 = 10.852, p = .028; F = 4.963, p = .003$) and parents ($\chi^2 = 9.845, p = .043; F = 5.742, p = .001$). Post hoc Tukey's tests showed that kindergartens with more EM students (16 or above; i.e., Tier 4 and Tier 5 kindergartens) were more likely to have the above advantages.
6. Concerning Aspirations of kindergartens in different tiers, almost all of our respondents agreed that cultivating a racially inclusive environment was essential to the development and growth of both EM and ethnic Chinese students, teachers' professional development, home-school relationships, and the overall development of the kindergartens (*M*s between 4.86 and 5.32, $\geq 93.2\%$ agreed). They were also willing to put more effort into teaching, administration, and staff training (*M*s between 4.34 and 4.91, $\geq 88.6\%$ agreed). While no

significant differences in Aspirations were found between kindergartens with and without EM students except in their activeness in recruiting EM students ($\chi^2 = 10.096, p = .001$), their positive attitudes were maintained by the availability of Government subsidies to a certain extent.

7. Regarding Resources, our respondents from kindergartens with EM students commonly saw the Government ($M = 4.45, 89.1\%$ agreed) and EM parents ($M = 4.21, 76.5\%$ agreed) as the most prominent resource providers. However, they were ambivalent about the likelihood of receiving support from ethnic Chinese parents ($M = 3.76, 62.1\%$ agreed), social service organisations ($M = 3.60, 58.5\%$ agreed) and tertiary institutions ($M = 3.49, 51.1\%$ agreed). They generally did not think they could receive support from other kindergartens ($M = 3.03, 35.1\%$ agreed), primary or secondary schools ($M = 2.54, 21.3\%$ agreed), and commercial organisations ($M = 2.47, 15.1\%$ agreed). When asked whether the overall support was sufficient, they remained relatively neutral ($M = 3.59, 57.1\%$ agreed). Those who thought the support was not enough especially hoped to receive more resources from the Government (94.7%), social service organisations (84.2%), and tertiary institutions (50.0%) for different types of support.
8. In terms of Engagement, kindergartens with EM students typically (97.8%) involved EM and ethnic Chinese students in the same classroom activities. They also provided additional support to EM students (98.9%) and their parents (94.4%). Although all were likely to use the subsidy to purchase teaching materials (overall: 80.0%) and organise racial inclusive activities (overall: 64.4%), kindergartens with 8 or more EM students (i.e., Tiers 3 to 5) often ($\geq 73\%$) hired a full-time teaching staff member to provide additional support with the more generous funding support. In contrast, their peers with fewer EM students tended to spend the subsidies on purchasing external services (including document translation services, Tier 1: 48.1%, Tier 2: 58.8%; and other supporting services, Tier 1: 25.9%, Tier 2: 47.1%) and hiring part-time teaching staff (Tier 1: 37.0%, Tier 2: 64.7%). Respondents commonly agreed that supporting EM students and parents helped increase their Capabilities (90.8%), Aspirations (97.7%), and Resources (88.4%). Nonetheless, they ranked the lack of human resources as their top obstacle, and most of the time, they had to rely on themselves to overcome any difficulties.

Recommendations

9. The research team recognises and appreciates the Government's increased financial support for kindergartens and considers it essential to encourage acceptance of EM students among Hong Kong kindergartens. However, we recommend that additional assistance could be provided for kindergartens on a need basis with relatively little experience working with EM students to enable them to establish the groundwork for promoting racial harmony. We also suggest the Government enhance its promotion of the new five-tiered subsidy among kindergartens, particularly among those without EM students at the moment, so that they would know about the new funding opportunity.
10. In addition to funding, pedagogical and resource support is also very important. We realise that kindergartens, the Government, and community sectors are, in fact, providing support of different natures to EM students. However, we opine that it would be helpful to assist kindergartens to develop a supportive network with other kindergartens, schools, social service and commercial organisations to utilise community resources better. We also recommend that the Government improves the accessibility of reference materials and resources for all kindergartens through different electronic means.
11. It is understandable for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and research institutions to target mainly kindergartens with a higher proportion of EM students. Nevertheless, with more and more kindergartens starting to admit these students, perhaps more attention should be placed on kindergartens with fewer EM students (i.e., below 16 EM students).