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## **Research by Hong Kong Metropolitan University and Hong Kong Child-riety Association finds that government funding encourages kindergartens to admit ethnic minority students**

Since the 2019/20 academic year, the Government has subsidized kindergartens under the Kindergarten Education Scheme (KES) to encourage local kindergartens to admit ethnic minority (EM) students. In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the scheme, the School of Education and Languages of Hong Kong Metropolitan University (HKMU) and the Hong Kong Child-riety Association (HKCRA) jointly conducted a research project titled “Admitting Ethnic Minority Kindergarteners: Overcoming Challenges and Identifying Opportunities”. HKMU and the HKCRA released the research findings today (23 June), which revealed that half of the kindergartens interviewed admitted more EM students because of the new subsidy. It also found that kindergartens typically involved EM students and ethnic Chinese students in the same classroom activities, but many kindergartens find the lack of human resources to be the biggest obstacle in admitting EM students.

The study, funded by the Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC), was conducted from May to July 2021 and involved interviews with 161 kindergartens that had joined the KES. Follow-up telephone interviews were also conducted with representatives of 10 selected kindergartens in July 2021.

This project is the first academic study adopting the Strength-based Approach to review how kindergartens provide education and care for EM kindergarten students under the new subsidy. The findings will help improve training and support for kindergarten teachers, as well as provide information to facilitate relevant policies for young children of different ethnicities.

### **Key findings and analysis**

1. Among the 107 kindergartens that reported that they had EM students, about half (49.5%) agreed that they had admitted more EM students because of 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 three kindergartens indicated that they would not consider admitting EM students. It was noted that two of these respondents were unaware of the five-tier subsidy introduced by the Government.
2. In terms of Capability, the report found that the responding kindergartens recognized their various capabilities in attracting and supporting EM students, such as their mission and values, school-

based curriculum and curriculum models. However, kindergartens with more EM students (16 EM students or more, Tier 4 to 5) were more likely to think their location and experience in supporting EM students helped attract EM students. They also believed having EM teachers and staff to support students and parents contributed to being able to admit more EM students.

3. Concerning the Aspirations of kindergartens, almost all the respondents agreed that they were willing to admit and support EM students, and there were no significant differences found among kindergartens with and without EM students. However, kindergartens with EM students were evidently more proactive in recruiting EM students, and their positive attitude was supported by the availability of Government subsidies to a certain extent.
4. Regarding Resources, respondents from kindergartens with EM students commonly saw the Government (89.1%) and EM parents (76.5%) as the most prominent resource providers. However, they were ambivalent about the likelihood of receiving support from other kindergartens (35.1%) or organizations. Only half of the respondents believed that the overall support was sufficient.
5. With respect to Engagement, kindergartens with EM students typically involved EM and local Chinese students in the same classroom activities (97.8%). Moreover, most kindergartens responded that they provided additional support to EM students (98.9%) and their parents (94.4%). The respondents commonly agreed that supporting EM students and their parents helped increase their Capabilities (90.8%), Aspirations (97.7%), and Resources (88.4%). However, they pointed out that the lack of human resources was their main obstacle, and most of the time, they had to rely on themselves to overcome any difficulties.

### **Recommendations**

1. The research team recognizes and appreciates the Government's increased financial support for kindergartens and considers it essential to encourage acceptance of EM students in Hong Kong kindergartens. However, the team recommends that additional assistance be provided for kindergartens with relatively little experience with EM students. It is also recommended that the Government enhance its promotion of the new five-tier subsidy among kindergartens, particularly among those without EM students, so that they know about the new funding opportunity.
2. In addition to funding, the research team suggested helping kindergartens develop a supportive network with other kindergartens, schools, social service and commercial organizations to better utilise community resources. The team recommended that the Government improve the accessibility of reference materials and resources for all kindergartens through electronic means.
3. With more and more kindergartens starting to admit EM students, non-government organizations (NGOs) and research institutions should pay more attention to kindergartens with fewer EM students (fewer than 16 EM students).

When presenting the research findings, Dr Jessie Wong Ming-sin, Assistant Professor in the School of Education and Languages of HKMU, remarked, "Many kindergartens reflected that the major obstacle they faced when admitting ethnic minority students is the lack of manpower and experience. It is hoped that the research findings will provide useful information to facilitate the formulation of relevant policies for young children of different ethnicities and to promote a racially inclusive society."

The Chairman of the HKCRA, Prof. Hazel Lam Mei-yung, said, “The Government can play a leading role to develop a support network by inviting representatives from the early childhood education sector, NGOs, social services, and commercial organizations to provide necessary support for kindergartens and ethnic minority students.”

**ENDS**

#### **About Hong Kong Metropolitan University**

Established by the Government in 1989, Hong Kong Metropolitan University (HKMU), formerly The Open University of Hong Kong, is the largest self-financed university in Hong Kong. In addition to offering full-time undergraduate, taught postgraduate, and research postgraduate programmes, HKMU provides distance education for aspiring learners and is committed to promoting research. Through its seven Schools, HKMU offers professional programmes tailored to society’s needs, including areas in high demand, such as nursing, physiotherapy, medical laboratory science, creative arts, testing and certification, early childhood education, and corporate governance. HKMU’s efforts and achievements in providing professional education are evidenced by the largest share of subsidized places under the Government’s Study Subsidy Scheme for Designated Professions and Sectors (SSSDP) in Hong Kong.

#### **About Hong Kong Child-Rity Association**

The Hong Kong Child-Rity Association (HKCRA) is a recognized charitable organization in Hong Kong established in 2014. The mission of HKCRA is to bring together early childhood education organizations, frontline educators, teacher education institutions, and scholars to provide quality education, care, and support services to children under the age of 8. It specifically works on improving the wellbeing, rights, and education for the children of poverty and in need.

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