



## **Press Release**

### **A 2-Year Longitudinal Study of the Effects of Half-Day versus Whole-Day Kindergarten Programmes on Hong Kong Children's Development**

#### **Background**

Hong Kong is witnessing a prevalence of dual-income and single-parent households as well as an increasing demand for the whole-day kindergarten programme. However, the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (hereafter the "HKSAR Government") did not consider fully subsidising the whole-day kindergarten programme upon the implementation of public policies, such as the *Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme* (hereafter the "PEVS") and the *Free Quality Kindergarten Education Scheme*. This was because the international research community had not clearly confirmed the advantages of the whole-day kindergarten programme. Therefore, the HKSAR Government continues to insist that the half-day kindergarten programme is "appropriate and adequate" for children in Hong Kong. Yet, since 2012, there have been calls from members of the early childhood education sector for a full subsidy for whole-day and even a long whole-day kindergarten programme. To solve this complicated educational problem and to provide scientific evidence for public policy-making, with the support from the Research Grants Council, Dr Hui Li, Associate Professor of the Faculty of Education, the University of Hong Kong, conducted the "**2-Year Longitudinal Study of the Effects of Half-Day versus Whole-Day Kindergarten Programmes on Hong Kong Children's Development**" from the 2015-16 – 2016-17 school years.

#### **Research design/framework**

As the first large-scale study in Hong Kong to track and compare holistically the impact of the whole-day versus half-day kindergarten programme, this research focused on three major stakeholders (children, parents and early childhood educators) in order to fully understand the impact of the two programmes.

1. Children: Prior to the start of the 2015-16 school year, 15 kindergartens from 377 PEVS-kindergartens offering both the whole-day and half-day programmes were randomly selected. After the start of the school year, 346 K1 children were randomly recruited to participate in this two-year longitudinal study, of which 186 were whole-day children (94 males/92 females, average age of 3.37 years) and 160 half-day children (79 male/81 female, average age of 3.33 years). Four waves of child assessment were collected: Wave 1 (Fall 2015), Wave 2 (Spring 2016), Wave 3 (Fall 2016) and Wave 4 (Spring 2017). All assessments were conducted using instruments with good levels of reliability and internal consistency so as to comprehensively assess the progress of and differences in children's language, cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development.
2. Parents: Parents of the participating children completed two questionnaires in April 2016 and April 2017 (around 300 returned questionnaires each round, 90% response rate) to allow for the exploration of the children's family background and outside-school learning experiences, and of their perceptions on the whole-day versus half-day kindergarten programme debate.
3. Early childhood educators: In April 2016 and April 2017, we surveyed (180 questionnaires, 73.47% response rate) and interviewed (30 interviewees) early childhood educators in order to explore their perceptions on the whole-day versus half-day kindergarten programme debate.

#### **Results**

1. Children: Whole-day and half-day kindergarteners did not differ significantly across their language, cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development.
2. Parents: There is a need for both the programmes. About 60–70% of parents supported the

whole-day kindergarten programme and believed that it could promote children's knowledge and self-care skills. About 20–30% of parents favoured the half-day kindergarten programme and believed that it could promote parent-child relationship and allow children to have adequate rest and access to outside-school learning opportunities. Parents hoped that the HKSAR government could fully subsidise the whole-day kindergarten programme to cater for the disadvantaged and poor families, and to release the labour force of women.

3. Early childhood educators: Both programmes have their strengths, weaknesses, and target families. There is no “best” programme, only a best “fit”. Programme choice should be based on the actual needs of the family and the child, as well as the family's financial situation. For example, children from families that are low in socio-economic status, lack an appropriate child carer, or comprise a single parent or dual-working parents, should attend the whole-day kindergarten programme; on the contrary, children from advantaged families or families where the father/mother could provide the child the time, care, and outside-school learning experiences, are more suited to attending the half-day kindergarten programme.

### Suggestions

1. Within 5–10 years, the educational authorities in Hong Kong should review and assess *the Free Quality Kindergarten Education Scheme* to further adjust the subsidy ratios for the whole-day and long whole-day kindergarten programmes. For instance, the subsidy ratios for the whole-day and long whole-day kindergarten programmes could be adjusted from 1.3 to 1.6 times, and from 1.6 to 2.0 times of the half-day kindergarten subsidy, respectively.
2. We recommend the educational authorities to establish a mechanism to prioritize the access to the whole-day and long whole-day kindergarten programme of needy families (e.g., single-parent and dual-income households).
3. For long-term development, the whole-day programme should be established in most kindergartens to ensure that all needy families can enrol their children at a nearby free whole-day kindergarten.
4. We suggest establishing and regulating family-based childcare and after-school services, as well as setting up play centres at each of the community centres housed with registered social workers or kindergarten teachers, to supplement the inadequacies of the current early childhood education services.

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August 1, 2018