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二零二二年七月

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Making a difference in education policy

教育政策創不同

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Voucher scheme

In 2007, the Government launched a Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme (PEVS). By giving parents a fee subsidy, in the form of a voucher, the scheme's aim was to provide affordable and quality early childhood education. The flat rate voucher, calculated on the basis of half-day kindergarten programmes, was designed to enhance parents' choices and the quality of provision.

To understand the scheme's effects, **Dr Gail Yuen Wai-kwan**, Associate Professor at EdUHK's Department of Education Policy and Leadership, and her colleagues began conducting a series of studies. The impact of their research was further extended through extensive knowledge transfer and public engagement. The entire process spanned over 10 years and was given a 4-star rating (outstanding impact in terms of reach and significance) by the Education Panel in the University Grants Committee's 2020 Research Assessment Exercise (RAE).

Effects

The first two studies involved surveys, focus groups, and interviews with over 1,700 parents of different socio-economic backgrounds, regarding their kindergarten choices and their views on the voucher scheme. Both studies found that, compared with children from more affluent families, those from disadvantaged backgrounds encountered barriers to accessing kindergartens because of the different ways of choosing available to parents, and limitations in those choices.

Two additional studies were then conducted in 2010. One involved over 10,000 parents and found that whole-day kindergartens were attended mostly by children with both parents working and from poorer families. The other surveyed over 1,400 kindergarten teachers and revealed a

學券計劃

二零零七年，政府推行學前教育學券計劃（下稱學券計劃），旨在為三至六歲的幼兒提供可負擔和具質素的教育。學券計劃以幼稚園半日制課程為基礎，計算定額資助，藉此令家長有更多的選擇和提升教育質素。

教育政策與領導學系副教授袁慧筠博士和她的團隊，為了解學券計劃成效，開展一系列研究。隨著廣泛的知識轉化和全面的公眾參與，該研究的影響力不斷擴大，整個過程跨越逾十年，並在大學教育資助委員會「2020年研究評審工作」中，獲得教育評審小組四星評級，即在相關範疇及意義上有傑出影響。

政策成效

首兩個研究涵蓋問卷調查、聚焦小組和訪談，涉及超過一千七百名來自不同社會背景下的家長，了解他們如何選擇幼稚園，以及對學券計劃的意見。研究結果發現，與較富裕家庭相比，弱勢家庭之選擇取向和選項備受限制，造成幼兒在教育上的障礙。

二零一零年，團隊繼續進行兩個研究。第一個研究涉及逾萬名家長。調查發現，就讀全日制幼稚園的幼兒，大多數是來自雙職和較貧困的家庭。另一個研究則涉及逾一千四百名幼稚園教師，調查反映受訪教師普遍感到工作壓力沉重和士氣低落，原因是政策要求質素保證和提升專業資歷，加上繁重的非教學職責、專業發展不明朗，以及取消建議薪級表，令幼稚園教師百上加斤。



feeling of intense pressure and low morale, due to policy requirements for quality assurance and professional upgrading, heavy non-teaching duties, the lack of career path and the removal of the recommended salary scale.

Change of policy

Dr Yuen and her colleagues' combined research provided clear evidence of the inequities and social injustices arising from a voucher system exposed to market forces. In particular, the voucher scheme had negative effects on parents' choices of kindergarten and the overall quality of early childhood education. The research contributed to a body of new empirical evidence and knowledge regarding education vouchers, education markets, and activism in the teaching profession. The adoption of its findings by major professional and advocacy groups led to the Government's abandonment of the PEVS policy and the adoption of a new funding model, the Free Quality Kindergarten Education Scheme. This came into effect from the beginning of the 2017/18 school year and provides direct subsidies for not-for-profit kindergartens.

This change has decreased the economic burden on families, especially those with a low income, and has improved teacher-student ratios, teachers' salaries, and career path, which are key conditions for improving and sustaining the quality of education. This research has not only had local relevance, however. There is increased interest globally in the privatisation and opening of school systems to market forces and Dr Yuen's team's findings represent an important analysis of the pros and cons of such initiatives.

政策改變

袁博士及其團隊的綜合研究，清楚印證受市場力量影響，學券制度造成幼兒學習機會的不公平和社會不公，尤其是學券計劃對家長在選擇幼稚園和幼兒教育的整體質素方面，產生負面影響。這綜合研究為教育券、教育市場和教師專業中的行動主義，提供了一系列新的實證經驗和知識，並獲得本地主要專業和倡導團體採用，促使政府放棄學前教育學券計劃，改用全新的資助模式，推出免費優質幼稚園教育計劃，並於二零一七至一八學年生效，為非牟利幼稚園提供直接補貼。

此一變化，減輕了不少家庭的經濟負擔，尤其對低收入家庭更甚。同時，亦改善了師生比例、教師薪酬和專業發展前景等問題，而這些都是提升和維持幼兒教育質素的條件。此綜合研究不僅與香港有關，目前全球對學校系統私有化及市場化的興趣日益濃厚，袁博士團隊的研究結果，正有助分析此類措施的利與弊。