

RGC Ref. No.: UGC/FDS16/H07/18 <hr/> (please insert ref. above)

**RESEARCH GRANTS COUNCIL
COMPETITIVE RESEARCH FUNDING SCHEMES FOR
THE LOCAL SELF-FINANCING DEGREE SECTOR**

FACULTY DEVELOPMENT SCHEME (FDS)

Completion Report

(for completed projects only)

<p><u>Submission Deadlines:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Auditor's report with unspent balance, if any: within six months of the approved project completion date. 2. Completion report: within 12 months of the approved project completion date.
--

Part A: The Project and Investigator(s)

1. Project Title

The Development of Kindergarten Practitioners' Professional Identity under the Free
Kindergarten Education Policy in Hong Kong

2. Investigator(s) and Academic Department(s) / Unit(s) Involved

Research Team	Name / Post	Unit / Department / Institution
Principal Investigator	Dr WONG Ming-sin/ Assistant Professor	School of Education and Languages, Hong Kong Metropolitan University
Co-Investigator(s)	NA	NA
Others	NA	NA

3. Project Duration

	Original	Revised	Date of RGC / Institution Approval <i>(must be quoted)</i>
Project Start Date	1 Jan 2019	NA	
Project Completion Date	31 Dec 2020	30 Jun 2021	17 Feb 2020
Duration <i>(in month)</i>	24	30	17 Feb 2020
Deadline for Submission of Completion Report	31 Dec 2021	30 Jun 2022	17 Feb 2020

Part B: The Final Report

5. Project Objectives

5.1 Objectives as per original application

1. To identify the attributes of professional identity that are relevant to the current context of kindergarten education reform in Hong Kong
2. To determine how Hong Kong kindergarten practitioners perceive their professional identities and relationships with the government and parents under the Free Quality Kindergarten Education Scheme (FQKES)
3. To explore kindergarten practitioners' views toward the factors affecting their professional identities

5.2 Revised objectives

Date of approval from the RGC: NA

Reasons for the change: NA

- 1.
- 2.
3.

5.3 Realisation of the objectives

(Maximum 1 page; please state how and to what extent the project objectives have been achieved; give reasons for under-achievements and outline attempts to overcome problems, if any)

Objective 1 was addressed in the first nine months of the project. First, individual and focus group interviews were conducted between April and June 2019 with a total of 41 kindergarten principals, headteachers, and teachers of four half-day and four whole-day kindergartens, randomly selected from all FQKES kindergartens in Hong Kong. The transcribed data were analysed according to the stages outlined in Creswell's (1998) data analysis spiral. Six major attributes of the professional identity of kindergarten educators were identified. However, kindergarten educators considered these attributes were given different priorities by different stakeholders (please see 6.1).

Second, the views of 175 Hong Kong pre-service kindergarten practitioners from 7 teacher education institutions were explored using self-administered, open-ended, and qualitative questionnaires in Spring 2019. The results triangulated the observation in the

interview study with the 41 kindergarten practitioners that the professional identity of kindergarten practitioners should be viewed multidimensionally, and this identity was formulated even before the kindergarten practitioners started their careers.

To address Objective 2, two online self-administered questionnaires (the Principal Questionnaire and the Teacher Questionnaire) were developed based on the findings of the previous two studies. These questionnaires, which contained both questions common to the two questionnaires and questions that uniquely reflected the concerns of the two groups, allowed quantitative analyses of the overall situation in Hong Kong and addressed the commonalities and distinctions in the views of different kindergarten practitioners. Data collection was originally planned to be carried out between December 2019 and February 2020. Unfortunately, that period was exactly the outbreak of the first wave of COVID-19 in Hong Kong. All schools suspended since 29 January 2020. Although we were able to obtain responses from 273 principals and teachers of 90 FQKES kindergartens (achieving our sampling target of 10% of FQKES kindergartens in Hong Kong) by that time, we foresaw the ongoing school suspension, kindergarten practitioners' increased workload and stress of adopting a new distance mode of instruction, and further social distancing measures would affect our plan to conduct in-depth follow-up interviews to address Objective 3.

We immediately applied for a project extension (please see Part A3) and waited for more school resumption information from the government. At the same time, we reread the transcripts of the interview data of the 41 kindergarten practitioners and the preliminary results of the surveys with pre-service and in-service practitioners, and carefully considered whether the rich data obtained would be adequate to address Objective 3. We decided to add a couple of open-ended questions to the online questionnaires and conduct a new wave of data collection following the partial resumption of the Upper Kindergarten level on 15 June 2020. We successfully obtained responses from 117 principals and teachers of 29 kindergartens in addition to the existing data. Altogether, we received responses from 390 principals and teachers of 119 FQKES kindergartens in Hong Kong. The data were analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively in the subsequent months to address Objectives 2 and 3.

5.4 Summary of objectives addressed to date

Objectives <i>(as per 5.1/5.2 above)</i>	Addressed <i>(please tick)</i>	Percentage Achieved <i>(please estimate)</i>
1. To identify the attributes of professional identity that are relevant to the current context of kindergarten education reform in Hong Kong	✓	100%
2. To determine how Hong Kong kindergarten practitioners perceive their professional identities and relationships with the government and parents under the FQKES	✓	100%
3. To explore kindergarten practitioners' views toward the factors affecting their professional identities	✓	100%

6. Research Outcome

6.1 Major findings and research outcome

(Maximum 1 page; please make reference to Part C where necessary)

Objective 1: The results of the interviews are summarised in the table below:

Attributes perceived related to professional identity	Party that considers kindergarten practitioners professional in terms of the given attribute			
	Self	Public	Government	Parents
(1) Knowledge of child development	✓	N/A	N/A	N/A
(2) Teaching ability	✓	N/A	N/A	×
(3) Caregiving skills	✓	×	N/A	✓
(4) Affect and attitudes	✓	N/A	N/A	✓
(5) Professional qualification	✓	N/A	✓	×
(6) Salary level	✓	N/A	×	N/A

The preliminary results were reported at the OMEP Asia Pacific Regional Conference 2019, (see Part C9). A journal manuscript is now being prepared (see Attachment 3 in Part C8).

The results of the survey with pre-service kindergarten practitioners show that they as well used the professional qualification and affective and attitudinal domains (e.g., “patient”, “creative”, and “loving”) to describe the professional identity of kindergarten practitioners, but a sense of inferiority was detected as they did not think these attributes were considered “professional” by the society. Key findings were reported at The Southeast Asian Conference on Education and the OMEP Asia Pacific Regional Conference 2021 (see Attachments 4 and 5 in Part C9). Detailed results were also published in *Early Years*, an SSCI-indexed journal, in 2022 (see Attachment 1 in Part C8).

Objective 2: Findings of the large-scale questionnaire survey findings reveal that: Hong Kong kindergarten practitioners considered (1) “professional qualification”, “knowledge of child development”, and “affect and attitudes” the most important attributes that related closely to their professional identity; (2) the government had replaced parents as the most prominent influencer of their professional identity; and (3) the government as the “boss” and parents as close-coordinating partners. Preliminary findings on the data of the 273 principals and teachers will be reported at the 74th OMEP International Conference if presenting online is feasible (see Attachment 6 in Part C9), and the results of the full set of data with 390 respondents will be reported in a journal article (see Part C8).

Objective 3: Further analyses show that the governmental discourse was apparent in the professional identity of kindergarten practitioners. However, it was precisely the government’s way of defining kindergarten practitioners’ professional identity based on “professional qualification” that might have unintentionally reinforced their sense of inferiority. As reflected in their constant comparison with the all-graduate primary and secondary school teachers, the government’s different qualification standards were deemed unuseful in changing the deep-rooted mindsets of other members of society that kindergarten practitioners were less important than primary and secondary school teachers. A journal manuscript is now being prepared based on the above results (see Part C8).

In addition to the above, a journal manuscript prepared based on the student trainee’s mini-research (which was a part of the FDS project and conducted as Research Experience for Undergraduate Student, as mentioned in the proposal) has been submitted to the *International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy*, an ESCI-indexed journal (see Attachment 2 in Part C8 and Attachment 7 in Part C11).

6.2 Potential for further development of the research and the proposed course of action
(*Maximum half a page*)

The findings provide a timely and precise picture of Hong Kong kindergarten practitioners' perception of their professional identity against the changing policy environment. We have worked with the World Organization for Early Childhood Education – Hong Kong (OMEP-Hong Kong) to make policy suggestions to enhance the support for the kindergarten education sector and promote the professional image of Hong Kong kindergarten practitioners (see Attachment 8 in Part C12).

The development of the professional identity of kindergarten practitioners should also be monitored through further research. Due to the fact that many kindergarten practitioners are struggling between the expectations from the government and parents as well as seeing the government as the “boss”, we are particularly interested to see how this identity evolves in light of the growing political context of Hong Kong. As part of the Principal Investigator's new FDS project, “Developing a National Identity in Young Children: Values and Practices of Kindergartens, Local Chinese and Non-Chinese Families of Different Backgrounds in Hong Kong” (UGC/FDS16/H17/21), we will continue to investigate how kindergarten practitioners position themselves in response to the growing authority demands.

7. Layman's Summary

(Describe in layman's language the nature, significance and value of the research project, in no more than 200 words)

With the world concerned about attracting and retaining quality early childhood practitioners, our analysis suggests that reorienting the status of early childhood teaching will require much more than merely increasing financial input and establishing higher professional qualification standards. In addition, the results demonstrate the importance of appreciation from other stakeholders (including parents, government authorities, and the public) in building the professional identity of early childhood practitioners. This research was, to the best of our knowledge, the first large-scale empirical study of kindergarten practitioners' professional identity and relationships with the government and with parents in Hong Kong under the FQKES. Our findings are not only a useful reference point for future research on early childhood education policies and teacher professionalism, but they also highlight the government's important role in shaping the professional identity of kindergarten practitioners. The research calls for the government to take action to create a better professional image for kindergarten practitioners through various channels.

Part C: Research Output**8. Peer-Reviewed Journal Publication(s) Arising Directly From This Research Project**

(Please attach a copy of the publication and/or the letter of acceptance if not yet submitted in the previous progress report(s). All listed publications must acknowledge RGC's funding support by quoting the specific grant reference.)

The Latest Status of Publications				Author(s) (denote the corresponding author with an asterisk*)	Title and Journal / Book (with the volume, pages and other necessary publishing details specified)	Submitted to RGC (indicate the year ending of the relevant progress report)	Attached to this Report (Yes or No)	Acknowledged the Support of RGC (Yes or No)	Accessible from the Institutional Repository (Yes or No)
Year of Publication	Year of Acceptance (For paper accepted but not yet published)	Under Review	Under Preparation (optional)						
2022				Jessie Ming Sin WONG*	'Are we becoming professionals?' Pre-service early childhood teachers' perceptions of the professionalism of early childhood teachers in Hong Kong. <i>Early Years</i> . doi: 10.1080/09575146.2021.1954604	No	Yes [Attachment 1]	Yes	Yes
		Yes		Jessie Ming Sin WONG*, Venus Sin Yee TONG (research assistant), Selina Chun Man CHAN (student trainee hired with funding for Research Experience for Undergraduate Student)	Preparing for early childhood inclusion: Educators' views on pre-service teacher education and fieldwork practicums in Hong Kong. <i>International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy</i> . (A part of the current FDS project and conducted by the UG student as mentioned	No	Yes [Attachment 2]	Yes	Yes

					in the proposal.)				
			Yes	Jessie Ming Sin WONG*	Understanding the Professional Identity of Kindergarten Educators in the Face of Reform: A Framework of Analysis	No	Yes [Attachment 3]	Yes	Yes
			Yes	Jessie Ming Sin WONG*	Struggle between Expectations: The Professional Identity of Hong Kong Early Childhood Educators in the Face of Reform	No	No	Yes	Yes

9. Recognized International Conference(s) In Which Paper(s) Related To This Research Project Was / Were Delivered

(Please attach a copy of each conference abstract)

Month / Year / Place	Title	Conference Name	Submitted to RGC <i>(indicate the year ending of the relevant progress report)</i>	Attached to this Report <i>(Yes or No)</i>	Acknowledged the Support of RGC <i>(Yes or No)</i>	Accessible from the Institutional Repository <i>(Yes or No)</i>
09/2019 Kyoto, Japan	The Development of Kindergarten Practitioners' Professional Identity in Hong Kong: Results of the First Phase of Research	OMEPA Asia Pacific Regional Conference 2019	Yes (Mid-term progress report submitted in 2019)	No	Yes	Yes
02/2020 Singapore	The Professional Identity of Early Childhood Teachers in Hong Kong: Perceptions of Pre-service Early Childhood Teachers	The Southeast Asian Conference on Education	Yes (Abstract submitted with the mid-term progress report in 2019)	Yes [Attachment 4]	Yes	Yes

11/2021 Hangzhou, China (online mode)	'Are we becoming professionals?' Pre-service early childhood teachers' perceptions of the professionalism of early childhood teachers in Hong Kong	OMEPA Asia Pacific Regional Conference 2021	No	Yes [Attachment 5]	Yes	Yes
07/ 2022 Athens, Greece (Accepted in 2020, postponed to 07/2022 due to COVID-19. The organiser has decided to resume the conference but it is still thinking whether to adopt a hybrid mode as we from Asian Pacific have complained that we cannot possibly attend the conference physically.)	Hong Kong Kindergarten Practitioners' Professional Identity under the Free Quality Kindergarten Education Reform: Results of a Large-Scale Survey	The 74 th OMEP World Assembly and Conference	No	Yes [Attachment 6]	Yes	Yes

10. Whether Research Experience And New Knowledge Has Been Transferred / Has Contributed To Teaching And Learning

(Please elaborate)

The research experience was highly relevant to the courses taught by the Principal Investigator, including the undergraduate-level "Educational Management: Theory and Practice" and "Policy Analysis in Early Childhood Education", as well as the postgraduate-level "Investigating Early Childhood Education". Findings of the research have been incorporated into the two undergraduate courses on topics related to the professionalism of early childhood teachers. The development of the research has been used as an example to illustrate how to conduct research in early childhood education in the postgraduate course.

The Principal Investigator also joined other early childhood professionals, including Dr Maggie Koong (Victoria (China) Education Group), Dr Sun Jin (EduHK), Dr Suzannie Leung (CUHK), Ms Mary Wong and Ms Iris Tam (TWHGs), and Dr Amelia Lee (HKBU-SCE) to deliver a professional symposium on "The New Trend of Early Childhood Education in Hong Kong" for 79 in-service kindergarten practitioners in Hong Kong on 5 November 2021. The findings of the present research project were discussed.

11. Student(s) Trained*(Please attach a copy of the title page of the thesis)*

Name	Degree Registered for	Date of Registration	Date of Thesis Submission / Graduation
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]

12. Other Impact*(e.g. award of patents or prizes, collaboration with other research institutions, technology transfer, teaching enhancement, etc.)*

Preliminary results of the project were incorporated in OMEP-Hong Kong's suggestions for the 2020 Policy Address and submitted to the Chief Executive's Office. The support of RGC is acknowledged. [Attachment 8]. The document can also be found in OMEP-Hong Kong's 2020 newsletter, which can be downloaded at <https://www.facebook.com/OMEP-Hong-Kong-199564400195927/photos/pcb.1810068192478865/1810066252479059>

13. Statistics on Research Outputs

No. of outputs arising directly from this research project	Peer-reviewed Journal Publications	Conference Papers	Scholarly Books, Monographs and Chapters	Patents Awarded	Other Research Outputs (please specify)	
	Type	No.	Type	No.	Type	No.
	4 (1 published, 1 under review, 2 under preparation)	4 (3 delivered, 1 accepted)	0	0	0	0

14. Public Access Of Completion Report

(Please specify the information, if any, that cannot be provided for public access and give the reasons.)

Information that Cannot Be Provided for Public Access	Reasons
NA	NA