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Honours Project Report

Teacher Commitment of Hong Kong Primary School Teachers

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1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

Hong Kong students are always under social awareness of suffering from great academic pressure, however seldom do teachers' pressure concerned by the public. Educational reforms led to teachers' physical, psychological, and working conditions in crisis (Cheng, 2009). According to a survey conducted by the Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union, 54% of teachers said their students have at least seven or more assignments a day and 60% of teachers spent the median time five hours per week to have extra lessons with students, indicating the heavy workload of teachers in marking each student's work and spending extra school time with students (HKPTU, 2018). Apart from coping with the heavy workload, teachers also face different kinds of pressure like relating to their teacher responsibility and career prospects. The teachers interviewed by a Hong Kong news website EJ Insight revealed that they feared of being evaluated as failing to fulfil their duties, complaining from parents and not having promotions or renewal of contracts (Ejinsight, 2018).

The difficult and stressful situation of Hong Kong teachers does not discourage teachers in participating or continuing in this career field. According to the Education Bureau, the number of primary school teachers increases from 22173 in 2012/13 to 26264 in 2017/18 (EDB, 2017). Hong Kong school context is highly regarded with its status in teaching profession and relatively high salary (Mclnerney et al, 2015). Are these the reasons encouraging the teachers to stay in this field?

In Hong Kong, the professional status for many teachers is not acknowledged. The government has the all-graduate teaching force policy goal for nearly 20 years. In 2016/17 school year, the ratio of graduate teacher posts in the public sector is 60% (EDB, 2018), which is far unable to satisfy the needs of 97% teachers who is a degree-holder. These 'certificate master' positions teachers who have the same qualifications and job duties with 'graduate teacher posts' receive lower salaries. According to the 2018 Policy Address, the Task Force on Professional Development of Teachers set up by the Education Bureau suggests that the all-graduate teaching force policy would achieve full implementation by the 2020/21 school year (HKSAR, 2018). It is also suggested to improve the manpower at the middle-management of the level to support the long-term development of school. The goal of the policy is to 'raise teachers' professional status and retain talents' (EDB, 2018). The proposal of the professional ladder for teachers is expected to advance the career prospects of teachers and raising their professional status. The full report with specific recommendation is further confirmed and submitted to the government in March

2019. It is believed that this policy goal may have influence on the intensity of teacher commitment.

Under the new proposal of enhancing the professional development for teachers, in this study, we focus on the role of teacher commitment in encouraging teachers to stay in this career field in Hong Kong primary school context and the reasons contributing to it.

This study is significant for several reasons. First, it is crucial to understand the teachers' commitment in Hong Kong context. Teachers are the most important resources in schools. Their commitment is a determinant factor in affecting the quality of education and whether students are benefited from the education system (Ayele, 2014). Without the contributions of highly committed teachers, quality education can hardly be achieved (Razak, Darmawan & Keeves, 2009).

Second, this study provides more updated and in-depth data on teacher commitment. According to Choi & Tang (2009) and Mclnerney et al, (2015), a number of studies concerning teacher commitment have been conducted by the researchers in the educational field since 1980s (see, for example, Dee, Henkin, & Singleton, 2006; Chan et al, 2008; Choi & Tang, 2009). However, these studies on teacher commitment are rather not up to date and are mostly generalized with less in-depth exploration of the teachers' perceptions. With the increasing stress and workload faced by teachers and the changing education policy such as the professional ladders for teachers proposed for raising the professional status of teachers, what is the intensity of teacher commitment? The data collected in this study reflects the current situation of teacher commitment and which could be served as reference materials for teacher educators and education authorities to understand clearly the present situation and to enhance the teaching environments for teachers.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

This study focuses on investigating the teacher commitment among Hong Kong primary school teachers. There are three main objectives of this study:

1. To study the <u>perception</u> of teacher commitment of Hong Kong primary school teachers in different career cohorts
2. To study the <u>factors</u> contributing to the teacher commitment
3. To study the <u>relationship</u> between teacher commitment and the proposal of enhancing the professional development for teachers

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1.3 Research Questions

Three research questions were addressed.

1. How do teachers with different years of teaching experiences perceive teacher commitment?

2. What are the most important factors in affecting their teacher commitment?

3. How do they perceive the relationship between teacher commitment and the proposal of enhancing the professional development for teachers?

2. Literature review

2.1 Introduction

This study focused on the teacher commitment in different career cohorts and the factors contributing to it. Teaching is a professional career requiring personal commitment to motivate the teachers to actively be involved in the work (Day, 2004). Therefore, it is of paramount importance to investigate the teacher commitment for assisting schools and teachers to satisfy the demands in teaching and learning in schools (Crosswell, 2006).

2.2 Teacher Commitment

Commitment refers to the high level of attachment to the organization, with one's positive intention toward his work (Crosswell, 2006; Cohen, 2007). Some defined teacher commitment relating to the amount of time teachers devoted to their commitment objects (Choi & Tang, 2011). Committed teachers refer to those who put their best effort in jobs and focus on attainment of school goals (Mclnerney et al, 2015).

The teacher commitment studies have been started since the 1980s, focusing on the analysis of the employees' psychological process on their attachment with the organization. Allen & Meyer (1990) constructed a three-component model of commitment, including affective, continuance and normative commitment. Affective commitment refers to the employee's emotional attachment to the organization and which the employees stay in the organization because they want to do so. Continuance commitment refers to the employee's attachment to the organization because of their awareness of the high costs of leaving the organization (like retirement benefits). Employees with high continuance commitment stay in the organization because they need to do so. In normative commitment, the feelings of obligation and loyalty explain the employee's attachment to the organization. Employees with high level of normative commitment stay in the organization because they feel they ought to do so.

Besides, the social external effects on the internal processes of the employees should also be under consideration. Since then, the studies on teacher commitment covered more on the interactions in teachers' personal, institutional and systemic contexts (Choi & Tang, 2009). With this conceptual framework, we can explore the teacher commitment in a more comprehensive way on how the trends and reasons of the commitment levels are varied in different career cohorts.

2.3 Factors on Teacher Commitment

Teacher commitment could be affected by factors like student behavior, colleague and school support, parental expectations, education policies and their own profession and career cohort (Day, 2004).

Personal factors

Achievements, recognition and responsibility, are the intrinsic factors in motivating one's enjoyment in the task (Ayele, 2014). Life situations like births, deaths, divorce and illnesses posed negative threats to the teacher commitment (Choi & Tang, 2009). Good self-adjustment is required for teachers to maintain inner motivation and the commitment to their profession (Day & Gu, 2007).

Workplace factors

Workplace factors like leadership, teacher autonomy, colleague collaboration and resources are crucial in teacher commitment (Choi & Tang, 2009). Reyes (1990) stated that positive social relationships and interactions benefit teachers' attachment to the organization commitment. The colleague relationships develop their shared goals and objectives and which this collaborative effort is expected to enhance the teacher commitment to schools (Jong, 2015). Principals could enhance teacher commitment by reducing teachers' pressure from community expectations (Ware & Kitsantas, 2007).

Systemic factors

The systemic factors are considered as contributing mostly on diminishing the teacher commitment (AARE, 2002). According to Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE), in Brisbane, the common negative systemic factors were the poor funding and resourcing while having more power in school administrative decision making was the positive systemic factor on the teacher commitment.

2.4 Teacher Commitment in Hong Kong Context

According to Choi & Tang (2011) who conducted a related study, teachers include both with satisfied and dissatisfied commitment in Hong Kong. Most teachers reported that their commitment levels changed in the first ten years of teaching. Teachers felt worried and dissatisfied with their professionalism when they increased time investment in work. Choi & Tang (2009) indicated that Hong Kong teachers from different career cohorts who had a positive commitment trend recognized the importance of 'love for students'. Unfavorable education systemic and working environment factors were negatively perceived and which decreased the teacher commitment. In the study of Mclnerney et al (2015), Hong Kong teachers who perceived commitment as loyalty and responsibility to their teaching profession enhanced psychological well-being.

The literature provides insights and general concepts on teacher commitment, which refers to the attachment of teachers to school. The psychological process of teachers and other external interactions in the institutional and systemic contexts are the elements of the teacher commitment. Both external factors and internal factors have effects on teacher commitment. With the literature review, this study aims at investigating deeper into the perspective of each primary school teacher in the teacher commitment.

3.   Research design

3.1 Methodology

For the main context, the study was conducted in a Hong Kong primary school. In this study, a qualitative method was adopted, and which interviews were conducted to in-service teachers on voluntary basis. Qualitative research is a responsive and comprehensive approach, which expands the existing knowledge by deepening and enriching the understanding (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It was appropriate for obtaining more in-depth information with greater details of teachers' thoughts on teacher commitment. The qualitative research created opportunities for every individual to share their stories in their own ways and which the power relationships existed between researchers and participants are reduced (Creswell, 2007). The findings of every participant in a qualitative research were unique and could not be valid for other context.

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3.2 Participants

For the selection of participants, typical case sampling in purposive sampling were used. The participants were 6 in-service teachers in different career cohorts in a local primary school in Hong Kong. In classifying the years of teaching experiences into career cohorts, this study followed the work of Hargreaves & Goodson (2006) to divide 6 participants into three cohorts, which is the early-career cohort with 0-9 years of teaching experiences, the mid-career cohort with 10-19 years of teaching experiences and the late-career cohort with more than 20 years of teaching experiences. 2 teachers from each career cohort were chosen to demonstrate a comprehensive data in these generations. Considering a number of variables in influencing the perspectives of participants, the following table (Table 1) showed the participants' information in terms of their years of teaching, gender, major teaching subject and role in school.

Table 1 - Participants' Demographic Information

	Years of teaching	Names	Gender	Major teaching subject	Roles in school
Early-career cohort (0-9 years teaching experiences)	0.5 years	Ada	F	English	Class teacher
	4 years	Anne	F	English	Substitute teacher
Mid-career cohort (10-19 years teaching experiences)	10 years	Bella	F	English	Class teacher
	19 years	Betty	F	Chinese	Chinese panel, Vice class teacher
Late-career cohort (more than 20 years teaching experiences)	22 years	Carmen	F	English	English panel, Vice class teacher
	40 years	Cindy	F	Chinese	Class teacher

3.3 Data Collection

The data set was drawn from the interviews with 6 primary teachers in December 2018. Semi structured interviews were conducted for around half an hour with a set of questions asked across all participants. The interview questions (Appendix I) were set

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around the topic of teacher commitment and related to the research questions. The interviews included mostly open-ended questions, allowing more unexpected data on the teacher commitment topic. On the day of interviews, the purpose and format of the interview were clearly explained to the participants beforehand and the order of the interview questions were flown with flexibility according to the answers of the participants.

With reference to the study of Choi & Tang (2009), the participants were asked to indicate and compare their teacher commitment levels in the year of their career entry and in the current state, with 0 as the lowest and 10 as the highest. The subjective figures serve as illustrators in facilitating the participants to express their thoughts on teacher commitment. The changes of their commitment levels were also be reported and analyzed with these figures.

Cohen et al (2007) emphasized that a high standard of ethical considerations is deserved for interviews, which interviews are considered an invasion of participants' private lives. Considering the ethical matters, participants were given a consent form to sign before the research and they were told that their participation in the interview was voluntary based that they could withdraw at any time. More importantly, the data collected were kept confidential and destroyed once the research analysis was concluded to protect participants' confidentiality.

3.4 Data Analysis

The qualitative data analysis relies heavily on interpretation. The data analysis part of this study was conducted in January to March 2019 with the steps below. First, the data was read and examined repeatedly for several times, which was for the researcher to obtain an overall impression of the teacher commitment. Reading the collected data closely also provides major themes discussed preparing for the process of coding (PREDICT, 2016). Second, coding was under process for identifying similar information (similar patterns and features) from the collected data. The data were then grouped and described in a meaningful way with reference to the literature review. Finally, by connecting the data and identifying the relationship of the data, the research results would then be reported with identified themes.

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4.   Results

4.1 Perspectives on Teacher Commitment

4.1.1 Common Commitment Objects across Teacher Career Cohorts

It was found that students and teaching were the common commitment objects of the teachers in all career cohorts. All the teachers considered their commitment object as whether students could learn and had improvements in both academics and behavior.

> To me, teacher commitment is the children, how to get them to learn and how to instill them into different subjects. (Anne – early-career cohort)

> Teacher commitment refers to my responsibility to my students. It regards as whether my teaching can help students learn and improve academically. Apart from studies, as a teacher, I can support students with their moral development, especially those primary kids. Laying a right foundation for students ensures that they will not go into wrong direction when growing up. (Belle – mid-career cohort)

> Teacher commitment is how you teach every child, apart from their studies, you have to teach them how to behave, for example, a child should respect their parents, finish their homework, arrange things for themselves. (Cindy – late-career cohort)

The teaching of teachers was considered as highly related to students' performance and improvements. The extension of students' learning, the way teachers engaged students to learn and how they motivated students in diverse subjects were emphasized by teachers. The quality of teaching had influence on students' learning and which also affected teachers' commitment levels.

4.1.2 Early-Career Cohort: Building Competence

The early-career cohort teachers were in the stage of building competence. Teaching and student learning were the focuses of these teachers.

For example, a teacher of early-career cohort had high awareness on whether her teaching facilitated students' learning and how students could gain benefits from teachers and school.

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> Teacher commitment to me, is that at least I can teach something, and whether more or less, the students have to gain something from me. (Ada – early-career cohort)

Another teacher of early-career cohort emphasized more on her growing competence in classroom teaching, for example, teaching skills, adjusting teaching in light of curriculum requirements.

> Teacher commitment is patience in how to improve your own skills, patience to yourself. Patience to ourselves is how you can adapt to the curriculum in different schools ... how you adjust yourself. Or else, you will find very stressful. (Anne – early-career cohort)

Ada and Anne were both English Language teachers. English language teachers autonomously build competence, not only for themselves, but also for their students, other teachers and the school (Haworth & Craig, 2016). These two English early-career cohort teachers were conscious on building their competence not only for their self-professional development, but also for their students' learning.

4.1.3 Mid and Late-Career Cohorts: Extended Scope of Commitment

For the teachers in mid-career and late-career cohort, apart from teaching and learning, they expanded the concept of teacher commitment covering more aspects of commitment objects. Their commitment objects were not only about students and teaching, but also the administrative work, their responsible subject, colleagues and school. This was especially common in teachers with higher school positions and more responsibility in mid and late-career cohorts, i.e. Betty (a Chinese Subject Panel) and Carmen (an English Subject Panel).

To these two subject panels, they were responsible for the matters in their subjects. They both seemed accomplishing the administrative work of the subject as their commitment objects.

> … My another teacher commitment is focusing on handling the administrative work of our Chinese subject. (Betty – mid-career cohort)

Apart from the administrative work of the subject, the English Subject Panel Carmen had further gone beyond the commitment in the administrative work of the subject.

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She put the focus also on other matters on enhancing the subject, like promoting its development.

> As an English Subject Panel, my commitment emphasizes on how to promote English Subject's development, how to help colleagues in understanding this school's expectation on English Subject. I am responsible to my colleagues. Their performances, most of the time depend on whether I have an effective communication with them, whether I have conveyed the school's message to the teachers' level, to let teachers understand how they could perform well in their daily teaching. (Carmen – late-career cohort)

As shown, 'colleagues' was one of the commitment objects of Carmen. She supported her colleagues to improve their teaching to maintain the quality of English subject. She believed that an effective communication with her colleagues was essential in determining the performances of her colleagues. She considered herself as a medium between colleagues and the school by understanding colleagues' situations and reflecting the school's expectation to them.

Besides the subject level, Carmen had further extended her commitment objects to the school level. She was committed in promoting the development of the school, for instance building a positive image in school admission.

> I need to assist the school in admission and promotion, how I help the school to set a direction, an image... All these aspects are based on whether I have done a great job on the administrative work. For example, in school admission, being in the front line, welcoming the guests and giving a positive impression to the parents are my commitment. (Carmen – late-career cohort)

4.2 Factors Affecting Teacher Commitment

Most of the teachers had sustained commitment levels since their career entry to the current state (Appendix II). Two teachers (i.e. one from mid-career and one from late-career) had raised their commitment level throughout the years. With the favorable development of all teachers, it was foreseeable that the factors affecting teacher commitment were mostly favorable factors. However, there were still some unfavorable factors in discouraging teachers in their commitment. The factors

affecting teacher commitment involve three categories, which are the personal factors, workplace factors and systemic factor.

4.2.1 Personal Factors

Teachers' love for students was the common commitment factor of teachers in all career cohorts. They cared about students' performances. Positive performances of students brought a sense of satisfaction to teachers, which was crucial in reinforcing teacher commitment. It proved the effectiveness and importance of teachers' teaching in helping students to achieve good results. On the other hand, negative performances of students frustrated teachers in doubting about themselves. But with a desire of helping students, they would pay extra efforts in supporting the students.

> When your students have improvements, having a little positive change, you are satisfied, because it proves your hard work and your affection to them. (Bella – early-career cohort)

> You will be unhappy because of students' situation, for example, you have already tried a lot of ways to help them, but they do not have much improvements in academics and behavior. But after that, you will still think of other suitable ways to support the students. (Cindy – late-career cohort)

Teachers gained satisfaction from students' positive responses and interactions with them. They enjoyed the time spending with their students. When students liked the teachers and showed love and care to them, the teachers felt more satisfied and would love their students more.

> You can see from their (students') eyes, the way they talk, you'll know whether they like you… they understand I care about them, so they will like to talk to me actively during recess time or lunchtime. No matter I tried to sometimes push them, they still can share their care and love to me, that is very satisfied. (Anne – early-career cohort)

The factor of teachers' 'love for students' was consistent with teachers' perception on 'students' as their teacher commitment. Since the teachers loved their students, they found seeing the improvements in students and positive interactions with students satisfied and worth continuously spending time and effort on them.

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Teachers' personal beliefs in teaching increased their level of teacher commitment. Three teachers from different career cohorts had their own beliefs fostering their development in the teaching career. They treated challenges as an opportunity to learn and to enhance themselves. Their beliefs showed their strong sense of enthusiasm and commitment over their roles as a teacher, to nurture the students.

> Treat every challenge as a chance to enhance your job. (Anne – early-career cohort)
>
> I want to become the role model of students. (Bella – early-career cohort)
>
> I have a sense of commitment that is to serve the society by nurturing the students and treating them as our future. (Carmen – late-career cohort)

A teacher in the late-career cohort Carmen believed that with more experiences and professional knowledge enabled her to be more competent and responsible for the non-teaching duties, like the administrative work, the jobs allocation of which had great influence on its organization's development. She mentioned that in her career entry, without understanding on the teacher career, and lacking sufficient knowledge and experiences on teaching and classroom management, she had lower commitment and just treated it as a job.

Factors concerning personal background had effects on teacher commitment. Two teachers considered personal interest as the reason they started this career. They were very passionate and had keen interest since their career entry.

For the family background and personal growth, it both positively and negatively increased the teacher commitment level. Ada from early-career cohort agreed that her open-minded parents and school life gave her chances to pursue anything she wanted, and which shaped her as a teacher respecting students and rejecting traditional punishments like copying. A positive personal growth encouraged the teacher to start and continue her career as a teacher. On the contrary, Cindy from late-career cohort claimed that she became a teacher because of the work-family tension. She grew in the 1980s, having a traditional father believing that girls should not study but marry someone when grow up. In order to avoid control and obtain freedom from her family, this teacher studied hard and developed her independent career as a teacher.

Life phase was the factor also considered by Cindy from late-career cohort that decreased her commitment. She thought that while she was getting older, she wanted

to engage more in other activities, such as studying Chinese medicine and participating voluntary work in helping the elderly, which were also meaningful to her life apart from teaching.

4.2.2 Workplace Factors

5 out of 6 teachers regarded workplace factors, including the favorable and unfavorable factors, as most important contributing to their commitment. School vision and policies were concerned by 4 teachers including those from early-career cohorts and late-career cohorts. It was important that the vision of the school and how the school set the approach of learning matched with their personal beliefs and values. For example, these teachers emphasized on student-centered and people-oriented education, and which they could find these principles in the school curriculum and policies. Therefore, it raised these teachers' commitment level and encouraged them to stay in this school.

> This school is matched with what I expected and without much contradiction, like … respecting students, which are some basic but important attitudes… School's vision affects its policies. Everyone has different view on teaching, so you have to see if the environment matches with yours. (Ada – early-career cohort)

> … how the school set their approach in learning, whether they're really making more student-oriented, how they give a balanced school life between academic performance and personal growth. You can actually observe these from the school activities and their curriculum. If you can have a good environment which is very understanding and thoughtful, that would make a teacher to stay longer. (Anne – early-career cohort)

> School's vision, whether it is people-oriented, some schools are more commercial… you have to see how the school gets a balance. If the school's direction is not people-oriented, but a pure commercial education, I think I must get influenced. But so far this is a school with religious background, people-oriented with less commercial nature, my commitment did not change much. (Carmen – late-career cohort)

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Two teachers agreed that a harmonic relationship between colleagues, such as gaining trust from their colleagues and having colleagues that were willing to help, increased their commitment level and made them continue to be a teacher.

A teacher of the late-career cohort Cindy gained her former principal's recognition and trust, assigning her in finishing various confidential work relating to funding and parents' information. This made her willing to follow the principal and contribute a lot to the school. She thought she were without much pressure at that time even though the working hours were long with a lot of work, she enjoyed the job.

Workload was an unfavorable factor regarded by three teachers from early- and mid-career cohorts. The administrative work and the school arrangements, like assigning workshops for teachers, increased the workload of teachers. The extra work of teachers shared the time for teachers to focus on teaching.

> You are not going to teach only, you are also going to accept all the admin work, all other jobs like receiving circulations, collecting money, organizing activities. Those are very tough somehow. And it somehow would make me feel very stress and find it difficult. Not really lessen my commitment, instead I would have a lot of doubts whether I should continue… They assigned me to do a lot of workshops. I think it's good but it somehow affects my school time, turn out I receive complaints from parents… (Anne – early-career cohort)

> The most unfavorable factor is my administrative work, like the meetings, paperwork and analyzing reports, which would lower my commitment… I am a teacher, not an administrative officer. I want to focus more on my teaching. (Betty – mid-career cohort)

Both teachers of the early-career cohort mentioned 'parents' as one of their decreasing commitment factors. Facing the questions of parents concerning their children and the school life, these teachers found satisfying parents' demands as a source of stress created. This situation was not common in teachers in other cohorts, and which could be explained that 'parents' was not the major factor in affecting teacher commitment of teachers with more experiences.

> I think it's difficult that the parents will find you first, because they only know you, the class teacher, so they always ask me questions that I do not know much about. (Ada – early-career cohort)

… parents, which are also very important because sometimes you need to convince the parents to let them be free, be confident with you. Or else, you will be stressed because you can't satisfy the parents' curiosity and their needs. (Anne – early-career cohort)

An interesting point to note that a teacher from the late-career cohort Cindy explained the reason why she would not encourage anyone to enter the teacher career. She thought that parents nowadays were different from those in the past who respected teachers. Parents nowadays would strive to get all the rights they 'deserve', seldom considered in the perspectives of teachers, and which could be strong frustration to the new colleagues.

4.2.3 Systemic Factors

Systemic factors were not considered by teachers as the most significant factors in affecting their commitment. Yet, some unfavorable systemic factors discouraged them in various ways.

A mid-career teacher reflected that the limited resources from the government depressed her commitment. She especially mentioned about the inclusive education policy, lacking enough support for teachers, increased the workload of teachers.

Under the inclusive education, teacher's teaching is surely under influence… if government provides more resources to help these students, I believe it will reduce teachers' workload. (Bella – mid-career cohort)

A teacher from the early-career cohort shared similar views on the inclusive education. She felt it difficult for a teacher alone in dealing with a number of students with special educational needs in class. The government did not provide enough support for pre-service and in-service teachers to have professional training and practical experiences in assisting the learning of these special educational needs students. In the classroom, the ratio of special educational needs students to teachers was a negative high and which the heavy burden of responsibility was put on teachers.

It (inclusive education) really, is not easy. For us, we do have some training from the university, but somehow, it's just for the lectures or case studies. We don't have really much practice. When you come to the school, you are dealing with the class

> which can have half… I once have half of them needs special help, yet I am a teacher alone, and it's quite difficult. And yet the government promotes the inclusive education, which is really good, but the support is really limited. (Anne – early-career cohort)

Besides, this teacher mentioned about the education system in upsetting her on her commitment. She thought that children had a hard life in Hong Kong under the education system focusing on academic performances. This made her doubted whether she should continue the role of a teacher in spotlighting academic studies on children.

> ...the school system, which focuses a lot in academic performance. I know it's quite harsh for young kids. Keeping them very busy and lots of writing work which may not be very good for young kids. So that will make me less that I want to be a teacher, whether I would like to continue to do something like this. (Anne – early-career cohort)

Two teachers stated that the systemic factors have no direct effect to their commitment. One of them was Ada from the early-career cohort, believing that she was new in this career, what she cared the most were the school and students she was facing every day. To her, the effect from the government related policies was not immediate, and which she thought she might understand more and consider those in a few years later. Another teacher Betty from the mid-career cohort also mentioned that to her level, the effect from the government was not very direct, and unknown in the future. These teachers believed that because of their positions in the school, the systemic factors were not directly related to them and thus they did not treat them as major factors on their teacher commitment.

4.3 Teacher Commitment and the New Proposal of Enhancing Teachers' Professional Development

At the time of interviewing the teachers, it was at the stage of consultation for establishing the Professional Ladder without much detailed recommendation presented to the public. These teachers knew little about the details of the policies and explanation was needed to provide to some of them before the interviews.

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Among the six teachers interviewed, all of them affirmed that this proposal did not affect their teacher commitment. This again proved that systemic factors had less effect on teacher commitment.

Yet, 5 teachers held a positive attitude towards the proposal, believing that this proposal acted as a motivation for teachers. Under the proposal, the status of teachers was recognized. The teachers thought it was an encouraging step that the titles of all graduate teachers were changed from certificate master to graduate master.

This heightened job security for teachers. A teacher in the early-career cohort hoped that this policy was effective in ensuring teachers were fully paid.

> It's good news to teachers because it tries to recognize the status of teachers, whether they should have a better pay. Because what I know many teachers are underpaid… I mean they have to teach and organize activities, but actually they are not fully paid, which is funny I think, cause they are doing the same job as the other teachers, but only because the schools have less seats or they want to save money, they will do something like this. (Anne – early-career cohort)

For the teachers in late-career cohort, they also believed that this proposal was more a motivation for the early-career teachers.

> It basically has greater influence on the early-career teachers. The positive change and the whole level up, especially to the young people, is a good encouragement. That means if you want to be more professional in your profession, you can gain equivalent reward with your hard work, having proposed chances, it is a great motivation for people to improve. (Carmen – late-career cohort)

Concerning the work distribution, different teachers had divergent views. A teacher from the late-career cohort expected less administrative work in the future.

> If everyone is in the post of APSM, being responsible for some administrative work… it will surely share the workload. (Carmen – late-career cohort)

But some of them showed uncertainty on work distribution.

> I think the policies are brief and not specific. There may be new problems, like how to allocate the work, who we should listen to between different seniors, what

if there are some communication problems between them, which could produce more troubles. (Ada – early-career cohort)

If everyone is in the post of APSM, I am concerned about how the school distribute our work … or our titles, to see how we can go up a level and allocate our work. (Betty – mid-career cohort)

A teacher from the late-career cohort thought that the school leaders should have full understanding on the ability of every worker and assign the work based on their strengths. 'It depends on how the school adapt to the new policies and arrange best for the teachers.' (Cindy – late-career cohort) This echoes the recommendations of the Task Force that through arranging suitable experienced teachers to shoulder more responsibilities would help develop the teachers' potential and nurture their professional growth (EDB, 2019).

5.   Limitations

The interview was conducted in one primary school of Hong Kong. The workplace factors on teacher commitment would be limited. Although interview is a powerful way to understand the participants' perceptions and to get insights them, it should be in line with other methods to provide in-depth information about participants' inner values and beliefs (Ho, 2006). In our study, the data collected was from a small-scale study which could not be generalized to represent all the in-service teachers, but could be used for enriching the phenomenon by those who had experienced the teacher commitment.

6.   Discussion and Conclusion

Teacher commitment is the center of quality education with influence on enhancing teaching profession and students' performance (Billingsley & Cross, 1992). In our study, the results showed that 'students' was the major key in teacher commitment. The teachers perceived students as their commitment objects. Their love for students turned out to be their commitment factor in increasing their level of commitment. Teachers commitment influences teachers' behaviors, attitude, perception and performance (Thapan, 1986). The inner belief of teachers shaped teachers' behavior, for instance they had high awareness on whether their teaching improved students' intellectual and moral development. Teachers' passion in teaching is highly related to the quality of students learning, that teaching brings inspiration and motivation to

students (Fried, 2001). Positive performances and responses of students increased teachers' satisfaction and teacher commitment, and which encouraged teachers continue to stay in this career field. With strong teacher commitment, it is a mutually beneficial relationship for both teachers and students to promote their development.

External social factors are essential in sustaining the internal process of teachers. Under the workplace factors in affecting teachers' commitment, school vision and policies are the common favorable commitment factor. To explore more, these teachers worked in the same religious school holding the vision of respecting students, spreading the fraternity and envisioning students with compassionate in serving others. It could be concluded that this school emphasized the love education with high understanding and teaching students to love others. It matched with the belief of most teachers who loved and highly respected their students. This explained that teachers shared the same teaching aspiration with the school vision and which encouraged them to work in this favorable environment. In order to sustain teacher commitment, the school vision as a facilitating factor should be in line with the inner values of teachers.

Yet, workload is a detrimental commitment factor could not be neglected. Teachers found it frustrating in spending time on administrative work and which shared their time on teaching. This problem is hoped to be reduced with the new arrangements suggested by the Task Force.

Regarding the systemic factors which had the least influence on teacher commitment, teachers had less understanding on the establishment of the Professional Ladder for Teachers since it was in the stage of proposal during the interviews. However, with the detailed report released in March 2019, the timeline of all-graduate force was confirmed, and the professional ladder was suggested with clearer guidance, for example enhancing the ratio of senior teachers to every classes from one for three classes to one for two classes, critically reviewing the roles and duties of senior teachers to realize teachers' professional potential and increasing more senior teacher posts to support the wide spectrum of school work in developing quality education (EDB, 2019). With the clear framework implemented, the concern of teachers on heavy burden of administrative work was responded and their worries on work distribution in the future was hoped to be lessened. A policy change and implementation seldom succeed because of the complexity of the dynamics of policy change (Cerna, 2013). It is essential to understand better the conditions and further strengthen the personal values of committed teacher to achieve quality education in

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Hong Kong.

The results of this study not only affirm the findings of previous research that teacher commitment was reinforced by personal sense of achievement and their 'love for students' (Choi &Tang, 2009), but also illustrate how other factors like parents and the recent education policies affect teachers' commitment.

The results from our study showed that 'parents' was one of the unfavorable commitment factors especially to early-career cohort teachers, of which the phenomenon was not common in teachers from mid & late-career cohorts. The experiences of Ada and Anne reflected the difficulty of new entrants in meeting parents' demands and which adversely affected their teachers' commitment level. School leaders can provide more support for early career cohort teachers to overcome challenges and strengthen their 'love for students' and teacher commitment. It is recommended that staff development is essential in mentoring early-career cohort teachers to have an effective communication with parents. For example, when talking with parents, it is necessary to start with a positive attitude and avoid conveying the bad characteristics of their child in a direct way (Aslan, 2016). However, a late-career cohort teacher also mentioned that nowadays parents seldom consider in the perspectives of teacher. It is suggested to provide opportunities for parents to understand more about the importance of high-quality relationships between teachers and parents and effective parental attitudes, like conducting seminars on these topics at the beginning of the school year. Opening the channels of communication allows mutual understanding and quality communication to be achieved (Aslan, 2016). Parents should be in the role of supporting teachers to facilitate their children's learning and to encourage teachers' love for students.

The evidence also suggests 'workload' as another major unfavorable factor for teachers, in early-career and mid-career cohorts in particular. They admitted that their time spending on administrative work shared their time on teaching and which negatively affected their performance in teaching and their teacher commitment. It is of paramount importance for the school leaders to understand the ability of teachers and distribute the workload according to teachers' strengths. However, a point to note is that the late-career cohort teacher Carmen did not find the administrative work a heavy burden but considered herself as more manageable for it than those early career cohort teachers. Further studies are recommended on investigating the reasons for some teachers perceiving administrative work positively while some others shared a negative view on it.

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With the implementation of suggestions in the establishment of Professional Ladder for Teachers, there are hopes that the management duties of teachers would be reduced and the manpower at the middle management level situation would be improved to further facilitate and intensify the teacher commitment of teachers. Regular consultation with stakeholders of the schools and the government is suggested to continue reflect on the effectiveness of the policies and further foster the development of education in Hong Kong.

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Appendix I -- Interview questions

A. Background information 背景資料

1. How many years have you been a teacher? How many schools have you worked as a teacher?

你成為教師多少年了？ 你曾在多少間學校擔任教師的工作？

2. Why would you become a teacher?

為什麼你會成為一名教師？

3. What are your duties at school apart from the teaching duties?

除了教學的工作外，你還有什麼其他的職務嗎？

B. Teacher commitment 教學工作承擔感

1. Will you encourage others to become a teacher? Why?

你會鼓勵別人入行成為一名教師嗎？

2. To you, what is teacher commitment?

對你而言，什麼是教學工作承擔感？

3. What is the level of your teacher commitment when you were a teacher in the first year? (10 is the highest and 0 is the lowest level of commitment)

在你投入第一年的教學時，你對教學工作承擔感的程度為多少？(10 是最高, 0 是最低)

4. What is the level of your teacher commitment when you are a teacher now? (10 is the highest and 0 is the lowest level of commitment)

你現時對教學工作承擔感的程度為多少？(10 是最高, 0 是最低)

5. What do you think have sustained you to continue to be a teacher?

什麼因素令你至今仍成為一名教師？

6. Did any personal/ school/ systemic factors affect your teacher commitment over time?

你的個人成長背景 / 學校的組織環境/ 政府的相關政策等曾否影響你對教師身分的信念及你的教學工作承擔感？

7. What is the most important factor for your increased/decreased teacher commitment level?

最增加/減低你教學工作承擔感的重要因素是什麼？

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C. Policy for professional development of teachers 教師專業發展政策

1. Do you know about the proposal of enhancing the professional development for teachers, i.e. full implementation of the all graduate teaching force and establishing the professional ladder for teachers (the manpower arrangements for senior teacher) mentioned in the Policy Address of 2018?

你知道 2018 施政報告提及的 提升教師專業發展，關於落實全面教師職位學位化及檢討教師的晉升階梯 (主任級教師人手安排) 的內容嗎？

2. With the above mentioned proposal of enhancing the professional development for teachers, does it affect (increase/decrease) the level of your teacher commitment? Why?

以上所提及的提升教師專業發展政策會影響 (增加/減低) 你的教學工作承擔感嗎？為什麼？

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Appendix II – Table showing the changes of the commitment level of teachers

	Names	Commitment level in the year of career entry	Commitment level in the current state	Changes
Early-career (0-9 years teaching experiences)	Ada (0.5 years)	7		----
	Anne (4 years)	10	10	----
Mid-career (10-19 years teaching experiences)	Bella (10 years)	8	9	+1
	Betty (19 years)	7	7	----
Late-career (more than 20 years teaching experiences)	Carmen (22 years)	7	10	+3
	Cindy (40 years)	8-9	8-9	----