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Teachers' job satisfaction under Free Quality Kindergarten Education Scheme in the Hong Kong context

Abstract

Kindergarten education was neglected in the past. The Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme was implemented in 2007, which was the first governmental policy to support the kindergarten sector since it found the significance of pre-primary education. However, some disputes arose in the Voucher Scheme, such as limited financial support to parents and injustice to whole-day kindergartens. As a result, the Free Quality Kindergarten Education Scheme has been implemented since 2017 to provide a quality kindergarten education to children with diverse needs. On the other hand, the turnover rate of kindergarten teachers has been high for many years compared with other sectors, although the government had already implemented the new scheme. In contrast, achieving quality pre-primary education require high-performing or experienced teachers. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate teachers' job satisfaction under Free Quality Kindergarten Education Scheme by adopting quantitative and qualitative research with 100 kindergarten teachers in different kindergartens. The results indicated that the degree of job satisfaction of kindergarten teachers was not high, with the mean scores 3.28 and 3.00 (out of 5) in 2 instruments. Also, compensation, and training were the most significant correlated

factors in predicting job satisfaction. As a result, the government should provide more support in increasing the remuneration and offering sufficient training to early childhood educators to retain teachers in kindergarten education.



Introduction

In the past, all Hong Kong kindergartens were run by the private sector the government did not provide support. Thus, the pre-primary sector was politically neglected (Yuen, 2021). No free education for kindergarten has been criticized for many years in the past, causing a heavy economic burden on kindergarten education for parents (Yuen, 2015). For instance, some schools charge \$12,900 as a school fee per year (Education Bureau, 2007b). Later on, the government realized the significance of pre-primary education. As a result, the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme (Voucher Scheme) was the first policy that the Hong Kong government implemented to alleviate the economic burden of parents in the kindergarten sector. Hence, parents could have more options in choosing the kindergartens (Wong & Rao, 2015). However, there was a doubt about the effectiveness of supporting parents' financial needs. According to the survey conducted by Yuen (2015), parents agreed that the Voucher Scheme helped save the cost of extra-curricular activities. Therefore, the low-income families did not benefit much.

On the other hand, there was another dispute about allocating resources. Under the Voucher Scheme, the government subsidized the kindergartens by calculating the number of children only. This was an injustice to full-day operation kindergarten because they have only one group of children. In contrast, the half-day program will

have two groups of children because of morning and afternoon classes. (Chan, 2020; Wong & Rao, 2015; Wong & Rao, 2020). Hence, the insufficient support to whole-day kindergarten teachers may lead to a heavier workload, which causes more serious attrition.

From teachers' perspective, generally, they might negatively perceive the Pre-Primary Education Voucher Scheme. According to the statistics presented by the Education Bureau (2020), the turnover rate of kindergarten teachers was relatively high as compared to primary and secondary teachers. The turnover rate of kindergarten teachers was near 9-10% in 2014-2016, while nearly 5% in both primary and secondary schools. The dropout rate of kindergarten teachers was twice that of the other sectors. This may reflect that some teachers were discontent with the working conditions. The high teacher attrition may lead to various deteriorating concerns, including *"lower student academic achievement, hindrance of academic reforms"* (Luk, 2020, p.10).

The long working hours, a lot of workloads, and salary disputes were the major concerns that have been argued for a long time in the past (Luk, 2020; Wong, 2015). Since the problems mentioned in the Voucher Scheme, the government reformed the policy to provide more consummate support to kindergartens. Therefore, this research aims to explore in-service teachers' perceptions of the new scheme and their job

satisfaction levels.

Literature review

The government was concerned about the significance of kindergarten education and tried to tackle the disputes discovered from the old policy. Hence, the government then announced a new scheme to provide a more comprehensive service in 2017 by providing more support to kindergartens.

2.1 Free Quality Kindergarten Education Scheme

Hong Kong government implemented the Free Quality Kindergarten Education Scheme to "[provide] *a more comprehensive service with the purpose of providing good quality and highly affordable kindergarten education and enhancing the accessibility of students to different services that suit their specific needs*" in 2016 (Education Bureau, 2016, p.2). 97% of Non-profit making kindergartens applied this scheme in the 2017/18 school year (Education Bureau, 2017, as cited in Yuen, 2021). During this scheme, the government provided more crystal-clear instruction in the operation, including management, learning and teaching, teacher management, and home-school communication (Education Bureau, 2020). To cite an example, a better teacher-pupil ratio (1:11) to allow teachers to spend more effort on teaching-related work helps to ensure the teaching quality.

2.2 Relevant questionnaire about the teachers' perception under the new policy

Hong Kong Federation of Education Workers (2019) investigated the working condition of kindergarten teachers under the implementation of the Free Quality Kindergarten Education Scheme. The result reflected that the majority of (over 80%) teachers stated the problem of long working hours. More than 45% of participants pointed out that the working hours of a week were more than 60 hours. Also, more than half of the interviewees mentioned that the workload increased enormously due to the new scheme. 90% of teachers agreed that they received tremendous pressure from the work while insufficient rest time was the main reason for the work stress. These data reflected the work stress of teachers increasing under the new scheme.

2.3 Teachers' job satisfaction

There are lots of definitions of job satisfaction, and the most commonly cited is Locke's. Locke (1976) stated that job satisfaction is the pleasantness resulting from the employee's appreciation of the job. Hoppock (1953) defined the three main aspects of job satisfaction as involving the combinations of environmental, physiological, and psychological influencing the self-satisfaction on the job. Vroom's (1964) definition was the affective orientation of employees toward the position.

Spector (1997) defined how much an employee likes the components of the job.

Dugguh and Dennis (2014) delimited job satisfaction as its meaning and how it influences and enhances the employers' work performance. Regarding the multidimensions of the definition of job satisfaction, it mainly refers to workers' perception of the job-related components.

The job duties of Hong Kong kindergarten teachers are diverse. Teaching children, communicating with parents, organizing activities for families, and handling administration work were part of the job duties. The heavy workload may lead to a low level of job satisfaction. On the other hand, the policy supporting the job may be one of the crucial factors, for example, salary. Also, the number of holidays and working hours will affect the quality of leisure time. Thus, there are lots of factors that influence teachers' job satisfaction. This essay mainly focuses on teachers under the Free Quality Kindergarten Education Scheme. Since their kindergarten joined this scheme, what has the level of their job satisfaction is.

Wong (2015) conducted research about the job satisfaction of Hong Kong kindergarten teachers. The result stated that the three major aspects: social space, staffing, and working hours, are negatively correlated with job satisfaction. The long working hours and clerical work going before the teaching tasks were part of the questions that scored low marks in the questionnaire.

2.4 Teachers' workload

The key roles of teachers listed on the kindergarten curriculum guide under the launch of the new policy include 5 main roles involving undertaking the teaching duty, catering to children's diverse learning needs, participating in the design and review of curriculum, maintaining home-school collaboration, and sharing experience with other teachers (Education Bureau, 2020).

The working hours of teachers were long in the past. Research conducted by the Strategic Planning Office of The Education University of Hong Kong (2010) reflected that the average working hours of the interviewed full-time kindergarten teachers were 53.5 hours on weekdays, and "25.4% of the teachers had to work more than 61 hours." Moreover, on weekends, the average working hours were 7 hours. Even 18.6% of interviewees worked more than 11 hours in 2010 under the Pre-Primary Voucher Scheme. It definitely reflected that the working hours were too long for kindergarten teachers. In the research, teachers thought that the workload increased in different aspects under the implementation of the scheme, including professional development, student assessment, curriculum development, and lots of non-teaching tasks, for example, quality assurance. Moreover, 78.2% of teachers felt exhausted after work, while nearly half of the interviewed teachers (48.6%) said that they always

could not finish their work on time.

The Teacher-Pupil ratio is required to raise from 1:15 (principal included) to 1:11 (principal excluded) for kindergarten joining the new scheme (Education Bureau, 2016). Hence, the government will provide more financial support for kindergartens to recruit more teachers. Therefore, children can get more help by increasing the amount of teaching staff. On the other hand, the policy encourages schools to offer more support to children with diverse needs. One of the aims of adjusting the Teacher-Pupil ratio is to allow teachers to have more capacity to handle children with diverse needs and both teaching and non-teaching tasks (Education Bureau, 2016). Despite this arrangement, the working environment may be improved for teachers since more teachers can partake in the workload. For long whole-day childcare centers, the government will provide extra support instead of depending on the number of enrolled children. Hence, the government requires these extended whole-day programs to have more teachers (40%) than half-day programs (Education Bureau, 2016). Therefore, the workload can be partaken by more teachers.

The amount of workload will affect the teachers' job satisfaction. Klassen and Chiu (2010) pointed out that the insufficient time to finish all job duties, including 'planning, preparation and the heavy teaching workload [will reduce] satisfaction from teaching' (p.742). The enormous amount of work will increase the job stress of

teachers, which may cause negative emotions. According to Yang et al. (2018), work stress is the most crucial factor affecting teachers' dropout rate. Excessive work stress may deteriorate teachers' well-being and decrease their job satisfaction. To conclude, the workload plays a vital role in influencing teachers' job satisfaction.

2.5 Teachers' salary

Under the Voucher Scheme, although teachers agreed that the salary should increase, most of the teachers were not satisfied with the remuneration. Findings on the work of teachers under the old scheme showed that 80% of interviewed teachers were discontent with the remuneration, including insufficient holidays lacking the opportunity for advancement. Especially for the salary, compared with the salary of primary and secondary school teachers, nearly 90% of kindergarten teachers felt less valued than other sector teachers. At the same time, many senior teachers reflected that the salary could not respond to their working experience (袁慧筠等人, 2020). Furthermore, teachers' salaries would change depending on the amount of subsidy given by the government, which causes an unstable wage.

In contrast, the government established a suggested salary range for reference. For instance, the salary range for teachers will be \$22,790 to \$40,530 in the 2020/21 academic year (Education Bureau, 2020). The kindergartens that join the scheme

should provide the salary to teachers at least meet the minimum requirements. It will be conducive to increasing the starting salary for new teachers (Chan, 2020). On the other hand, the government suggests having a long-term career ladder to retain and attract teachers to stabilize the teaching force. To cite an example, one teacher will upgrade to a senior teacher (headteacher) out of 5 teachers. In comparison, one senior teacher will upgrade to vice-principal if there are more than three senior teachers. The level of salary is an essential factor affecting the level of job satisfaction.

Furthermore, the low salary level can be one of the major reasons causing the withdrawal of the teacher profession (Harris & et al., 1985, as cited in Kim & Loadman, 1994). Also, Spector (1997, as cited in Nahid, 2011) defined pay as one of the factors affecting job satisfaction.

2.6 The final decision of the policy related to salary

In Hong Kong, the government has established a salary pay scale for primary and secondary teachers, which means that teachers with specific qualifications and teaching years can get a certain level of salary. Adopting the government's Master PayScale to calculate government-aided primary and secondary teachers' salaries, so the teacher is not a poor paying job in Hong Kong (Lam, 2012). It may provide a financial incentive for graduates to become a teacher. Moreover, teachers' pay scales

will be modified over time. For instance, the starting salary of a degree teacher was \$ 27145 in 2000, but it increased to \$35040 in 2007 (Hong Kong Federation of Education Workers, 2019).

On the contrary, the same policy was not implemented in kindergarten. In 2012, International Labor Organization pointed out that the poor salary appeared in the kindergarten setting worldwide, causing a high turnover rate, especially 50% in Hong Kong (Li, 2014). Despite the low-income criticism, the Chief Executive of Hong Kong, Miss Carrie Lam, proposed to implement the salary pay scale in a kindergarten setting in 2017. After investigating the feasibility of this policy for a few years, it was finally found out that it would be difficult to do so due to the uniqueness of the kindergarten environment, which is not a government-aided school (Hong Kong government, 2021).

2.7 Professional development

Before the government intervened in kindergarten education, there was an uneven quality of kindergarten programs. *"The structured, academically-oriented, and teacher-centered"* was always criticized before the Voucher Scheme (Wong & Rao, 2020, p.8). As a result, ensuring the quality of the kindergarten program would be one of the major concerns of the Voucher Scheme. Wong and Rao (2020) pointed out that

the government aimed to let kindergartens' teachers and principals gain more professional training within a short period of time which helps to improve the quality of pre-primary education by "performing according to the performance indicators" (Quality Assurance) (P.44). Therefore, most of the teachers accepted the professional training and agreed on the effectiveness of the training activity in improving the teaching, while they thought that it was unnecessary to force teachers to have the professional training (Wong & Rao, 2020). Hence, teachers can have the right to choose when to upgrade their competence. Also, Wong and Zhang (2014) indicated that Hong Kong early childhood workers who gained more school support the professional promotion tended to have higher job satisfaction levels. Moreover, This caused the problem of increasing the workload, as mentioned in the previous paragraph. The Education Bureau noted that schools should upgrade the teacher's competence through different means in the new scheme again. Kindergartens should employ enough teachers with Certificates in Early Childhood Education, which may cause a burden on teachers.

Identification of the problem

Since the policy of the Free Quality Kindergarten Education Scheme has been implemented recently, there are fewer research papers to analyze its effects on

teachers, so we lack the information on the new scheme. On the other hand, the Free Quality Kindergarten Education Scheme highlights the relationship between the quality of kindergarten education and teacher professionalism. The workload of teachers increased. Therefore, I would like to investigate the current situation, aiming to understand teachers' points of view under the new policy with a focus to understand the change in teachers' working environment since I found that the turnover rate of kindergarten teachers increased under the change of policy. The average turnover rate before 2018 was 10% a year. However, it rose to 12.3% and 12% in 2018/19 and 2019/20, respectively (Education Bureau, 2020). The high turnover rate may increase in-service teachers' workload as they need to take up others' job duties when the school has not employed new teachers (Hong 2012). In addition, Ingersoll and May (2012) noted that teacher retention is essential to provide a smooth and effective practice in schools due to the support to nurture the high-performing teachers. Therefore, it is of utmost crucial to understand kindergarten teachers' points of view to retain them.

Method

Research objective. Since the turnover rate increased in the past few years under the new scheme and the previous survey conducted by a non-government organization

stated the great work pressure under the new policy, the primary aim of this study is to find out the perception of teachers towards the working environment under the Free Quality Kindergarten Education Scheme. Regarding the purpose mentioned, the research will be focused on two main parts. Firstly, to understand teachers' impressions and opinions on the new scheme. Secondly, to find out the crucial factor(s) affecting the work satisfaction in the Free Quality Kindergarten Education Scheme on kindergarten teachers.

Research Questions

1. What is the level of kindergarten job satisfaction under the implementation of the Free Quality Kindergarten Education Scheme?
2. Which factor(s) of work affects the teachers' job satisfaction the most?
3. To what extent does the level of salary affect the job satisfaction of the Hong Kong Kindergarten teachers?

Participant

In quantitative research, 100 teachers who worked for kindergartens joining the Free Quality Kindergarten Education Scheme (FQKE) with different working experiences from other kindergartens will be invited to participate in this study. Teachers will be

divided into three groups according to different teaching years in the analysis, which contained new teachers with 1-3 years of working experience, 4-9 years of teaching years, and lastly, more than ten years of teaching experience. As a result, I could collect the data from teachers with different years of teaching in kindergartens to investigate their views of the current working environment on various aspects.

In qualitative research, six kindergartens with different teaching years will be invited to conduct an individual interview. They will be divided into two groups. Three teachers belong to the group whose kindergartens participated in Voucher Scheme. The other three did not join the old scheme.

Procedure

Firstly, all participants would fill in the consent form to seek their own approval. After it, the survey that was derived from 2 instruments was distributed to teachers in mid-February. It was given a half month to collect the result of the questionnaires. After collecting the quantitative data, the data analysis part will be conducted. Then, based on the analysis, I found some aspects affecting teachers the most. Hence, the interview questions could be designed on the top of the questionnaire results. For the interview, the online meeting and phone calls were the ways to carry out to collect further information in March, which would be commodious to teachers because they

could receive the interview for their convenience.

Measure

Teaching Satisfaction Scale

Quantitative research was the first research method and was conducted to collect more data in order to understand the general situation. Thus, the questionnaire will be distributed to teachers. The Teacher Satisfaction Scale is developed by Ho & Au (2006), which makes the reference to Diener's Life Satisfaction Scale. With the aim of understanding kindergarten teachers' points of view of their jobs, the scale includes five questions to ask about their judgments on becoming a teacher, including *'In most ways, being a teacher is close to my ideal'*, *'My conditions of being a teacher is excellent'*, *'I am satisfied with being a teacher'*, *'So far I have gotten the important things I want to be a teacher'*, *'If I could choose my career over, I would change almost nothing.'* For each question, teachers require to answer on a 5-point scale, one shows strongly disagreed, and five shows strongly agreed.

Kragujevac's job satisfaction questionnaire

Another part of the quantitative research is the factors affecting teachers' job satisfaction. Kragujevac (2019) summarized 18 critical dimensions that should be

included in investigating job satisfaction. I chose six related factors due to the relevance to the factors mentioned that will influence the job satisfaction of kindergarten teachers, including 'Compensation,' 'Recognition/Rewards,' 'Working Condition', 'Training and Development', 'Work-Life Balance' and 'Work Stress', for the sake of understanding their perception of these aspects under the new policy. There were total 24 questions on this scale.

In Compensation, 3 questions were included, *"I feel I am being paid a fair salary for the work I do", "I am satisfied with my annual salary increments.", "I am satisfied with allowances"*. On the other hand, *"When I do a good job, I receive the recognition from my company.", "I do not feel that the work I do is appreciated.", "I don't feel my efforts are rewarded the way they should be.", "In our company, there is a mechanism to reward good work done by employees.", "Recognition and reward system practiced in our company is fair and justified."*, these 5 questions belong to

Recognition/Rewards. The third factor is Working Condition containing 4 questions, *"I have too much to do at work.", "Many of my company rules and procedures make doing a good job difficult.", "I am satisfied with the working conditions", and "The company follows all statutory norms with respect to working hours and break time."*.

For Training and Development, there are 6 questions in total, including *"The training and development programs have increased my confidence.", "My company arranges a*

sufficient number of training programs.", "The training and development programs have increased my morale.", "The training and development programs have helped me in attaining better technical ability.", "The training and development programs have helped me in adapting to change easily.", "The training and development programs have increased my job satisfaction.". The fifth factor is Work-Life Balance with 3 questions, *"My job prevents me from giving the time I want to my spouse or family or friends.", "I don't get much support from my organization which is most important to pay attention to family responsibilities.", "My job responsibility does not allow me to get enough sleep, exercise, and healthy food.".* Finally, there are 3 questions in Work Stress, *"I can't see the final outcome of my work as expected.", " I am not happy with what my company is making me work on, which I don't like to do.", and "I am stressed because my manager gives me unachievable deadlines."*

Interview

After collecting the questionnaires from 100 teachers, a short structured individual interview was conducted with six kindergarten teachers. Three teachers from kindergartens joined Voucher Scheme while the other three did not. Then, the significant factor(s) affecting job satisfaction will be the focus of the interview. The first focus is working conditions to understand which part of the work teachers are

contented and discontented, which also relates to the workload. The second focus will be the opinion on their school salary pay scale to obtain their view on the financial aspect. The interview questions were "Do you like your job? Which part do you satisfy the most? Why?", "Which part(s) of the job you are dissatisfied with?", "Does your job give you a great workload?", "What is/are the source(s) of your workload?", "Which part(s) do you think that it is unnecessary?", "Which part(s) do you think that it is necessary, and do you feel satisfied after completing it?", "What is your view on your kindergarten teacher pay-scale policy? (Do you like this policy? Will this policy increase your working incentives? Or you do not care about this policy?)", and "What is your suggestion on the current salary pay scale?"

Result

Quantitative Result

Demographic information of questionnaires

The quantitative method received 100 responses from teachers with different backgrounds. 78 participants were in the age group 18-30, while 22 teachers were in the age group 30-50 years old. For the gender, 95% of participants were female, while 5% of them were male. Apart from it, 58% of teachers have taught in kindergartens for 1 to 3 years, 26% have worked at kindergartens for 4-9 years, and 16% belonged

to teaching kindergartens for more than nine years. Lastly, the majority (76%) of respondents' kindergartens joined Voucher Scheme before. In contrast, 24% of their kindergartens did not join this scheme. For the district of the kindergartens, three major districts of kindergartens were presented in this research. 23.8% of participants were from Sham Shui Po, the location of the kindergarten in Tsuen Wan is 17.8%, and 13.9% were from Tun Mun. Since to fit the requirement of the research focus, all participants' kindergartens should join the Free Quality Kindergarten Education Scheme.

Descriptive information about instruments

Table 1 presents the result of the reliability of the two instruments chosen with scores.

The Cronbach's Alpha of both the Teaching Satisfaction Scale and Kragujevac's job satisfaction questionnaire ranged were .73 and .92, respectively, which reached the minimum suggested criterion by Nunnally (1978). Hence, it indicated that the 2 instruments used in this study were reliable.

The mean score on Teaching Satisfaction Scale was 3.28, and the standard deviation was 0.50. While the mean score of Kragujevac's job satisfaction questionnaire was 3.00, and the standard deviation was 0.43. Since Kragujevac's job satisfaction questionnaire contained different factors affecting teachers' job satisfaction, I have

also independently analyzed each aspect. The mean score ranged from 2.44 to 3.31 of the 6 factors, while the standard deviation scored between 0.47 and 0.87.

Table 1

Reliability and Descriptive Statistics of two instruments

Instrument	Cronbach's alpha	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Teaching Satisfaction Scale	.73	3.28	0.50
Kragujevac's job satisfaction questionnaire	.92	3.00	0.43
Components of Kragujevac's job satisfaction questionnaire			
1. Compensation		2.74	0.87
2. Recognition/ Rewards		3.18	0.53
3. Working Condition		3.11	0.47
4. Training and Development		3.31	0.49
5. Work-Life Balance		2.44	0.56
6. Work Stress		2.84	0.56

Note. Kragujevac's job satisfaction questionnaire contained different aspects and analyzed by aspects

Predicting teacher job satisfaction under Free Quality Kindergarten Scheme

I am investigating the correlation of different variables correlated with the Hong Kong kindergartens teachers' job satisfaction by utilizing the Spearman correlation test. The table 2 shown in the below showing the most significant aspects correlating with the job satisfaction ($p < .05$), including age group, teaching years, and joining Voucher Scheme or not, with the essential elements in job satisfaction: Teaching Satisfaction Scale, Compensation, Training and Development, and Work Stress in Kragujevac's job satisfaction questionnaire.

Table 2
Correlations among variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1 Age										
2 Teaching experience	.715**									
3 Joining Voucher Scheme or not	-.242*	-.341**								
4 Teaching Satisfaction Scale	.358**	.514**	-.211*							
5 compensation	.530**	.662**	-.308**	.749**						
6 Recognition	.228*	.359**	-.09	.439**	.525**					
7 Working condition	.07	.198*	.02	.417**	.382**	.628**				
8 Training	.263**	.18	.02	.656**	.483**	.424**	.510**			
9 Work life balance	-.07	-.07	.09	.333**	.214*	.349**	.442**	.559**		
10 Work stress	.221*	.312**	.07	.634**	.588**	.692**	.633**	.662**	.591**	

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

After that, to assess the significant relationship with the correlated variables mentioned, a two-step hierarchical regression analysis was conducted with instrument 1 (Teaching Satisfaction Scale) as the dependent variable, and the result is presented in Table 3. In step 1, entering the Age and Teaching years to control the effect and reduce their interference on the test. In step 2, the instrument 1 (Teaching Satisfaction Scale), Compensation, and Training and development were entered.

R2 of step 1: Age and Teaching Years jointly explain 26.4%, while R2 of step 2: Compensation, and Training and development is 70.1%, indicating that Compensation, and Training and Development accounted for 70.1% of the variance in teachers' job satisfaction. Moreover, the correlation between teaching years,

Compensation, and Training and Development is found as a significant predictor ($p < .001$) to use to predict kindergarten teachers' job satisfaction. In addition, the coefficient ($\beta = .468$) of Compensation reflected that .468 positive units would be influenced by this factor. Thus, the Teaching Job Satisfaction Scale and Compensation, and Training and Development were the most significant predictor of teacher job satisfaction in predicting the job satisfaction of kindergarten teachers. This has proved that the regression result in the previous part indicated that compensation was a significant predictor and had a positive relationship in predicting the Hong Kong kindergarten job satisfaction.

Table 3

Summary of hierarchical regression analyses predicting job satisfaction

Variable	β	R^2	ΔR^2	F
Predicting job satisfaction				
Step 1		.264		17.405
Teaching experience	.528**			
Age	-.020*			
Step 2		.701	.437	55.695
Compensation	.468***			
Training	.433***			

* $P < .05$ ** $P < .01$ *** $P < .001$

Qualitative result

6 individual interviews with different teaching experiences reflected different teachers' points of view on the work nature, workload, and salary. The most satisfying part of work was related to teaching or getting along with children. The dissatisfying

factors were classified as follows.

1. Enormous workload

With respect to workload, five interviewees (out of 6) pointed out that they had a heavy workload. Since kindergarten teachers need to handle different aspects of work, including administrative work, paperwork, and communication with parents, teachers need much time to complete their daily routine. Moreover, some teachers suggested hiring more teachers to partake in the workload. This led to some negative impacts, including overtime work and exploitation of private time, causing an imbalance of work and leisure time.

"I have a hefty workload. I don't have any personal time to deal with my work. I often work at school until 9 o'clock." (Teacher 2)

2. Too much paperwork

From the perspective of work nature, five teachers mentioned the necessary paperwork causing the heavy workload. Handling the different types of documents is of utmost importance in a kindergarten teacher's daily routine. The teaching-related documents included lesson plans, students learning reports by unit, reflections, and

checklists. Teachers claimed that they put more time into completing the paperwork instead of preparing the lesson materials. For instance, they needed to spend more time taking photos with children in order to write the student learning reports for all children in a unit. This even occupied more time, and teachers spent less effort in teaching due to lack of time. However, they thought those documents could be reduced and should put the focus on fostering children's development. Otherwise, the teaching quality may decrease.

"I am not satisfied with too many administrative documents to deal with, because it takes too much time to finish rather than preparing lessons." (Teacher 3)

3. Unnecessary repeated work

Another point of work nature was the unnecessary repeated work. One teacher stated that the school already has a similar checklist or rating scale to evaluate the performance of students. In contrast, the school required each teacher to create their own checklist. The teacher-made checklist was quite similar to the one in school. She thought that it was repeated and useless to do so. The time should be spent in a more effective way to activities that nurture children.



"Unlimited meetings and some repetitive documents can be reduced. For example, the school itself already has some evaluation scales as evaluation and approval rules, but every year the principal requires the teacher to make his own checklists, but in fact, they are similar." (Teacher 6)

4. Different opinions on salary

For the salary part, half of the interviewed teachers did not have great dissatisfaction with the salary level in their kindergartens, while the other half thought the income could be higher, their points of view were different. For the salary information, the monthly salary range of 5 interviewers was the same: \$20000-30000. While teachers with teaching years of more than 10 had the highest salary range: \$30000-40000.

They mentioned that the starting salary had a big gap as compared with primary teachers. On the contrary, 4 teachers gave suggestions on increasing the income level or the government should implement a salary pay-scale in kindergartens like the implementation in primary and secondary schools, although there were only 3 teachers showing they're discontented with their current income.

"I think the salary should be increased because compared with primary schools. There is still a big difference in starting salary." (Teacher 5- with salary range \$20000-

30000)

Discussion

The job satisfaction level of Hong Kong kindergarten teachers was not high by looking at the mean scores on 2 scales (3.28 out of 5 and 3.00 out of 5), representing that teachers' overall judgment was on the neutral level of the job only. The most dissatisfied aspects were Work-Life Balance and Compensation, with the lowest mean scores. Also, many teachers mentioned too much workload in the interview. Wong (2015) conducted research about the working condition of early childhood educators. The long working hours were one of the most dissatisfying parts of the job. The long working hours caused an imbalance between work and life. The research of Li et al. (2021) also pointed out that teachers need to face the challenges of heavy workload in the Free Quality Kindergarten Education Scheme. The usual overtime work in kindergarten reflected too much work for the pre-primary teachers. In the long run, the attrition rate in kindergartens will remain high if there is no significant change in the workplace.

With the first quantitative research result, it presents evidence of the compensation and training for kindergarten teachers' job satisfaction. In contrast, Li (2014) indicated that the low income for teachers and the high dropout rate has been remarkable

problems for many years. Also, Luk (2020) indicated that educators usually have lower starting salary than other professions, which directly lead to the high attrition rate in the education sector because the opportunity cost of quitting the job is lower, not to mention kindergarten teachers whose starting income are lower than primary and secondary school teachers. Moreover, in this study, compensation was one of the most significant variables affecting job satisfaction. On the contrary, when asked about the opinion of the teacher on the current salary, only half of the interviewed teachers suggested increasing the salary or showed dissatisfaction with the current income. Chinese people are usually conservative, so they may avoid showing their negative opinion on income in front of others. Thus, the policymakers should be aware of this problem when collecting the view on income. In addition, Luk (2020) conducted research to investigate kindergarten teachers' views and working conditions. The result also indicated that teachers mentioned the unfairness of the low-income and their effort. However, it was an industry-wide phenomenon. The income level evidently affects their job satisfaction.

On the other hand, training and development were other significant factors influencing teachers' job satisfaction, especially for new teachers. Tait (2008) mentioned that new teachers have their own abilities and personalities when entering the workplace. Therefore, it is crucial to provide systematic training to them in order

to enhance their capabilities to cope with job-related issues and establish confidence in handling challenges (Li et al., 2021). Although teachers received some professional training before receiving the qualification to work at kindergartens, new teachers lack practical skills. Also, the training can help teachers to deal with the curriculum change or reformation with the updated information.

Implications

Teachers' perception of the working condition correlates with job satisfaction (Wong, 2015). Heavy workload causing long work hours has been a persistent problem no matter before or now. Although the teacher-pupil ratio was regulated in the curriculum guide by Education Bureau to have more labor to release teachers' capabilities in handling the teaching work, many teachers still mention the problem of a large workload. Thus, the government should take this phenomenon into consideration to adjust the teacher-pupil ratio or provide more financial support in increasing the labor force in kindergartens, especially for administrative work, and ensure the teaching quality and teachers' well-being.

Another factor was compensation. The gap between the salary of kindergarten teachers and primary school teachers is apparent, so pre-primary teachers may feel less valued and underpaid. However, the government has considered implementing

the mandatory salary pay scale in the kindergarten sector. Thus, the salary increase of early childhood educators will guarantee by the scale. Under Free Quality Kindergarten Education Scheme, the government only suggests a salary range, so the extent of salary increase may not be high to retain the experienced teachers. Although the government finally decided not to implement the salary pay scale, it can implement other forms of compensation to increase teachers' job satisfaction and decrease the dropout rate.

Limitations

It should be noted that in the research conducted during the pandemic situation, new teachers' opinions might be affected by the adverse environment in the job market. Future research may conduct after the pandemic. Also, the gender imbalance appeared in this research due to the characteristic of this career. On the other hand, there was a time limitation for this research that insufficient time to collect the data might affect the analysis. In addition, due to the received data, most of the kindergartens worked at non-profit-making kindergartens. Hence, this research paper mainly focused on the analysis of non-profit-making kindergartens. Moreover, owing to the lack of resources, the sample size was small. As a result, further research may need to enlarge the sample size and involve different types of kindergartens to have a more

comprehensive view.

Conclusion

This study discovered salary and training were the most significant factors influencing teachers' perception of their job. Under Free Quality Kindergarten Education Scheme, teachers' job satisfaction level was not high. Teachers mentioned the problems of the heavy workload that has been a deep-rooted concern for a long time. If the government hopes to enhance the quality of pre-primary education, retaining experienced and productive teachers is of utmost importance. Therefore, the government should take this problem seriously and improve the working condition to keep the experienced teachers staying in this career.

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